

MAKING HIS MOVE

JOEL SPALDING STEPS IT UP IN EXPERT CLASS

SO MUCH FOR THE “LEARNING CURVE.”

In his first year racing in the expert classes, Buell racer Joel Spalding has already made his mark in the CCS (Championship Cup Series) racing world, adding a handful of regional and track championships to the titles he won in the amateur ranks. He also made a strong showing in the ASRA (American Sportbike Racing Association) Pro Thunderbike class.

Really, though, this fast start as an expert should come as no surprise. In 2008, his first full racing season, he won a CCS Midwest Region title in Amateur Thunderbike, placed second in the Midwest Region in Amateur Supertwins, won the Blackhawk Farms track championship in Amateur Thunderbike, and claimed a national CCS championship in Amateur Thunderbike.

He could have won a few *more* races that year. But frankly, well ... he got a little bored.

“I started the season contesting in three Lightweight classes, as well,” he says. “But by mid-season I had gotten first place in every single one of those races, and it felt like I was just starting to do laps. So I decided to focus on the classes where there was more competition and that Buell supported.”

Not bad for a guy who didn't run his first road race until 2007, at the ripe young age of 36. (That's how he chose his number.)

THE ROAD TO RACING

Like so many successful racers, Joel started out riding dirt bikes as a kid, followed by his first street bike at age 18. Then, like so many frustrated adults, gave up the sport for a time when grown-up responsibilities and financial obligations got in the way.

By 2004, he was ready to ride again and bought a Harley-Davidson® Fat Boy®. It didn't take long, however, before he was “itching to get back on a sportbike.” So he checked out the Buell motorcycles at the local H-D dealership and brought home a 2006 Buell® Firebolt® XB12R.

At the dealership he saw a flyer for a Buell-sponsored Inside Pass™ track day at nearby Autobahn Country Club in Joliet, Illinois. All it took was a few laps, and he was ready to go racing. Success followed very shortly thereafter.

He attributes his fast start to “preparation, determination, and passion.”

“I love it,” he raves. “I fell in love with it the very first time I went to the track, and I've wanted to go faster and faster every time out. I've studied the sport, studied my technique, and asked a lot of questions.”

And one of the great parts of racing a Buell, he says, is how eager his fellow Buell racers are to help.

“Guys like Paul James, Dan Bilansky. Those kinds of guys were always very accessible, and offered up a lot of help and advice. And I've made sure to pay attention when it was offered!”

Of course, you can't underestimate the value of a quality crew chief, either. In Joel's case, he found one very close to home. *In* his home, as a matter of fact.

“My wife Cindy is my crew chief, my biggest sponsor, and my mechanic,” he says with obvious pride. “She has totally embraced the sport and now goes to every race with me. She changes tires, changes oil, gets my grid positions, keeps

the bike clean, inspects the bike between rounds, does all the safety wiring, and keeps me calm. Sometimes she takes my bike through tech for me.”

Cindy's interest in motorcycles did not come as a surprise to Joel – she's a Harley® rider, after all (and they began dating at 14!). But her mechanical aptitude did. She didn't even go to all the races at first. But then Joel crashed.

“After Joel crashed the first time, I started to take note and observe the other riders around and thought, ‘this is nuts!’” she recalls. “These guys are out here pushing the limits and most of them come here alone. I realized I had to be there to help keep my husband safe, if nothing else to get him home safely if he did crash.

“The first race he almost went out without his helmet strap buckled. Another race his boots weren't strapped. So after a few of those incidences I started to have Joel teach me how to work on the bike and take note of certain things so he could sit, relax, and concentrate on the race. I can't do everything, but it's enough to get him out there safely, and I just pray I did everything right.”

“And you know what?” Joel adds. “She's better than I am at most of it. When I work on the bike, I'm always rushed, so I miss stuff. But she doesn't miss anything. She takes her time because she's worried about her husband, and she gets it done right. There's no doubt she's been a big part of my success.”

STEPPING UP

Following his breakout 2008 amateur season, Spalding added a 2008 Buell 1125R™ (which he rode in the Supertwins classes) to his racing stable and set his sights on 2009. His stated goals were fairly modest: “To chase the experts around and stay as close to them as I can. But I'd also like to shoot for a Midwest Region Championship,” he said, “and maybe a top-five season finish in ASRA Thunderbike.”

With his *three* regional championships and one track championship, he clearly exceeded expectations. He even gave the ASRA Thunderbike season championship a good run, holding the season lead a few times before fellow Buell rider Dan Bilansky clinched the title in the next-to-last race.

“Unfortunately, because we did so much racing this year our budget ran a little short, and we had to skip the Virginia race,” Joel said. “But we had a very strong season otherwise.”

With one race left – at Daytona, October 18 – Joel hopes to recapture second place with a strong performance (and add a national CCS title or two). And while winning is great, what's almost as good is being surrounded by a very tight Buell racing community. One that Cindy has embraced, as well.

“Everyone is there to lend a hand and is very friendly, so it's nice to be able to be a part of it all and share the experience with Joel. I'm very proud of what he has accomplished in such a short amount of time. I do have to thank Henry Duga and Jay Smith, as they keep an eye on me and answer most of my questions. It's nice to have both of them at the races.”

“If you see another Bueller and you need help with something,” Joel adds, “chances are he's going to help you out. I don't think that exists with the other manufacturers. I'm not sure why it does with Buell, but it's definitely one of the things – besides the great bikes – that's going to keep me on a Buell in the future.” **fuel**



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FAST FACTS

Name: Joel Spalding

Year of Birth: 1970

Residence: Huntley, Illinois

Family: Wife, Cindy

Started Riding: Age 10

Current Bike(s): 2006 XB12R, 2008 1125R

Racing Number: 36

Sponsors: Michelin, Hal's H-D, Airtech, Amsoil

2009 Titles: Midwest Region Expert Thunderbike, Midwest Region Expert Supertwins, Great Plains Region Expert Supertwins, Blackhawk Farms Expert Supertwins