

The World's Fastest Sprint Kart – 125cc Formula C – would you like to drive it?

Being given the grand tour of MakoTrac was a delight. Lunch catered for at the restaurant as we spoke about karting, the beautiful environment in North Queensland and what Tobia would like to do in karting.

Prior to coming to the circuit Horst Kipper had promised a drive of what he affectionately terms 'the six gear kart'. "You must drive the Formula C kart with the TM engine. You will like it very much and it is very fast too" he said.



I mean as if you could turn down an offer to drive one of these karts that you only see in KartOz when they race in Europe. These are the real thing, the exact machines raced in Europe by the likes of Gianluca Beggio, Danilo Rossi, Jarno Trulli and company. The Swiss Hutless chassis is their Formula C model which is actually very similar to the 100cc Evolution chassis, the only visible difference being front wheel brakes and various add on bits to accommodate the 125cc engine and components. The Tm rotary valve engine pumps out a thumping 47 horsepower (your Clubman engine has 15) and is ideally consistently kept in the correct rev range by a six speed gearbox. The kart will accelerate from 0-100km/h in under 4 seconds flat and come to a dead stop from this speed in less than 30 metres.

It's often said of the world's Formula 1 Grand Prix circuits that the ones with the best facilities don't offer much of a racetrack, in contrast the tracks with poor facilities have great race circuits. MakoTrac has superb facilities and is actually a very, very good racing track. It's an excellent circuit in fact, big, fast, undulating and a great track to really race on.

MakoTrac is nestled among the beautiful surrounds of the Mareeba bushlands, just next door to the famous Mareeba rodeo grounds. This makes a great backdrop as you scream around this superb circuit. However driving a 125cc Formula C kart, there isn't much time to observe the scenery!

Onto the 220 metre straight for the first time, on the left side of the track building up to around 145km/h at the end of it (this is no exaggerated speed either, Clubman's have recorded speeds of 116-118km/h!) The 90 degree right hander is actually banked quite dramatically allowing you to throw the kart in very confidently, back to fifth through here, right out to the edge of the track, accelerating hard before braking hard into what looks like a hairpin but is actually a medium speed (third gear) never ending sweeper.

Accelerating from here slightly uphill to the next 90 degree left hander going through here leads onto a 'short' straight which is still longer than the main straight at most circuits. Braking hard into a (second gear) hairpin that opens up on the exit, accelerate



to a similar but slower corner 80 metres away. Now you are on the back straight that heads uphill into a flatout, left-hand knik and braking hard, uphill into a right hander.

Stay in a second gear to head left around the slowest point on the circuit, accelerate then turn right on a corner that opens up slightly on the exit and down a short stretch leading to the pits, flatout-ish right, along the pit straight and through a very fast left-right chicane that leads back onto the main straight. That is 1345 metres of awesome racetrack.

Race 1

Earlier in the day I had watched other drivers do practice starts, within the space of 100 metres they were doing 100 kays an hour. Figuring that stalling the kart at the start was almost inevitable I elected to start at the back of the grid to avoid being collected if it did happen and sure enough, yes, there I was, four corners behind the field by the time the kart fired. Anyhow it didn't really matter, here was still another chance to drive a World Championship Formula C kart around one of the finest tracks on the planet, this is not something you get to do every day. Gradually some of the karts ahead began to get close and no sooner had this happened than MRL member and 1998 Queensland Formula Ford Champion Peter Roggenkamp slowed up to provide someone to race with.

This was not simply because these people had a foreigner among their ranks, they do this on race days so that even the slower guys have an enjoyable time – they would rather have a great scrap for ninth place than to finish first. Winning is not important, having a great time is.

With Peter right in front there was now not only incentive, but also an experienced campaigner. Being male – and therefore only mono capable – I was having trouble doing more than one thing at a time. Following Peter on the right line, trying to race and therefore pass him, brake late in a kart with a four wheel braking system and that damn gearbox! Second, third, fourth, third – whoops 15,000rpm (2000 too many), brake, accelerate, change the gear before the tacho overloads with too many numbers! While dicing with Peter the golden rule of 125cc gearbox class racing was hammered home, keep the engine in the right rev range. If you let it drop below the engine will just idle and have absolutely no power, over rev and it goes no-where.

Learning this was done the hard way, when the engine went too slow the kart virtually stalled, only problem was it gives the same feeling of the kart dropping a chain. Instinctively the right arm goes up which only cuts out the engine altogether with the emergency kill switch being attached to your arm (similar to the 'kill' chord on some jet ski's). realising the situation, the kill switch cord was quickly plugged back in as the kart rolled down the track, then pull the clutch and going again. 100cc racing was starting to seem so easy! A couple more laps then the chequered flag.

Race 2

This time off the grid there was no stalling, into third place and a race long battle with the others. For 13 years of age Tobia Kipper manhandles an FC kart around this circuit like an accomplished senior pilot and he's dying to join the national JICA class in 2000. After



leading the first part of the race he dropped back to dice with us. As the sun set on MakoTrac we completed the final race of the day side by side down the main straight at 100+ kilometers per hour to finish third. Who won? Who cares? The objective of the Motor Racing League are to race and have fun. Objective achieved.
Ian Salvestrin – Melbourne (written in 1999)