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Motorcycling-GP
DOOHAN TAKES POLE POSITION

By: Arul Rajoo

JOHOR BAHRU, April 18 (Bernama) -- A thrilling race is on the cards in the Malaysian Motorcycle Grand Prix tomorrow as defending champion Michael Doohan has grabbed pole position ahead of Japan Grand Prix winner Max Biaggi.

Australian rider Doohan, who failed to complete the season-opening race in Suzuka two weeks ago, proved his mettle by recording the fastest lap time of one minute 28.225 seconds in the second qualifying practice at the Johor Circuit in Pasir Gudang, near here, today.

Biaggi of Italy had the pole position under his belt until the 25th lap of the qualifying practice with a time of 1:28.410 but Doohan, who was placed eighth yesterday, secured the lead on his 26th lap.

Biaggi, who made a grand debut in the 500cc by winning in Japan, crashed twice today, first in the morning during the free practice and again at the end of the qualifying session.

Despite snatching the pole, Doohan was still unhappy with the performance of his Repsol NSR, saying that the front tyre could be a problem tomorrow as the surface and the heat made it tough.

"The bike still feels like a big 250, not 500. We have been working mainly on suspension and gearbox, but the circuit is so bumpy there's not much you can do... you have just got to try and make the bike track over the bumps," he said.

Biaggi, who suffered minor abrasions to his right elbow, said tomorrow's race would be tough and the secret would be to conserve oneself in the race.

"Doohan is good at that, so he has got to be the favourite tomorrow. Unlike Suzuka, we are not fully prepared, though we worked so hard today," he said.

Biaggi also referred to a cobra that strayed on to the track during the morning's 125cc session. It was killed by Gino Borsoi when he swept past, striking the cobra with his knee.

"I am half expecting to see a python on the track. It's so hot here that it makes life really tough for the team as well," said Biaggi, who has won the 250cc in Malaysia four times in a row.

Carlos Checa of Spain and Kyoji Nanba of Japan will be the other two riders in the front row tomorrow.

Germany's Jurgen Fuchs was the surprise leader in the 250cc when he took the pole position while Italians Loris Capirossi and Valentino Rossi were second and third respectively.

Malaysia's Sharul Yuzy, who is riding in his third Malaysian Grand Prix, had another disappointing day when he managed only 24th place with a time of 1:34.066.

In the 125cc, Noboru Ueda of Japan was the fastest, clocking 1:34.516 while Roberto Locatelli and Mirko Giansanti, both of Italy, were second and third respectively.

Malaysian rookie M. Meganathan, who was facing the possibility of missing the race tomorrow, made it when he clocked 1:40.882, which was good enough for him to qualify although he finished last.

"I never expected to qualify. It was all hard work as we stayed until 2am to work on the bike. I just want to complete the race tomorrow," he said.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will flag off the Grand

Prix tomorrow.

RACE SCHEDULE

125cc -- 11.15am

250cc -- 12.30pm

500cc -- 2pm

-- BERNAMA

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