

## Four Wheels Takes To Two

Nevin Power

By definition motorcyclists prefer to get from A to B on two wheels rather than on four. This is so for a whole variety of reasons, one of the main ones being fun. However there are plenty of opportunities to have fun on four wheels as well, the most obvious and accessible being to take to the karting track for some high speed, well, relatively high speed, fun on four wheels.

There's plenty to differentiate between karting and motorcycling, the most obvious being the fact that on a bike there are two wheels under you but on a kart there are four wheels and you sit bang in the middle of the four wheels, your backside barely two inches from the track. However the sense of position, grip and machine control that you develop on a motorbike can carry straight over to a kart. If you've never driven a kart then you should certainly get a group together and treat yourselves – the kart consists of a frame and small, though wide, slick tyres at the four corners with the engine directly behind the driver. Unlike bikes, karts often do not have gears and brake only at the rear. As we know, anything with an engine is going to be expensive and even though karting is one of the cheapest forms of motorsport, it can still drain your cash reserves but the fun factor is off the scale as you slide the kart through bends, feeling no grip through the tyres before you whip back the steering wheel in an attempt to ensure that the kart faces in the correct direction again. The only problem is, this doesn't often quite according to plan!

The plan is always to face forward and try and go as fast as you can but for the 21 participants at the motorcycle club's karting night last Wednesday, the plan wasn't always evolving into actual action. The night had been organised by club captain Ciara Utsch and was set up by Karworld in Watergrasshill as a Grand Prix event with a practice session and then a 35 minute race. After suffering through the rush hour traffic and finally making it to the track everyone signed the usual "motorsport is dangerous, don't blame us if you have an accident of your own making" forms after registering to the system and then heading over to fit into the waterproof overalls. After squeezing into the overalls all 21 of us crossed into a separate building where helmets were fitted and a quick briefing was given by one of the track marshals on what not to do. He asked how many had karded before and it turned out that quite a few had never sat in a kart before but even so this didn't always show out on the track once the practice session was finished and the rolling start procedure explained. It was time to race.

With practice over and a damp and slippery track apparent for all who sped around in those first few minutes, we clambered out of the karts. The race would begin with the safety kart taking us around in formation for one lap, much like how the safety car in Formula One racing works. The safety kart would then pull in to the pits and the race would begin as we carried on. I started near the end of the pack keeping my position throughout that opening lap as the safety kart led us around but even on that lap there was a fair amount of karts jostling for position. The sound of 21 kart engines even on that opening lap was something to behold and everyone knew it was only a matter of time before they really started to make noise. With the safety kart having pulled everyone was free to race, tyres squealed around the turns as some of the more experienced drivers slid their machines through the damp corners, powering down on those who were still just getting used to it. As the laps went on by the gap between those with experience and those without steadily grew leading to some very interesting situations on the track. Somewhere in the middle of the race I began to push on to catch

someone who was ahead of me. Approaching the first turn, I turned in a bit late, hit the brakes and tried to recover but the wet track was giving up no grip at all and I was put right in to a spin. This particular corner was a long right-hand bend which dipped slightly downhill. My kart was now facing the wrong way and just over the crest of the hill. Two karts were on their way to get through the bend. They were side by side. I had no time to move, I could only hope that I wasn't going to be hit. The karts came by – "shit", I thought, both of the bearing karts veered to either side of me as I looked, spun it around to face the right way and carried on. There was some battling to do.

This was to continue for the next half of the race as people spun off on the damp corners of the track, not quite being able to push their karts through the corners at a speed that would enable them to catch the front runners. Come the end of the race most people had spun off at least once with one competitor even managing to have a mini-crash as he parked up due to what he later described as a "brake failure". Needless to say, no one believed him. In the trackside building the podium finishers were awarded their trophies while timing sheets were handed around for all to compare.

It had rained, almost everyone had been off the track at some point and some more than a few. Yes, it was four wheels instead of two but the fun factor was definitely still in evidence.