

Karting Come Back in Europe

Wolverhampton Grammar School student and European Kart Racer George Williams stepped up a class last week whilst competing in the European Rotax Winter Cup in Campillos, Southern Spain.



Although only 15 years of age rules dictated that this year he had to move up to the Senior Rotax class for over 16 year olds. His FA Alonso kart was basically the same as his usual kart except for three notable differences: powerful front brakes operated by a lever mounted on the steering wheel: rear brakes operated by foot and a variable valve on the exhaust outlet port, opening at around 7000 rpm so providing more power to the engine, which had to be adjusted by hand. Although effective it could be temperamental and often had to be corrected during the actual race.

George, a member of The Dan Holland Racing Team, was given a "crash course" in handling the new controls by Dan, head of the Team and it wasn't long before he had become acclimatised to the kart and track.

The first session on Wednesday morning would be the test, and what a test. He was immediately on the pace with the second fastest time, just 1/10th of a second slower than his team mate Jack Dex. With 34 karts in the session this was no mean feat! Enjoying the experience and being able to out brake his competitors in the tight hairpin bends Wednesday was a huge success and the whole team were amazed at how fast George had learned to handle the new spec kart.

The practice sessions of Thursday and Friday were hampered by electrical problems and the Rotax 125cc engine failed to perform. Battery, wiring loom and coil were changed between



sessions to rectify the problem before timed qualifying on Friday afternoon, but It was to no avail and George, with his engine down on power, could only manage to qualify in 36th place.

On Saturday morning Dan decided to change everything on the kart. Engine, battery, coil, wiring loom, switches, fuel pump and carburettor in the hope that in the ten minute early morning practice the kart would show signs of improvement and perform really well. With stopwatch in hand the team could only watch and compare lap times with his competitors. Good, it looked as if all the hard work had been successful.

It was now down to the points awarded for finishing positions in the three qualifying heats of Saturday that would decide the starting grid for Sunday's pre-final and grand final. The first of the three heats did not start well, George starting 18th on the grid arrived at the first corner and could not avoid colliding with stationary karts in front of him. He was now at the back of the field and quarter of a lap behind, but at the chequered flag he had powered his way up to 13th place with a bent track rod and bowed steering column.

Again starting at 18th on the grid in the second heat he came through the pack well, much faster than the low qualifying competitors around him, making full use of the powerful front brakes, getting alongside the European's and forcing them wide. He finished in 9th place.



In the third and final heat of the day he had managed to get upto 10th place but, with three laps to go, Dutchman

Mats Van der Brand on the fastest downhill part of the circuit missed his braking point and rammed the back bumper of George's number 250 kart, forcing him across the gravel trap. It took three of them to lift the kart back onto the track, half a lap down now in 20th position. Even so George had equalled the fastest lap of the heat, but it was still a most disappointing end to the day and meant that with the lack of points scored over the three heats he had not yet made the finals. This meant joining the remaining fourteen drivers in a "B - final shootout" where the first six to finish would go through to the last six places in the final.

The whole team were nervous, but the B-final stomach butterflies were not necessary as George, from pole position led for lap after lap. Instructions were given from the side of the track by team manager Dan Holland and George duly obliged by taking the chequered flag after ten tense laps. He was now in the pre-final, 15 rows back and 29th on the grid.



After the disappointment of qualifying and the woes suffered during the heats Dan said the pressure was now off and all George had to do was to relax, enjoy himself and try for a top 15 finish. He didn't disappoint. Following yet another first corner accident

George, starting from the back, managed to pick his way around the carnage to finish in 8th place at the flag. A thoughtful, intelligent and controlled piece of driving meant starting the final from 8th on the grid.

For the Grand Final the karts were wheeled out onto the circuit on their trolleys by each driver and his mechanic in front of the European press. Photographs were taken and video

footage for live internet TV. Exciting live commentary echoed around the circuit and kept over 2000 Internet listeners including family and friends on the edge of their seats.

Mats Van der Brand came over to George, and in his broken English said, 'What are you doing this far up the grid, I thought that after your bad luck you would be at the back?' they laughed, shook hands and started the parade onto the start grid.



George was soon amongst the pack, battling and jostling for position, getting up to 75mph down two of the long straights. He and team mate Jack Dex momentarily had a two lap battle with fellow Englishman Harry Drysdale, delaying George and Jack's progression through the field. But by the time Drysdale had realised how quick they were and that he couldn't stay on their pace, he soon dispersed and a couple more places were made up. With one of the eighteen laps to go George was on Dex's bumper and could have taken another place, but laps ran out and George crossed the line, after a fine performance in 7th place.

A superb weekend, showing George can handle many situations, come back after disappointment and hold his own against much older and more experienced highly regarded racing drivers from Europe. He says he now has the confidence to do well in the British Super 1 Kart Championship at Whilton Mill, Daventry on March 19th.

Let's hope so!