

BY MIKE MCGILL
PHOTOS BY JAMES LISSIMORE

THE THREE AMIGOS



NEXT YEAR, 2018, PROMISES TO BE AN INTERESTING SEASON IN THE WORLD OF PRO MOTOCROSS IN CANADA. ONE OF THE MAIN REASONS FOR THIS WILL BE THE EMERGENCE OF THREE HIGHLY RATED YOUNG PROSPECTS INTO THE MX2 CLASS. WOODSTOCK, ONTARIO'S TANNER WARD, CORUNNA, ONTARIO'S AUSTIN WATLING AND MARCO CANELLA, WHO HAILS FROM WATERDOWN, ONTARIO, ARE ALL MAKING THE MOVE FROM INTERMEDIATE TO THE PRO CLASS NEXT SEASON, AND IF THE HYPE SURROUNDING THESE YOUNGSTERS MATERIALIZES INTO ANYTHING CLOSE TO WHAT HAS BEEN PREDICTED, THE RACING BETWEEN THE THREE OF THEM SHOULD BE FANTASTIC.

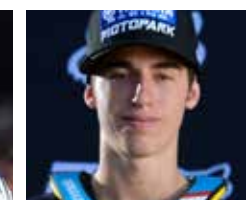
I personally don't follow the amateur scene all that much, but I've seen the seen these kids race and have been truly impressed by their speed and professionalism on the track. I've also heard that they are all good friends off the track as well, which surprised me a little bit, since on-track rivalries usually lead to off-track tensions. I decided to give all three of them a call to find out what was going on with them and what exactly their plans are for the coming season.



TANNER WARD
HOMETOWN: Woodstock, Ontario
AGE: 18
SCHOOL: Done



AUSTIN WATLING
HOMETOWN: Corunna, Ontario
AGE: 18
SCHOOL: Done



MARCO CANNELLA
HOMETOWN: Waterdown, Ontario
AGE: 17
SCHOOL: Currently completing Grade 12

WHEN DID YOU START RACING AND HOW DID YOU GET INTO IT?

TANNER: My Dad and my older brothers were into it. That's how I got into it. I got my first PW50 when I was two-and-a-half, I think, and my Dad got me started by riding around in a field by my house. I actually had my first race when I was three. It was a TVR [Thames Valley Riders] race at a track near Granton, Ontario. It's not there anymore and I don't really remember much about it. I was three.

AUSTIN: My Mom and Dad were into trail riding, even before I was born. When I was four they got me a bike and I started riding. I did my first race when I was five at a track just outside of Grand Bend, and shortly after that I met the Thompsons. I started riding with them a lot and they really helped me out.

MARCO: My Dad got me my first bike when I was three - a PW50 with training wheels on it. I would drive it around all over the place in the snow and everything. I still actually have it. I just rode it over to my neighbour's house the other day. I took off the training wheels, though. I first raced on the PW when I was five, just for fun. I believe it was a Steel City Riders Club Race and things just progressed from there. My Dad had a good friend who was really into dirt bikes and we would go with him to watch the races at Gopher Dunes. That's what really got me interested in racing.

HOW DID THINGS GO FOR YOU THIS SEASON?

TANNER: It went way better than expected. I had a lot more fun this year, and I think that was because I didn't really put a lot of pressure on myself. In past years I was guilty of putting too much pressure on myself, and that took away from the fun that I was having. I decided this year that I was just going to go out there and ride, try to learn as much as I could and have some fun. I decided rather than do the American Amateur Nationals thing this season I would ride Pro Am in the East Coast portion of the CMRC Nationals in the MX2 class. That turned out to be a good decision for me as I had some good results and I think I made an impression on some people. The Deschambault National was obviously a big day for me. I rode the Amateur National there during the week and was feeling really good coming into Pro Day, and then boom! it started to pour rain. This is going to be interesting, I thought, but then I went out and set the fastest qualifying time. That's when I started thinking to myself that maybe I can actually do something here. I ended up getting second in both motos and second overall. After I finished on the podium it was just a surreal feeling. It didn't really kick in until well after the race when I realized that all the hard work was finally starting to pay off for me. My Dad was near tears and the whole KTM team was really happy for me. All the bosses from KTM Canada were there so it was a great way to meet the new team.

AUSTIN: This year was alright. It started out well at the early season races but then at Moto Park I crashed and that put me out for a while. I hit a kicker and went over the bars. It knocked me right out. I never went to the hospital but I'm sure I sustained a concussion so I wasn't going to rush back. When I did come back it was frustrating for me because I wasn't getting the results that I felt I should be getting, so I wasn't happy about that. I went to Loretta Lynn's in August and ended up getting 4th overall in the 450B class right behind Marco, so that was pretty good. Looking back now, though, I kind of wish I had done what Tanner did this year and skipped Loretta's. There's just so much pressure involved with that race. After Loretta's I really just wanted to take a break, and my parents supported me in that. They just want me to have fun and not put too much pressure on myself or get burned-out. I raced the final National of the season for GDR Honda at RJ's in Barrie. I crashed off the start of both motos but felt that I rode well. I ended up getting 13th overall. I learned a lot, though, and the team really helped me out, which I really appreciated. Now I'm looking forward to taking a full-on break.

MARCO: This year went well for me. I did all the big US Amateur Nationals and my results were pretty good. I got 2nd OA in the Schoolboy Class at Daytona Amateur Supercross, two top fives at Freestone, and then at Loretta's 3rd overall in the 450B Class. Things didn't go as well in the 250B - I finished 9th. After that, my last big race was the CMRC National in Barrie. I was really looking forward to that and I was pretty excited for it - riding 30-minute motos in the Pro class. In the first moto I got a great start and ran 5th for the whole moto until the last lap when I had a stall and dropped to 6th. Second moto I ended up getting 5th for 5th overall. I was really excited about the result. I see it as something to build on for next year.

WHAT ARE THE PLANS FOR NEXT SEASON?

TANNER: Well, obviously I would love to be back on KTM next year and be their Canadian MX2 rider. We're talking right now but nothing has been signed. Whatever happens I'll be riding the whole outdoor series. In January, I plan on going down to the States and riding some rounds of the Amsoil Arenacross Series, so I'm excited about that. Hopefully it will be on a KTM, and for now I'm just taking a little break.

AUSTIN: Well, I've got nothing signed yet for next year. I've been on a Honda for pretty much my whole career, other than one season on 80s when I rode a Kawasaki, so I'd love to stay on a Honda. GDR and WCK Honda in Corunna have been very supportive and I hope to stay with them in some way or another. Either way, I plan on doing some Canadian Arenacross over the winter and will be doing the Outdoor Nationals next year, for sure. In a couple of weeks, I'll be getting back on the bike and I'll be heading down to Florida in a few weeks to race the Mini-0's.

MARCO: Well, first off, I've got the Mini-0's in November. We'll see what happens. Who knows if I do well there; I could possibly end up riding in the States next year. Most likely, though, I will be in Canada racing the new Supercross and Arenacross Series and doing the whole outdoors as well. I'm currently in talks with OTSFF Yamaha to ride for them but nothing is for sure yet. I also just signed a one-year contract with Club MX in North Carolina, so I will be based out of there for the next year at least. The place is awesome. They have three outdoor tracks, two supercross tracks and arenacross as well. I'll be heading home here and there but will be mostly based there for a while.

SO, LET'S GET INTO THIS. WHO, SO FAR IN YOUR CAREER, HAS BEEN YOUR BIGGEST RIVAL?

TANNER: Marco and Austin, for sure. Whenever we get together it's always close, always great racing. I'm not sure who has the most wins between us but I'm sure it's close.

AUSTIN: Tanner and Marco. Early in my career I wasn't really the guy, you know, back on 80s, but when I went to Junior things started to click for me and I started mixing it up with those guys. We always seem to find each other on the track. Always, it's crazy. Especially Tanner and I.

MARCO: Tanner and Austin, for sure. Tanner and I have been racing against each other right from the beginning. Austin has come onto the scene a bit later in Junior and Intermediate. A kid named Kyle Biro was a big rival on small bikes, and Casey Keast from BC. When he came east he was a strong competitor, but Tanner and Austin, for sure.



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MARCO CANELLA

**THE
THREE
AMIGOS**



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TANNER WARD

WHAT’S YOUR MOST MEMORABLE RACE WITH THE OTHER TWO GUYS?

TANNER: I’m not sure if there is any one race for me. I must say, me and Austin have crashed a lot together over the years. [Laughs] It’s funny because Austin is definitely not a dirty rider. He races clean and I know he’s not going to pull anything dirty. This sport is dangerous enough without stuff like that going on but we really have come together many times. Marco and I haven’t really raced each other that many times to be honest. His program isn’t really the same as ours so we don’t hook up as often, but that’s going to change next year.

AUSTIN: Walton 2016 – final moto. Me, Marco, Tanner and Casey Keast were all in the same moto. Something happened to Tanner early, but me, Marco and Keast were swapping leads throughout the whole moto. Marco ended up winning but it was a great race. So much fun, we were doing burn-outs on the podium. [laughs]

MARCO: No one race. Really, all the races that we had together at Walton in 2016. All three classes I would say. There were some great battles, and fortunately I was able to beat them all at Walton.

I’VE HEARD THAT YOU GUYS ARE ALL FRIENDS. IS THAT TRUE?

TANNER: Austin and I are really close. As I said, it’s kind of rare that all three of us are together. I know Marco has a lot of confidence and he’s a good kid, but sometimes he can have a bit of an attitude. For example, when I have beaten him in a race before, I’ll stop to shake hands after the checkers but he just rides right by. He’s very competitive, I get that, and as I said I know he’s a good kid. As for me I’ll just keep smiling and enjoy everything about this while I can.

AUSTIN: Yes, Tanner and I are good friends. Marco is a really good guy, too. When we are together we are all friendly. We plan on racing each other for quite a few years so I think we’re going to be friends for a long time.

MARCO: Yes, we are friendly, for sure. I’m not as close as Tanner and Austin are but we are all friendly. When we are all at a race I’ll always go over and say hi, then we watch some races together. There’s no bad blood.

WHAT ABOUT WHEN YOU TURN PRO, AND YOU ARE RACING EACH OTHER FOR A LIVING. DO YOU THINK YOU’LL STILL BE FRIENDLY THEN?

TANNER: If anything, I think we’ll be even more friendly. We’re going to be in it together, I guess. All three rookies in the Pro Class. We’ll be spending a lot more time together so I think we’ll get along really well, even though we are racing each other.

AUSTIN: For sure. We’ll be in the same boat. Hopefully we can show everyone what we’ve got.

MARCO: I certainly don’t want to start anything between us. We’ll all be racing hard and trying to win. We’ll be racing for a paycheck then and not just trophies, so we’ll be racing hard. As I said, I’m sure we’ll be good, but you never know, I guess.

YOU’RE STILL YOUNG, BUT WHEN YOU WERE GROWING UP, WHO WAS YOUR FAVOURITE RIDER?

TANNER: When I was young I was a big Ricky Carmichael fan, and as far as Canadian riders go I would have to say Colton [Facciotti]. I know he’s from BC but I met him after he moved to Ontario. It’s almost like he’s a local boy and I actually got to train with him a bit. He’s a dominant rider on the track and a really nice guy off. I’m friends with him now. I never thought that would happen.

AUSTIN: When I started getting interested in watching Supercross, Ryan Villopoto was winning everything so I was a fan of his, I guess. As far as Canada goes I would say Colton. He has always been my favourite rider, and this year I was a teammate of his. That’s cool.

MARCO: Well, as far as American riders go, I would have to say that I’m a big James Stewart fan. But when I was very young I had a Colton Facciotti poster in my room. I still have it as a matter of fact. He’s always been my favourite to watch. He’s so smooth and makes it look so effortless. I’ve always tried to copy his style as much as I can.

THE THREE AUGOS

FAVOURITE TRACK?

PANTYER: Well, Dechambault, obviously. [laughs] It's got a great flow, in my opinion, and lots of elevation. I've always done well there. It's a great track but I don't really have a favourite. As long as I'm riding I'm happy.

AUSTIN: Actually, my favourite track would probably have to be GPF, Josh Woods' track. It just never gets boring. They don't have races there, just practice, but it's a great track, for sure.

MARCO: Moto Park. I train there. I trained there for three weeks last summer and I love it. I also love Gopher Dunes, especially when it gets all rough. I love rippin' the sand and getting blasted in the face. Also, Red Bud. That place is the ultimate.

WHO ARE THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE HELPED YOU OUT THE MOST SO FAR IN YOUR CAREER?

My parents, for sure, especially my Dad. He's put so much effort in for me to be able to race. Plenty of nights he works late on my bikes and then drives to the track early. He doesn't get any sleep. We drove across the country to the Monster Energy Cup in our mini-van. There has been a lot of sacrifice and hard work, for sure. Kyle Thompson from Frankfit helped me out a lot with my riding earlier in my career. This year I've been working a lot with Kyle Keast at AlphaMX. I also want to thank KTM Canada, Thor Racing, Dunlop, Renthal, Motorex, Oakley, TCD Racing, Team LTD and New Era. Austin: My parents of course and the Thompson family. Jay, Cole, Kyle and Justin Thompson have all been a great help to me ever since I



started riding really. I would also like to thank my sponsors. They include Honda Canada and GDR, Fox, Shift MX, Real Deal Training Facility, Ryno Power, Frankfit Canada, New Era, WCK Honda, Humberview Group, Proven Moto and SSS Suspension.

MARCO: Of course, my parents have sacrificed a lot for me. That goes without saying, but I also have received a lot of help along the way from Iain Hayden at Moto Park. He's helped me a lot with my riding over the years. All the people at Moto Park, really, I can't thank them enough. Matt Crown from MCR Suspension has been my riding coach for the last year and I would also like to thank my sponsors for all their help as well: Yamaha Canada, OTSFF, Evolved MX, Steve Simms Racing, Fox Canada, Scott, Orthoflex, Marin bikes and Rockstar.

"I WENT TO LORETTA LYNN'S IN AUGUST AND ENDED UP GETTING 4TH OVERALL IN THE 450B CLASS RIGHT BEHIND MARCO, SO THAT WAS PRETTY GOOD."

AUSTIN WATLING

So, there you have it folks, a little bit of insight into these three young speedsters. I've been around the sport for quite some time and don't ever recall a season in which three, such highly touted, Ontario based prospects have made the move into the Pro ranks. No matter where they end up or who they end up riding for, be it a privateer or a Factory Team, their presence in the Pro class should certainly make for some intense competition and great racing, and I for one can't wait to see it. **MXP**