



For Immediate Release:

James Whitham, a popular Yorkshire born and bred motorcycle racer turned commentator has led a life of crashes, success - and battling against lymphatic cancer. In a racing career spanning 18 years, he secured four British titles and competed in World Superbike, World Supersport, Endurance and Grand Prix. As a hard-charging motorcycle racer Whitham knows all too well the importance of time, as he said 'I've chased it enough at race tracks in pursuit of podiums, but for the likes of the Air Ambulance, every second can literally be the matter of life or death'. He continued that 'The Air Ambulance and regional Blood Bike groups do an incredible selfless job; I hope that I will never need their services, but having had mates rescued from the side of remote mountains, and of course at race tracks - its a service that resonates with me'.

James Whitham visited the site of GNAAS today to officially hand-over two Vauxhall Mokka 1.7CDTi 4x4 SUVs to be used by the Cumbria and Northumbria Blood Bike groups so that they have all-weather transport for the ferrying of blood between hospital and aircraft, and return to transport the blood when bikes can't be used. The presentation was made on behalf of the Henry Surtees Foundation, a charity set up by motorsport legend John Surtees following the tragic death of his son Henry.

James continued 'I was absolutely honoured to be asked to represent John Surtees OBE and The Henry Surtees Foundation today to hand over the two vehicles; I know that John would also like to say a special thank you to Vauxhall for their support too. I'm sure the assistance of these vehicles will be a huge benefit to the region and help save multiple lives'.

Since January the Henry Surtees Foundation has been working closely with GNAAS, Royal Victoria Infirmary in Newcastle and two serving Blood Bike groups (Northumbria and Cumbria) with the 'blood on board' initiative. The foundation has provided funding of equipment including thermostatically controlled boxes and blood warmers to enable them to deliver fresh blood supplies to the scene of life threatening accidents, and carry out roadside blood transfusions; GNAAS is one of only a few air ambulances in the world to perform this life-saving procedure which has already saved life.

Available for Interview:

John Surtees OBE, Founder of the Henry Surtees Foundation
James Whitham, Former Motorcycle Racer and Superbike Commentator
Dr Rachel Hawes, Great North Air Ambulance Service
Peter Robertson, Chairman of Northumbria Blood Bikes
Bill Bertham, Chairman of Cumbria Blood Bikes

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Notes to editors:

Henry Surtees Foundation - The Henry Surtees Foundation was inspired by motorsport legend John Surtees OBE, following the tragic death of his son Henry whilst competing in a Formula 2 race in 2009 aged just 18 years old. For more information visit: www.henrysurteesfoundation.com

John Surtees OBE - Motorsport legend John Surtees OBE needs little introduction. Between 1956 and 1960 Surtees won seven World Championships and six Isle of Man TT's on 350cc and 500cc MV Angusta Motorcycles. Moving from bikes to Formula One cars, he drove for Lotus, BRM, Cooper, Honda and Ferrari. After winning the Nürburgring and Monza 1000km races in Enzo's sports cars is a feat unmatched by any other racer. In 1966 he won the Can-Am Championship in the Lola T70 MkII - a car he helped develop and between 1969 and 1978 he ran his own team - Team Surtees - designing and campaigning cars for Formula 5000, Formula Two and Formula One. Last year, he celebrated the 50th anniversary of his Formula One World Championship with Ferrari, and also his 80th Birthday.

Great North Air Ambulance Service (GNAAS) - The Air Ambulance Service in the North costs a mammoth 4 million annually to keep their 3 helicopters airborne. Founded in 1991, the charity based service covers the vast areas of Cumbria, North-East England and North Yorkshire. GNAAS operates three helicopters, 365 days a year, across the North-East, North Yorkshire and Cumbria, responding to about 1,000 call-outs each year. The aircraft are crewed by specialist trauma doctors and paramedics.

For more information visit: www.greatnorthairambulance.co.uk

Northumbria Blood Bikes & Cumbria Blood Bikes - Northumbria Blood Bikes and Cumbria Blood Bikes charitable organisations, established and run by local volunteers. They are essential in delivering urgent blood and media supplies, between hospitals, sites and labs in North East England. Between them they cover Northumberland, Tyne and Wear and County Durham and Cumbria.

For more information visit: www.northumbriabloodbikes.org.uk and www.bbcumbria.org