

TWO LOWES AND

23 year-old Sam and Alex Lowes are both brilliant racers. But it turns out they find their speed in completely different ways

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The 1933 Rudge and 1936 New Imperial racers are in this picture purely because they look fantastic, OK?



SAM LOWES

2013 World Supersport Champion, and already a front runner in the elbow-banging circus that is Moto2, riding for the Speed Up team

A PSYCHOLOGIST

KATE OLIVER

Top occupational psychologist who also interviewed (and psychologically profiled) James Toseland, Steve Plater and Shakey Byrne

ALEX LOWES

2013 MCE British Superbike champion, now graduated to WSB with Voltcom Crescent Suzuki. Injured, but will be fit for Aragon

YOU COULDN'T HAVE scripted it any better. Within two hours and 41 minutes on Sunday 20th October 2013, Sam Lowes became World Supersport champion and Alex Lowes British Superbike champ. After 18 years of dedication, training and total commitment to racing motorbikes, the identical twins achieved at the highest level at the same time.

This is, in a way, the story of how they did it. It's also the story of what drives the Lowes twins – a rare insight into the bike racing psyche, and the different ways it can operate. Because while the brothers look identical, and have

the same brutal work ethic and insatiable desire to win, they are polar opposites when it comes to preparation, outlook and dealing with the pressures of racing.

Everything you're about to read comes from a detailed psychological examination of the twins by occupational psychologist Kate Oliver. Kate's used to racers; in a 2002 edition of MCN Sport she tested James Toseland, Shane Byrne and Steve Plater. The three

underwent a conventional test normally used in business. It showed levels of competitiveness and self-determination so far beyond ordinary people's that they couldn't be measured. This time Kate tried Sam and Alex with a test called the Risk Type Compass, published by PCL. It measures something much nearer to what bike racing is about: attitude to risk.

The results threw up fundamental differences in the two men's personalities – traits that she went on to explore in an intense, two-hour, joint interview.

It's hard to feel anything other than upbeat when you're in the Lowes' company. Whatever you're doing there's the constant background noise of chatter and pisstaking from two people who are overflowing with enthusiasm for everything they do, and also exceptionally close.

THE ESSENTIAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ALEX AND SAM

Kate: "As soon as I met them I could see they were totally different. Sam is straight in there chatting away, having a laugh

and trying to break the ice. He wants you to like him straight away, whereas Alex will sit back and survey the arena, and decide whether he is going to engage in it."

Sam: "Yeah, you're right. My back is killing me. I've been carrying him for 23 years!"

Kate: "Alex's risk profile is much more intense than Sam's. He's fuelled much more by self-doubt and anticipation. He likes to plan ahead in an effort to avoid things

WHEN WE WERE
YOUNG I'D PUSH SAM
TO THE FRONT TO DO
THE TALKING

ALEX





Alex (left) and Sam (right) have raced in different paddocks for five years but know each other seasons intimately. Could probably swap rides too

that could go wrong. That's what gives him his passion, his focus and his determination to succeed. He has a very different profile to Sam; it comes out in what they say, and how they speak about each other.

Alex: "Our mum says that when we were really young and we met new people I'd just push Sam to the front to do the talking while I stayed behind him."

Kate: "Once Alex is engaged in something he will be very passionate and sincere about it, but he will be much more selective about what he gets into. He doesn't have the same need as Sam to be liked by everyone."

HOW THEY BECAME CHAMPIONS

Becoming a British or World champion takes exceptional talent and determination. At 23 the twins are among the youngest champions, especially for Brits, who tend to blossom later in their careers.

Kate: "Their work ethic comes from their dad. He works really hard and was really strict on them. They had to go to school, they had to do well and be top of their class, and they weren't allowed to ride their bikes unless they did their homework. They both got 11 GCSEs at the exact same grades."

Alex: "We were focussed at school because our Dad told us that unless we did well we couldn't ride our bikes. We'd stay in at lunch to do homework so we could ride when we got home."

Sam: "If dad hadn't set those rules I don't think I would have even gone to school!"

After leaving school they both worked for their Dad for free for two and a half years while he funded their racing.

YEAH, MY BACK IS KILLING ME. I'VE BEEN CARRYING HIM FOR 23 YEARS!

SAM

TWO RACING PERSONALITIES

Every champion rides and handles pressure in a different way. The twins' methods differ wildly.

Kate: "Alex is much more self-referenced, so he measures himself against himself with questions like, 'Have I done the best I can possibly do?'. Sam thinks a little bit more about how people see him, so he asks questions like, 'Do they think I'm a champion?'."

"Put simply, Sam is worried about what other people think and Alex is only worried about what he thinks. Sam is also naturally more trusting and laid back. So before a race Sam will be chatting, messing about and having a bit of a giggle. Whereas Alex pretty much wants to be on his own, with no distractions. Alex is much more planned; he has the personality that means he wants to be in control of life, with everything scheduled, regimented and structured.

So if the plan is to train every day at 8am, Alex will want to be there at 7.45 and if something comes up it will pretty much have to be a life or death situation for him to change that."

Alex: "If my girlfriend needs a lift somewhere when I'm meant to be going training, she'd be getting a taxi."

Kate: "Sam is different. Alex often has to drag him out of bed to go training. For Sam, as long as they get to the gym it doesn't matter if they start at 8am or 9am. He'll still train as hard as Alex, so it's not about being any less committed. It's just that Sam is far more spontaneous and easygoing."

DEALING WITH THE LOWS

During 2011 Alex saw his career derailed. After initially impressing on the WFR Honda in the EVO class he parted

Kate's now got five international racers on her CV, with three World Championships (and counting)





IF SOMEONE SAID I
WAS GOING TO FINISH
SIXTH, I'D FEEL
PHYSICALLY SICK

ALEX

company with the team when contract negotiations collapsed. He was immediately signed by the MSS Kawasaki squad, but while showing incredible speed suffered frequent crashes. He substituted for the injured Jonathan Rea in the Castrol Honda WSB squad before finishing the season back in BSB, in the Motorpoint Yamaha team run by Rob McElnea.

Kate: "Alex admits that his intense personality caused problems during that season. It wasn't going well so he just kept pushing himself, and got more down. The more down he got the harder he pushed and the bigger the risks he took. And because he is more self-referencing, whenever people tried to offer him advice he wouldn't listen."

"This was a crux moment in his career, because he learned so much from it. Now he's more willing to listen to other people, and learn more about how to control himself. Now he can make it work to his advantage, as opposed to getting in the way. He's more likely to dwell on things that have gone wrong in the past or anticipate problems. This is what drives him, whereas Sam hasn't had these setbacks – and even if he did, he would just assume everything will be all right."

Alex: "Even now I still feel like I missed two years of my career because I didn't have the right ride. Sam has never had that. It was a tough two years for me and these experiences are obviously going to change your outlook on life."

THE ABILITY TO CELEBRATE

History shows that while some racers celebrate in style (Valentino Rossi) and even to excess (Anthony Gobert), others are simply unable to enjoy the moment. Wayne Rainey says he felt only a few seconds of happiness when he won the 500GP crown, knowing he had to come back and win it next year.

Kate: "If Alex wins a race there's a fleeting moment of joy and satisfaction, but then it's gone. There's a feeling that he cannot celebrate because he doesn't want to get complacent. He always wants what he does next to be better. Sam would find it easier to enjoy the moment – not go out and party, because neither of them does that – but enjoy it a bit more."

Alex: "If I finish third, I can't be happy. I need to understand how I can be better. I'm very critical of myself. If someone said I was going to finish sixth in a race, that might be a good result for my first year in WSB, but I'd feel physically sick. I'd want to commit suicide."

"I love riding the bike, but after a race, even if I've won, I'll drive through the night if I have to so that I can be at the gym training next morning. I know it won't make a difference for the next race – I guess I'm a bit harsh on myself. After Assen I did exactly that – got home at 3am and was in the gym by 7.30. Sam would never do that and, in reality, you don't need to. I should have just chilled out, had a night with the team, travelled home and been at the gym on Tuesday."

10,000: THE MAGIC NUMBER

You might think the twins' achievements are luck, coincidence or divine intervention. The truth is less glamorous.

Kate: "They've both got from their dad a real sense that if they push themselves and work as hard as they can that will lead to success. They both speak about the thousands of hours they've spent riding bikes, which is really interesting. The book *Outliers* by Malcolm Gladwell says we over-attribute success to natural talent. Actually, what success comes from primarily is this magic number of 10,000 hours of practice."

"He goes on to say that practice comes from two things: first is opportunity – and clearly the twins were given the opportunity when they were young and their dad was into racing. Second is that because they enjoyed it so much, they made the most of it. Their dad instilled in them that if they didn't take it seriously then he wouldn't fund them to do it. So they really put in the grind. This has given them the sense that they can achieve their goals if they really want them." ➤

THERE ARE LOTS OF
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THE BIG ONE

SAM



GOALS, AND WHY THEY MATTER

Alex ended the 2012 season as the revelation of BSB, while Sam had become a multiple WSS race winner. Both had the chance to progress to bigger pay days. But money was not the driving factor – championships were.

Alex: “In January last year, when we signed to ride in BSB and WSS, it was all we ever spoke about. We were both 150 per cent convinced we had the opportunity to win. I can remember on the golf course imagining how good it would be. We thought it could happen, we wanted it to happen and we worked hard to make it happen. And it’s not a coincidence that it did happen.

“We both had options to do other things, but we both wanted to win the championships we were in.”

Sam: “I went to a team no one had ever heard of (Yakhnich Motorsport) but I felt good with them. I knew people would question my decision. A lot of people doubted me and I just kept telling them it was going to be good. I went on to finish first or second in every race I completed so it wasn’t bad.

“There are lots of things that drive us in our sport, but winning is the big one. I knew I’d achieved only 60 per cent of my capability riding at PTR Honda. I just needed the chance to show it. That was the motivation for going to Yakhnich.

Alex: “It was similar for me going to Samsung Honda. I’d won races on the WFR Honda at the end of 2012 and I knew the Samsung bike had to be at least as good. I knew I could win.”

MODELLING THEMSELVES ON EXCELLENCE

Unlike older racers, the twins are part of the first digital generation, with unlimited opportunity to watch, understand and analyse every part of their lives. At the track, everything they do on the bike is datalogged, and nearly every session is televised. On top of this is an unquenchable desire to examine how top sportspeople have achieved at the highest level.

Kate: “From an early age they’ve modelled themselves on people who were really good by watching racing DVDs every night in their bedroom. They’ve also read biographies of successful sportpeople. This has fuelled their winning mentality. It’s all about the mind-set of making it happen. Reading about successful people installs this belief.”

Alex: “We used to go skiing every year over Christmas and we’d get a book as an early present to read along the way. It was always a biography: Foggy, Hodgson, other sporting icons. We wanted to know how they’d been able to do things so well.”

THE POWER OF TWO

As twins, Sam and Alex have an intense relationship and partnership that the 98 per cent of the population who aren’t twins simply can’t understand.

A breathtaking example was when Alex first tested the Voltcom Crescent Suzuki WSB bike at Portimao. The Portuguese track is notoriously difficult to learn due to its undulations and blind approaches but, having been giving a run-down by his brother, Alex was on the pace on his first flying lap, and finished the three-day test fastest.

Kate: “They have an advantage as twins. They both have someone that they can absolutely trust and would listen to more than anyone else. They won’t always take advice from other people, but from each other they will, because they know there is no other vested interest.

“One of the ways you get better at something, particularly in competitive sport, is having a training partner on a similar level. The fact that they are identical means they are the same build and strength. They both have their exact equal to race, day in, day out. They’ve always been team mates.

“Alex also has Sam to calm him down and help him relax, and Sam has Alex to keep him focussed. We don’t know if they’d each be as strong if they hadn’t had a twin. But the dynamic helps them bring out the best in each other.”

IF I WIN, IT’S BECAUSE OF ME!

The Lowes’ self-determination shapes their resilience as racers, but in ways that suit each rider’s personality.

Kate: “Sam has a very positive attributional style: he will attribute success to himself, but when things go wrong he’ll generally attribute it to something external. He’ll also assume it’s an isolated event and move on.

“Alex will also attribute success to himself. The difference is that when it goes wrong he’ll blame himself. But it’s not a negative thing, because he’ll look at it, learn from it and prevent it from happening again.

Alex: “I’ve already noticed this in WSB. Quite a few of the lads at the front talk about things that wouldn’t even enter my mind. Even in the team people have spoken about how other riders did on the bike, and the problems they might have had. I’m so not interested in this. I don’t want to limit myself by other riders’ experiences. I’m not bothered what Eugene or Leon Camier did. I just want to go as fast as I can go.”

1933 RUDGE 500 TT REPLICA

If Sam had been born 80 years ago, this is the kind of device he would have been riding. It’s a race replica produced by the factory to capitalise on Rudgets coming first and second in the 1930 Senior (Wal Handley won the guy they named the corner after), and taking the top three positions in the Junior.

Despite the twin exhausts it’s a single, with a four-valve head, and the exhaust valves splayed radially just like today’s MV (p78). Riders could adjust the steering damper on the move via a cable.

Spec: 499cc, 85 x 88mm, 7.25:1 compression, close-ratio four-speed gearbox, girder forks, 21in front wheel, 20in rear. Dry weight 147kg (324lb), top speed 110mph.



BROTHERLY LOVE

The guys are each other's number one fans, and their support and praise for each other is unconditional – pretty much what you'd expect from brothers in arms. Here's an example:

Alex: "What I notice with Sam compared to other riders is that he doesn't make excuses. When he went to WSS and the Honda was slower than the Kawasaki, you never heard him say that. It's the same when he's ridden injured – he won't mention it because he doesn't even see it as an excuse. I think that's a really good trait to have in our sport, because if you listen to other riders being interviewed a part of it is always negative."

Sam: "I'm not going to waste my time thinking that my bike is slow. Instead I'll be thinking how much later I can brake."

Alex: "It's like when he broke down on the last lap at Aragon when he had the race won. When he got back into the gym he behaved like he had won."

Sam: "Well I did win. It wasn't my fault the bike broke down. I actually spoke to my team and said, 'Don't worry, lads. We'll win the next one'."

Alex: "If that had been me I'd have wanted to know why it happened, how it happened and whose fault it was."

Sam: "I didn't dwell on that because I did everything I could and it was good enough to win. So if I do that, and the bike doesn't break down, then I've won. Why be negative? At the end of the day no one died. My bike broke."

Alex: "Some people gloss over their failings, whereas I'll be harsh on myself. If I couldn't win because I had a problem with my front tyre, Sam would just say, 'Don't worry about it, not your fault,' whereas I'll be thinking how I could have ridden differently to save my front tyre. Ninety nine per cent of people blame other things. We don't. We work on ourselves because really that's the only thing you can control." ➤

ALEX ON DIGGING DEEP

Here's a point in any race when it gets really difficult. Your arms are tired, your legs have had it, your tyres have gone. It's like a war of attrition and you have to give it everything you've got. And it's this that makes the difference between the riders. It's not qualifying, or the first ten laps – it's the last five laps that make the difference, and I train 100 per cent thinking about that.

When I'm in the gym with my trainer [Kirk Gibbons] he shouts at me, "Right, there's three laps to go, you've got arm pump, you're knackered, there's sweat running down the inside of your visor and your front tyre is fucked." And he tells you you've got to do another five K on the rower.

A few weeks later I was at Snetterton, which is a very physical track now. There were three laps to go and I had Shakey and Brookes

right behind me. I remembered the training session and then I did my best two laps of the race, and won it by three seconds. If I hadn't thought about it in training and pushed myself to the limit there's no way I could have done that.

It all comes down to how much you want it. We're racing in the World Championship – everyone is fast, otherwise they wouldn't be there. So what makes the difference is not how fast you can go on one lap with a new tyre, or how good your team is. It all comes down to when your back is against the wall and you decide you can do it. I've also been at that point in my career, and given up. I did that on a 125 when racing was just a hobby. I didn't know any better, gave up and finished fourth. If I had the same trainer and mentality as I do now I would have won those races.

I KNEW THEN THAT EVEN IF HE WON KIYO COULD NEVER BEAT ME OVER A SEASON

ALEX





1936 NEW IMPERIAL 250 RACER

Alex is lusting over a 1930s equivalent of a 2009 factory NSR250 Honda: theoretically the same as customer versions, but in reality considerably trickier and faster.

Unique features include the light alloy barrel with extra finning, hairpin valve springs, offset inlet port, Sturmev Archer gearbox and provision for a rev counter. There was also a central oil tank with a lethally-placed filler cap behind the tank. Head-on crashes would have been a very bad idea.

1936 was the final year for New Imperial's race department. The firm itself closed down three years later.

Spec: 249cc, friction-damped girder forks, 21in front wheel, 20in rear. Dry weight 139kg (306lb), top speed 100mph.





“PEOPLE THINK
I’M A JOKER AND
I WANT THEM TO
THINK THAT”

— SAM

BEATING THEIR TEAM-MATES

They say the first person you have to beat is your team-mate. The twins take this adage very seriously indeed.

Alex: “At the beginning of last year there was a lot of talk about [team-mate and triple BSB chasmp] Kiyo, but in testing he wouldn’t turn up until 11am, whereas I’d been riding around for two hours. I knew then that even if he won the first three races he could never beat me over a season. In the races that really count, how could he? What’s he going to do when there are five laps to go and you’ve got arm-pump? He only ever won in his career when he was faster. He never won when his back was against the wall.”

Sam: “I’ve had team-mates before where I didn’t even let onto them that I even trained. When I was team-mates with James Ellison at PTR, I’d be there eating chocolate in front of them while he’d be sending his poo off to be analysed. On track I annihilated him, and that was mega. When I’m on my own, as long as I know myself that I’ve put enough effort in, then that’s good enough for me. If I feel like that I have no problem going out and enjoying myself. People think I’m a joker and I want them to think that.”

THE LOWES RUTAL WORK ETHIC

Like all top racers the twins take their training very seriously, but in 2011 their regime went to a whole new level. Close friend Leon Haslam persuaded his long-time trainer Kirk Gibbons to take them on.

Kirk: “When I started training Jamie Dobb and he won the the Motocross World Championship we succeeded because we were a lot fitter than anyone else. Now everyone trains so hard, so the question is: what gives you the edge? The key to success is all in the mind. I throw scenarios at Alex like: You’re leading, but Shakey is closing you down. He’s on your back wheel and your bike is chattering. You can’t let him beat you. What are you going to do? Or: He’s caught and passed you. Don’t panic, but only push to 110 per cent when you really have to. We win in the gym so we can win on track.”

Sam and Alex work

ethic is incredible. I haven’t seen anyone hungrier than when I worked with Jamie in 2001. These guys can go all the way because they listen and they learn.

“We train five days a week, we train competitively and we train how we intend to race. So sessions are longer than a race, with targets throughout that you have to be completely committed and focussed to hit. We aim to be consistent and we saw that from both riders all of last year.”

There’s no point doing one or two fast laps. We need to do 20. Our motto is start strong and finish stronger. The first five laps will be quick, the next five quicker, the five after quicker still, and if there is still someone behind I give them the capacity to push again to the finish. We are under no illusion of the challenges they both have in 2014, but we’re not working to finish top six. We’re there to win.”

Thanks to Kate Oliver, chartered business psychologist: koperformanceconsulting.co.uk • Kirk Gibbons • James Hewing at the National Motorcycle Museum near Solihull thenmm.co.uk for the loan of the 500 Rudge and the 250 New Imperial. With 850 bikes in five halls, spanning 1898 to the present day, the museum is the biggest collection of British bikes in the world. It’s also just bought the Bruce Main Smith archive of workshop manuals, parts books and catalogues. Restorers can choose from more than 4000 photocopy sets, soon to be available at thenmmshop.co.uk