

Valentino Rossi understands speed. He should. He's won the MotoGP premier class world championship seven times. "Speed is like the elimination of moments when there is nothing to do, of wasted time, sometimes of boredom... It is an aspiration and often a choice; or an attitude that amplifies feelings, reactions and enjoyment." For the Italian, speed is also "something dangerous" but "very exciting".

Between September 22 and 24, this will all come together – speed, thrill, danger, excitement – at the Buddh International Circuit (BIC) in Greater Noida, which will host the MotoGP. For the uninitiated, this is the highest class of motorcycle racing. And it's coming to India for the first time.

The last time BIC saw some real action was 10 years ago, in 2013, when the third and final Indian Grand Prix – the country's tryst with Formula One – was held before the event ran into tax-related issues. German driver Sebastian Vettel – in his Red Bull-Renault car – had come out on top in each of those three years (2011-13). Vettel aside, F1 stars like Lewis Hamilton, Fernando Alonso, Felipe Massa and Kimi Raikkonen showed their wares at the chock-a-block BIC.

This time around, the likes of Francesco Bagnaia (the reigning MotoGP champion and the ongoing championship leader), Marc Marquez (six-time world champion), and Fabio Quartararo (2021 season winner) are the top draws for the event. Christened MotoGP Bharat, the event is being promoted by a private sports management enterprise – Fairstreet Sports. The company has signed a seven-year deal with Madrid-based Dorna Sports, the exclusive commercial rights holder that has been managing MotoGP across the world for the past 30 years.

"The first MotoGP season was held in 1949, a year before the first F1 season. In India, motorcycle racing has a massive following. There are many Indians hooked on it. So, it was inevitable that MotoGP came to India," Amit Sandill, the racing director of Fairstreet Sports, told TOI. "We want to give the fans an incredible experience. The MotoGP Bharat this year will be special," said Carlos Ezpeleta, the chief sporting officer of Dorna Sports.

2019, A Watershed Year

India is the biggest two-wheeler market in the world, with more than 1.5 crore bikes sold annually. So, in a sense, MotoGP's India debut was long overdue.

In 2019, the Centre classified motorsport as a sport – earlier, it was in the entertainment category – and that proved to be a major step towards MotoGP coming to the country. It meant the motorsports federation – Federation of Motor Sports Clubs of India, or FMSCI – also got recognised. That's when Fairstreet Sports started talks with Dorna Sports. "Once the government also showed interest, things became a lot smoother, processing of visas became easier," Sandill said.

A Modified Track

The 5.1km BIC track was inaugurated in October 2011 and is owned by the Jaypee Group. It was designed by the illustrious German race track

HELLO MOTO



After a brief tryst with F1 a decade back, Buddh International Circuit in Greater Noida is gearing up for the welcome sounds of screaming engines and screeching tyres as it hosts India's maiden MotoGP event from Sept 22-24



Alex Rins (Spain) | Takaaki Nakagami (Japan)

Winner of six MotoGP races, Rins's latest victory came at this year's Americas GP. He's also an eight-time Moto3 winner and four-time Moto2 winner. Nakagami moved to MotoGP in 2018 as a two-time Moto2 race winner. In his sixth season as a valued Honda Idemitsu star, he remains in search of his first premier class podium.



Chart Topper

Most MotoGP Titles
Valentino Rossi (Italy) 7

Most MotoGP Race Wins
Valentino Rossi (89)

2022 Constructors' Champion
Ducati

Graphic Sunil Singh

LCR Honda Castrol/ Idemitsu

Tech3 GASGAS Factory Racing (KTM)

RNF MotoGP (Aprilia)

Mooney VR46 Racing (Ducati)

Team Champion 2022

Ducati Lenovo

2022 World Champion Francesco Bagnaia

Gresini Racing (Ducati)

Red Bull KTM Factory Racing

Repsol Honda

Aprilia Racing

Prima Pramac Racing (Ducati)

Monster Energy Yamaha



ON THE GRID

Constructors | Honda, Yamaha, KTM, Ducati, Aprilia
Tyres | Michelin

5.1 km Length of BIC track

1.006 km Length of the straight, which makes BIC one of the fastest circuits on the calendar

13 Turns in the track, 8 right and 5 left

22 Riders
11 Teams



Fabio Quartararo (France) | Franco Morbidelli (Italy)

Quartararo impressed as a MotoGP rookie in 2019, going on to win multiple races in 2020. He became France's first premier class world champion in 2021. A year later, he came second in a title fight. Morbidelli moved to MotoGP in 2018 as the reigning Moto2 world champion, clinching a runners-up finish in 2020.



Johann Zarco (France) | Jorge Martin (Spain)

Zarco won back-to-back Moto2 world titles in 2015 and 2016 before linking with Yamaha in 2017 for his MotoGP debut. The 'Martinator', as Martin is called, claimed a podium in just his second MotoGP race. He clinched a debut win in 2021.



Alex Espargaro (Spain) | Maverick Vinales (Spain)

At 34, Espargaro is the oldest rider on the grid. He won his first race in 2022 and had a slow start to 2023 until a double victory at the Catalan GP. Vinales, the 2013 Moto3 champion, has been a MotoGP regular since 2015.



Marc Marquez (Spain) | Joan Mir (Spain)

Marquez remains the youngest-ever premier class winner, clinching the title before turning 21. The 2020 MotoGP champion, Mir finds himself in Repsol Honda after Suzuki's unexpected departure from MotoGP in 2022.



Jack Miller (Australia) | Brad Binder (S Africa)

Miller jumped straight to the premier class from Moto3 in 2015 with a debut win coming in 2016. He switched from Ducati to his current team in 2023. Binder, the 2016 Moto3 world champion, is on his fourth MotoGP campaign with Red Bull KTM after two tricky seasons in 2021 and 2022.



Alex Marquez (Spain) | Fabio Di Giannantonio (Italy)

Younger brother of Marc Marquez, Alex claimed the 2014 Moto3 and 2019 Moto2 world titles. Back-to-back podium finishes came in his rookie MotoGP season with Repsol Honda, before he faced two difficult years at LCR Honda. After joining the premier class in 2022, Giannantonio's standout moment in his rookie campaign came with pole position at his home GP in Mugello. He has had five raceday top-10 finishes.



Francesco Bagnaia (Italy) | Enea Bastianini (Italy)

Francesco 'Pecco' Bagnaia arrived in MotoGP in 2019 after bagging the 2018 Moto2 title. A debut MotoGP win came at Aragon in 2021 though the title slipped through his fingers. But despite a slow start in 2022, he produced a stellar second half to clinch the crown. He has been leading the way in 2023. Bastianini won the 2020 Moto2 and earned a maiden MotoGP podium finish in his rookie season in 2021.



Luca Marini (Italy) | Marco Bezzecchi (Italy)

Valentino Rossi's half-brother, Marini made his Grand Prix debut as a Moto3 wildcard in 2013 before moving to Moto2 in 2016. His breakthrough season was in 2018 when he had six Moto2 wins. He claimed his first MotoGP podium in 2023 at the Americas GP and is a regular top-six finisher. Bezzecchi came to MotoGP on the back of impressive Moto2 seasons in 2020 and 2021. A Rookie of the Year campaign followed in 2022 and he's a title contender for 2023 with two wins in the first five races.

ing 366.1kmph at the Italian GP at Mugello. Binder beat Spaniard Jorge Martin's record of 363.6kmph, again set at Mugello in 2022.

"BIC is a fast, flowing track. We can expect the bikes to hit the highest speeds here. The long straight back, 1,006m long, will give the riders an opportunity to reach speeds of around 370kmph," Sandill said. "This straight stretch is divided into two parts. The first segment is downhill, which will allow the riders to achieve maximum acceleration,

while the latter part, which is uphill, will enable them to brake late and maintain top speed."

A Gala Event

The organisers are anticipating a turnout of 1.5 lakh. Apart from sprucing up the seats, they have ensured open spaces with umbrellas, a fan zone, and shuttle service to help fans travel within the arena.

"Usually, the stands in front of which the race begins and ends, witness the most excitement," Sudip

Sarkar, a motorsports fan who had attended the F1 races earlier, said.

Top Riders In Race

MotoGP Bharat will see 22 riders representing 11 teams in what will be the 13th race of the 2023 season.

While there isn't an Indian rider in the MotoGP premier class, local rider Kadai Yaseen Ahamed will compete alongside Malaysian Shahril Danial Syahmi as a wildcard for the Petronas MIE Racing team in the Moto3 category.



Organisers expect new speed records on BIC's 1,006m straight back