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Holly shows Christmas spirit with swim in sea

THE Annual Christmas swims that take place up and down the country are a great way of folk clearing their systems before they launch into an orgy of food and drink over the festive season, and it is also a good way for charities to make some well-deserved monies.

This year in the Skerries Christmas Day Swim, two lovely lassies will be braving the conditions to raise money for the MCI Medical team.

Holly Smyth and Catherine Gorman will be taking part in the Christmas Day Swim that takes place at the slip at noon, and while it won't be a showdown the brave lassies have already raised €265 from the C500

that they have set as a target through their GoFundMe page.

I spoke to Holly about her plans and the 19-year-old Skerries native, who has been around racing for a few years now, said: 'My interest in racing came about when I was 11, as I really had no interest in bikes up to then. I went to the Skerries 100 practice on a Friday night with my dad, and it was purely walking around the paddock and getting photos of the riders, so it came from that.'

'Then it progressed to going to the Ulster and then all the national road races. [At] the Skerries that year my mam was working late and my dad had no one to mind me, so he dragged

me along. My dad was a great race follower, and while he dragged me out first, after that it was me who then dragged him along to the races.'

In those few years since her visit to Skerries, Holly saw a niche in the market and started her own video channel, Holly Smith Media.

'Up to about 18 months ago I had no intention to do anything like that, but I did a few interviews for Conor Gibney at East Coast in 2018, and from that a number of people got in touch and said that I had a flair for interviewing.'

'A producer in Ardmore studios advised me to set up a media page to get myself out there. I saw this niche in road racing as there are no women reporting on it as it's basically a male-dominated sport, so I suppose it was both the love of the sport and the niche that I just homed in on.'

'The purpose of the page was to get recognised for my presenting, and I have interviewed a number of top riders since then. In August I interviewed Stephen Watson from the BBC and he opened a few doors in the BBC, but unfortunately owing to the pandemic I have been unable to do anything, but it has gone on that little bit.'

I asked Holly why the MCI Medical was her chosen fundraiser and she replied: 'The MCI Medical Team are road race fans who work for frontline emergency services as Paramedics, Advanced Paramedics and Doctors. They provide pre-hospital emergency care at the entire Motorcycling Ireland road racing events.'

'When we were talking about doing the Christmas Swim, there are a lot of people that do great work for various charities, and because there was no road racing in 2020 their revenue was going to be down and I wanted to give something back to the sport.'

'They volunteer their services and without them we would be lost. They are such a vital part



Balcadden rider Finnan Wherity proved that he was in a class of his own during the Pit Bike season, and this young man has a bright future. Photo: Baylon McCaughey

of our sport. All of their funding comes from donations made by race fans, supporters, riders, teams and clubs, all of whom generously give their time and money to ensure that they can continue to provide the high standard of care for both riders and spectators.'

'We set up the GoFundMe page to try and raise €500 which we hope can be done by the swim, and bearing in mind everything that is going on in the world at the moment and with there being no MCI road racing events held in 2020, we would ask that if people were in a position to donate to this wonderful cause, please do. You will be

helping to provide road racing spectators and riders with the best standard of care.'

On a serious note, the MCI Medical team are like any other professional medical body and they have to plan in advance, and this includes ordering drugs that have a very short shelf life for the season ahead.

When we look at the summer just gone, we had no racing, and yet the drugs still were bought as the problems only started in March.

I spoke to Jim Leonard, the MCI medical team coordinator, and he said: 'Our drugs cost us roughly between €3,000 and €5,000 a season and we buy

them in the hope that they go out of date rather than use them.'

'All these fund-raising events are crucial to getting the funding that we need on an annual basis, and for 2021 we will be buying a whole new fresh batch of drugs and hopefully we will get some kind of a season next year. I would envisage the costs running into a few thousand euro, just for medication.'

'We still need more equipment as the LifePak that we need has never materialised. The old one had gone past its working lifetime, and it's such an important part of our life-saving equipment that we need at road races.'

'I would love to see some racing going ahead, but with the TT gone it will be hard to see what races will go ahead in 2021. I would love it if the emergency management would come together and allow maybe 2,000 to 3,000 to be able to attend the like of Skerries, Walderstown and the other nationals in the South.'

So we have a valuable fundraiser on Christmas morning and I hope that fans will turn out to support the girls and make their donations on the GoFundMe page and help them raise the much-needed €500 which will help our medical team next year.



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Michael Dunlop was frustrated with no TT this year, and he will have to wait until 2022 to try and add to his 19 wins. He made a rare appearance at Kirkistown in September. Photo: Baylon McCaughey



Rush barber Vinny Brennan took the 2019 Junior Support Irish Championship, and owing to the pandemic he only had one race outing in the Senior Support at Cookstown, a race where he took the win in fine style. Photo: Baylon McCaughey

Thanks to all my helpers this year

AS this will be my last column for 2020, I would like to thank so many of you that have given your time and work to keep this column going.

I have only been to two events that took place during the year. The first was the Rockabill Grasstrack just before lockdown, and the IMC Pitbike racing in Athboy. I really enjoyed both events, and while Rockabill ran a practice day later in the summer that was all that was held in our area, which is generally steeped in two-wheel sport.

We had the Cookstown and a meeting at Kirkistown, as well as one in Mondello, but the final one in the Co Kildare course was cancelled at the 11th hour, and that was it.

I know there are some people that I will miss, and if I do my apologies. Baylon McCaughey has been a pillar of strength with this column over the years, and his help this year alone has been amazing. His workrate at all levels of the sport is second to none, and his encouragement of youth, especially with his scholarship in the pit bikes, is to be admired.

Paul McClean is another man that never fails when it comes to digging out old photos to go with an article.

I have had great help from two of the sport's historians, Harry Havelin and Richard Agnew. They have been so helpful with old race facts and stories that have made my job that much easier when it came to fill this column when there was no racing.

While my long-time sponsor Ollie Grimes from Ollies in Skerries has been closed since March, he has also supported me this year, and hopefully all his work in getting the New Snug together will bear the fruits that he deserves.

Adam McMahon is a young man from Rush who has taken to bike photography so well in the last two years, and his help has been top-class. Leo Bissett is a favourite postman in Rush, but he is another fan who has taken bike photography to his heart, and his contributions are much appreciated.

Another fan behind the lens is Pat Nolan, and while he hasn't been busy at all this year, his help and advice is always very welcome.

I would like to thank my editorial team in the Fingal Independent for their help and support during this difficult year, and my family for putting up with me every Sunday as I type my column.

I also appreciate all those who have made themselves available for interviews. There have been many, and their help is appreciated.

We have lost a few friends during the year, and to their families, our thoughts are with you all at this time of year.

I would like to wish all a very Happy Christmas and an even better 2021. Keep 'er lit!