



"It's a really forgiving motorcycle," he says. "It gives a lot of feedback, at the rear especially. I know I'm ready to race on the 600."

Picotte also has renewed confidence in the latest Pirelli spec tires. When the Pirelli rubber was introduced at the start of the 2006 season, it appeared that Picotte, a longtime Dunlop rider, was having some trouble adjusting, a point he doesn't entirely dispute.

"The new tires in a way are a bit better for me," he explains. "They're a little stiffer, and the carcass is harder; they're closer to a Dunlop feel. There's not as much tire movement, with the DOT or slicks."

When Blackfoot and Picotte merged their rider strengths it left longtime Blackfoot ace Clint McBain out of a job, but Suzuki was anxious to keep him. So the Cochrane, AB rider will run his own Suzuki Acceleration Racing squad, with tuning help from Patrice Goyette, who worked with Martin in his championship run at Diablo Suzuki in 2005 and at Blackfoot last season.

## ACHES AND PAINS

It has become a bit of a frustrating trend for Pascal Picotte – a big preseason fall that suddenly throws his championship challenge into jeopardy.

Last April in practice at the AMA Superbike round at Barber Motorsport Park Picotte suffered a crash that left him with four broken vertebrae, a broken toe and banged up knees. His Canadian season was thrown in doubt. Many were convinced there was no way he could be fit for the Parts Canada opener at Shannonville a month away.

Stiff and sore, Picotte arrived at Shannonville and produced a magnificent ride to fourth spot. He continued to put together top five results through the summer, even though he was clearly far from fit.

The whole scene seemed to replay itself in Jennings, FL this past April, when a mechanical

The team will be based in Quebec, and McBain will run exclusively in the Superbike class.

Matt McBride returns aboard the Riders Choice Suzukis, which showed very well at the end of last season.

"Matt is one of the young guns we think has the potential to really do something," Naslund says of the 22-year-old, who has received a slightly increased budget for 2007.

Naslund is also high on a couple of rookie Pros on Suzukis this year. Ross Millson of the Go BIG Racing Suzuki team, who finished second in International Motorcycle SUPERSHOW Amateur 600 Sport Bike points last season, has acquired the ex-McBain and Martin equipment from 2006.

Another of the Amateurs to step up with Suzuki in 2007 is Dany Jourdain, who won the final AM 600 round at Shannonville last year and placed third in series points.

Also aboard Suzukis will be consistent North Bay, ON rider Jean-Paul Tache, former Superbike race winner Frank Trombino, veteran Csaba Werner, East Coast rider Todd Scott and Canadian Thunder champ Darren James.

It is a deep line-up with a lot of weapons. If Suzuki got its sums right, it could be a big year.

failure sent Picotte tumbling late in the final day of the test. Fortunately, on this occasion, Picotte was able to walk away. His injuries amounted to nasty bruising in his ribs and lungs, and while he didn't feel he would be quite at 100% for the Mont-Tremblant national opener at the start of June, he didn't think the injuries would slow him for long.

"I'm getting there, I'm still not 100%," he said in mid-May, a month after the crash. "But I'm much better."

He admits that he's in much better shape than he was this time last year, but even those 2006 injuries remain a source of concern.

"Every time you end up crashing and are seriously injured you do lose a bit of your flexibility," he explains. "You do end up a bit stiff. I'm carrying some of those injuries [from last year] but I don't think they'll hold me back."

Such is the life of a professional road racer.

— John Hopkins

## KEY RIDERS

- 9. Clint McBain (Suzuki Acceleration Racing)
- 13. Matt McBride (Riders Choice Suzuki)
- 16. Francis Martin (Team Suzuki / Blackfoot / Picotte Performance)
- 21. Pascal Picotte (Team Suzuki / Blackfoot / Picotte Performance)
- 28. Jean-Paul Tache
- 31. Frank Trombino
- 39. Ross Millson (Go BIG Racing)
- 68. Csaba Werner
- 98. Todd Scott
- 229. Darren James (Ruthless Racing)

## EQUIPMENT

Suzuki GSX-R1000  
Suzuki GSX-R600

All Time Superbike Titles: 6

All Time Superbike Wins: 38

First Win: Michel Mercier,  
Westwood, 1985

Last Win: Kevin Lacombe, AMP, 2005

## QUOTABLE...

"I think I have something to prove. I have a new challenge, and I think the Suzuki has quite a bit of potential. But when things move around as much as they did this off-season, everybody's got something to prove."

— Pascal Picotte on motivation.



Clint McBain (top) has a solid team behind him. Matt McBride (above) ended the 2006 season in excellent form.

PHOTOS BY ROB O'BRIEN