

DMR race HQ isn't exactly in the McLaren league. A few yards down a country lane north of Ramsey stands a modest bungalow, unremarkable but for the race transporter in the drive, and a forlorn ex-transporter gathering moss and rust alongside. A concrete drive, home to sundry bike bits, leads past the kitchen door to the workshop. At most, it's about 20 feet square.

There's a lathe and a mill, a welding set, pipe benders, the usual array of posters and calendars. A near-completed DMR chassis sits on the bench nearest the door. That one's for Roy Hanks. That's what pays the Molyneux bills. Another, not even a full skeleton, sits on a jig in the far corner, its front forks forlornly bolted to fresh Manx air where the headstock will eventually go. That's ear-marked for winning two TTs this year. That's Moly's own.

You've seen Moto GP on the telly, and even British Superbikes, with their over-the-top branded one-upmanship, their mine's-bigger-than-yours trailers, and all the other corporate kit. This is as different as it could get.

As a sidecar racer, even a successful one, being skint goes with the territory. But even for them, being broke and watching your livelihood smash itself to bits then burst into flames as you're carted off to hospital is tough to bear.

That's precisely what happened to Moly on the Thursday of practice week last year. Already the most successful sidecar driver



call his wife, Gaynor, at the grandstand. "I've had a bit of a prang he explained. "I'm all right but I'm going for a ride in the helicopter". From his hospital bed he later announced his retirement from TT racing.

"I was dead straight when I said I was retiring from the TT", he explained last month. "I woke up after the surgery on Friday knowing the crap my wife had gone through – not just the crash, but a tough winter with no dough. I had no TT pay day, no money,

nothing to sell to get money, no way to build a new bike. And I knew I'd be out of action for six months – six month's earnings down the pan. It wasn't a light-hearted decision. If I wasn't going to be even half-fit until Christmas, like they said, how can I recover, build a new bike and earn a living?"

I just thought 'I can't be doing this any more'."

Moly's no quitter, and definitely not the sort of guy who asks for sympathy. Nor does he easily admit to frailties. And he's certainly not the first racer to be in such a pickle, nor the last. But he says enough to let you know that night in Nobles Hospital, last June wasn't the best he'd ever had.

And much though making a living has to be a practical business, whether from installing plumbing or building and racing winning sidecars, even at 43 the racer in Moly would always have found it hard to quit, particularly on such a sour note. "I

like riding my bike. I struggle with some of the things around racing, but still love it. I've got nothing left to prove at the TT, but didn't want to bow out like that."

It's a racing truism that resolutions made from hospital beds often fail to endure, but Moly came within microns of packing in. It wasn't a matter of will or ambition, just hard reality. "I thought there was no way I could make it happen again in 12 months. There just didn't seem time to recover, build a new bike and earn a living. But Honda came through with a deal that made it possible. They're why I've been able to do it. I'm late now because of the injuries, but I'll be there."

Other than Honda, Moly has the medical profession to thank.



Photo: DAVE COLLISTER

in TT history, on the previous evening he'd lapped the Mountain Circuit at 116.224mph, an unofficial record.

Then, over the leap at the exit from Rhencullen bends, it all went hideously wrong. "Normally", he explained a couple of days later, "the front just lifts a little, but this time it carried on up". The outfit flipped completely, throwing passenger Craig Hallam down the road and pinning Molyneux underneath until it righted itself again and he was able to kick it away whilst still sliding down the road. Hallam miraculously sustained nothing more than friction burns.

Despite a dislocated shoulder, broken bones and burns, Moly clambered into an adjacent garden and borrowed a phone to

His physiotherapist, Isla Scott, put him in touch with one of the UK's foremost shoulder specialists, Leonard Funk. Within two days of seeing him, he was under the knife, during last year's Manx Grand Prix. His original injury was a double fracture and dislocation to the right shoulder, plus associated nerve and tendon damage. "They dislocated the shoulder again and fixed me up. I couldn't start working until the New Year, and even then was struggling to put in half a day. But it's fine now, nearly 100 per cent. Without them", he nods gratefully in the direction of the medics, "I wouldn't be riding this year."

But what of the crash itself? What metaphorical scars has that left? What's to stop it happening again?

For a while Moly simply didn't know the answer to that – a hurdle to the racer's healing as well as the man's. His initial reaction, when I spoke to him last June, was that he'd got the perfect line and hit the jump faster than ever before. Too fast, it seemed...

Now, having talked to marshals who saw it, he knows better. "There's been a lot of rubbish talked about that crash and most people have no idea what actually happened", he insists. "Looping sidecars is nothing new. (Heinz) Luthringshauser looped at Ago's in the early Seventies, Derek Bailey had one at the Waggon and Horses in '87. And Roy Hanks nearly flipped at the same place we did the day before – and he had a Martec fairing, a totally different design than ours. So it wasn't an isolated incident."

It is true that if an outfit does lift significantly, its aerodynamics won't do it many favours. "The underbody is a flat pan," Moly explains, "five feet long by four and a half feet wide, and the rules mean you don't have any choice about that. Try holding a sheet of plywood that big at an angle to a breeze and see what happens. But our crash wasn't caused by the aerodynamics."

The outfit that day was the same one that had done the previous two TTs. "It had gone over that jump 28 times without a problem. I was right in the middle of the road, nowhere near a kerb. When I stopped sliding I got up and thought 'what the hell happened there?' Because I knew I'd done nothing wrong. The bike was already on its side on the left-hander before the jump. That's what I couldn't understand. I did nothing wrong and neither did the bike."

Now, the mindset is back on track. "If I knew I'd made a mistake or the bike was at fault, I wouldn't be doing it again. If someone's trying hard, things can go wrong, but I'm sick of hearing tales of my fairing being wrong and all that stuff. The previous evening I broke the lap record but didn't even come close to crashing, anywhere. It just isn't an issue." Incidentally, should you wish to see the sorry result of the crash, the outfit will be on display in the Manx Museum for the summer.



Photo: DAVE COLLISTER

The burnt out remains of last year's outfit

So, the shoulder's healed, the head's intact. All Moly needs now is a bike. At the beginning of April all he had was an engine and a few tubes. Now, it's taking shape. It's nothing radical. In fact it's essentially the same as the wreck it replaces, but then that was the fruition of over 20 years of painstaking TT experience, and the only significant changes are dictated by the new CBR600 powerplant, which is shorter, narrower, 2kg lighter and a useful quarter inch lower than the old.

As for the last two years, Evomoto's Dave Hagen will be preparing the two engines, both with lashings of HRC goodies, in his Ramsey workshop. Neither will be in a radical state of tune, yet each will be good for just four laps at racing speeds – one lap of practice, plus the race.

Far from refining the bodywork, Moly will be sticking to what he's had before – spurred somewhat by a typical streak of stubbornness. "I as thinking about changing the fairing just cosmetically," he grins, "but now I'm not. I'm sick of people telling me it's wrong. Besides, there just isn't the time to make new plugs and moulds. As it is I expect I'll be working on the bike right up to the TT."

So when Moly and new passenger Rick Long bump start the DMR Honda down the pit lane to start the Bavaria Beer Sidecar Races that will probably be the first time it's ever fired up in anger. Something like 20 minutes later, all being well, they'll be back in Douglas and atop the leaderboard. And along the way, will he take it easy through Rhencullen? Will the despond he felt all those months ago in Nobles Hospital nag at his right wrist? My money says not. That's what it takes to be a winner.



WORLD SUPERSIDE CHAMPIONSHIP

This year, for the first time, Moly's is embarking on a full Superside world championship campaign. Backed by Peter and Tracy Lloyd, who've supplied him with a GSX-R1000-engined FI outfit, he and Rick will begin their campaign at Schleiz, Germany on 11 May. Round two, at Brands Hatch on 10 June, will cause Moly to dash direct from Senior day's Parade of Champions to the Kent circuit. The final round is at Le Mans on 7-9 September.