

# Mates share racing passion

By Colin Smith

It's more than 18,000km from Tauranga to Northampton, but for two motorcycle racing friends from opposite sides of the world the shared passion is the 37¼ miles (60.7km) of the Isle of Man TT circuit.

British bike racer Maria Costello, MBE, is making Tauranga her home this month, linking up with local sidecar racer Tracey Bryan to escape the British winter and race in the Suzuki International Tri-Series.

It's actually the third visit Down Under this year for Costello.

She was invited to the Australian edition of the Barry Sheene Memorial at Sydney's Eastern Creek in April and then raced at the Hampton Downs leg of the series at Labour Weekend before adding a Manfeild club meeting to her plans.

She met Bryan — who was part of the Kiwi team racing at Eastern Creek — and the 41-year-old racers renewed their friendship again at the New Zealand event in October.

Bryan and her husband Steve — also a sidecar racing stalwart — have organised a KTM 690R Duke through Hamilton's Boyd's Motorcycles for Costello to race in the Suzuki Tri-Series and for the Boxing Day street race at Wanganui. Costello will also race a McIntosh Manx Norton in the classic races.

"I'm looking forward to Wanganui. It's a real road race and that's what I do," Costello says.

She has a busy racing schedule but her programme is centred on the Isle of Man TT in June and the Classic TT event in August.

Tracey Bryan has also caught what bike racers call "Island Fever" and plans to race there in 2015 as part of an all-Kiwi sidecar team.

The Tauranga dental technician has raced sidecars for 10 years — as a rider and passenger — and in recent months has achieved some of her biggest success.

She teamed with her brother to win four out of five classic sidecar races at the Barry Sheene meeting and doubled up with Hamilton's Aaron Lovell to win all of the modern sidecar races. The winning run has continued with four wins from four starts at the Hampton Downs and Manfeild rounds of the Tri-series.

For the 2015 Isle of Man TT Bryan will team up with Auckland's Chris Lawrance for his sixth TT.

"The Isle of Man has been a dream of mine for quite a while," says. "But doing the TT only became a reality about 12 months ago when Chris said he was returning to race again and approached me to ride with him.

"It was really Steve's idea to ask Maria to come to stay with us. She has been amazing and I've been picking her brain every day.

"We've been going over the track together watching the videos. I know it's different on two wheel and three wheels but she has so much knowledge and experience and she understands all the important parts of how the TT works.

"She's been brilliant. What Maria has achieved is amazing and she definitely inspires me."

Interestingly for a solo rider, Costello has also caught the sidecar bug. She had her first taste of



Maria Costello (left) and Tracey Bryan have struck up a bike racing friendship that traverses the world.



Maria Costello is competing in the Formula 3 and the BEARS classes of the International Tri-Series on the KTM 690R Duke. Picture / Colin Smith



Maria Costello racing the KTM 690R Duke at Hampton Downs this month.



It's been an unbeaten run in two rounds of the Tri-Series for the sidecar combination of Hamilton's Aaron Lovell and Tauranga's Tracey Bryan. Pictures / Colin Smith

"driving" a sidecar in a November club meeting at Manfeild and she's keen to add some three-wheel competition to her already busy schedule. There's already talk of the women teaming up as rider and passenger one-day.

But first Costello has two-wheel ambitions to satisfy. Her 2014 Isle of Man TT campaign was fraught with challenge after a crash at the North West 200 in Ireland just a couple of weeks beforehand.

She broke her fibula and although still on crutches and with a badly swollen knee she amazed doctors and raced finishing 25th in the Lightweight TT race for 650cc twin machines.

"I felt pretty empty after all of that but I'd done it. I got a bronze replica and I beat some boys."

Since then the goal has been to return to the TT next year fitter and stronger than she's ever been.

"I've been working with a fantastic young sports therapist called Donna Norman and my CrossFit regime is devised by ex-Marines trainer Jack Floney."

There's been no holiday from the training and Costello has been hitting the gym at Tauranga CrossFit and found herself roped into Bryan's netball team.

"There's still some [sponsorship]

money to find but all the bikes are in place for next year's TT and my aim is go there the best prepared I've ever been."

It's a multi-bike TT effort with 1000cc, 600cc SuperSport and Lightweight machines.

Costello didn't grow up in a motorcycling family or get an early start in the sport.

She began riding on the road in her late teens and says her parents weren't happy as her passion for two wheels took hold.

She was working as a vet's nurse when she was knocked off her road bike. She put a compensation payout towards her first 250cc race bike. "You could say that set me up for life," she laughs.

She was in just her second season of racing when she lined up on a 600cc machine for her rookie Manx Grand Prix effort in 1996. It was her first road race of any kind. Almost 20 years later she's been a regular at the TT and Classic TT events and has raced in the United States, South Africa and Australia and wants to add the Macau Grand Prix to her racing CV.

In 2004 she achieved the fastest lap by a woman on the TT course and the record stood till 2009.

She was also the first female solo rider to achieve a podium finish

on the TT course and has a best result of 8th in the Manx GP Senior race. She's won eight silver Manx GP replicas and three bronze TT replicas — trophies based on finishing the race within a percentage of the winner's time. Her MBE in the 2009 was in recognition of her services to motorcycling.

"To this day I have no idea who nominated me," she says.

She's worked as a journalist, copy writer, TV presenter and stunt double and combines those skills to make a living from the sport as a racer, public speaker and by running women's track days and training events. She established an online organisation called Women on a Motorcycle.

"There are quite a few women who have bikes but don't actually ride them very often so I offer training in a controlled environment on circuits and help with their skills and confidence."

She says she used to have "normal jobs".

"I get by but I have an amazing life. You could say I make a living from motorcycles but it's living on the edge because you never know what will happen next."

Last year Costello was invited to join the Women's Commission of the FIM — the world governing body of

motorcycling. She's the only road racer on the commission which was set up nine years ago to encourage women in all forms of motorcycling — racing as well as day-to-day riding and touring.

"Sometimes it seems a bit of a contradiction. I want to be treated on equal terms with the guys but I'm passionate about doing everything I can to encourage other women in the sport."

That includes guiding Tracey Bryan with encouragement and TT racing experience.

"I've never raced a sidecar on the Isle of Man but I can help Tracey understand what the event is all about and introduce her to people who can help," says Costello.

"She hasn't even been there as a spectator before. Tracey can watch all the videos but it won't be until she races down Bray Hill [the first section of the TT course] that she'll realise how steep it really is."

For Costello this month's Kiwi races are an important part of preparing for her 2015 TT campaign and she intends to enjoy a first Christmas with her newly adopted Kiwi family and fit some sight-seeing into her schedule.

"I want to have some fun racing and keep training hard. It's cold and foggy at home at the moment."