

Rookie rider 60 points clear

Richie Dibben has comfortable margin after Hampton Downs

SUPERBIKES

Whanganui motorcycle hero Richie Dibben is rocketing ahead in the chase for the Supersport 600 class title in this year's New Zealand Superbike Championships series.

The 30-year-old bike shop owner is dipping his toes into unfamiliar waters, making his debut on the superbike scene and racing a Suzuki GSX-R600 in the talent-laden Supersport 600 class.

Dibben kicked off his 2020 campaign by dominating the class at both the South Island rounds of the series in January, winning five of six races at those back-to-back events, and built up an impressive 54-point lead over his nearest rival.

The competition took a seven-week break, allowing Dibben to catch his breath and reflect on his sharp start to 2020.

Over the weekend, the championship racing resumed at Hampton Downs. The seven-week break didn't seem to slow down Dibben, who set the fastest time in qualifying.

However once the proper racing had begun, Dibben met his match in Upper Hutt's Rogan Chandler. Chandler was on fire all weekend, winning all three races and forcing Dibben to accept three runner-up finishes on the undulating Waikato track.

Despite Chandler's strong showing over the weekend, Dibben still sits a comfortable 60 point advantage at the top of the standings.

With points worth more than two race wins up his sleeve, Dibben can perhaps afford to relax over the two rounds (six 600cc class races) that remain – at Manfeild and then Taupo – although that's not really something that's in his nature and he says he will still be pushing hard for race wins at the upcoming events.

"It was a good weekend (at Hampton Downs). Obviously I wanted to be winning the races, but I have still extended my points lead, so I'm happy with that," said Dibben matter-of-factly.

"I am looking forward to the next



Whanganui's Richie Dibben sits a comfortable 60 points ahead of his nearest rival.

Photo / Andy McGeehan, bikesportnz.com

rounds. I am reasonably familiar with Manfeild and don't usually go too bad there. I love the Taupo track, probably my favourite, because it seems to suit my style.

"I have picked up this branch of the sport remarkably well. It helped going over to Australia and racing a couple of rounds of their 600cc nationals last year. I went over there to see if I could pick up the speed a bit and see if I could be on the pace in this style of racing.

"That experience has certainly paid

dividends for me back here in New Zealand," said Dibben, well on course to clinch the national 600cc title at his first attempt.

Dibben said regardless with how this season plays out, he will be moving classes again next year.

"I have already decided that I will be in the (1000cc) superbike class in next season's nationals.

"It should be a good challenge. I have never even ridden a superbike before," he laughed.

So is it optimistic and ambitious to jump

up to a 1000cc Suzuki?

"Yes, but it's the same as for me racing the 600 this year. I never really knew whether I would feel comfortable with it to start with. It will just be a time thing to get used to another bike and try to go fast," Dibben said.

Round four is set for Circuit Chris Amon, Manfeild, on the outskirts of Feilding in three weeks' time, on March 28-29, with the fifth and final round scheduled for Bruce McLaren Motorsport Park near Taupo on April 4-5.

Aotearoa Maori Tennis tournament returns for first time since 1927

TENNIS Logan Tutty

Organisers of the Aotearoa Māori Tennis Championships have been in Whanganui as the city gears up to host the tournament for the first time in 93 years.

Aotearoa Māori Tennis Association president Dick Garratt said the Whanganui Māori Tennis committee's passion and enthusiasm were key reasons they chose to bring the tournament to the city "because of what they want to achieve within Whanganui, especially with our youth".

Garratt, alongside secretary/treasurer Geoff Kaye have been in Whanganui to organise the event alongside the Whanganui committee and ensure both sides are running on the same page.

Whanganui's central location and

strong ties to neighbouring cities were also strong reasons they were accepted as hosts.

"The Māori tennis champs used to travel around the country all the time."

Garratt was quick to bring up the 1954 tournament that was hosted in Dunedin, where more than 80 Māori travelled by boat to play.

The tournament will be held at the Whanganui Tennis Club from December 27-30. The last two years the tournament has been held in Rotorua.

"It is about promoting tennis among Māori people, especially our young ones. But also hopefully increase the profile of tennis in general.

"It's a unique tournament. The family gatherings are strong. It doesn't have the extreme rules and pressure of non-Māori tournaments, but still remains very competitive."

The Aotearoa Māori Tennis



The Aotearoa Māori Tennis Championships are coming back to Whanganui after 93 years. Trish Biddle-Amoroa, Dick Garratt, Geoff Kaye and Paula Fore.

Photo / Bevan Conley

Association has a long and storied history, established almost a century ago in 1926. Whanganui hosted the second tournament in 1927, signalling the last time it was in the town.

Aotearoa Māori Tennis are hoping to bring in a new generation of players, and keep them in the sport.

Garratt sees the new partnership they have with Tennis New Zealand as key to growing the sport in the country. A partnership was made last December after the two had an MOU that was "pretty much non-existent" for years, Garratt said.

"The current board of Tennis NZ

are very keen to right that wrong where they can by supporting this current partnership we've built with them."

Garratt points out Ruia Morrison and Kelly Evernden as crucial figures in Māori tennis history.

Morrison was a 13-time New Zealand champion, and in 1957 became the first New Zealand woman to play at Wimbledon.

Evernden had his lung removed after injuries suffered in a car accident at the age of 16, and remarkably went on to have a successful pro career where he reached No 31 in the world.

Garratt quickly pointed towards local tennis stars Kyle Butters and Paige Hourigan as key mentors going forward.

Butters is the defending Aotearoa Māori Tennis champion while Hourigan is NZ's top ranked woman.

