

We Talk To The Man Who Built MakoTrac, Horst Kipper.



What is your background motor racing?

“Zero! Well not exactly, but it’s not as great as you might think. Back in the 1950’s and 1960’s I used to race motorcycles back in Germany. I raced in the 500cc open class around the old Nurburgring – that was pure racing. I’ve always been interested in motor racing although I am actually a marine biologist and that’s why I came to North Queensland from Germany back in 1984.”

How did you get into karting?

“We got into karting when Tobia was 8 years old. I looked at all the options there were for him as far as sports and social activities were concerned. We tried everything from karate to sailing but karting we thought was the best because of the educational values. Karting teaches so much more than just driving and racing, it teaches technique, discipline, skill, how to win, how to lose, it encourages friendship and social interaction, it teaches responsibility and many other traits. It teaches a child how to drive but almost as a side effect, to me it is not the most important aspect.”

Why did you build this circuit?

“Despite what many people say, not for Tobia (Kipper). We were in Karting for a number of years before MakoTrac racing with the Cairns Club at their old circuit at the Edmonton Speedway. We also raced at Charters Towers, Mackay and Townsville. During this period I failed to understand the mentality people had in karting, they had shiny new karts and beautiful clean racesuits but they would go to a race circuit which was dusty and dirty so everything got wrecked and covered in mud when it rained! It was totally the wrong environment for karting. We went to a night race at Edmonton and halfway through the night it started to rain and by 11.30pm the place was flooded. The bottom of our tent was so deep with water that we lost some of our tools underwater, it was raining and dark and I was searching in the mud for our tent pegs. Tobia was nine years old and was crying, Pim my wife, was saying that we should stay and finish the racing and after that I said we would never do this again. I thought ‘how can karting develop if this is what is being promoted – the sport has no future at a track like this.’ It was then that we looked into our own track and started to get ideas on how we could build our own circuit.”

Where did you get your ideas for the circuit?



“A mixture of places, some tracks in Germany some in Australia, Italy and France. Unfortunately it was more a case of avoiding the problems that the other circuits had. We picked up some good idea’s for example from Michael Schumacher’s circuit at Kerpen in Germany is where I got the idea for the refueling bay, although I didn’t like all the tyres they had to line the circuit, it gave a very black appearance. We have tried to put continuity into MakoTrac, all the buildings have a standard design and able to be extended someday if the need is there. The circuit we have also tried to make very functional.”

Why did you build the circuit at Mareeba instead of Cairns or one of the more popular tourist places like Port Douglas?

“Because we get so much less rain here. Mareeba is in a rain shadow, we get 90% less rain than in Cairns. We have hardly ever used wet weather tyres at makoTrac! Mareeba has a population of 20,000 people and is a nice drive of about half an hour from Cairns which has a population of 120,000 people or up to 150,000 in the tourist season.”

Why did you choose Swiss Hutless Karts?

“Initially we contacted all the major manufacturers in Europe to let them know what we were doing and if they were interested in being involved. Some of them replied to us within three weeks, others a couple of months. Swiss Hutless replied to me within 30 minutes of receiving my fax. Markus Schneeberger (who is no longer with the company) came to visit us from Switzerland – their service has been excellent. Apart from the Swiss Hutless are an excellent product. Their best points are the quality and function.”

Why the name MakoTrac?

“It has nothing to do with karting. The Mako shark is the fastest and most beautiful shark, it can jump 3.5 metres out of the water. It is also very dangerous, but yes, very beautiful and very sleek. All these things describe MakoTrac. Plus I am against long names, with makoTrac even the Japanese can pronounce it!”

Has the circuit been a success?

“From the hire karts point of view, yes and overall yes. It has been a success. We have now had 6500 people through the hire karts. At first we had many people who would go on the hire karts and not drive responsibly, now we have more family’s and people who wish to enjoy themselves in karting without being silly. From the circuit’s point of view, we have attracted 11 very prominent business people from Cairns to be involved in karting at MakoTrac through the Motor Racing League, this was simply not possible at Edmontnon.”

What effect has MakoTrac had on karting in North Queensland?

“Karting really has not grown a great deal yet, mainly because we are still dealing with the Cairns club. People from Townsville and Mackay come to the circuit and say how fantastic the place is and that the Cairns club are actually very lucky and should wake up to themselves! People from other tracks who visit do say that it encourages them to lift their standard.”



What are the advantages and disadvantages in having one of the best circuits in Australia, if not the world, in such a remote location (ie Far North Queensland)?

"The disadvantage in, firstly, having such a track is that we are always trying to make it better. People always expect more than what we can give, when the money becomes available we will spend it at Makotrak, maybe with a large electronic scoreboard for example. Also people do complain very easily despite the fact we give them this facility. The advantage is that time passes quickly from the time people come and then return, within that time we have improved the facility further."

How important are the facilities such as the restaurant, sealed pit areas and garages been to the success of the circuit, particularly attracting the corporate companies to be involved?

"Oh very important. Having those things as well as lights on the hire kart track, the lap timing on both circuits are very important. The corporate people would not come if we did not have all these facilities at our circuit. The restaurant and the licensed bar all make it a very social occasion when people want to spend time at the circuit. We also have the helicopter pad in the middle of the track for bringing in tourists for the day."

Why do you not have lighting on the main circuit?

"I love nature, I think the lights destroy nature and change the environment. It also destroys the atmosphere of the racers. At the end of the day's racing all the racers can gather in the restaurant to socialize and have dinner. But maybe one day people will want the lights and I will have to put them in."

How much interest have you had from Asian and overseas visitors?

"In karting not any really. I sent a letter to 130 karting clubs in Asia Pacific region but did not get one reply! With the tourist market there is good interest. We have 130 places in and around Cairns where we promote MakoTrac and we also work with the hire car companies. The key is to sell karting as a part of a tourist package, with a day at the Barrier Reef and other tourist places, the people can book all this from their motel or resort and it all gets billed on their accommodation. Unfortunately our problem is that we are too cheap when compared to other activities you can do around Cairns so the tourist people only get a small percentage. We do get a lot of people come to the circuit though, remember we have the helicopter pad so that they can fly into the track and spend the day here and then fly back to their resort. We especially get a lot of people from Port Douglas who do this."

Have you had any interest from Asian drivers in competing in international races at MakoTrac?

"No. With the Swiss Hutless team coming in December this will be a good start. It is not just the karts though, it will be easier to come here with 15 of the 80cc Grand Prix bikes than with the karts. What we will try to do is have a race meeting for the 80cc bikes where we can have the riders come here on school holidays, spend two days on the Great Barrier Reef and race on the weekend. We will do this with Australians first and if successful we will go to the Japanese and do it with them. Then we can also do a similar thing with the karts because it makes the event more exciting and there is better action with the karts and bikes."



Do you have any interest in hosting national championship races here?

"Of course! But I need support. I am not the official and I am not the person who can run the event. I provide the perfect facility but I need help in running the major events.

What about international races?

"Of course, why not? The place is designed for FMK racing so there's no problem. We will have a good start with the Swiss Hutless team and then hopefully we will get the Japanese to come and build the event from there. From Cairns it is only six hours to Japan, but it is still four hours to Melbourne so we are in a good position for International racing."