

# NEXT BIG THING

By Ben Johnson



## Nathan Parker

**After been written off as an injury prone also ran, the big Lancashire lad has suddenly found his feet and is fast becoming the man to watch in MX1**

**T**he world moves so fast in the 21st century it's hard to keep up. Life is constantly in flux, moving forward at a frightening rate. Trends come and go in the blink of an eye and the whole world constantly seems to be searching for the next experience, the next big thing. If you're not of the moment, you're old news.

Ken Roczen and Jeffrey Herlings are of the moment, the hottest things on planet motocross right now, and with good reason. Not everyone is a 15-year-old wonder kid though, not every rider bursts on to the scene with the results and success to match their talent, and in the clamour to find that next big thing, the new stars, genuinely talented riders, tend to get written off too quickly. Riders like Proppa.com Honda's Nathan Parker. Which makes it all the more satisfying when, like Parker, they suddenly find their form and start banging in the results.

After a slow, unpromising start to the season it looked like the recently turned 22-year-old from Leyland was carrying on where he left off last season, lacking confidence and speed, but then at the Canada Heights round of the Red Bull Nationals a different Nez Parker hit the track. Smooth, stylish, and most importantly blazing fast, a switch seemed to have gone off in Parker's head and he looked a rider reborn, mixing it with the big names of the British scene, and most importantly confident in himself.

He carried even better form through into the fourth round of the British Championship at Lyng a few weeks later where he was probably the stand

out rider of the weekend, running in amongst the established names and beating experienced teammate James Noble for the first time as he swept to seventh overall on the day. It may not sound a jaw dropping finish, but given his 18-21-14 finishes in the previous four rounds, and the previous seasons he's had, it is a dramatic turn around in form for Parker. Most impressively, it looked like there was more to come as well.

It's fair to say that Parker had been written off by most and the result a big surprise. On paper it's easy to see why. Since moving up to the adult ranks following a feted and successful schoolboy career that saw him finish runner-up to Tommy Searle in the BYMX championship, Parker's career has been a stalled story of repeated injury and crushed confidence. Two seasons have been lost to repeated ACL injury, while 2009 showed a rider just trying to make it through the year unhurt, afraid to push and risk another injury.

Had Parker been shopping for a ride for 2010 it could well have been a struggle, but the one person whose belief in Parker never diminished was the man who built the Proppa Honda team around him in late '07. Team owner Steve Turner is currently one happy man at seeing his protégé begin to show the kind of form he thought him capable of all along.

Says Steve, "I've always had the belief in Nez' ability to do what he's been doing recently, if not more. I knew the Parker family through my own racing at the Newton le Willows club they were involved in and I watched Nez closely growing up. I could see he had a lot of talent so when I got injured and decided to run a team instead of racing myself,

Nez was really the rider I built the team around.

"Obviously it has been a hard road for him. He tore his ACL at the opening round of the Maxxis in 2008 at Donington and was out for the whole year recovering from that, and last year he was so focussed on not getting injured and just making it through races that his confidence just wasn't there. It was important for him to get his confidence back without too much pressure and I think that approach has paid off now."

Clearly Turner is feeling vindicated by the return to form, but he's also quick to give a lot of the credit for this to James Noble, who has been a huge help he says. "You just have to look at Nez racing to see that he's naturally gifted. He's been working hard and we've got the bikes set-up and running brilliantly, but I think the biggest factor in his improvement has been having James Noble on the team. He's been brilliant. The pair of them have been training and riding together a lot and James has been really good with giving him advice and praise to get his confidence up. If Nez is faster than James, James isn't afraid to say so and I think that has done a world of good for Nez. It shows the kind of character James is too.

"The change in Nez is massive. Now he's had a few good rides he wants to get out of the gate and run up at the front of the pack, whereas before he was apprehensive and didn't really know what to do when he got a good gate. I think we'll see him right up there before the end of the season."

MOTO wouldn't bet against it either. **MOTO**