

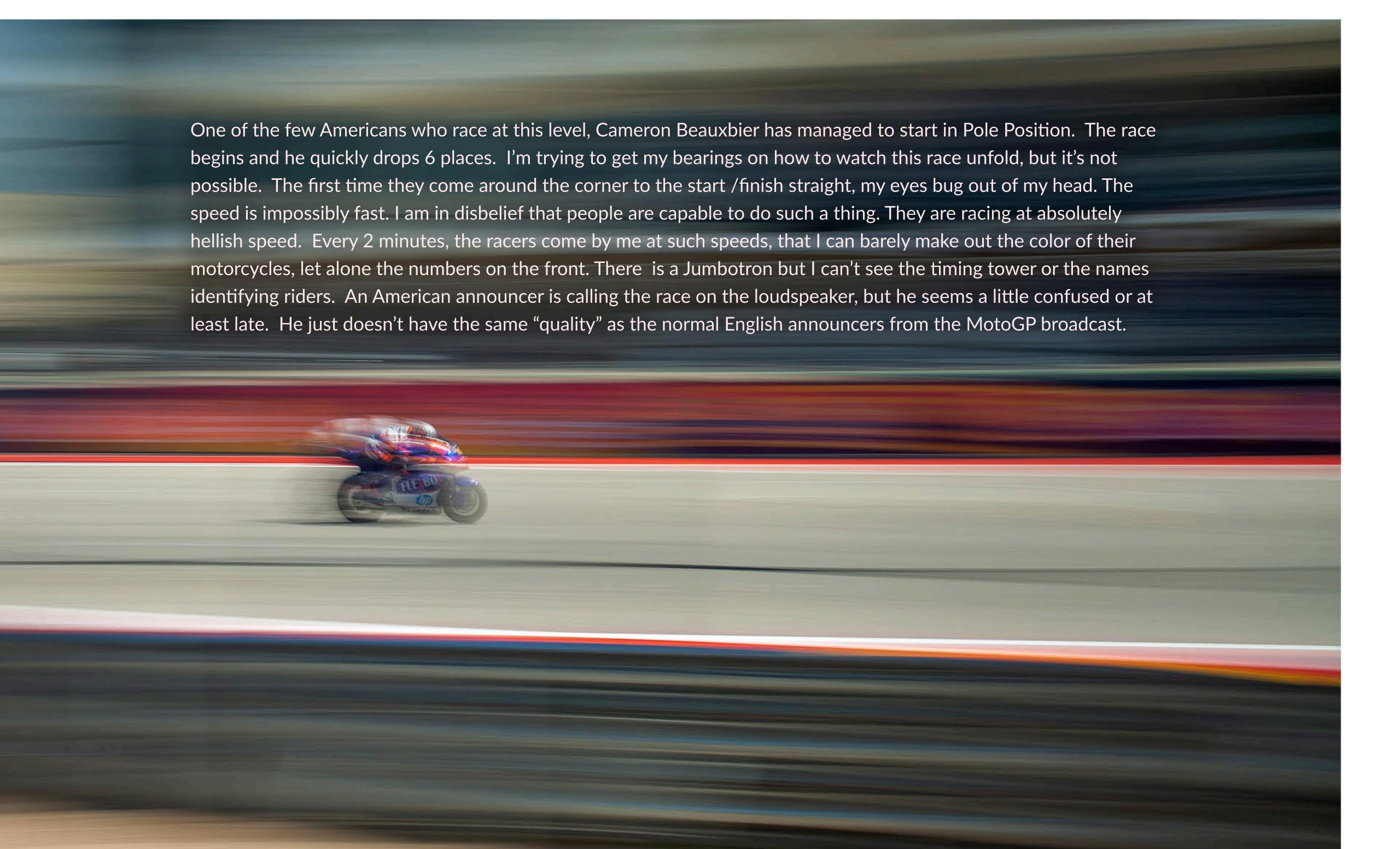
1mlost: MotoGP in Austin, TX



I awake on Sunday as early as I possibly can to GET TO THE TRACK. I'm excited like a little kid .After a few wrong turns, I arrive at The Circuit of The Americas (COTA). I pull into the lot and there's motorcycles for miles. Every kind of bike: sport bikes, adv bikes, classic bikes, Harley bikes, trikes. I kill the motor and some primordial beast lets off a scream in the distance. It's my first time hearing a MotoGP bike and it's terrifying. It is a ripping sound that tears at your ears. It's louder than I imagined loud could be. I'm half a mile from the front gate and I'm reaching for my ear plugs.



One of the few Americans who race at this level, Cameron Beaubier has managed to start in Pole Position. The race begins and he quickly drops 6 places. I'm trying to get my bearings on how to watch this race unfold, but it's not possible. The first time they come around the corner to the start /finish straight, my eyes bug out of my head. The speed is impossibly fast. I am in disbelief that people are capable to do such a thing. They are racing at absolutely hellish speed. Every 2 minutes, the racers come by me at such speeds, that I can barely make out the color of their motorcycles, let alone the numbers on the front. There is a Jumbotron but I can't see the timing tower or the names identifying riders. An American announcer is calling the race on the loudspeaker, but he seems a little confused or at least late. He just doesn't have the same "quality" as the normal English announcers from the MotoGP broadcast.



I can now say that racing is best viewed on television. The closer to the screen the better. Eventually, I give up on trying to follow the race and resign myself to watching it later. Wouldn't want to spoil the outcome while sitting across from the podium. During the awards presentation I ask a man taking pictures, "who came in third?" "The guy in orange." He replies. Such is watching racing at the track.



Please do not misunderstand me. The experience of attending a race is unforgettable, but it has nothing to do with the world of watching on your couch. A man walks out of a garage and mounts a machine that is roaring so loudly, it can deafen you in a matter of minutes. He shifts it into gear and heads to the track. After 1 km, he's now traveling, untethered, at 200 miles per hour down a bumpy track. 20 turns later, he returns to start. The tires of his machine are now sufficiently melting to enable him to keep going faster. It took going to the track, but I am now in awe of this sport and the people who risk their lives to compete for the sake of our entertainment.



It's time for the main event: MotoGP. After a warm up lap, the riders assume their positions on "the grid." It's chaos on the track, as each team's mechanics and engineers make last minute tweaks to the bikes. It's an odd sight in 2022 to see "grid girls." These beautiful women are hired by the teams to hold umbrellas over the rider to keep the hot sun from overheating them. It's a throwback to a different time, but it communicates to my young daughters a message about what their role is in this world. Across the 3 classes of racing and over 60 riders, there is just one woman competing for speed.



The race is one of the best that COTA has ever offered. The rider who normally wins at this track has had a malfunction at the start and dropped back to last place. From there he mounts an amazing charge passing 16 bikes to finish 6th. Enea Bastianini runs away with the win after passing Jack Miller on lap 16 who led for most of the race.

The sport looks barbaric and stupid but it's anything but. In it's purest sense, it is a competition of speed. Go fastest by any means possible. It is physical, elemental, technological. Races are won by 3-4 thousandths of a second. Comprehending how this unit of time is even calculated is beyond me.



The last race of the day is Moto3, the junior class. After 3 fatal crashes in 2021, the 16 year old age limit of the junior classes will be raised to 18 in 2023. I decide to wander the perimeter of the track to really get a feel for it. The distances are really far, even with two short tunnels allowing you to cross in the center of the track. Every 2 minutes, these 16-19 year old kids go whizzing by. My mind drifts to their parents, who have offered their children up in an offering for our entertainment. Some never returning.