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WELCOME TO PLANET ROSSI

1979 was an epic year for Graziano Rossi. Buoyed by the birth of Valentino earlier in the year, Rossi senior stood on the podium in every 250GP race he entered – winning three. Injury curtailed Graziano's career, an accident in 1982 nearly taking his life. Had things been different Graziano wouldn't have nurtured his son's talents to their incredible peak.

First in the quarries around their Tavullia home, then on the little mini-moto tracks around the Adriatic coast, Graziano introduced his son to the internal combustion engine. Little Valentino showed ethereal natural talent for one so young. What with his father's genes, his enthusiasm, his attitude and his connections, Valentino was put on a path that would change the course of motorcycle racing forever.

"Maybe if Graziano make another sport I wouldn't have this passion to be a rider," said Valentino of his father, but this background is no different to hundreds of kids whose Dads were racers. No, something set Valentino

apart from his rivals. He clearly has an affinity to race bikes to their ultimate potential – but it's the way he's done so that's made him so special.

Adored the world over, it's his sheer love of racing that sets him apart. Emerging after the sterile days of Doohan's dominance, Rossi combined race pace with impish antics. His first words after a race? "I am very 'appy," and rather than thanking his team, Rossi explains his race in a way that his joy is shared the world over.

Success and personality has brought huge riches, and few will begrudge him of his place in legend. OK, so he's knocked people off, not paid his tax bills and played more than a few mind games with crestfallen rivals. But in a paddock full of anodine riders and groomed media operators, Rossi is the one we want to watch, hear what he says and wear what sells.

Valentino Rossi's called his autobiography 'What If I Had Never Tried It'. Just imagine how dull MotoGP would be if he hadn't...



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