



Team Honda Racing launches into 2012

And it's expanded into a three-rider team with the inclusion of teenager Josh Hook, who will pilot a CBR600RR in the supersport class. There will be scorching battles on a number of fronts at Phillip Island from February 24-26, with the GP circuit set to host the opening rounds of both the world and Australian superbike titles.

Once again, Team Honda Racing will be one of the biggest names in domestic racing, and the outfit held its official season launch in Melbourne last week, unveiling its three-rider line-up for 2012 as well as the latest livery on both the CBR1000RR and CBR600RR.

Jamie Stauffer (#27) and Wayne Maxwell (#47) remain the team's superbike practitioners – two of the most experienced in the paddock – while 19-year-old sensation Josh Hook has been signed to compete in the supersport class.

Team Honda Racing will again be run on its behalf by the Melbourne-based tuning business Motologic, managed by former top-level racer Paul Free.

"We have made quite a few significant changes to the bike (CBR1000RR) from 2011, mainly in the form of a different power-up kit in the engine -- different camshafts -- which has really increased the performance of the bike," said Free. "We have also gone to a different exhaust, the Akrapovic, which has also given us some more top end."

"The bike's evolved quite a bit in the chassis, particularly in the forks, which is going to give us another grab in performance and a step forward from the competition."

"And the supersport program is an extremely exciting one for us, and especially having Josh on board. To work with a 19-year-old is really fun. And it's a great little motorbike (the CBR600RR)."

Although this year's Aussie superbike grid isn't going to be a huge one, it's full of quality, with Maxwell and Stauffer up against a three-pronged attack from Suzuki (Ben Attard, Josh Waters and Robbie Bugden) as well as defending champion Glenn Allerton (BMW). And at Phillip Island, young hard-charger Beau Beaton could wreak some havoc on his Ducati.

Stauffer, already a two-time Australian superbike champion, and Maxwell finished second and fourth respectively in the 2011 superbike title. Maxwell is also the current lap record holder at Phillip Island, and shared wins with Waters at the 4.45km circuit in the final round of 2011.

And in supersport, Hook will have his hands full at Phillip Island with reigning No. 2 Brodie Waters (Suzuki), his fellow supremely gifted teenager Mike Jones (Yamaha), Mitchell Carr (Triumph) and Glenn Scott (Kawasaki).

Hook, who hails from Troy Bayliss' hometown of Taree (NSW), has already gained valuable racing experience both in Australia and overseas. He competed in the Red Bull Rookies Cup for two years and has been a 125cc wildcard in the last two Australian MotoGP rounds. In 2011, he blazed a trail through the Australian Superlites Championship, winning all his races.

"I am really looking forward to getting on the track on the Honda CBR600RR and I'm very excited to join Team Honda Racing," said Hook. "I know I will learn a lot working with the team as well as from Wayne and Jamie."

"It's a pretty competitive class so it's not going to be easy, but I've been happy with how testing has gone and I will feel comfortable on the bike at Phillip Island."

Honda last won the Australian Supersport Championship in 2005 with Josh Brookes, and hasn't officially competed in the class since Maxwell in 2008.

Other than superbike and supersport, other local classes to kick off their 2012 season at Phillip Islands will be prostock, superstock and the newly introduced 250cc production.

For more information on the 2012 Australian Superbike Championship, visit www.asbk.com.au.

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