



Some of racing's top female riders came to Hampton Downs and showed the boys their clean heels at this year's Barry Sheene Classic.

Words: Robert Cochrane / Photos: Jossie Photography (www.photographybyjossie.com), Robert Cochrane

The third Barry Sheene historic race meeting in New Zealand at Hampton Downs was a huge success with many observers calling it a 'Great Meeting'. As a promoter, wet weather is your greatest fear as it can turn a meeting into a loss situation oh so easily - as happened at the 2012 event. This year the weather gods were kind and crowd figures were up on last year. Past NZCMRR President Peter Lodge had the vision to invite Maria Costello MBE, a UK racer and past Isle of Man TT lap record holder.

This charted a course for a female-focussed event that seemed simple in concept, but at times had its moments as the team had to arrange loan race machines for most of the solo riders. Fifteen solo women riders and five swingers in action together brought a touch of glamour to the event –

and the TV cameras followed. Kiwi TT Riders were filming a documentary, TV One came out on Saturday with reporter Abby Scott to film some action and interview the lady racers. With funding from key sponsors Mike Pero Real Estate, Bell Helmets and Penrite Oil we were able to hire a six camera TV crew to film a documentary for CRC Motorsport TV3 which will screen probably in early Feb 2015 in a two part show, plus will be on Speed TV in Australia and distributed in Europe to other channels.

The thirty-two Australians who attended managed to wrestle the Trans-Tasman Trophy from us and there was great racing all weekend and, considering the 250 plus entrants, very few race incidents. The women all had a great time hanging out together, having tons of photos taken and TV interviews. Young Amie Valucik-Hamilton, aged 15, was the star of the



Women

WOW

*at the Mike Pero
Barry Sheene Motorcycle Classic*

2015

Saturday TV One news clip and Mihi Banks showed great determination and skill in riding the pants off the 1960 250 and 350 Jawas all weekend.

Avalon Biddle raced a CBR600 Honda and created a huge buzz in the pits when she became the first woman to win a Barry Sheene solo race on either side of the Tasman when she took out a Post Classic 250 race on the 'Ginger Molloy' TSS Bultaco 250. Avalon said, "The bike has the weight of a 125 but with tons of cool power [said with a huge smile and a sparkle in her eyes], it is quite stable, doesn't step out and if the back starts to slide a bit it suddenly bites and, wow, you are off again."

There was lots of laughter amongst the women all weekend as they told each other about getting past another bloke or two in their last race. Many of their loaned bikes were mid-field clubman machines but they

were all there to have fun and were a pleasure to work with. Nicki Smith road a Yamaha XJ550 and Moto Morini 500, the latter she found so easy to ride through the bends in third gear due to its even torque spread. Amie raced her own RG150 Suzuki alongside her dad George throughout the event, while Philippa Beck had both a Benelli 2502C and a 3TA Triumph 350cc clubman's bike to enjoy.

Sarah Elliot had mechanical problems with the Yamaha Anderson XJ600 all weekend but Debbie Bridge had a consistently reliable weekend on the Ducati TT2 in the Pre-82 Junior class. Other solo riders included Brigid Woodcock on an Aermacchi 250, and Janel Wilson and Karel Pavich – who both joined the women's track parade led by Mike Pero at lunchtime on Sunday. Janet Wilson was the first women to win a Classic



Avalon Biddle and Scout Fletcher definitely not sniffing 'race fuel'

Sophie Lovett with the Ducati 851 posted the 19th fastest solo race lap time of 1min 15.13s

Register Championship when she won the 350 Clubmans with a BSA Gold Star DB32 350cc mount a few years ago, while Karel Pavich was the first woman to win an MNZ NZ Road Race Championship with her 250GP win. Young Kiwi International Scout Fletcher was plagued with what looked like ignition problems on the Bimota TZ400. The Australian women were on form with Sophie Lovett showing class to clock the 19th fastest lap of the weekend on a Ducati 851 while Leanne Nelson kept riders honest on her Honda RS125.

Maria Costello MBE, the guest of honour, campaigned at the Barry Sheene Festival of Speed earlier in the year and, fresh back from racing in Europe, she was as keen as mustard to put on a good show at this year's event. She was frightfully quick off the start line from the back of the pack, running past the field down the inside on the white line. Maria was a popular figure all weekend – always with a cluster of women racers or riders around her – and campaigned the TT Industries Manx Norton and a Honda VFR400, on which she took a third place.

Maria spoke on Saturday evening at the Barry Sheene Dinner about her career and the great many opportunities she now gets to ride classic bikes around the world and has confirmed she will be in Australia for the next BSFOS in March 2015 and will be back here in NZ in December

at the Tri Series races. While Avalon Biddle took the first solo race win, it was the sidecar swinger Tracy Bryan who took home all the silverware for the ladies with a brace of ten trophies. In the modern sidecar class, with Aaron Lovell on the LCR GSXR1000, she took four wins from four starts plus the feature 'Lawrence Bros Trophy'. With her brother Bryan from Wanganui on dad Roger's T150 Triumph Trident 750cc they won the four classic sidecar races plus the feature 'John Anderson Trophy' race at the end of the meeting. Other sidecar swingers included Tina McKeown, Wendy Ploeg, Julie Loveridge plus Aida Gulbrasen.

Maria is a member of the FIM Women's Commission that seeks to offer equal opportunity for women racers at all levels of elite motorcycle sport and I believe that goal was thoroughly achieved at this event.

Perhaps in the years to come the JV Barry Sheene clubs will choose to do another women's promotion and next time I suspect the numbers will climb from twenty to forty-plus female racers. In the meantime the team has already started planning work on the Barry Sheene 2015 event with an air of confident optimism that next year, with lots of work, will also be a top event. The two TV One news clips can be viewed at www.barrysheene.co.nz

17yr old Mihi Banks of Wellington on the 250 and 350cc Jawas

Abby Scott from TV One news interviewing sidecar swinger Julie Loveridge



Guest of honour for this year's Barry Sheene Motorcycle Classic, sponsored by Mike Pero, was Maria Costello.

Maria has been racing motorcycles for 20 years and was presented with an M.B.E for services to Motorcycling in 2009. Prince Charles acknowledged Costello as a champion of women in sport as well as for promoting sport in schools and communities.

Starting on the closed circuits, it seems Maria has found a calling in real roads racing. In 2004, she set a Guinness world record for setting the fastest lap for a woman on a production bike at 114.73mph – which was set despite a broken collar bone. In 2005 Maria once again made history when she became the first woman to take a podium finish around the Isle of Man TT course – a third place in the Ultra Lightweight at the Manx Grand Prix on board an RLR Motorsports Honda RVF400. Maria has won a total of two Isle of Man Classic TT Silver Replicas, twelve Manx GP Silver Replicas and Four TT Bronze replicas racing in the Isle of Man.

In 2013 Maria was inducted on to the Fédération Internationale de Motocyclisme Women in Motorcycling Commission (CFM) and, through her women-only trackdays and Woman on a Motorcycle project, aims to provide opportunities for women to improve their two-wheeled confidence on road, track and off-road motorcycles.

It's not all modern machinery though, Costello has a real passion for classic racing and has competed on a variety of machinery throughout Europe, South Africa, Australia and the USA - and can now add New Zealand to that list. At this year's Classic TT races, Costello placed fifth on a Paton and second in class on a Suzuki T20 250.

Costello's biographical book 'Queen of Bikers' is out of print but available on Amazon.com for Kindle. Visit costelloracing.com for more information on Maria and the inspirational work she does to promote gender equality in racing and the workplace.

And Maria's view on the event? "It was a dream come true. I'll look back and remember the Barry Sheene Classic as one of the most memorable events in my career. It wasn't just about making my racing debut in New Zealand, it was the fact that I got to celebrate women in motorcycling with an amazing group of women both on and off the track. That was so special to me and I think the organisers really did something exceptional doing that.

"To headline the event was overwhelming and to race Bruce Verdon's McIntosh Manx Norton was, like I said, a dream come true, I'm smiling just thinking about it. I don't know who decided it but I was racing as part of the winning Aussie team and getting back on the Rob Francis VFR400 was, as before when I rode it in Aus, a total pleasure. If only I could have squeezed that bike in to my luggage, I'd love it for the Tri Series. I had so much fun. I can't thank everyone enough for making me so welcome. And I get to do it again in December for the Tri Series!" ■



Maria Costello MBE, Queen of Bikers



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