

# KAMICARZE

BMW's S 1000 RR has beaten everything on two wheels this year – so it's time to broaden our horizons to four

WORDS BY: ALASTAIR 'A-FORCE' FAGAN

PICS BY: FLOW IMAGES/BIKE CHANNEL



Two machines, at the very top of their classes, about to battle in a war of the wheels

**B**eing Fast Bikes' 2010 Sportsbike of the Year and 1000cc group test winner isn't enough for the accolade-hungry S 1000 RR. The Beemer has obliterated the opposition and sparked a rush of unwanted hastiness in R&D departments in Japan. Nothing else comes close to it. So how else can we challenge ze German?

BMW has been relentless in churning out shit-kicking cars, where speed and raw pace has always been paramount. Yet it's only now that the Motorrad arm of the company has produced something to get us truly hyped. But even its cars

aren't wiz-bang enough to keep the S 1000 RR behind. So we've lined up the RR's four-wheeled, electro-frenzied rival as a further possible scalp to add to its collection – the Nissan GT-R.

Car versus bike? Yes, it's been done before, but never to this degree of intensity and complete evaluation. And why? Because we can. You may remember me razzing around Bruntingthorpe on a GSX-R1000 K7 a few years ago, with Moby nearly destroying a Caterham CSR260 trying keeping up. Fun though it was, Moby ain't a car racer, and although scenic and

The two protagonists begin the mind games. Al loves sudoku







## WHO THE BLOODY HELL IS CRAIG CURRIE?

Well, Craig Currie drives a 350Z for Nissan in the Dunlop Sport Maxx Cup (seen as the class below the British Touring Car Championship) and has race wins to his name. But there's more to Craig than just a four-wheeled racer. He was once a team mate to a certain Mr. Casey Stoner when the Aussie raced in the UK, partnering each other in the 125cc British Championship.

And there's more. Craig now owns and runs a British Superstock team, looking after ex-supermoto ace and drift king, Sam Warren. As far as drivers go, I couldn't have hoped for a more qualified man who I'd be sharing the Tarmac with. At least he could anticipate lines and biking etiquette.



A-Force goes on the B of the Bang. Well, the cafe was closing in five minutes...

## MY P45 WOULD BE HANDED OVER IF I RETURNED DEFEATED

► boasting a splendid café, Bruntinhorpe Proving Ground is no Brands Hatch, either.

So, that's where we went. We also drafted in a top-flight Nissan racer by the name of Craig Currie. Troy Corser missed his flight, so I was the lucky substitute pilot on the Beemer. We're doing things proper, ya get me?

This is no Top Gear-type choreographed bullshit. We genuinely didn't know what was going to happen, other than a guarantee of my P45 getting handed over if I returned defeated. I collected the S Thou' from the BMW press fleet on the way to Brands, only dropping tyre pressures. Similarly, the Nissan was delivered directly from their press armada in thoroughbred road-trim. All's fair in war.

Blazing sunshine pumping out 31 degrees meant for tricky conditions. Suddenly, the lure

of the Nissan's air-con became appealing. MSVR (owners of Brands, among other track Mecca) kindly let us loose on circuit for a few hours during a car trackday, sans cars, which unfortunately meant Craig and the GT-R could get out for a few sneaky laps of practice before the confrontation. He'd also raced there a few months previously. The last time I was at Brands was during the British superbike round some 18 months ago. Nervous wasn't the word. That's my excuses out the way.

Being a road-legal trackday, there were a few shitters, but the majority were rich boys in Porsche GT3s driven to the circuit by Jeeves, and several other £100k exotica. However, few got more looks than the GT-R. I was beginning to fathom how kick-ass this thing is, I guess it's akin to rocking-up to a trackday with an S



Both are on the edge, but it's the bike that looks dynamic. That's bikes for you...



Thou' in March, earlier in 2010.

The original plan involved staging the showdown around the GP circuit at Brands, something I was confident about as we could utilise the BMW's straight line speed and lack of tighter sections – where the car could take full advantage of its downforce, enough to lift cats-eyes. But after a sneaky switch to Brands Hatch Indy circuit, the car had an instant advantage and I was getting a twitchy botty, especially when Craig and the GT-R dipped straight into the 54s within a few laps, slicing through traffic.

I did a little sex-wee though when Craig returned to the pits, brakes smoking like a Jah Rastafarai jungle fire, just smelling a lot worse. He'd managed just a handful of flying laps and burnt half a tank of fuel. Was this in their plan, reducing weight in readiness for the race? The plot thickens. Judging by the seriousness of the Nissan officials, anything was possible. The air-con was banned, as it sapped valuable horsepower and ran the engine-temp too high. And the windows remained closed to maximise aerodynamics.

We headed out together for some practice

laps and a chance to get to know where each other's lines were, for safety more than anything else. Needless to say, both of us were holding back and not giving too much away. But the area that really had me pooping it was the Surtees to Clearways section of the track, not helped by the new Tarmac

laid earlier this year – Craig and the Nissan were making me and the Bee-Em look silly, pulling seconds. I knew I had to push harder come the showdown.

A race wouldn't be a race without it being a head-to-head dogfight. With kind clearance from Race Control, and after several warm-up laps to generate some heat into the road-going Metzeler Racetecs K3s, we sat side-by-side facing the lights for a standing start, one-lap race.

I had to make it into Paddock Hill first otherwise the GT-R would stay wide and block any moves. I wasn't too worried – the Beemer can nail a 0-60mph in three seconds all day long, mit quickshifter. The GT-R, at its absolute peak, can manage 3.5 seconds with launch control, and Craig only had one shot at the money.

The S Thou' also savages the car up to 100mph – 5.6 seconds to the Nissan's 8.5 seconds, so my only concern/focus was to ensure the BMW was in 'Slick' mode (to deactivate the super-intrusive anti-wheelie) and hope the grabby clutch didn't kangaroo me from the lights. Simples. ►

## NISSAN GT-R: WHAT'S THE SHIMMY?

As far as cars costing £60k go, the Nissan GT-R is the daddy. There's a 3.8 litre twin-turbocharged V6 packing 478bhp and 588Nm of torque spread through 4WD, capable of 195mph. And there's the electronics that make the S Thou' look like a Christmas cracker gift, including traction control, launch control, erection control and even a Bose 11 speaker sound system. Oh, and a cup holder in the rear centre console. But, she's tipping the scales at 1.8 tonnes and carries a whopping 74 litres of go-go juice.

You know a car is good when even fashion guru Jeremy Clarkson raves about it.

Clarkson said, "This is a car that can bring me closer to God without having to almost kill me.... The Nissan GT-R has set a new standard for sportscar production, not just because it is phenomenally fast, capable and approachable, but also because it's not actually that expensive. Porsche, Ferrari, Aston? There's no longer any need." Take it from the gobby Northerner, it's a damned fine car.



Being able to brake super-late, the GT-R always had an uncomfortably close view of Al's arse



## THE SCIENCE BIT

## GEAR CHANGE MARKERS

1 Bike

1 Car

2 2

2 4

2 3

2 3

2 3

3 4

3 2

3

5 4

4 5

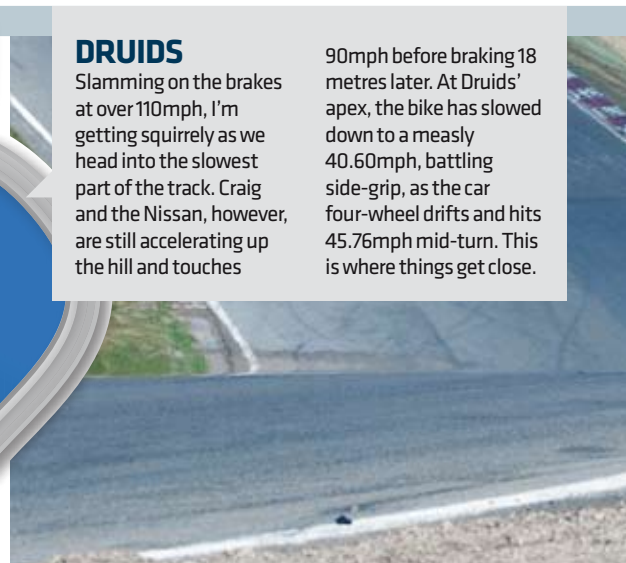
Eschewing the cool of the garage, both boys elect to catch some rays



## DRUIDS

Slamming on the brakes at over 110mph, I'm getting squirrely as we head into the slowest part of the track. Craig and the Nissan, however, are still accelerating up the hill and touches

90mph before braking 18 metres later. At Druids' apex, the bike has slowed down to a measly 40.60mph, battling side-grip, as the car four-wheel drifts and hits 45.76mph mid-turn. This is where things get close.



The car looks as if it could be being pushed round. The same can't be said about the Beemer



## BRABHAM STRAIGHT

Despite being in between gears, the Beemer peaks at 111mph on the run into Surtees, the car hitting 97.38.

## GRAHAM HILL

The BMW grips and rips exiting Druids and the downhill approach to Graham Hill sees 89.28mph and 1G, as the car bimbles up to 66.22mph before braking

and a creating a whopping 1.6G. Surprisingly, corner speed and apex speeds are very close here, the bike at 53.12mph and the car a notch faster at 54.59mph.

## START/FINISH

Hitting 145mph, the bike has a clear 20mph advantage over the car, but soon loses out on the anchors as Craig is braking 45 metres later, and harder. The GT-R is coping much better with incline-to-decline as the BMW battles weight transfer and an adverse camber.



## SURTEES

The car just doesn't slow, dabbling the brakes around 25 metres later than the bike which hits 80.75 mph at Surtees' apex. The GT-R has scrubbed off a smidgen of speed and clips the apex at 87.02mph, and 0.6G on the transition between the tricky left/right flick.

## CLEARWAYS

This is where the BMW really struggled – big, long lean clocking 49.41mph at Clearways' apex, whereas the GTR shreds at 56.68mph in the middle of the turn and carries its pace onto the start/finish straight.

allowing banzai throttle abuse as we descended down to Graham Hill. This was the section that I had to make time on the GT-R.

The Brabham Straight saw a further gap extension. I closed my eyes and prayed as we headed into Surtees and the new Tarmac.

A quick glance in the mirrors revealed a angry looking red GT-R filling the glass, but unless Craig executed a retarded move, things were looking good for me and the bike – save from a stereotypical Clearways highside.

But even one of the most notorious corners in the world couldn't rile the Beemer and, despite the Nissan pulling alongside on the exit, we Foxtrot-Oscar'd our way to a comfortable victory.

Anyone can win a race from the front though, and there was no doubt that I was holding up the other pairing in some areas – mainly on the brakes, as in some places Craig

Avoiding getting skittled, just, Al makes it to Druids first



## BMW S 1000 RR

## Nissan GT-R

	BMW S 1000 RR	Nissan GT-R
0 - 100mph	5.69s	8.50s
Best and optimum lap	52.19s	53.72s
Top speed	145mph	124mph
Mid corner Paddock	58.58mph	65.99mph
Bottom of Paddock	109.99mph	78.93mph
Entrance before Druids pre-braking	N/A	89.57
Druids apex	40.60mph	45.76mph
Before braking for Graham Hill	89.28mph	66.22mph
Graham Hill apex	53.12mph	54.59mph
Peak speed at Brabham straight	111mph	97.58mph
Apex at Surtees	80.75mph	87.02mph
Apex Clearways	49.41mph	56.68mph
G-forces	Lateral G at turn-in to GH - 1.1G Pulling 1G at transition between left/right at Surtees. -1.7 at Paddock Hill	Lateral G at turn-in to GH - 1.6G but further down the hill, nearing apex. Pulling 0.6G at transition between left/right at Surtees -1.3 at Paddock Hill

## DOWNFORCE - A BIKE'S WORST ENEMY...

Downforce is a downwards thrust created by aerodynamic characteristics, allowing a car to travel faster through a corner by increasing the vertical force on the tyres, therefore creating more grip. This is the same principle that allows a plane to rise from the ground by creating lift under its wings, and the reverse action is the force that pushes the car against the surface of the track. That's why F1 cars have big fuck-off wings.

The creation of downforce by passive devices almost always can only be achieved at the cost of increased aerodynamic drag and the optimum set-up is almost always a compromise between the two – but the Nissan has an amazing balance.

was anchoring 40-50 metres later. The crux of the assessment involved flying laps without hindrance or distraction, complete with GPS to dissect the individual laps and cut the smack-talk – the data never lies. Maybe the car could rely on its 195mph top speed? Definitely on its extra two wheels.

First up were Craig and the four-wheeled love-truck, screeching and fighting the mass of electronics the GT-R offers, as the Nissan PR man grips the stopwatch in anticipation. This is more serious than I thought. Again, six laps was enough to get a time, and then it was me, fronting the two-wheeled fraternity.

I didn't even look at the results on the screen of the GPS – I didn't want to panic at a quickie or relax at the sight of an uninspiring lap. It was just a case of manning-up and keeping my eyes on the prize.

Needless to say, the tyres were roasting within a few laps and the S'Thou' was thriving in this environment. But as the California Superbike School will reiterate, lean is your





Druids was the only place Craig had a quarter of a chance of squeezing through

just too god darn hot – the Racetec K3s weren't functioning, turning to a jelly-mess in the 30-plus degrees.

Without sounding over-exuberant, the Nissan GT-R has similarly achieved what BMW has on the opposite global scale. Before, high-performance within a budget was a European-only option – M3s, GT3s and the like. Now there isn't a car for £60,000 that matches the GT-R, but enough blowing smoke up its arse. Conversely, BMW has hit Japan hard. Only a few years ago, buying Japanese to remedy your 1000cc fixations was the only solution.

Short of sticking the S 1000 RR on the

► worst enemy on a bike, especially on a 1000cc, and particularly when you're racing a car. Sure, it looks dapper, buried mid-corner with everything scraping, but there's only going to be one outcome – and it ain't the fastest form. It was a case of squaring-off the tighter corners and relying on the BMW's intrinsic traction control for mechanical thrust.

The front-end felt like Jabba the Hut was mounted to the rim, understeering and offering little on the limit when pushing the Beemer's nose. I think we may have dropped the pressures a couple of pounds too many.

Whining in parallel with the front, the Sachs shock proved to hamstring the times and highlighted something we've never experienced previously. Rounding Clearways, it was grippin' and rippin', but transferring too much weight onto the under-damped rear, causing tankslappers entering the start/finish straight. Feathering the throttle was the only option to halt an unwanted trip to the burger van. This lost valuable tenths. There's no

## THE FRONT-END FELT LIKE JABBA THE HUT WAS MOUNTED TO THE RIM

doubt a 'Blade's set-up would have benefited and we look forward to seeing what Moby's longterm suzzie mods will bring. I digress.

After busting my balls for several flying laps, it was time to analyse the data. There was no doubt it was close, as marshals and trackday-goers were blubbering random times from their stopwatches. 53.72s was the car's fastest, its ideal lap too – a time that would qualify for the British Touring Car Championship. Gathering around the GPS like a bunch of prepubescent kids waiting a growler shot on a mate's mobile, the majority of us relaxed when a 52.19 flashed up.

OK, the times weren't anything special and we were all expecting a 50 second lap from the S 1000 RR – in the right climate with suitable set-up, that's easily possible. As it was, it was

frontline to fight the Taliban single-handedly or a skirmish with a Euro Fighter, there aren't many challenges left for the Beemer – although we'd love to sample an RR with pukka suspension. Potential gearbox issues aside, it's fucked-shit-up in 2010 and will continue to do so next year, unless the new ZX-10R is proper mustard cutting material.

But costing a sixth of the price and 1.5 seconds quicker around Brands Indy, the S 1000 RR has once again reigned supreme. Viva la two-wheels. ☐



An old trick from Beverley Hills Cop – stick a banana in the tail-pipe



### CRAIG'S VERDICT

"It was a fair result in the end and shows the quality of each. Although Nissan thought it would be closer, I thought the GT-R would be two seconds off at the end of the day, despite the twisty track. Don't forget it weighs nearly two tonnes!

That Beemer pulled ridiculous amounts on me down the straights and there wasn't much in mid-corner speed. It was the brakes that set the two apart – I was braking 50 metres later into Paddock. In the head-to-head, I couldn't have got past without a nasty ending. Being cruel, I could have put a move going into Druids, but it was too close.

Even if Michael Schumacher had been driving, there was only half a second left in the car as it was on the limit of adhesion everywhere. A good result for FB though!"



Al celebrates the only way he knows how – wheelying his way to McDonalds