

## **SUZUKI RACING HISTORY IN THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP**

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***A lookback at the history of Suzuki as a cotton loom works in 1909 to moving to motorcycles and ultimately world motorcycling's most prestigious accolade.***

### **CHAPTER 1 - The Beginning:**

Suzuki has its historical roots in another industry. The founder, Michio Suzuki, was an innovator who built a weaving factory called Suzuki Loom Works in the small coastal town of Hamamatsu, in Japan's Shizuoka Prefecture, in **1909**. The production focused on cotton fabrics.

### **CHAPTER 2 - 1950's: FROM LOOMS TO ASPHALT:**

World War II and the post war period left Suzuki in crisis and forced large-scale restructuring. In 1952, as a result of this climate of uncertainty, Suzuki decided to manufacture their first motorised bicycle.

#### ***1952 - The Birth of the First Motorised Bicycle:***

Named the "Power Free", the bike was designed as an economical vehicle for those on a low budget. It was powered by a 36cc two-stroke engine anchored to a conventional bicycle. Its versatile design meant it could be ridden in a variety of ways; pedalled without power from the engine, or with full or partial power from the engine.

### **CHAPTER 3 - 1960's: SUZUKI START RACING:**

From the racing debut, to Degner, Anderson and Suzuki's dominance.

#### ***1960: The Racing Debut:***

The Tourist Trophy in the awe-inspiring Isle of Man was the first ever race in which Suzuki participated. All three Suzuki entrants finished the race.

#### ***1962: Finding Success:***

An East German rider, Ernst Degner, rode Suzuki to their first victory in the Isle of Man TT with a 50cc prototype called RM62. Degner was crucial in the development of those first Suzuki bikes. In 1961, after escaping from East Germany, he joined Suzuki and helped to develop their two-stroke motorcycles, using his in depth mechanical knowledge and skills.

#### ***1962: The Flying Kiwi:***

In the final round of the racing calendar, New Zealander and former rugby player, Hugh Anderson, gave Suzuki their first win in the 125cc class. It happened at the Autódromo Oscar Alfredo Gálvez in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

***1963: Mitsuo Itoh:***

Suzuki faced its second full year in the World Championship. A development engineer in Hamamatsu, Mitsuo Itoh, took an extraordinary victory at the Isle of Man TT. This memorable feat went down in history, as Itoh was the first, and only, Japanese rider to have conquered the dangerous roads of the island.

***1963-1965: Anderson Shines:***

Hugh Anderson won the 50cc and 125cc championships in 1963 as well as giving Suzuki two constructors' titles in the same season. He took his third title in 50cc in 1964, and a year later won his fourth, this time in 125cc. Suzuki seemed unstoppable in the smaller classes, and Anderson was confirming his legend status on Suzuki.

***1966: The Two Cylinders of Hans-Georg Anscheidt:***

After the success of Anderson, in 1966 it was Hans-Georg Anscheidt's turn to explode onto the scene. The German rode the fabulous RK66, a two-cylinder prototype capable of reaching 170 km/h. He confirmed his dominance in the 50cc category for three years, from 1966 to 1968.

And in 1970 Suzuki concluded a brilliant period in the small classes, when another German rider, Dieter Braun, won the 125cc World Championship.

**CHAPTER 4 - 1970's: SHEENE AND THE GLORY YEARS:**

After their success in the 1960's, it was time for a change of direction for Suzuki, and they began developing larger capacity motorcycles. Suzuki's history was about to take a dramatic and inspiring turn.

***1971: Findlay's Victory:***

On August 12<sup>th</sup> 1971, Australian Jack Findlay took Suzuki's first victory in the 500cc class in Belfast.

***1976-1977: The Golden Years:***

Barry Sheene, a young British rider, arrived like a whirlwind into motorcycle racing and revolutionised the sport. Sheene was the first rider to become a celebrity outside of the race track. Considered by his fans almost like a 'Beatle' for his character, his lifestyle, and outlandish behaviour, he took the 500cc title with the RG500 in 1976. This legendary bike occupied the first six positions in the championship that year. Sheene continued to shine, also winning the 500cc title in 1977.

## **CHAPTER 5 - 1980's, TWO ITALIANS JOIN THE FRAY:**

In the 80's Suzuki turned to Italy to extend their dominance. Marco Lucchinelli and Franco Uncini both proved successful in a private Italian structure running Suzukis, called Team Gallina, created in 1975.

### ***1981: The Crazy Horse:***

Marco Lucchinelli was the successor to Sheene at Suzuki. The charismatic Italian rider, nicknamed 'Crazy Horse' for his wild riding style, won the crown with an RG500. Lucchinelli fought hard with a young and unruly American named Randy Mamola who, despite his enormous talent, he could never get a world title.

### ***1982: Uncini:***

In 1982 success came for another Italian on a Suzuki: Franco Uncini. After five victories that season, he won Suzuki's second consecutive title.

## **CHAPTER 6 - 1990's, THE MAGIC OF SCHWANTZ:**

Another of the talents nurtured by Suzuki, Schwantz had one of the most spectacular riding style ever seen in the World Championship. He pitted his huge talent against his compatriot Wayne Rainey, with whom he maintained an extraordinary rivalry throughout the years.

### ***1993: "When I see God I know it's time to brake":***

Kevin Schwantz made history by defeating Yamaha and Wayne Rainey after winning the 500cc World Championship with a RGV-500 in 1993. The Texan had extraordinary charisma and his style remains unforgettable. Not least due to his "full gas" attitude on the bike and his seemingly impossible braking at the limit of physics!

### ***2000: Kenny Roberts Jr.:***

The next Suzuki World Champion also hailed from America: Kenny Roberts Jr., son of the famous 'King' Kenny Roberts. Against the odds, he won the 2000 Championship after a total of four victories. That title, the sixth for Suzuki in the premier category, was very special as it put an end to a drought of seven years without a crown. Kenny won it ahead of promising youngster Valentino Rossi!

## **CHAPTER 7 - THE MODERN ERA:**

In 2002 the Motorcycle World Championship changed its name to MotoGP, but that wasn't the only change as new rules saw the introduction of 1000cc four-strokes. After a bedding in year where both 500cc two-stroke engines and 1000cc four-stroke engines were allowed, it became immediately clear that the latter had more potential, and all manufacturers focused their development in that direction.

### **2007: First MotoGP Win:**

Australian Chris Vermeulen gave Team Rizla Suzuki an epic victory in the rain at Le Mans, achieving the brand's first MotoGP victory.

### **2015: Back In The Game:**

After a three year break from the World Championship (from 2011 to 2015), Suzuki returned to the scene with Team SUZUKI ECSTAR.

### **2016: On Top Of The Podium Again:**

Spain's Maverick Viñales flourished, achieving another win for Suzuki, this time at Silverstone.

### **2019: Fantastic Year:**

Alex Rins managed to win two races during the season (Austin and Silverstone) to finish the year fourth in the Championship.

### **2020: Champion of the Century:**

Joan Mir put together a sensational season, showing consistency and maturity throughout the year to be crowned MotoGP World Champion and put Suzuki back in the spotlight after 20 years. Coupled with Alex Rins' impressive form, this was truly the 'comeback' year for Suzuki - a feat made even more special as the factory celebrated 100 years since their founding, and 60 years in racing.

## **STATISTICS:**

### ***World Championship Titles – Rider***

1962 - 50cc - Ernst Degner (GER)  
1963 - 125cc - Hugh Anderson (NZE)  
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1965 - 125cc - Hugh Anderson (NZE)  
1966 - 50cc - Hans-Georg Anscheidt (GER)  
1967 - 50cc - Hans-Georg Anscheidt (GER)  
1968 - 50cc - Hans-Georg Anscheidt (GER)  
1970 - 125cc - Dieter Braun (GER)  
1976 - 500cc - Barry Sheene (GBR)  
1977 - 500cc - Barry Sheene (GBR)  
1981 - 500cc - Marco Lucchinelli (ITA)  
1982 - 500cc - Franco Uncini (ITA)  
1993 - 500cc - Kevin Schwantz (USA)  
2000 - 500cc - Kenny Roberts, Jr. (USA)  
2020 – MotoGP – Joan Mir (SPA)

TOTAL: 16

**Suzuki World Champion Image Gallery** (being updated): [http://www.suzuki-racing.com/motogp/series\\_gallery.aspx?OBJ\\_ID=108818](http://www.suzuki-racing.com/motogp/series_gallery.aspx?OBJ_ID=108818)

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