



Behind the Eight Ball

It was a plotline straight from reality TV, complete with ridiculous deadlines and profanity-spewing hotheads—could Maximum Street Performance's Joe Marasco and company take a brand-new 'Busa straight from the shipping crate and make it run an 8-second quarter-mile in less than 8 hours?

Words: Tim Hailey Photos: Matt Polito





Above In the beginning, all bikes were crated... Rider Stu Hamby (left), tuner Joe Marasco (center) and mechanic Mark Hill push, pull and drag the crated Hayabusa to the Bradenton starting line.

Below Hamby flaunts Florida's helmet law and buzzes around Bradenton's pit area in nothing but a beanie hat, to put a few easy break-in miles on the freshly uncrated, totally stock Hayabusa.



The challenge was simple: Take a brand-new Suzuki Hayabusa right out of the shipping crate at the dragstrip starting line and, over the course of a single 8-hour work day, have the bike lapping in the 8-second bracket without breaking the bank. From crate to the 8s in 8—does the Discovery Channel know about this?

For the record, this was all Joe Marasco's idea. *Super Streetbike* readers will likely recognize Marasco's name. He is the owner of Maximum Street Performance Suzuki in Heath, Ohio, the source of some of the most consistently quick streetbikes (and dragbikes) in the country, and he's legendary for his grudge-racing exploits with (now ex-rider) Keith "Shine" Dennis. Even though he's the one who dreamed up this scheme, as the sun sets over Bradenton Motorsports Park in Bradenton, Florida, and the 'Busa in question hasn't yet dipped into the 8s, Marasco probably wishes he had never left Ohio. It hasn't quite been 8 hours yet, but the light is almost gone and the track owner is definitely getting anxious.

Why the late hour? The weather hasn't exactly been cooperative. Morning rains left the track dotted with puddles, and after the rain cleared, a devil's wind howled across the strip. At one point, conditions were so bad the track owner threatened to limit runs to the eighth mile, and that just wasn't going to work for this story (in addition to us, Troy Coughlin's Pro Mod Mustang, Marty Ladwig's 200-mph, 4-cylinder Cobalt and a handful of other big-buck racecars were on site).

Fortunately, things cleared up by noon, and the full quarter-mile was open for testing, so the MSP crew got straight to business. In addition to pit boss Marasco, MSP go-to guys Mark Hill, Richard Luzador and Josh Davis were on hand, plus pro rider Stu Hamby, who would pilot the bike, and Dan Rudd of Motorcycle Performance Specialties (MPS), who would add some additional tuning expertise (and if the editor mixes up "MSP" and "MPS," I'm gonna get a serious case of PMS). Marasco officially started the clock at 12:15 p.m. and Team MSP/MPS got to work like a NASCAR crew during a final-lap pit stop. It was just a matter of minutes before they had unpacked the 'Busa and assembled it to showroom stock condition. Fresh, white shipping grease on the chain, blue plastic wrap on the exhaust cans—this is what a 'Busa looks like straight from the factory.

"Here's what I'm thinking," Marasco announced. "What I'd like to do is get the bike broken in, buzz it around the pits a little bit to get some miles on it, then put it on the dyno [Marasco had his mobile dyno with him that day], and just let it run to save us the trouble of going to the street. Once it's broken in, we'll add pump gas, dyno it stock for a baseline setting, and then let Stu make some passes on it and see what it does. If that all works well, then we'll go for it." Sounds like a plan.



Left Hamby appears in danger of being eaten by a hopped-up Mercedes while he builds some heat into the 'Busa's OEM Bridgestone, under the watchful eye of Richard Luzador.

Above To speed up the break-in process and greatly simplify the track-side tuning, Marasco brought the MSP portable dyno along to Bradenton.

Right An MPS air shifter takes the footwork out of making clean, split-second shifts.



One Hour And Counting

Assembly went smoothly, and now the bike was being broken in. Hamby took some slow laps around the Bradenton grounds before Marasco put some more miles on it strapped to the Dynojet drum.

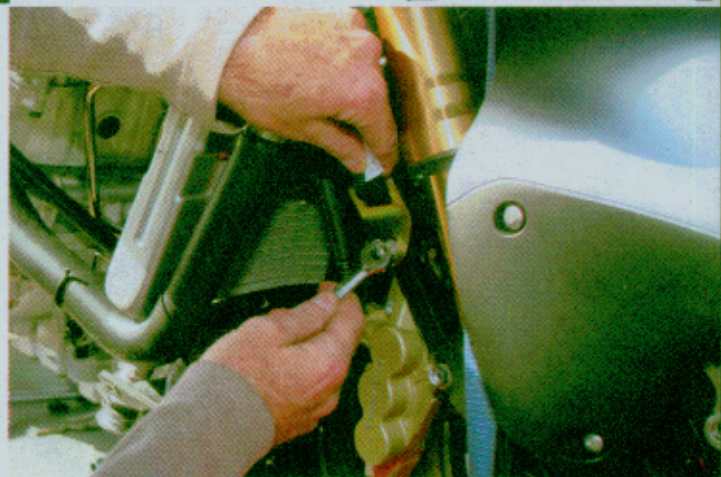
Feeling cocky, the team broke early for pizza and hot wings. They even took a few precious minutes off to screw with some guys who brought a twin-turbo Viper that reportedly ran high 7s. In addition to the box-stock 'Busa, Marasco also had his notorious TTS-supercharged, nitrous-equipped "Loch Ness Monster" Hayabusa grudge-racer, and there was nothing we wanted to see more than the Viper and the Loch Ness Monster run it out in an impromptu, big-bucks grudge race. But the Viper guys—young stockbroker types—were slow to come around. The gambler in Marasco wouldn't let it go, and soon he offered up a milder, 60-inch, normally aspirated 'Busa, but the car guys were too wrapped up in their own little world to play.

Fortunately, we had our box-stock 'Busa to entertain ourselves. After the accelerated break-in was complete, the bike posted a peak horsepower number of 163 on the portable dyno. On the track, Hamby nailed a 9.909 at 142.11 mph on the first pass—a number that had everybody smiling. Keep in mind there are 30 to 40 guys who show up at every Prostar or AHDRA event with race-tuned, wheelie-bar and slick-equipped dragbikes who run the 9.90 index Super Gas class, and Stu hit a top-four Super Gas qualifying time the first pass out on a stock bike assembled on the starting line at the track! And Hamby wouldn't even call that a good pass. "I couldn't get it wide open 'cause it was wheelying," he reported. "When you can't take it to the redline, it really hurts it in first gear."

Stu rang up an amazing 9.770 at 142.81 on the second pass of a planned three-pass session when Marasco decided the bike's life as a stocker was over. "We need to work on the clutch," he reasoned, noticing that the bike's 60-foot time climbed from a 1.64 to a 1.69.

"It's getting hot," confirmed Hamby. "It grabbed, and the clutch hopped a little bit. But I held it wide-open through first, and that's where it made up all the time."

"A 9.70 is better than we expected, so we're movin' on," said Marasco. The clock read 2:15 p.m., just two hours into the project.



Above Hamby cinches down the front end of the 'Busa using an MPS lowering strap, to bring the bike closer to the ground and lessen the chance of it rearing up on the rear wheel under a hard launch.

Right Marasco slips the first of four header pipes from the Tsukigi/MSP Spec 2 pipe into its exhaust port—not an easy job when the clock is ticking.



Time To Tune

Marasco's 8-hour hop-up strategy began predictably, with a lighter, freer-flowing exhaust system. Naturally, Marasco selected one of his own street-legal Tsukigi/MSP Spec 2 exhaust systems. Truthfully, through the magic of nitrous, the project bike would probably get into the 8s without the \$899 pipe, so you can argue about whether it is necessary or not. But one thing you can't argue with: The Tsukigi/MSP pipe is a real looker that brings with it a deep, throaty burble—and for that alone, it's worth the cash for most of us. Removing and replacing the pipe is a simple job when you have all day, but with the clock ticking, the tight confines between the Hayabusa's engine block and the radiator made this a tedious task.

For the best possible performance, the Tsukigi/MSP pipe requires a modified airbox, and Marasco brought a pre-tweaked piece along with him to ensure a good result. This move raised some suspicions on the part of photographer Matt Polito, who pondered the ethical implications of premodified parts for the timed project. "Mine is a conservative interpretation of the rules," reasoned Polito, who could feel the tension rise. "You guys are real sensitive about this, I can see."

"Look!" Marasco exclaimed in mock hysteria as he grabbed an MPS electrical piece off the table. "Someone put the end on this terminal already! And I put my socks on before I got here today! Not to mention we unloaded the trailer and set up the dyno while we waited for you and Hailey to have a good breakfast!"

"Point taken," conceded Polito, belching up the aroma of his Cracker Barrel hash browns.

With the opened-up airflow provided by the aftermarket pipe/airbox combo, Marasco had to reprogram the 'Busa's fuel injection. He chose the ubiquitous Dynojet Power Commander III USB for that task. "You got to have one of these. It's all about the map with these things," said Marasco, who brought his Power Commander with his own map already programmed in. This is where a tuner with Marasco's experience is so crucial to making a bike perform to the best of its abilities.

"I'll be honest with you," Polito said, looking at his watch. "I think you're gonna wrap this up in 6 hours. When 8 hours comes around we're gonna be celebrating over a nice seafood dinner."

"Paid for with the \$8000 we win off the Viper guys," someone added.

But dinner speculation proved presumptuous. Marasco's plan also included dropping down one tooth (from 17 to 16) on the front sprocket, but they forgot to bring the correct sprocket along, so it was up to "Fireball" Davis to drive to Tampa to retrieve another. This setback left the team a man short for the next hour.

The assembly continued. Hamby installed an MPS lowering strap on the front end and adjustable lowering links (\$78) out back. The frame had to be drilled and tapped so Rudd could mount the MPS air shifter (\$419), and the foot-shift lever had to be ground slightly to fit.

It was up to Marasco to install his MSP-modified clutch hub (\$49). The stock Hayabusa clutch is equipped with an anti-back-torque pressure assist feature that disengages the clutch to keep the rear tire from locking up when the clutch is released too quickly under deceleration. While this is great for a daily driver, the play built into the piece causes it to jump and buck under a hard launch, complicating Hamby's attempt to get out of the hole as quickly as possible. The MSP modification involves welding the two pieces of the clutch hub together to eliminate this play. Coupled with stiffer springs (to account for the spring pressure lost because the pressure assist was eliminated), the bike now had a clutch sufficient to stand up to the added horsepower.

During the installation of the clutch mod, the team suffered yet another setback. Marasco leaned the 'Busa over onto Hill's shoulder while reinstalling the clutch plates. "When we were leaning the bike over, the clutch lever hit my arm and knocked the plunger loose," said Hill. "So we had to rebleed the clutch master cylinder, and that added another half hour. Bummer."

In the meantime, Rudd installed an MPS race wiring harness (\$59) and MSD ignition module (\$29.56). Davis finally returned with the sprocket and added a charge of VP Ultimate 4 race gas.

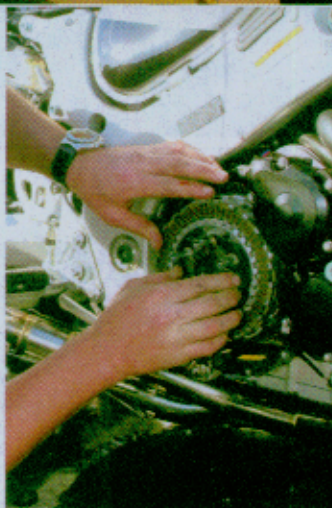
It was now 5:15 p.m., and while Marasco wasn't exactly breaking a sweat, he was starting to move around with slightly more urgency. Soon the big 'Busa was back on the dyno. Hill checked for air leaks as Marasco wicked the throttle and Davis manually charged the air shifter (Team MSP also forgot to pack an on-board compressor). Then the 'Busa screamed through the gears



Top Like a 24 Hours of Le Mans crew executing a late-night gearbox swap, Team MSP/MPS swarms over the stripped-down 'Busa in the midday Florida sun.

Above Everything you need to transform your own Hayabusa into an eight-second street sleeper can be found on this table.

Right Marasco installs the essential, MSP-modded clutch hub. Every high-horsepower Hayabusa needs this mod to handle hard, high-rpm dragstrip launches.



Left Marasco bolts up the MPS-lowering links—a \$78 mod that brought the back of the bike down to the level of the strapped-down front.

Below Dan Rudd from MPS twists and turns the line for the air shifter from the air bottle that is concealed beneath the 'Busa's seat cowl.





once more as the gathered crowd covered their ears.

The bolt-on modifications yielded an honest 178 peak horsepower. "That's liable to go in the 8s without the nitrous!" exclaimed Davis.

"Put cams in it and you're talking almost 190," said Marasco. "Add a piston kit and you're talking 200."

"What we should probably do to save time is put the bottle on it now instead of before Hamby takes it out again," Marasco said, looking at his watch and brushing sweat off his brow.

With the bike still on the dyno, Rudd plumbed the MPS dry nitrous kit (\$349) as Josh heated the bottle outside the trailer. With the bottle on, the 'Busa positively wailed as it rang up 220 horsepower on the dyno. It was 6 p.m., 5 hours and 45 minutes since the crate was first cracked open, and the sun was just dipping below the tops of the trailers parked to the west. The weather forecast for the next day wasn't promising, so it was time to wrap this business up.

"Let's try to go fast without the nitrous first; we should be able to go 9.15, 9.17, 9.18 on motor," Marasco said as we headed toward the starting line. It was 6:08 p.m. when Stu made his next run, the 9.232 at 149.42 mph falling short of the off-the-bottle goal. Still, that's with stock wheels, brakes, tires, etc., and it was only the third pass on the bike since it was assembled earlier in the day. The 1.529 60-foot time was a vast improvement over the earlier runs at stock ride height, but Marasco saw something he didn't like in the 6.01/123 eighth-mile time. "I think the clutch is slipping," he said. "We'll let him make another hit and see what happens."

But the 60-foot fell off to 1.538 on the second pass, and so did the ET and mph: 9.285 at 148.34. "He had to back out of it," groaned Marasco. The clock was moving forward, but the bike was going the other way.

"Woo, this baby's hot!" Marasco said as he removed the clutch cover. After the adjustment had been made, the sun was long gone, and this was the do-or-die pass. The bottle was armed, and Hamby headed to the water box. He lit up the tire and sent smoke rolling past the tail and headlights. The tree turned green and Hamby twisted it hard. This pass looked like his cleanest of the five (remember, the 'Busa only made five passes in three configurations), and the scoreboard revealed it to be true: 8.980 at 156.79 mph. It was 6:44 p.m., six and a half hours after the 'Busa first saw the light of day. Elated, but still critical, Marasco looked at the timeslip. "The clutch is still slipping!"

Above Left Hamby achieves lift-off during his first pass on the lowered Hayabusa, in its 178-horsepower configuration, before the nitrous oxide was dialed in.

Above Right Man of the hour: Marasco checks his Timex and starts to sweat as the sun sinks in the Florida sky and the 'Busa is still lapping in the nines.



Want the full story about Joe Marasco's eight-hour adventure? Visit author Tim Hailey's web site at www.eatmyink.com to order a copy of his "From the Crate to the 8s in 8 Hours" DVD that documents this project from beginning to end.



Shutdown Area

By the time the trailer was packed up, the seafood joints were all closed, so we were stuck eating at a chain restaurant. But the beer was cold, and everybody was happy. The next day, just as forecasted, it was raining puppies all over Florida, but that didn't matter since the MSP/MPS squad had already delivered. We sidled up for another Cracker Barrel breakfast. Before we hit the road, someone reminded us of Joe's old shop on Columbus' west side when Keith Dennis was reading aloud from *Super Streetbike* about some West Coast guys who spent almost \$8K and untold man hours to get a new 'Busa to go 8.95 at 151 mph (*Sibling Rivalry*, *SSB Summer '04* issue. —Ed.). It was funny to the MSP guys then, and it seems even funnier now that they did the same thing in less than 8 hours for considerably less dough. 🍀

Top Eight is the magic number. Hamby launched our brand-new 'Busa into the eights just six-and-a-half hours after the shipping crate was first cracked open—and without any daylight to spare!

Above Hardly a sunset cruise, Team MSP/MPS hustles in the Bradenton pits to finish the job in the failing light of day.

Right It's beer o'clock! Marasco (second from left) is obviously excited after Hamby rings up an 8.98 on what is just the fifth pass on the bike! Bradenton's track owner (foreground, in the yellow shirt) is just excited about going home for the night.

Gratitude

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