

# Going Big

By David Podolsky



## ON TRACK ★

**R**ear tires come in a variety of sizes. How can you decide which one is right for you and your bike? For some street riders the decision can be influenced by the bigger is better mentality which is a bit more fashion than function, but for racing purposes we only want to go fast.

If you look at top fuel drag bikes, they run a flat slick that is for maximum grip and obviously doesn't need to turn. Most sportbike tires have a steep profile, which is the curve of the tire across the tread from left to right. This helps the bike turn into the corners. In fact, some road racing tires have what is called a triangulated profile where the front tire profile is so steep the motorcycle sort of falls into the corner as you tip it in.

The Chicken Hawk Racing Team has mostly raced big twin-cylinder motorcycles. Typically, the nature of these bikes is that they get great drives off the corners due to the high torque of the motors, and with only two power pulses compared to a four-cylinder motor, won't spin up the rear tire. The shortcoming of the twin compared to the four-cylinder bikes has traditionally been the overall weight and concentration of mass, making the bikes harder to flick back and forth through tighter sections.

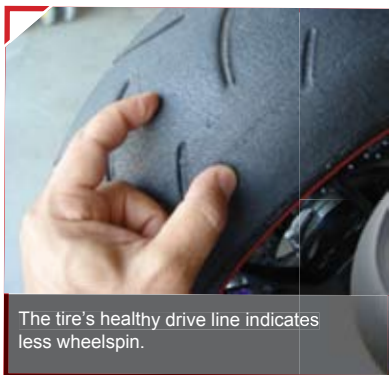
For these reasons we'd been running a 120 front, which is pretty standard, and a 180 rear tire. The 180 tire is lighter than the 190s, so there is

less mass to accelerate, and being more narrow it usually makes the bike change direction easier.

Enter the Ducati 1098S. The team has been setting up our Ducati 1098S throughout the race season and although the bike has plenty of grunt right out of the box and carves a nice turn, we've been a bit held back by a pogo-stick of a front end and a rear shock that is too hard. The

result is that when I'd get on the gas hard the bike would start spinning the rear tire.

Since our last race we've installed an Öhlins front fork valve kit and installed a shorter rear



The tire's healthy drive line indicates less wheelspin.

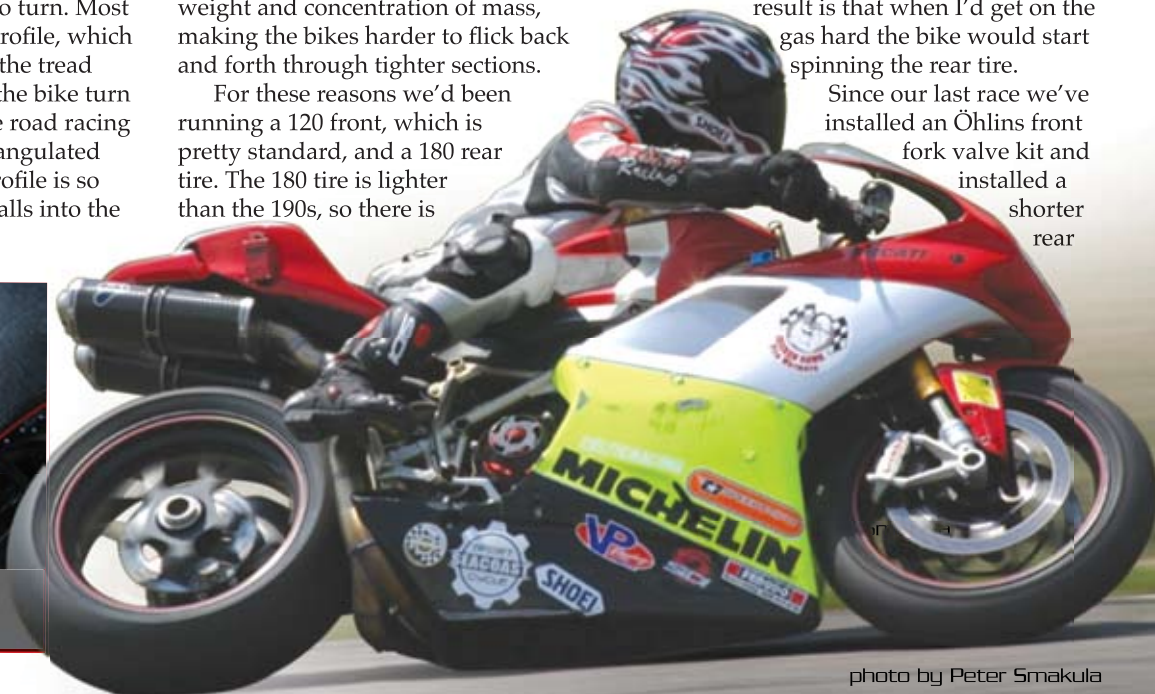


photo by Peter Smakula

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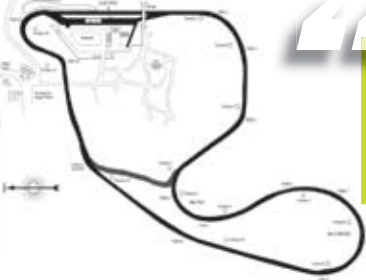


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*Even with the softer rear spring, the high horsepower was spinning the tire."*

shock spring that is the same stiffness as stock (8.0). Both modifications made a world of difference and we're moving in the right direction.

Nelson Ledges Raceway is a notoriously bumpy and fast racing circuit. Where better to test our new suspension modifications. Being my first time there I can say the track is everything it's cracked up to be: bumpy and fast with a simple but interesting layout. Top speed for our 1098S was probably about 155 mph, but our overall average speed for a lap was just about 100 mph — that's really moving considering the patched asphalt is about equal with the Brooklyn/Queens Expressway.

We'd brought Michelin Power Race tires and had the medium and hard compounds, still afraid of abusing the rear tire and destroying it by spinning the tire on the gas. The practice day revealed a much improved setup; the bike was feeling comfortable going over the bumps and the rear wheelspin was greatly reduced. We still had some of the same wear pattern on the drive line of the tire indicating we were spinning it some even though I couldn't really feel it.

David Podolsky is the founder of Chicken Hawk Racing, and is a nine-time national champion competing in AHRMA and AMA Sports Championships.

Across from our pit area was another racer on a 1098S, local fast guy Vince Larusso. After a bit of conversation about the mods we'd been making to our bikes, Vince recommended I try the 190 tire. I returned to my pit area and thought about it. At a dry weight of only 377 pounds this new bike is lighter than my previous twin-cylinder bikes and it does seem to carve a curve a bit easier, too. Hmm... With about 150 horsepower at the rear wheel the 1098S does make a bit more power than the other race bikes I've had.

Even with the softer rear shock spring, the high horsepower of the bike was spinning the tire. With the motorcycle being light and nimble, the issue of being able to change direction quickly was not really a problem. I had to change my traditional way of thinking and try something new.

Lucky for me the tire vendor had just what I needed. It is pretty cool when a fellow competitor is willing to give you some good advice, because the bigger tire was a good idea. The tire was used in two



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races on a hot 90-degree day and looked ready for more.

I guess Vince figured he had the field covered no matter what since he won both races. I managed to take two fourth places and was in a fight over third in both so we were pleased with those finishes since it was our first trip to Nelson Ledges.

Sometimes bigger is better. **2WT**

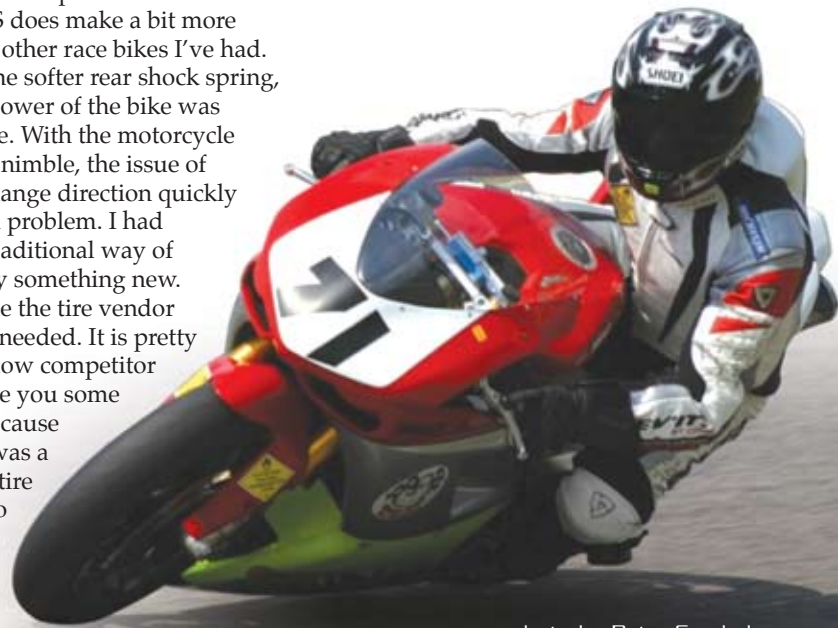


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