

## LESSONS ON THE BLACKTOP



Interview: Simon West

It may be easy to envy someone who rides Superbikes professionally, but London-based Australian Mark Aitchison explains that there are many overlooked obstacles to his craft.

**What is your profession?**

Superbike rider for Triumph.

**Where are you living?**

I'm currently living in Ealing with a bunch of mates from school.

**What made you come to London?**

To get into the World Championship, I put everything on the line to come over. I had a really good job in Australia with Yamaha, and I was comfortable there, but the only way to get into Europe and the World Championship is to give up what you've got back home and start from scratch again.

**Besides riding experience, how do you make yourself better?**

I do a lot of cardio and weight work. Strength in your core and lower body is essential, but you also definitely need endurance conditioning in this sport.

**What do you think about while racing?**

I actually try not to think too much. Everything's got to be an automated process: when it's not is when problems occur. When you're riding consciously, not with your subconscious mind, you tend to make mistakes and tend to be not so accurate with the lines you take on the bike.



**How do you train yourself to think quickly?**

I try and do a lot of visualisation practice, which has helped me a lot in the last couple of years, but sometimes you might turn up to a circuit and not have any cues. Video is good, but in terms of reaction times a lot of it is down to experience.

**Who do you admire in your sport?**

Bayliss (Troy). He's the man - he really is a weapon. I don't understand how he can do it sometimes, because now he's 38 and he's done it year after year and he just keeps coming back stronger. It's absolutely phenomenal.

**What are your future goals?**

I want to make Moto GP - that's a goal. Whether I can actually win the championship, well, that's another goal. But, just to actually make it would be a huge achievement in itself. We'll just take it as it comes.

**What steps can you make to get to Moto GP?**

This game of motorcycle racing is very political. It's political in terms of sponsorship: it's political in terms of who gets what and what nationalities are involved. Promoters may not be biased, but money is what they're there for in the end - TV rights, TV audiences and all the components of the marketing and exposure is what they're after, so consequently they'll push a lot of British riders. And as for the Aussies, there's a few there, so you have to be a bit lucky with timing. Everything has to work from a promoter's point of view.

**What are the challenges when moving overseas in Superbikes?**

Look at Bayliss when he moved up to Moto GP. He had a lot of problems, and they were mainly political too. He was involved in an Italian team that basically wouldn't listen to him. That's why he struggled, but he's definitely one of the best riders in the world. 🍀

**Mark Aitchison is represented by Sports International Management. Check out: [www.s-i-m-l.com](http://www.s-i-m-l.com)**



## Dancing Star

LIEZL MACLEAN speaks to Aussie burlesque performer Sapphira.

**What do you love most about burlesque dancing?**

I think burlesque is great because it embraces women of all shapes and sizes. I love the gorgeous costumes and seeing people smile during a performance is the biggest reward of all. It really gives you true creative licence because it encompasses all styles of dance, costume and creative ideas.

**How did you become a burlesque dancer?**

My transformation into a burlesque dancer has come about over several stages in my artistic life. I learned belly dancing in my early 20s and when I moved to London in 2003 the burlesque scene was just starting - I was so inspired!

**Is the London burlesque stage hotter than the Aussie stage?**

Well, London is much closer to the rest of Europe and the world, but Australia has a thriving scene too. I guess in London we benefit from so much theatre and live performance, so there is a lot more work.

**Is this your full-time job?**

At the moment it is. I have had day jobs to supplement my income and I may look at going back to the 9-5 again. I find a way to fit it all in, but I am extremely busy!

**What is the strangest thing that has ever happened to you during a routine?**

I performed as a belly dancer at lesbian 50th birthday party. Lots of the ladies were untucking their shirts to show their bellies and giving them a good wobble. We had a hoot. Any live event can present problems so there is always a challenge on stage - I always say that improvisation is the mark of a true professional.

**Tell us more about your signature 'sing and fling' routines?**

I am one of the few burlesque artists that sing my material live whilst performing. Basically I have a repertoire of show tunes and jazz standards and I often incorporate that into my act. I will 'sing' a song and 'fling' pieces of my costume away with a cheeky wink and sly grin!

See more of Sapphira at: [www.missapphira.com](http://www.missapphira.com)