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Russian Racer Is a First at Irish Cookstown 100

St. Petersburg native is racing his way through the U.K.

By Ben McCook

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Danila Krasniuk ready to start his race in Northern Ireland. **Ben McCook / MT**

On Saturday the Russian motorcycle racer Danila Krasniuk entered motorsports history. He became the first ever Russian to compete in an Irish motorcycle race, the Cookstown 100.

The Cookstown 100 has been held on public roads in Northern Ireland since 1922 and traditionally opens the Irish road racing season in late April. However, this year due to Covid-19 restrictions the race couldn't take place in the spring. Although the organizers submitted an application to run the race later in the year, they didn't know if it would happen.

Meanwhile, in St. Petersburg, Danila Krasniuk was following the news. The 33-year-old has held a strong desire to race in Ireland since competing at the Manx Grand Prix on the Isle of Man for the first time last year. There he had became the first Russian to finish a race on the

grueling 37.75-mile mountain course circuit. Now he sought to make his mark on the roads of Ireland. The Irish and Manx road races are perceived to be the pinnacle of road racing throughout the world, and Krasniuk, who normally competes in the Baltic road race championship, wished to test himself against the world's best.

“I think that every real athlete is always looking for a harder track and stronger opponents. Difficulties only strengthen your spirit and will to win,” he told The Moscow Times.

This year the only chance he would get was at Cookstown, and he was determined to make it happen.

He received confirmation of his entry for the rescheduled Cookstown at the start of July.

That was the good news; the bad news was that no one was allowed to leave Russia. On his Instagram account, he announced his acceptance with the caveat that he “hoped to be released.”

“Initially I planned to go by car,” he said, “but due to quarantine, the only way was to travel by plane and send my motorcycle in a container by sea.”

Undaunted, he made his travel arrangements and set about designing and building a bespoke container to house his gear on the high seas. Designed to perfection, the talented engineer maximized every millimeter within and packed away his bike and accessories away like sardines in a can. On Aug. 26 “the magic stall” was shipped to Belfast. There was now no turning back. His beloved CBR 600 Honda was on its way to Cookstown and there was now no other option but for the jockey to follow his stead.

By then the Russian authorities had begun to permit travel to the U.K. Of course, he would have the small matter of two weeks of quarantine to deal with on arrival, but in the grand scheme of things, that would be the least of his worries.

After a long and tiring journey Danila began his quarantine at his friend Rachel’s house in Banbridge. His bike was due to arrive the day before qualifying for the Cookstown, and the prospect of its late arrival was just one more thing to worry about. But Danila remained calm.

And, as it turned out, quarantine wasn’t without some advantages. “It’s fine,” he said. “I live with Rachel and her partner Jeffrey. She makes incredibly tasty food every day and teaches me English. I sleep a lot in the morning and study onboard videos of the race during the day.”

In the end, all of the worry and trepidation was for nothing. His bike arrived with two days to spare and on Saturday Sept. 12 Danila Krasniuk wrote himself into Russian and Irish motorsport history forever.

He started his race from pole position — the inside lane in the first row — and led into the first corner. His pace was good, but on the second lap he made a mistake. “I selected fourth gear instead of second... I didn’t fall, but lost 10 seconds,” he said. Then, he continued, “It rained on the third lap and I was on dry tires, but the pace didn’t drop. I caught up with the group of fast riders and almost came in third.”

His lap times had been faster than the winner on every lap except the one where he made a

mistake. His missed third place by a mere two seconds.

Right after the race Danila said he was quite down about it, but the following day he seemed to have a much more positive outlook. “The track is cool and fast, lots of jumps and green corridors... The whole time I was in a trance! Thank you to everyone who has helped me race in Northern Ireland, each of you has become part of Russian motorsport history. This is a huge deal!”

While Danila hopes to return and finish what he started, finances will dictate whether this will be possible. All being well, there will be a full program of racing in 2021, and he would love to show everyone what he’s capable of achieving. Only a fool would bet against him.

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