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NASCAR hostess takes two wheels to the track

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DAYTONA BEACH -- Racer Nicole Hoffman can count Jim France among her fans.



N-J/Nigel Cook

Nicole Hoffman of Port Orange has a pretty good day job as a hospitality coordinator for NASCAR, but this week she's taking to the track aboard her 2000 Aprilia RS250.

Hoffman, who works as a hospitality coordinator at NASCAR by day, has turned her NASCAR co-workers into quite the motorcycle racing fans as she competes aboard her 2000 Aprilia RS250.

In fact, during the bike week races here at Daytona International Speedway last October, France came down and helped out in her pits.

"I grew up around racing," said Hoffman, whose dad, Bob Dee, raced hydroplanes in the early 1970s. And her brother Don not only builds cars, he's the Can-Am TQ Midgets Indoor Champion in Niagra Falls, N.Y.

"I guess it's always been in my blood," Hoffman said.

"For a while I was content just to ride on the street. A lot of us would meet at the old Krystal when it was on beachside and we would ride around at night. I think I got tired of sitting around reading books. It's such a great sport."

Hoffman showed off her skills Friday at DIS with a second-place finish in the Amateur UltraLight SuperBike class. She finished just behind James Hillis, who was riding a modified ApriliaRS2500.

"It was awesome," Hoffman said. "The most exciting part was passing some of the experts out there. It was just a great time.

"I know that I could have taken a win with the additional horsepower -- I was faster through the infield, but just didn't have enough through the banking and on the straights."

Hoffman said she couldn't have done it without her NASCAR friends and co-workers.

She said several donated \$10, \$20 and \$50 here and there to help with expenses.

"It went straight to the tire fund," she joked.

She also admits that at times she wonders what her co-workers think of her hobby.

"When you come into our office, there's posters of Dale Earnhardt Jr. and Jimmie Johnson," she said. "Then, you walk in my office and there's a huge poster of Troy Bayliss and Ben Bostrom."

Hoffman's racing also is a family affair. Her husband, Jeff, who is a sheriff's deputy with Volusia County, rides a Suzuki GSXR 750 and finished fourth in Friday's Formula 40 class.

"You know, I've been riding for at least 10 years and ever since Nicole started doing this, I've been in her shadow," Jeff joked. "Maybe it's because she's faster than me."

Hoffman pretty much has taken the sport by storm. A few years back she was of only a handful of women out of hundreds of applicants accepted to the two-day Ducati Revs America Women's Riding School in Las Vegas.

There, she rubbed elbows with Freddie Spencer and Reuben Xaus and also got a chance to ride the Ducati996 SPS alongside the world champion rider.

"It was an amazing experience," she said. "I was in the second group of riders with Rueben Xaus. I can't even tell you how amazing he is. He has such great talent, but something you don't find all that often is a personality like his. He is very personable and took the time to spend with every girl he could on the track."

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