



ON THE ROAD WITH A RED BULL ROOKIE

Our lady of many talents Mrs Karen Landi was lucky enough to go over with the family to watch Red Bull Rookies Cup rider Brad Binder in action at the Assen and Mugello MotoGP races. She managed to snap some pics and send us a really long but interesting story. **Words: Karen Landi Pic: Karen Landi & Red Bull**

1 5 year old South African - Brad Binder is in his 3rd year of the Red Bull Moto GP Rookies Cup. He gets to compete in 14 rounds at 8 Moto GP events in 2011. Red Bull Rookies brings together the best teenagers from around the world to compete on the Moto GP world stage. I recently had the pleasure of accompanying Brad and his dad, Trevor, to the Assen and Mugello Moto GPs for the Red Bull Rookie Experience.

Brad always arrives at least a full day before he is required to report to the Accreditation Centre. This gives him the opportunity to acclimatise, rest, and prepare himself for a gruelling weekend of racing ahead. All Rookies are required to report to the Accreditation Centre to collect their Red Bull Rookie Passes - which allow access to the Paddock where the Red Bull Energy Station and Mobile Pits are situated. Dinner is served in the Red Bull Energy Station giving the Rookies an opportunity to catch up, check the notice board and ease their way into the frenetic race pace of the weekend.

We arrived in Amsterdam on Thursday 23rd June and made our way from Schipol Airport to the picturesque village of Vledder. Vledder is in the Dutch province of Drenthe (Assen is the capital of Drenthe) and is 103 km east of Amsterdam. For our stay in The Netherlands we were very generously hosted by Brad's sponsor - Gordon Howell and his team from Pole Position Travel. Pole Position Travel are Moto GP event and travel specialists and offer packages for all Moto GP events. They are Red Bull Moto GP Rookie's travel partner and offer total care for their guests, we certainly enjoyed their care and Moto GP expertise!

Our accommodation in Vledder was at Adelhof Bungalow Park. We stayed in a bungalow situated next to a lake set amidst a forest - too beautiful! Vledder is approximately a 30 minute drive from the Assen TT Circuit. Being in a new country is always a wonderful experience and Holland was no exception. The drive was a hugely enjoyable experience, getting to appreciate the flatness of the country, the oversized bicycles that the Dutch peddle along on effortlessly, and most especially the beauty of the homes and the care that the house proud homeowners take with their homes and gardens. Window dressing is something the Dutch take very seriously, there are no curtains or blinds on the large front windows and they are adorned with hanging ornaments, plants and knick-knacks. The roads are ever so narrow and the cyclists rule the road. At one point we thought we had made a wrong turn and we were on a one way! Everyone is courteous and most of your time is spent driving with half of the car on the dirt to enable traffic to move in both directions. I think that the Beatles had visited Holland when they penned "Strawberry Fields Forever" as fields of strawberries and mielies (probably called corn abroad!) stretched as far as the eye could see. In the middle of farm lands with farmers advertising their fields as camping grounds and big screen TVs set up in wagons, the 4.555km, 10m in width Assen TT Circuit rose up - The Cathedral of Speed with its 11 right turns, 6 lefts took our breath away and we were reverend in silence - just as one is in the Cathedrals of Europe. With a capacity for 100 000 spectators - including 60 000 seats, from the time we alighted from our car the atmosphere was abuzz with Moto GP energy. Each day the energy was

different, hugely intense, but ever changing - like a living, breathing being. We had no trouble finding the Red Bull Energy Station and Pit Area. I think Red Bull are taking over the world with participation and domination in just about every sporting arena. Accreditation usually takes place on a Thursday with practise on the Friday and the Red Bull Rookie races on the Saturday and Sunday (apart from Mugello and Misano where there are only races on Saturday). However, Assen is raced on Saturdays. In Holland it is due to tradition, people went to church on Sundays and as such they have always raced on Saturdays - a tradition followed since their first race in 1925 - the Dutch TT (Tourist Trophy was originally held on country roads before the circuit was built in 1955).

Our first stop was the Red Bull Energy Station where we hooked up with Trevor and Brad Binder. The Red Bull Energy Station is hugely impressive. It caters to the Rookies, their families, media, invited guests and the huge Rookie Team of Mechanics, Coaches and Staff. There is a Coffee Bar where Cafe Latte, Cappuccino, Espresso, Tea and an assortment of Red Bull Products are served - many not yet available in SA - including a fabulous Cola and Water - hope they arrive here soon! There are long tables and chairs, plasmas are erected on all of the walls where Red Bull Doccies are shown in between Moto GP coverage. Best of all on one of the walls was a full size image of our Brad sporting the South African flag! Breakfast, lunch and dinner are served by a team of friendly young women and the meals prepared are simply delicious - it is certainly a lifestyle I could get used to. Brad informed us that out of all of the Hospitality Suites in the Paddock, the Red Bull Energy Station had been voted as second best for their offering - I would have awarded them first prize!

Two 30 minute qualifying practice sessions were scheduled for Thursday afternoon for the Rookies. These are eagerly anticipated. In Brad's case, this is the first time he gets to ride on the track since Rookies in 2010. It was to the great disappointment of the Rookies that the qualifying sessions were cancelled, a Moto 2 bike managed to spill oil all over the track rendering it unsafe to ride on. A much shorter qualifying session was scheduled for early on Friday morning. Imagine the logistical nightmare trying to schedule in unscheduled events into an already tight programme. The day was not over for Brad, he was whisked away to enjoy karting with some of the other Rookies. Brad has been chosen with two other Rookies - Australian Arthur Sissis and American Joe Roberts - to feature in a Red Bull Rookies Documentary - Top Guns Rising. Inserts are filmed at the various rounds - including the karting. The Binders also hosted Stefan - an Austrian cameraman and the person responsible for the documentary -



here in South Africa. Stefan shadowed Brad for a week to get insight into his life.

Early Friday morning qualifying was wet – as was the rest of the weekend. Brad's worst weather conditions to race in. Not having been on the track for an entire year and battling to get to grips with the weather and the set up of the bike, Brad qualified a lowly 17th – his worst qualifying position in Rookies ever. He was disappointed but determined to fight back in the race and spent time strategizing. As affable and social as Brad is, he is extremely committed and dedicated to what has to be done. Be it qualifying or the race, a certain time before the race, he always excuses himself, goes off, finds a quiet place and spends time on his own, in his own space preparing himself mentally for the challenge ahead.

Friday's Race was at 16h30, the weather was ominous with dark clouds and rain showering down. The build up to the race was most impressive. Each rider has a mechanic for the year that takes care of the rider's bike. If the rider has a dad that is able to assist, the dad is on the grid alongside his son. Brad is extremely fortunate to have Trevor by his side. Brad made a major faux pas on 2 Wheel when he said that his dad does minimal except change tyres and clean his bike, he repeated this in his media training! He has never lived this mistake down. Anyone who knows Trevor is aware that he is a highly skilled engineer with years of experience in the mechanical field. As such he is a major asset to Brad and his racing career. Each rider has a pit box with the rider's name, the pit board and 2 spare wheels on rims. The Red Bull Staff arrive at the Pits – all have com sets and the fathers / mechanics line up in formation followed by all of the riders who push their bikes – they are not permitted to start their machines. You can just imagine the visual spectacle. All of the Rookies are already suited up and their fathers / mechanics are required to wear their Rookie Corporate clothing. The entire process from Pits to Grid is slick, professional, disciplined and creates



such a display that spectators cannot but stop, stare and take photographs – just another way Red Bull sets its brand apart. This procession is carried out for each practice and race.

Starting 17th on the grid, Brad ran a really good race, despite his aversion to the wet weather. Lap by lap he made his way towards the front of the pack putting in excellent lap times and consistently improving and gaining positions. By the time he got to 4th place he had the podium in sight untila high side changed all of that. But Brad never gives up, he got back on, pushed forward and managed to finish 10th.

On Friday night, Pole Position Travel hosted a function at Adelhof for their guests. Brad is required to speak at these functions as part of his commitment to his sponsor. He really did himself and his country proud! He spoke eloquently and confidently, with passion and dedication. Since Brad has started his public speaking engagements the number of

friend requests that he has received on Face Book has increased dramatically – from all around the world. Such a credit to his growing Bradical Brand!

In Saturday's Race – starting 17th once again, with rain, yet again, Brad was determined to right his wrongs of the day before. He once again confidently made his way to the front of the pack, on the last lap of the 16 lap race, on the very last corner – chequered flag in sight, fighting for 5th place position, a fellow rider clipped Brad and they both came down. Not only was the weather not on his side but clearly Lady Luck wasn't smiling down on him either. Determined to finish the race, Brad mounted his bike and pushed as fast as he could, he wasn't able to out push his fellow competitors at full speed but he did receive a standing ovation from the spectators in the grandstands who clapped him over the finish line.

Leaving the Assen Circuit was an exercise in patience and tolerance. As mentioned before, the oversized Dutch bicycles have right of way, add pedestrians who walk in the middle of the narrow country lanes and consider motorists with absolute disdain – respect though to the Europeans who aren't afraid to walk for longer than I would be prepared to drive to get places. Bring to the party hundreds of superbikes and it really gets interesting! The one really good thing is that the superbike riders and their pillions all wear full leathers – and it is just as well as their riding skills leave quite a lot to be desired!!! Apart from the absolute joy that I got from the exquisite scenery, it was a pleasure to see so many Ducatis on the road – wow! Clearly they are well supported by their dealerships and agents.

Monday and we were off to Florence to what many describe as the best Moto GP on the Calendar – Mugello.

Part two featuring Mugello will be in next months issue...

