



MISTI HURST

WOMEN'S ROADRACING

Many people balk at the idea of a women's only motorcycle roadracing series, believing that it will not be as edgy, fierce or competitive as the traditionally male dominated races. Some have even gone so far as to call it names like "powder puff" racing. But there is a series now, unique to North America, which is proving to all the skeptics, myself included, that an all women's racing series is pretty intense indeed. Not only that, but the women are turning out to be serious competition for many of the men too. Watch out guys!

Started in 2003 by Jean-Marie Pesci and Dany Torchy, the Trophee Feminine, as it was then called, was designed to encourage women to get into the sport in a non-intimidating fashion. Based out of Eastern Quebec, the series offered a safe and friendly environment for women to learn the ropes, and an alternative to jumping straight into racing against the men.

"The women's series gave me the chance to begin racing with other girls like me," explained Geneviève Lesieur, currently an expert racer in the women's category and in the amateur 600 against the men. "I always watched the races on TV but thought that it was a man's sport, and never believed that I could also do it. Now I know that this is not just a man's sport, and it's the greatest sport ever!"

Nadine Lajoie, who also races as an expert in the women's series, and against the men, explained how she got her start in roadracing. "I only started riding a bike in 2001 and my first time in a race was at the last round from the Quebec series in 2003 just to see where I could finish. I finished 3rd out of 12 women at my first race. WOW, so thrilling! I tried it and I loved it! I wouldn't have tried racing with the guys before but I do now!"

Anne Bossy, a novice racer in the women's series said, "I never thought about racing until the women's series came along. It was the first time that anyone put the idea in my head about racing and made me feel like I could do it. Then I was hooked, eating, breathing and sleeping racing!"

In March of 2005, very late in the start of the season, Kevin Graham, of Pirelli, and Orion Motorsports took over the organization after being approached by the women competitors to reorganize their series.

Bossy explained that, "during the 2004 season, it was felt by the women that we were not being managed properly, so we joined together and approached Kevin in the fall and asked for help. There was a limbo period after that where we really didn't think the series would continue."

The series did continue, however, and 2005 represented a great year for the all women's racing series. The name was changed from the Trophee Feminine to the Pro Honda Oils Women's Cup Challenge after Honda jumped aboard as the title sponsor. Quickly following suit, other companies stepped up to offer their support, including, Yamaha Motor Canada, Adam & Eve, Graphic Mart, Euro Moto, Hindle Exhausts, Orion Motorsports, RACE and ASM.



Along with some great sponsorship, a very healthy contingency plan was also put into place for the racers, which included a championship payout, year end travel fund, and contingency certificates after each race, that can be redeemed for discounts on sponsor products.

Benoît Filion was hired as the person to help run the series and to become the focal point for the girls, the “go to” person while Tina Capell volunteered her time to update and organize the website, www.womenscup.ca. Two of the female racers, Natalie Catherine Provost and Vanessa Gareau played pivotal roles in working as liaisons for new riders, with Natalie focusing on the French speaking women in Quebec and Vanessa with the English speaking in Ontario

For 2005, Pirelli upped the level of service they had been offering in 2004 to the women. The series developed into a spec tire series, and Pirelli offered the women a special price on the tires, as well as service at all the races, which is something they lacked before. Much of the service, including the mounting and balancing was free of charge.

Kevin Graham also explained that, “we had mechanics available at all of the races as another service point in case one of the racers arrived alone or needed some help at the track. We wanted to

make sure it is less intimidating for someone to show up as a new rider, being that there is help available if needed. This is a crucial part of what we do.”

Vicki Schouten, new to racing this year, said, at the final race weekend in Shannonville, “I honestly can’t believe I’m standing here today and it was the women of the series that encouraged me to start racing. A lot of the women can hold their own with the guys.”

For 2005, a seven race series took place that included three Parts Canada National rounds as well as four regional rounds in both Quebec with ASM (Association for Sport Motorcyclists) and Ontario with RACE (Racing Associates Canada Events). This, as Graham explains, “actually gave the women the largest series in Canada as they did more events than Pro Superbike or any of the regional classes.” The series was broken into two groups, Expert and Novice and both groups had the opportunity to race for two class championships; Open Sportbike, and 600 Supersport.

The number of women involved in motorcycle road racing has steadily been going up and, as Kevin Graham says, “we’ve had 15-20 girls on the grid at times which is the largest group of girls that have raced in an organization together in Canada, probably in the North America,

probably in the world. Once we got that group together we have been able to elevate them, put them in front of a national audience where they have gone over very well, and people are interested. You should see Pascale Picotte (Canadian Superbike Champion) rushing over to the wall to watch them race!”

Not only are the women racing fast and furious in the Women’s Cup series, but also several of them are racing against the men in such classes as the National Amateur 600 class and kicking butt! Graham says that, “This year, was the first year in almost 20 years that we had a woman run in the top ten of the National amateur guys class, Marie Josée Boucher who finished 7th at Calgary, and 13th overall in the championship!”

As Marie-Josée Boucher (winner of the Women’s 600 Supersport Championship) says, “we kick butt, just come and see us ride. And for the girls out there, come out to a track day, come and race with us because it’s so fun and better than riding on the street. Come and see us at least, you will be amazed and you will become addicted just like we did!”

And Catherine Nadeau, who also takes on the men in the amateur 600 explains, “We look very feminine and quiet. I tell nothing about my performance, instead I just show them I can do it. Last year in Quebec City, I won the 600 Amateur race.”

My experience with the Women’s Cup Series was a little different from these stories about the women who became involved in racing because there was a venue for all women racing. I was actually opposed to the idea of an all girls race. Having raced since 2001, strictly against the guys (usually as the only female in the group), holding my own, challenging them, and even winning against them, I had the initial misconception that a women’s series would be like taking a step backwards. A way of saying, “we are not good enough to race against the men.” I thought the class would be made up of mostly novice racers who were not interested in, or even

capable of, being competitive against the guys, and I wasn’t sure what the quality of racing would be like. I didn’t think that it would really be a “challenge,” but I was dreadfully wrong.

I was inspired to try out one of the Women’s Cup races after meeting three of the competitors at Mid Ohio Raceway during one of Keith Code’s California Superbike Schools. The three women, Natalie Catherine Provost, Marie-Josée Boucher and Geneviève Lesieur, had made the long trek together from Quebec, towing three 600cc race bikes, to participate in the single day school at the Ohio racetrack. For Natalie, it would be her 5th time attending the school, while it was the first time for the other two women.

As a riding instructor for the California Superbike School (currently the only female on the team) I was assigned to work with Natalie for the day, coaching her on the track, leading and following her, as well as debriefing her at the end of each riding session. I was initially surprised by her speed on the track and, by the end of the school day, was downright impressed with the calibre of riding that she had exhibited. From my observations of the other two women on the track, the calibre of riding from them was at an equally impressive level. I began to see, for the first time ever, that a women’s only series might, in fact, offer a hell of a racing challenge.

Before the girls headed out on their long drive back to Quebec, they gave me a bit more information on the Women’s Cup series, and even suggested I come and try a race.

So, on Sept 23rd, I entered the final two races of the Women’s Cup Challenge for 2005 at Shannonville Raceway in Ontario, and rode both the Open Sportbike and the 600 Supersport on a 2005 Honda Canada sponsored CBR 600RR, generously lent to me by Turn 2 Sportbike Rentals. The owner of Turn 2, George Budacki, also generously offered his mechanical expertise and service to me for the weekend as a tuner, and Parts



Canada, the California Superbike School, mspeed Performance, Flair Photo, RACE, Fitness World, Mr. Quick Lube & Oil, Serf to Surf, Veritas Web Design, Bitchin Gear, Paul Molinari, and Len Adams pitched in as much needed sponsors for the race weekend.

After riding with these women, and experiencing such camaraderie, friendship, and outstanding competition, I have completely changed my mind on the idea of a women's only racing series. I had to fight hard against the other racers, and the racing was fast, clean, exciting, challenging, and extremely intense. These girls are kick-ass motorcycle racers!

This is a great group of riders, a great series, and I'm very glad I made it to the races. Shawna Aron, winner of the Women's Open Sportbike Championship for 2005, said to me after the race weekend, "I'm glad you were able to make it and see what the "women's racing" is all about. It's hard to tell someone on the

phone of the calibre of riding, but as you saw first hand, the racing is as good as it gets!"

The 2006 series hopes to offer a venue out west to give the other Canadian racers a chance to participate, and they hope to eventually take the series National.

The female competitors of the series put together a calendar for the 2005 season, proceeds from the sales of which were used to help support the women racers, and the series.

"After the success of that 2005 "Racing Girls" calendar, the racers have re-united for a 2006 edition. By buying this calendar, you support and encourage these passionate women in what is traditionally a man's sport. You are encouraging not only their participation, but also the development of women's divisions within male dominated environments."

Check the website for information on the calendar, as well as for series rules, schedules, and rider information. www.womenscup.ca **MMM**

Misti Hurst is a motorcycle racer, an instructor with the California Superbike School, and a freelance writer. More info on her can be found on her website at www.mistihurst.com

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