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WEEKLY PERIODICAL - TIME-DATED NEWS

XDL Opens 2008 Season In The Big Apple With A Bang

The XDL Sportbike Freestyle Championship opened its third season June 21 in New York in conjunction with Hot Import Nights Nightshift at Belmont Park Raceway. Series director Randy Grube and director of competition Thomas Evans welcomed the 39 competitors, who were soon whittled down to 15 main-event finalists.

Leading the pack of the qualifying order was defending National Champion and Shift rider Alex Flores, who thrived with the new judging rules, which place more emphasis on difficulty than they did in the past.

The main event gave each of the 15 qualifiers a three-minute run, in which they could gain points in three categories: 40 points for Overall, 40 points for Difficulty and 20 points for Execution. Deductions are made for crashing, bobbling or missing a trick.

Disaster struck for Chris McNeil, the first rider of the main event. When he was performing a Switchback Christ, his foot slipped off the tank, he fell, and the seat came off the bike. McNeil recovered but he was only able to score enough points for 14th place. Japanese rider Shin laid down an impressive ninth-place qualifying run and backed it up with a 10th place in the main event. Ernie Vigil provided everyone with a big scare. Vigil is known as a very talented and aggressive rider, and, after time had expired on his run, he put on an encore trick for the fans that went horribly wrong, high-siding him off his bike. He hit the ground hard and, for good measure, got run over by his bike. A collective gasp went through the entire venue but, luckily, Vigil walked away with "only" a broken collarbone.

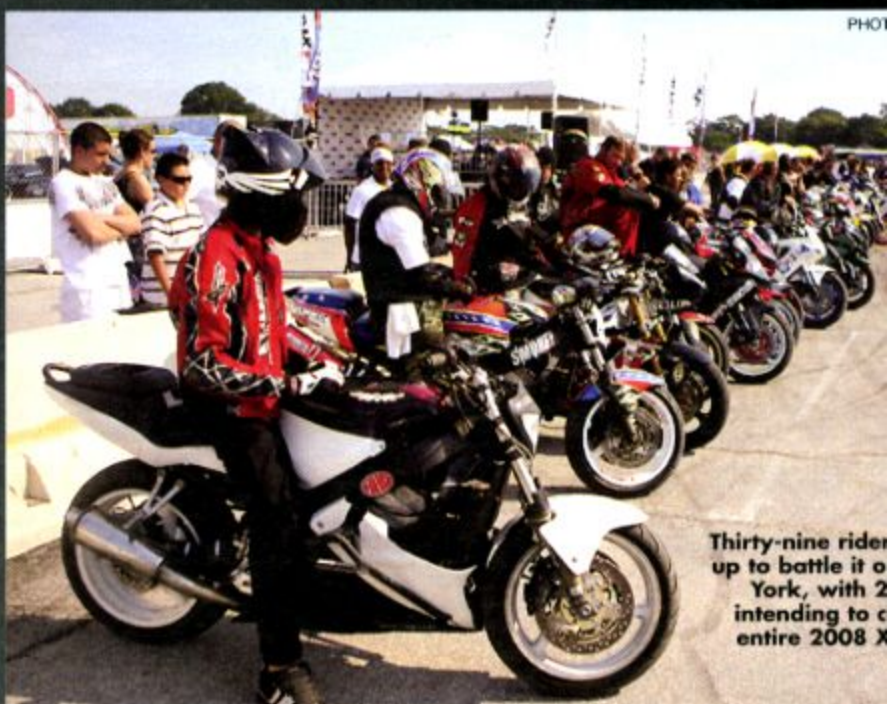
The battle for the top spot came down to 16-year-old Red Bull rider Aaron Colton, Rush Deal's Nick Brocha, and Flores. Having qualified in third, Colton started off the fireworks with a solid run that earned him high-fives from his fellow competitors. Brocha was still shaken up from witnessing the crash of his good friend Ernie Vigil, and he crashed early in his run while performing seat-stander figure-8s, but he picked up the bike and seemed to loosen up considerably after that. Flores started out with a switchback, one-handed stoppie and put on a flawless run, which put him in a tie for first with Nick Brocha at 88 points. The tiebreaker was decided by the higher "overall" score, which gave Brocha the win. In the podium interview, Brocha remarked that he was both elated and stunned (due to the injury of his friend Vigil).

"I honestly can't remember it, because I was thinking about Ernie," Brocha said when asked about his run.

The other competitions at XDL saw some surprise winners, some old faces, and a lot of new tricks. Red Bull rider Aaron Colton took Freestyle Burnout with a standstill burnout, saran-wrapping into a highchair burnout, earning him enormous applause. Circle Challenge went to Andy Niles, who finally seemed to break through with a win. Target Stoppie went to drift specialist Jesse Toler, and Sickest Trick was taken by Nick Brocha with his Vegas-style circle strip.

For more about the XDL Series and round two in Nashville on July 26, log on to www.xdlshow.com.

**Story by Randy Grube
Photos by Aaron Korsgaard**



Thirty-nine riders lined up to battle it out in New York, with 25 intending to compete in the entire 2008 XDL Series.



Celebrating on the podium are (clockwise from front) Aaron Colton, Alex Flores, Nick Brocha, Andy Niles and Ernie Vigil.



(Left) Nick Brocha was top dog in Sickest Trick.

(Right) Drift specialist Jesse Toler's skills got him eighth in the overall series points.



2008 XDL Champions Points Standings (Final)

1. Nick Brocha (45);
 2. Alex Flores (40);
 3. Aaron Colton (39);
 4. Ernie Vigil (38);
 5. Andy Niles (33);
 6. Rick Hart (30);
 7. Dan Farris (27);
 8. Jesse Toler (24);
 9. Dan Farris (23);
 10. Shin (18);
 11. Dan Farris (15);
 12. Aaron (12);
 13. Joe Dryden (9);
 14. Chris McNeil (6);
 15. Brian Chin (3);
- (Points in particular order): Lin Eshalom (1); Dan O'Leary (1); Bill Knight (1); Josh Nathan Hall (1); Tony Levesque (1); Seals (1); Chris Theis (1); Dennis Ronnie Herrera (1); Jason Bryan D'Orsi (1); Shaun Kazmierski (1); (1); Gilbert Conde (1); Donald Brisbin (1); Nicholas Hernandez (1); Loughlin (1); Chris Jones (1); Justin...