

FULL SPEED TO WORLD CLASS

SUNDAY PROFILE

TOM TOPARIS

FIXING smart-phone screens in his bedroom for \$50 a pop could become a thing of the past for Tom Toparis after the Goulburn high school student scored a shock wildcard entry to race in Moto3.

Just 20 months after beginning his motorcycle road-racing career, the 17-year-old is in the fast-lane to becoming our next Casey Stoner and will compete against some of the world's best riders in next month's Japanese and Australian rounds of the world tour.

"It is all just so exciting," Toparis said.

"This has all come about really fast. The opportunity came up and of course I am going to take it.

"It is my dream to race at the premier level and I would love to make a career out of it."

The son of a carpenter jumped on a 300cc bike dreaming of becoming an Australian Superbikes champion like his hero Troy Herfoss.

With his big chance in Moto3 Toparis, who is mentored by three-time superbike champion Troy Bayliss, will be racing in the curtain-raiser for MotoGP global superstars such as Valentino Rossi and Jack Miller.

"Last year was my first time on a road bike," Toparis said.

"We decided to go racing at the start of 2016.

"We entered in the production class on a Ninja 300 and I ended up winning a few

This Goulburn schoolboy is on the fast-track to becoming our next global motorsport star, writes **James Phelps**

races. We decided to speed it up and I jumped on a 600. As it turns out I have won two races and been up the front.

"I have been riding dirt bikes since I was four and it was actually another guy from Goulburn that inspired me to take up road racing.

"Troy Herfoss is a hero of mine and watching what he has done motivated me to go for it. I aspire to be like him and he is both a role model and mentor.

"I am lucky enough to have him in my corner. He is the reason why I am road racing."

A racing career could cost Toparis his bedroom business of fixing phones for friends on weekends and after school.

"It has taken a bit of a back seat lately," Toparis said.

"But I started it because I am always

away racing and no-body would give me a part time job.

"I needed to make a bit of money so I started fixing phone screens in my bedroom."

Toparis

will take leave from his Year 11 studies at Trinity Catholic School in Goulburn to compete in Japan on the weekends of October 13-15 and at Phillip Island on October 20-22.

"It gets a bit tough keeping up with the school work but of course the bike comes first," Toparis said. "It is exciting for me and my mates and they are all behind me.

"My family and friends are really excited and a lot of them will come to Phillip Island to watch."

Toparis will join fellow Australians Miller (MotoGP) and Remi Gardner (Moto2) at the two rounds of the international championship.



Tom Toparis this week in Goulburn; (insets) riding in a Superbikes race; at home with parents Vanessa and Richard and brothers Sam and James. Pictures: Kym Smith

TOM TERRIFIC

Tom Toparis will compete in the Moto3 class of two grand prix events

➤ Japanese Grand Prix, Twin Ring Motegi, October 13-15

➤ Australian Grand Prix, Phillip Island, October 20-22

No Alonso rush Red Bull swerves engine rumours Ricciardo sets record pace

FERNANDO Alonso said he needed time to look into McLaren's new partnership with Renault before pledging his future, as he kept his options open despite their split with Honda.

Alonso repeatedly threatened to quit as McLaren struggled with their Honda engines, and their switch to Renault power next year is expected to convince him to stay. The driver will now "try to know a little bit more about the project and about the Renault engine, about the expectations for next year."

FORMULA ONE

THE Formula One giants behind Australian driver Daniel Ricciardo, Renault and Red Bull, have both described as "speculation" reports that they will be ending their engine partnership after next season.

The pair won four consecutive drivers' and constructors' titles together at the turn of the decade but the relationship has been fractious since a new 1.6-litre V6 turbo hybrid power

unit was introduced in 2014.

Renault's engines have proved less competitive than those of rivals Mercedes and Ferrari, bringing the pair to the brink of a divorce that was only averted when Red Bull failed to find an alternative supply.

The team currently run Renault engines under Tag Heuer branding.

"We will have a TAG Heuer Renault-provided engine and that will be the case for next year," Red Bull principal Chris-

tian Horner said after McLaren and Renault announced a new three-year partnership.

"Anything beyond that is speculation, conjecture, and there will be all kinds of rumours, I'm sure, between now and then," Horner added.

With Honda leaving McLaren for Red Bull-owned Toro Rosso, that deal allows Red Bull to evaluate the Japanese manufacturer's performance next season with a view to subsequently using their engines too.

DANIEL Ricciardo has twice broken his own lap record to go fastest in Friday night's practice for Red Bull at the Singapore Grand Prix.

Ricciardo had already crushed his lap record from last year by nearly five seconds in the afternoon's first practice, and then went two seconds quicker in the second practice.

The Australian clocked 1 minute 40.852 seconds under the floodlights and was confident Red Bull could keep it going all weekend.

"I'm not surprised with our performance," Ricciardo said.

"I'm after a dominant weekend and so far this has been a good start. It's important that we obviously keep that for tomorrow but I have faith that we can perform on this level all weekend."

Teammate Max Verstappen was second, more than half a second behind, championship leader Lewis Hamilton was .70 back in third, and his Mercedes teammate Valtteri Bottas fourth.