

and a fan club during the early years, before I became a professional rider who could support myself. This gave me the base to get signed up by Suzuki, which was a true blessing as I was riding the best bike, with Joel Robert as my team mate who helped me improve so much."

Talk about those early days with Suzuki and just how important brand loyalty was for you.

"In 1970 I signed with Suzuki for the 250cc World Championship. Together with Joel Robert and Olle Peterson we dominated the championship and then after the GP season, during winter, we demonstrated motocross as a racing sport in the USA.

Once I started riding with Suzuki, I started learning how the Japanese culture valued loyalty. I began to understand the rules that they set for their employees and what they expected of people and what they expected in return. I discovered the way Suzuki racing group treated the riders, mechanics and all the staff, how the racing was organised and these were lessons that I took with me for the rest of my life."

How did your transition from racer to team manager go?

"Harry Everts requested my help in 1979, so I obliged and managed to assure him of a ride on a Suzuki 125cc in the world championship. He went onto win the title so the following year I was asked by SMC (Yokouchi san) to organise and manage their world motocross activities in Europe. They wanted to set-up a base somewhere with a workshop where the three classes, 125, 250 and 500 could all work together, but with the financial side and all the responsibility falling on SMC. This arrangement ended up being a massive success with 125cc world titles for Harry Everts and Eric Geboers, 250cc titles for Georges Jobe and a 500cc title for Brad Lackey, all within a four-year period. Unfortunately though, at the end of the 1983 season, Suzuki announced the end of racing support for all disciplines."

What happened after that break in racing?

"I stayed in contact with everyone in Japan and

in 1988 I introduced them to Stefan Everts, who was a highly talented junior rider. We ended up receiving limited technical support for Stefan that year, but the following year we had Stefan, Dave Strijbos and Pedro Tragter on the line. Then a year later Donny Schmidt rode alongside Stefan and he became World Champion, with Stefan following in his footsteps in 1991 when he won his first world title.

"At that stage I'd also been asked by Giuseppe Luongo to manage the support from SMC, but I separated from GL and set-up GRP in order to

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Sylvain always enjoyed a successful relationship with SMC in Japan throughout all his years in charge.