

# TO QUALIFY FIRST, FIRST YOU MUST FINISH... ERM, FOURTH!

*Adopting NASCAR's qualification system to shuffle the grid for Sunday's race two has raised more than a few eyebrows*

**W**HETHER YOU FEEL it's a necessary innovation to woo new fans, or needless tinkering which belittles the series' world standing, the race two grid format – requiring the race one podium to start the second race from the third row in reverse order, granting the fourth place finisher in race one pole position in race two – is breaking new ground for a motorcycle world championship.

Tampering with the grid to hamstring the apparently more successful racers has been a feature of the American NASCAR series. Paddock reaction has been largely positive, with many willing to temper the negatives if increased attendances and added interest is the end result.

For WSB's technical director, Scott Smart, establishing a separate identity for the championship, as well as retaining a capacity for trying new solutions ahead of rival series that are guaranteed to entertain and attract new viewers, is key. "WSB does tend to be a different product and has historically tried stuff sooner," he said. "We definitely need to remember we are not the poor man's MotoGP. Some of the criticism I've read reflects the view that, 'GPs are this, this and this.' In the end it's not a huge difference."

So why the need for the new format? While 2016 produced numerous intriguing shootouts, the series' top three became a tad too familiar with the podium for Dorna's liking. Over the past two seasons, two of the Jonathan Rea/Tom Sykes/Chaz Davies trio finished in the top three in 84% of the races,

including 19 podiums that featured all three.

With a greater depth of field added to the new grid, greater variety – to equal that of MotoGP in 2016 – must be the aim. What's more, there is now sufficient time after the first race (on Saturday) to generate excitement for the second, which will surely sell tickets for Sunday.

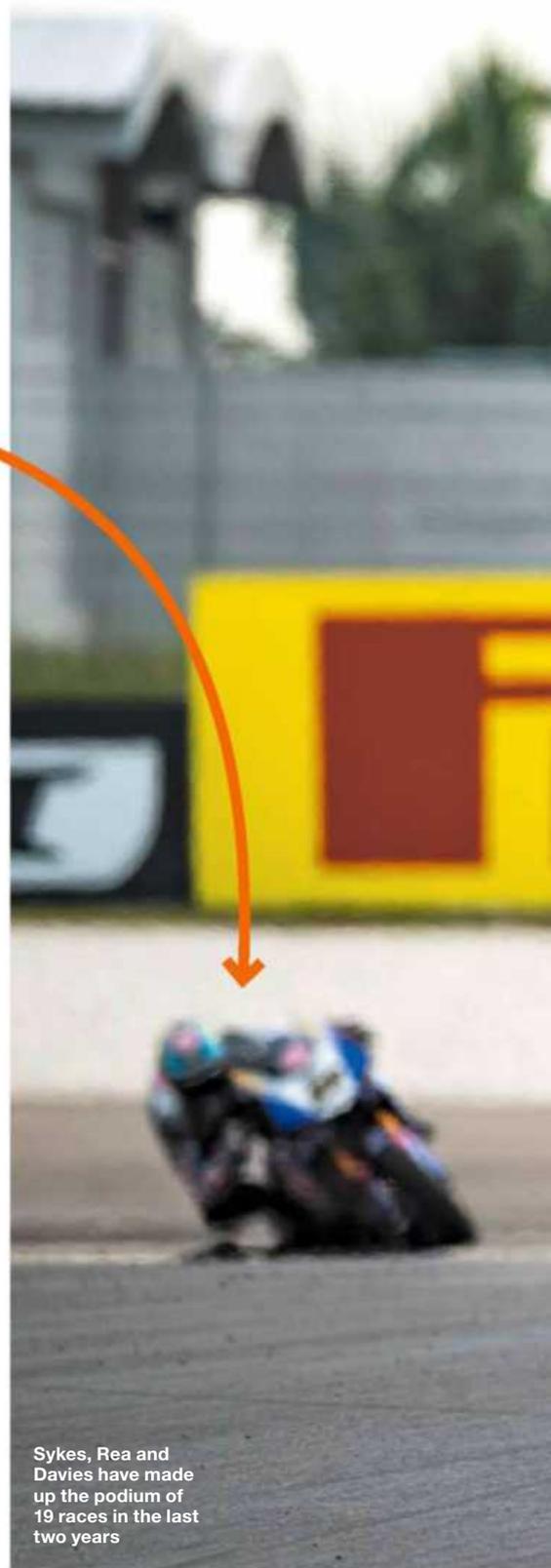
Those against the changes have pointed to the new format's dilution of the event's purity, in that the race one winner is effectively punished on Sunday for his feats on Saturday. Also, there is the perception that if you are explaining a rule for longer than 30 seconds, that very rule may be

## 'Race one's winner will effectively be punished on Sunday'

overcomplicated – something that Eugene Laverty is keen to dismiss, saying, "Some people were getting a little confused by it but I think the rule is pretty simple once you get your head around it."

As Smart reminds us, Dorna is ultimately in the business to entertain. He said, "Some of the riders have really supported it. The sharper riders understand we're in the business of entertainment rather than pure sport. Pure sports are falling by the wayside."

"The initial proposal was actually quite a lot more extreme. But there is always next year... And the year after that!"



Sykes, Rea and Davies have made up the podium of 19 races in the last two years

## WHAT DO THE RIDERS THINK?



**CHAZ DAVIES**  
ARUBA.IT DUCATI

"OK, IT'S NOT traditional and it takes a little bit of the purity away, but it definitely spices things up. There were some races last year that were exciting, others that were

boring. This way you can expect the second race to be more exciting as a spectacle.

"It's been a difficult time for WSB but it's a bump in the road. When these

rules came out I put myself in the shoes of the general punter who doesn't have a history of following racing. They want to see overtaking. No one wants to watch boring races."



**EUGENE LAVERTY**  
SMR MILWAUKEE APRILIA

"I THINK IT'S a pretty cool idea, because I think it's a good thing to mix things up a bit.

"Also, there was always a chance that if someone saw a runaway race on the

TV on Saturday, they wouldn't tune in on Sunday, whereas now they are more likely to.

"A lot of the time the riders from the third row will get through in race two

but there is also a good chance that they could get roughed up and lose more ground. This will be over 13 races and there's a chance that it won't go your way every time."



### THE RACE TWO GRID EXPLAINED

- > The winner of race one will start race two from ninth.
- > The second-placed rider in race one will start race two from eighth.
- > The third-placed rider in race one will start race two from seventh.
- > The rider finishing fourth in race one will start the second race from first.
- > Riders finishing fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth will start race two from second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth respectively.
- > The fourth row in race two is determined by fastest qualifiers finishing outside the top nine in race one.

### RACE ONE RESULTS

1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	9
10	11	12
13	14	15
16	17	18

### RACE TWO GRID

4	5	6
7	8	9
3	2	1
10	11	12
13	14	15
16	17	18



## WHAT DO THE TEAM BOSSES THINK?



**GUIM RODA**  
TEAM BOSS OF KAWASAKI RACING TEAM

**“FROM A SHOW** business point of view I think it’s an interesting idea. In the end it’s the same rules for everybody. Once you know the rules, you start again, then it’s a question of

managing them as well as possible. “If it helps to make the racing more interesting for fans and it helps to bring more people to the circuit to attend the race meetings, I think

it will be good. “It will also change the race strategy and the way we manage tyres. Considering the top 10 riders in WSB have a lot of experience that’ll be difficult.”



**PAUL DENNING**  
TEAM BOSS OF CRESCENT RACING PATA YAMAHA

**“CHANGE IS** OFTEN negatively perceived and there is also a clear risk of making something artificial. But I think this particular change has more positives. I’m sure it

will generate more interest around the Sunday race, and it presents an interesting challenge for the winning rider. It’s not a huge penalty but enough to make it interesting.

“There are also commercial interests to consider. For a team that has never started on the front row, perhaps there’s an additional opportunity provided there, for instance.”