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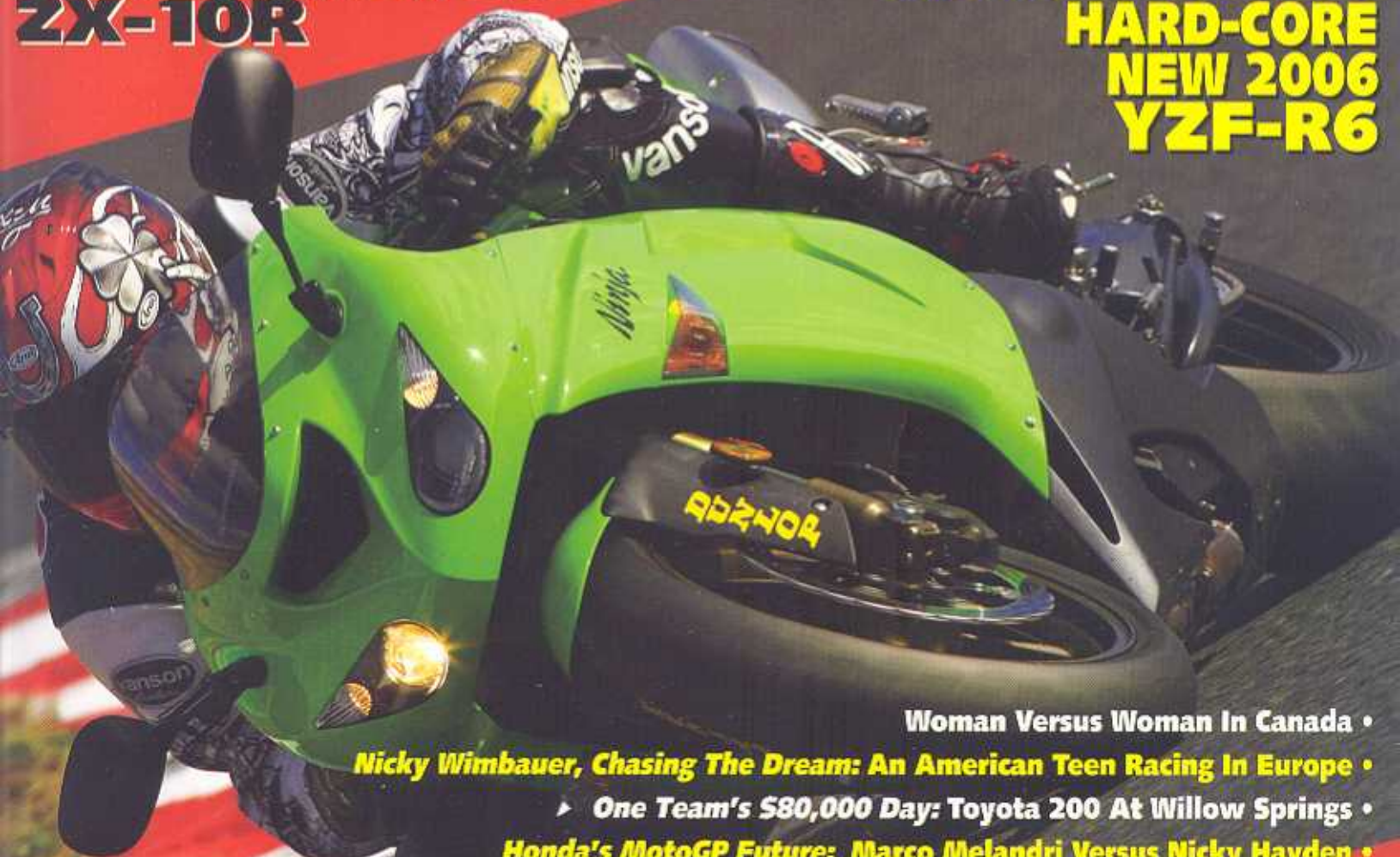
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# Women At Speed!

By Misti Hurst

Last September I had the opportunity to race in the final event of the Pro Honda Women's Cup Challenge at Shannonville Raceway in Ontario, Canada. It was there that I managed to completely obliterate a previously held bias that I had about racing against a field of all women competitors.

When I first heard about a motorcycle road racing series specifically for women, I was opposed to the idea simply because I thought it would take away my credibility as a motorcycle racer. For three years I have been racing against men, holding my own, challenging them, and even winning against them, and I thought that racing in a class with all women would be like taking a step backwards—a way of saying, "I'm not good enough to race against the men." I thought that the class would be made up of mostly Novice racers that 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.

Boy, was I wrong.



(Above) Misti Hurst (142) leads Geneviève Lesieur during the Open Sportbike race at Shannonville.  
(Below) Hurst chases Shawna Aron (169) and leads Lesieur, with Marie-Josée Boucher (not shown) out front.  
Photos by Flair Photo.



I was inspired to participate in the event after meeting three of the Canadian 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 fifth time attending the school while it was the first time for the other two women.

As a riding coach 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. As she rode past pit lane for the first session of the morning, I leisurely headed out on track to follow her and to watch her ride. After half-a-lap at a decent pace I realized to my surprise that I was not

catching her and I had to step up the program. I thought to myself, "wow, this girl is fast," and for the rest of the day I watched in amazement and pride. (she was my student after all), as her skills, speed and style improved tremendously. By the end of the school day I was really quite impressed with her riding, and from my observations of the other two women on the track, they were at an equally impressive level. I began to see for the first time that a women-only series might in fact offer a hell of a racing challenge.

Before the girls headed out on their long drive back to Canada, they gave me a bit more information on the Women's Cup Series and even suggested I come and try a race. Natalie put it bluntly,



Misti Hurst takes a victory lap after winning at Shannonville. Photo by Flair Photo.

saying, "Come see us racing, and get your ass on the race-track, you will be surprised!"

I couldn't very well turn down a challenge like that.

After that initial meeting with the girls I went online to [www.womenscup.ca](http://www.womenscup.ca) to find out some more information on the series, and I talked to a few of the women racers and to the organizers of the series.

Loosely started in 2003, under the name Trophy Feminine, and based at a racetrack in Eastern Quebec, the organization has gone through a lot of restructuring in the past two years.

Anne Bossy, one of the competitors in the series, explained that, "during the 2004 season, it was felt by the women in the series that we were being taken advantage of a little bit by the organizers. The sponsorship money that was given to the series was not getting to us and we didn't feel like we were being managed properly, so we joined together and approached Kevin Graham from Pirelli in the fall and asked for help. There was a limbo period after that where we really didn't think the series would continue."

However, last March Gra-

ham got the go-ahead to take over the organization and put the series together for the women. The name changed to the Women's Cup Challenge and the first thing Graham did was to hire Benoit Filion to help run the series and to become the focal point, the "go-to" person for the girls. Graham's assistant Tina Capell volunteered her time to update and organize the website, and Pirelli upped the level of service they had been offering to the women. The series developed into a spectre 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. Pirelli guaranteed that they would show up at all the races and everything, including the mounting and balancing of the tires, would be free of charge.

Graham also explained that, "we will also have mechanics available at all of the races as another service point in case one of the racers arrives alone or needs some help at the track. We want 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."

Honda Pro Oils and Chemicals jumped on board as the title sponsor, and 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 that included a Championship payout, year-end travel fund and contingency certificates after each race that can be redeemed for discounts on sponsor products.

For 2005, a seven-race series was announced 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

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Misti Hurst on the podium after winning the Pro Honda Women's Cup Challenge 600 Supersport race at Shannonville, flanked by second-place Marie-Josée Boucher (left) and third-place Shawna Aron. Photo by Flair Photo.



The girls are all here: Pro Honda Women's Cup Challenge Series competitors, at Shannonville. From left, Catherine Nadeau, Tanya Doyon, Marie-Josée Boucher, Vicki Schouten, Randé Hilliard-Martin, Jessica Soodeen, Tammy Byng, Nadine Lajole, Josée Bouchard, Shawna Aron, Anne Bossy, Natalie Catherine Provost, Geneviève Lesieur and Venessa Gareau. Photo by Flair Photo.

## Women At Speed

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(Racing Associates Canada Events). This actually gave the women the largest series in Canada as they did more events than Pro Superbike or any of the regional series. 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 600cc Supersport.

When asked about the women in the series, Graham's face lights up and he speaks fondly of the competitors. He says, "Over the course of the season we have gotten to know all the girls and become good friends with them, and one of the things we have found out is just how dedicated these girls are as a group to what they are doing. This is not a 'powder puff' class like a lot of people wanted to label it and these girls are very serious about what they do. I think we have proven that by not only getting a large group of girls together, up to 25 on the grid, which legitimizes the class as it is probably the largest group

of girls that has raced in an organization in North America and maybe even the world, but also by the fact that these girls hammer on each other. They are very fast. This year was the first year in almost 20 years that we had a woman run in the top 10 of the National Amateur guys' class, Marie-Josée Boucher who finished seventh at Cal-

gary. On more than one occasion I have been told that the women have had the best race of the day. You should see (Canadian Superbike Champion) Pascal Picotte rushing over to the wall to watch them race!"

I agree with Kevin Graham that the girls in this series are very fast and very serious about what they do.



Shawna Aron (left) and Mishi Hurst: The Canadian women welcomed American Hurst with open arms. Photo by Flair Photo.

On Friday of race week I arrived at Shannonville Raceway in Ontario and registered to race in the Open Sportbike and 600 Supersport Women's races as an Expert rider. My bike I was to race was a 2004 Honda Canada-sponsored CBR600RR, from Turn 2 Sportbike Rentals. The owner of Turn 2, George Budacki, generously offered to tune for me for the weekend, and Parts Canada, the California Superbike School, Speed Performance, Flair Photo RACE, Paul Molinari and Ken Adams pitched in as much-needed sponsors for my race weekend.

What I noticed the most in my first few hours at the track was the friendliness and camaraderie of all the racers, the organizers and the sponsors of the event. I was immediately accepted as part of the group and everyone was excited to have a new racer from our town. I spent Friday trying to learn the new track, the new bike, and to meet the other racers in the series.

On Saturday I practiced again in the morning and then got ready for the first of the four-lap qualifying races that would set our grid positions for Sunday's races. There were seven women on the grid, seven Experts and seven Novices with two races separating the two groups. Novices at the back. I started from the last position in the Expert field as gridding is based on previous points standing. After some intense racing, I finished third.

The second qualifier offered more intense racing just in the first. There was a lot of passing and I was impressed with the aggressiveness, the skill and the competitiveness of the racers. I never thought that I was racing in a "women's race," just felt like a pretty spectacular motorcycle race. I finished second after some last-lap action between myself and the 2004 600cc Supersport #1 plate holder, Shawna Aron.

The two qualifying races Saturday were some of the best racing I have ever been involved with in my life.

On Sunday, the racing was equally challenging, even in the rain. The 600cc Supersport race was first and the track was very wet and soggy. I managed to take the lead from the beginning and hold it to the checkered flag. The response from the other competitors was excellent and they were extremely friendly and seemed genuinely happy that there was new competition in the mix.

The track dried up for the second race of the day—Open Sportbike—which was more electrically charged than the first race. I had to work seriously hard and ride extremely well to run with the front-runners in this race. It took me two laps to work my way up to second place and by then the leader Marie-Josée Boucher was a few bikelengths ahead. She was on fire and riding very fast and hot on my heels were Geneviève Lesieur and Shawna Aron. I put everything I had into closing the gap a little bit before I found a damp patch in the middle of the final turn before the front straightaway and high-sided myself seven feet in the air in front of the grandstands, causing a red flag.

The race restarted without me and finished with Marie-Josée Boucher taking the win, Geneviève Lesieur finishing second and Nadine Lajoie taking third place.

After riding with these women and experiencing such camaraderie, friendship, and competition, I have completely changed my mind on the idea of an all-women series. I think it is a great way to promote the sport, to give the women their own Championships to work towards, and to offer a safer and less intimidating environment for those women who are not sure about jumping in and racing with the guys right away.

The top female riders in the Women's Cup Series do also race against the guys and during the Shannonville race weekend we watched as two of the women placed in the top seven in the Amateur 600cc race. I have no doubt that they can and will be stepping up the

program and fighting the men for podium positions in the future.

It is a great group of girls, a great series and I'm very glad I made it to the races. I'm happy to admit to being wrong in my own initial perceptions about what a women's series was going to be like, and racing with the Canadian girls has been really inspiring. These girls are kick-ass racers and hopefully we can get the word out about the Women's Cup and attract more and more talented women to the series.

As Marie-Josée Boucher says, "Don't discriminate because we are girls. You will be surprised to see how we can go, we put our knee down, we kick butt, just come and see us ride. And for the girls out there, come and take a track day and 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!"

Complete series rules, schedules and rider information is available at [www.womenscup.ca](http://www.womenscup.ca). **RW**

#### RESULTS:

**600cc SUPERSPORT EXPERT (September 25):** 1. Misti Hurst (Hon CBR600RR); 2. Marie-Josée Boucher (Hon CBR600RR); 3. Shawna Aron (Yam YZF-R6); 4. Geneviève Lesieur (Yam YZF-R6); 5. Natalie Catherine Provost (Hon CBR600RR); 6. Catherine Nadeau (Suz GSX-R600); 7. Nadine Lajoie (Suz GSX-600).

**600cc SUPERSPORT NOVICE (September 25):** 1. Vanessa Gareau (Hon CBR600RR); 2. Tammy Byng (Yam YZF-R6); 3. Anne Bossy (Suz SV650); 4. Vicki Chouten (Suz GSX-R600); 5. Josée Bouchard (Yam YZF-R6). DNF.

**OPEN SPORTBIKE EXPERT (September 25):** 1. Marie-Josée Boucher (Hon CBR600RR); 2. Geneviève Lesieur (Yam YZF-R6); 3. Nadine Lajoie (Suz GSX-R600); 4. Natalie Catherine Provost (Hon CBR600RR); 5. Catherine Nadeau (Suz GSX-R600); 6. Shawna Aron (Yam YZF-R6); 7. Misti Hurst (Hon CBR600RR). DNF, crash.

**OPEN SPORTBIKE NOVICE (September 25):** 1. Vanessa Gareau (Hon CBR600RR); 2. Tammy Byng (Yam YZF-R6); 3. Vicki Schouten (Suz GSX-R600); 4. Josée Bouchard (Yam YZF-R6); 5. Anne Bossy (Suz SV650); 6. Randi Hillard-Martin (Buell X1). DNF.

*(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 web-site at [www.mistihurst.com](http://www.mistihurst.com).)*

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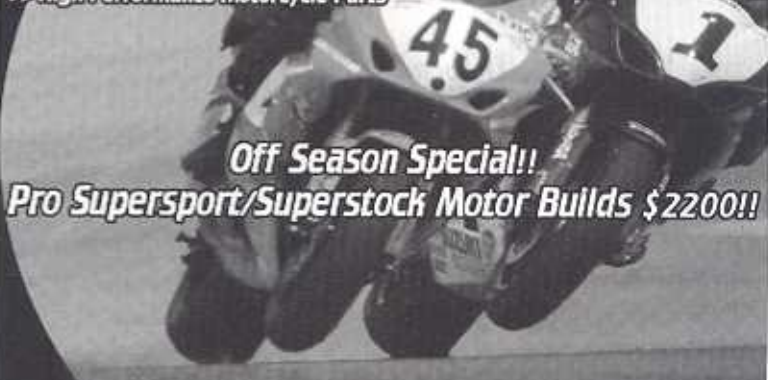
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