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Motorcycle-Test

DOOHAN AND KOCINSKI TO TEST AT SEPANG CIRCUIT NEXT MONTH

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 26 (Bernama) -- Five-time world champion Michael Doohan and inaugural Malaysian Grand Prix champion John Kocinski will lead a strong field of 500cc riders for the second IRTA test session at the Sepang International Circuit (SIC) next month.

A total of 19 riders will be testing their machines over a four-day session which begins on March 11, two days after the official opening of the 5.542km circuit by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

SIC chief executive officer Datuk Ahmad Bakri Shabdin said today the large number of riders testing showed that they were serious about the Malaysian Grand Prix.

"This track is challenging and all of them will want to do well here especially since the Malaysian GP is the opening round," he said. The Malaysian GP will be staged from April 16 to 18.

The IRTA (International Racing Team Association) testing session was first conducted at the circuit from Feb 2 to 5.

Doohan, who was not here for the first session, will be riding at the circuit for the first time.

The Australian, who has been unbeatable on his Honda for the past five years, will be out to learn the circuit well for the Malaysian leg of the World Grand Prix Championship, the opening round of the 1999 season.

Hot on Doohan's heels will be Kocinski, who is no newcomer to the Malaysian racing scene, having raced here a number of times. However, Kocinski, who will also be astride a Honda, has been known to revel in the heat.

In the inaugural race at the Shah Alam circuit in 1991, Kocinski blazed the tracks with some good times and went on to take the chequered flag.

The other riders who will be here for the test session include Max Biaggi, Alex Criville, Charlos Checa, Norick Abe, Tadayuki Okada, Kenny Roberts Jr, Simon Crafar and Tetsuya Harada.

Besides the 500cc riders, seven riders from the 250cc category will also conduct their test during the period.

They are Tohru Ukawa (Honda), Ralf Waldmann (Aprilia), Jeremy McWilliams (Aprilia), Anthony West (Honda). Johan Stigefelt (Yamaha), Marcellino Lucchi (Aprilia) and Valentino Rossi (Aprilia).

Meanwhile, admission for the public to the IRTA test session at the circuit is RM5 per entry.

Among those who will be attending the opening ceremony of the circuit are Doohan, Formula One champion Mika Hakkinen and Petronas Sauber Bull team drivers Pedro Diniz and Jean Alesi.

Admission for the opening ceremony is also RM5 per entry.

-- BERNAMA

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