

Darlings of the Dominican

Women's Cup stars shine in Caribbean

By Frank Wood

SANTO DOMINGO, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC - As an added attraction to the fourth annual Carrera Internacional Puntuable and the final round of the Dominican Republic National Superbike Championships, 10 of the ladies from the Canadian Pro Honda Oils Women's Cup Challenge were invited to attend and stage a race of their own as well as being invited to compete in the regular race program.

The event, a two-heat format held at the Autodromo Mobil 1 in Santo Domingo on the last weekend of November, was staged under cloudless skies with temperatures hovering near 30 degrees Celsius, conditions that our riders found near oppressive.

While there were some glitches early in race week, it all worked out well. The girls' motorcycles, scheduled for Tuesday delivery, arrived late Friday afternoon, resulting in a real scramble of borrowed bikes and equipment exchanges in order for the fast femmes to get some track time.

Off track the WCC and entourage were treated to a welcoming dinner hosted by event co-promoter George Butler, who gave a speech welcoming the Canadian contingent and wishing them well for the weekend. Butler is the D-R FIM representative and president of the nation's racing federation. His business, MotoButler was title sponsor for the race weekend.

In the three major Santo Domingo newspapers there were articles and colour photos featuring the WCC ladies and the team was featured on Colourvision 9 TV on a very popular live talk show called "Rock, Paper, Scissors." Vanessa Gareau and Parts Canada Superbike competitor and Dominican native Franklyn Dominguez (now newlyweds) carried much of the conversation, which of course was in Spanish, and Marie-Josée Boucher also joined in at times.

When the Pro Honda Oils speedsters finally got on track on their own mounts they quickly adapted to the 11-turn, 2 km flat surface. At day's end Marie-Jo Boucher, piloting the Excel Moto Honda CBR600, had posted the best lap time at 1:21.079, which was less than four seconds off the Superbike lap record.

Boucher won both legs of the WCC races, the first by over seven seconds. In the open-



PHOTO BY JOSE BONILLA

ing race Genevieve Lesieur on the Chaine Performance Suzuki GSX-R600 was compromised by a poor launch and, on her entry to turn one from the start, a front brake problem, which gave Boucher her early gap.

Lesieur pressed hard in the early going but, realizing the futility of overriding, she cruised home a safe second.

She had much more success in round two with a better start and a faster pace that saw her within striking distance on several occasions. Lesieur accepted second place once more and second overall.

Natalie Catherine Provost put in a great ride to place third in the first leg on the Les Soeurs en Vrac-sponsored Honda CBR600. She rode aggressively in the early laps and then settled into a personal pace. Provost placed fourth in the second leg and was scored fourth overall.

Gareau-Dominguez claimed a very close fourth place followed by a strong third place run on the Seamont Brokerage-sponsored Suzuki GSX-R750.

Josee Bouchard came home a lonely fifth in the first 10-lap contest and unfortunately had mechanical difficulties on her Yamaha YZF-R6 that saw her retire from race two on lap four. She would be scored ninth in the final results.

Anissa Burachynsky on the Canadian Kawasaki Motors-backed ZX-6R won the race within the race by taking sixth in round one and fifth in the second leg for a fifth overall. Burachynsky was involved in a vicious dice in each race with the brave Kana Matsumoto on the Suzuki of

Newmarket and Motovan-sponsored SV650, Manon Lemire, smooth and fast on the Velomania-backed Suzuki GSX-R600 and the diminutive dart, Roxanne Gravelle, riding the wheels off the Team Gym Max-supported Yamaha R6. Also involved in this war and swapping positions race long with the above was Maude Labrosse-Legriss on a Honda CBR600.

The five-way fight for fifth proved to be the highlight of the day as the vocal fans showed their approval. When the 20-lap total was calculated, Labrosse-Legriss secured sixth, Lemire seventh, Gravelle eighth, Bouchard ninth and Masumoto 10th.

The effort was observed to have been very successful.

"It was a wonderful spectacle," Butler said. "We had a very good crowd and they really enjoyed these girls. They were very excited. This city is crazy for motorcycle racing and they had a wonderful day of it. All the girls started both races and all but one finished. No one crashed and I think they all enjoyed themselves.

"This is a unique form of racing for us and we are very happy you could come, we are grateful to you. Your girls, I should call them ladies, are absolutely charming. They are colourful and fast. They have created a large fan base here and I hope they can come again next year. If I don't bring you back the fans will kill me."

Butler need not worry about irate fans, the Pro Honda Oils Women's Cup Expert final round of 2009 is slated for Autodromo Mobil 1 on Dec 4-5. **///**