

The I-5 Series Opener a Success

Under sunny blue skies and temperatures in the 70's, a new chapter in kart racing in the Pacific Northwest kicked off last weekend. The regions top drivers from Oregon, Washington and Canada converged on the picturesque facility in Canby, Oregon known to the karting world as Pats Acres Racing Complex.

The theme of the weekend seemed to be an all out assault on track records. Ideal conditions and a raised level of enthusiasm, not to mention the 15lb marble cup trophies that awaited the winners, were all contributing factors to an unprecedented weekend. To put it mildly, the record book took a good 'ol fashioned beating.

On Saturday in MicroMax, Corvallis resident Eddie Portz' took the pole and the heat race win. His track record 46.523 came in the main, as he fell just short to main winner Conner Robustelli. On Sunday, the two would battle back and forth with little 'Rocket' Robustelli re-established his position up front with a clean sweep, but Portz would drive home Sunday night with the track record in his name at a 46.302.

The TAG Cadet record was one of the few track records that was safe all weekend, but that didn't stop the little "Rocket" from putting his stamp on the class. Robustelli clean swept the class all weekend to take the points lead. One Saturday, it was Brady Egger finishing second and Hunter Melahn grabbing the short step on the podium. On Sunday, the three drivers jockeyed positions with all three leading at one point or another. At the end of the main, it was Robustelli on top, Hunter Melahn moved up a step and Eddie Portz got back into the trophy ceremony finishing third.

The third cadet class of the weekend was the MiniMax class. Jake Preston, out of Renton WA, made the trip south and showed up with 1 purpose: WIN.... and that he did. Preston smashed the track with a Saturday qualifying effort of 42.465. In fact, the top three drivers were under the track record. In the prefinal, it was Preston, Birel pilot Brady Egger and Beaverton native Marco Eakins in that order. The finals would see Eakins move up the second, dropping Egger to third. Sundays race was very similar. It was all Jake Preston out front, Egger running a solid second all day and Eakins a very close third. By weekends end, Preston would enjoy a commanding points lead in the class, not to mention taking home 30 plus pounds of hardware.....

One of the most competitive classes on the docket is always Rotax Junior. Coming into the weekend, it appeared to be up for grabs with a number of regional favorites on hand. Notice was served early Saturday during qualifying that Tonykart pilot Parker McKean meant business. McKean's new track record, 40.274, was the target that no one could reach. In the prefinal, it was again McKean first to the stripe, with Birel jockey Dalton Egger in second and Salem resident Austen Hudson third. The 20 lap feature was action packed from the green flag on. McKean broke away from the pack with Egger in tow. Many battles ensued, and in the end it was McKean on top, Egger in second and CRG pilot Jacob Delavergne taking home third place. Sunday showed much of the same. McKean won the pole, Mr Excitement, Brandon Schrieber, second and Egger third. Birel driver Joseph Schwager would put together a 2nd place run in the prefinal, and Schrieber would have to settle for third, but it was still McKean's show. The feature was again action packed. McKean took the early lead and looked to be on auto pilot out front. Egger, who failed to make the heat race, started 8th and got to 2nd before a mechanical gremlin took him out. Suddenly, McKean's day took a turn for the worst as the timing beacon fell and tangled in the steering column causing him to go off track. Brandon Schrieber inherited the lead and would drive on to victory. Hudson showed very strong with a solid drive to second and Jacob Delavergne would be the only driver in the class to hoist hardware both days. Parker McKean drove back home to Seattle with a strong grip on the championship points lead.

The majority of the TAG Jr drivers were only available for the Sunday round and split track time with

the Rotax Jr's. Seattle's Page Wallin's pole time of 41.381 was too much for the rest of the TAG field and would put her on pole. The prefinal saw Ms. Wallin drive to an easy victory with Kailia Walter crossing the stripe second and Ethan Word would have to settle for third. In the main, Page broke out to a commanding lead and appeared to be on cruise control. A racing incident about half way through would set her back a step and allowed Birel pilot Kailia Walter to get by. The deficit would be too much for Page to recover from giving Walters the top step on the podium, Page would have to settle for second and Ethan Word would take home the third place hardware. Page Wallin did escape with a commanding points lead on the field.

Rotax Sr (International) was another class that looked as though there could be a number of drivers on top by weekends end. Vemme pilot Stepanova Nekeel put a rest to that notion. Nekeel came out of the gate running and threw down a 40.476 in Saturdays qualifying session to set yet another track record. Fellow Seattlite Derek Wang was good enough for 2nd and local shoe Russell Francis would have to settle for third. The heat race was pretty much a carbon copy of qualifying with the front of the field remaining unchanged. In the main, Nekeel jumped out to an early lead, leaving Wang and Francis to battle. In the end, it was Francis claiming second and Wang would have to settle for third. Tonykart pilot Geoffery Roberti was in the mix all day and would settle for a strong 4th place finish. Sunday looked much the same. Nekeel set the pole time with Cameron Egger (Francis's last second replacement driver) taking second spot and Wang third. The heat race again saw Nekeel break away. Egger would get the black flag after losing his neck brace half way through leaving second to Wang and Darren Ward made his first appearance of the weekend into the top three. As you would guess, Nekeel again bolted off to a comfortable lead and would cruise to an easy win. Egger, battling from the back of the field, was able to reach Derek Wang and battle for the second spot by the mid way point of the race. The CRG of Wang and the Birel of Egger would swap positions 6 or 7 times before Wang would prevail on the final lap to take second, leaving Egger the low step on the box. At weekends end, it was an "exhaust free" weekend for Stepanova Nekeel, as he never once inhaled another drivers exhaust fumes.....

Local Rotax Masters pilot Alex Harrold threw down a track record 41.597 (breaking his old record by nearly 3 tenths) and put himself on the pole. Tim Moss would register a 41.790 (also under the old track record) and put himself on the outside of the front row for the heat race. By the time the heat race came around, a number of Masters drivers opted to join the International field, leaving the easy Saturday victory to Tim Moss. On Sunday, the V5 of Lee Taylor would make the starting call in Masters. Taylor would come up just short of Moss and have to settle for second on the day.

The Premier show of the day was the shifters. One of the objectives to the I-5 Series was to put the glory back into running the shifterkarts. Saturday started with a familiar tone. Another broken track record. This time it was local Hammer Nutrition driver Skyler Benoit. Benoit's 39.517 was the fastest lap ever recorded at PARC on the Mid track. Teammate Steve Purdue was fastest enough for 2nd, while the Intrepid kart of Josh Dannenman would capture 3rd. In the Prefinal, Benoit broke away to a comfortable win, but the story was local shoe Cameron Egger (who failed to qualify) drove from the back of the pack to finish second setting up an off pole start in the feature. Dannenmann would hang on to third leaving the outside of row 2 to Seattle's Jim Lilliberg. In the feature, Benoit got off the line quickly to assume the lead. Egger fell to 4th with Dannemann going to second and Lilliberg to third. About 6 or 7 laps in, Egger took the lead and drove away. Benoit took the checkers in second. In the tech tent, Egger was DQ'd (running the 09 SKUSA package) which handed the victory to fellow local kid Skyler Benoit. Dannemann ran a solid race, outlasting most to finish second. Jim Lilleberg was good enough to make the post race party, accepting the 3rd place cup. On Sunday, things were much the same in the premier Stock shifter class. Cameron Egger (now with the correct reed cage) came out

with a vengeance. With Benoit, Eggers toughest competitor, home sick tossing cookies, Egger laid down a 39.600 to establish the pole time. Steve Purdue would put himself outside row one and Lilleberg and fellow Hammer Nutrition Ace Craig Sender would go 3rd and 4th fastest. When the green fell in the heat race, Egger bolted and never looked back, throwing down a 39.572 fast lap. Purdue and Lilleberg would battle for off pole honors in the main, with the nod going to Purdue. Sender was still within striking distance finishing 4th. Much to everyones surprise, the bed ridden Skyler Benoit was able to shake off the flu symptoms, gargle a little mouth wash and strap his helmet on for one final show of the weekend. Starting 5 or 6 rows deep, Benoit would have to have the drive of his life to challenge Egger for the win. As the green flag fell, Egger again stumbled on the start, but by lap 3 or 4, he overtook Purdue and never looked back going onto a commanding victory. The real action was back in the field though, as Benoit started his march towards the front. Making quick work of 3 or 4 drivers, Benoit was on the move. A slight mistake on the outside of corner one at the mid way point, cost him though, and thwarted his chances of reaching the podium for a second consecutive day. Instead, it was Steve Purdue coming home a distant second and Jim Lilleberg again taking the bottom step on the podium. Benoit's valiant efforts scored him 4th place points for the day, while Hammer Nutrition Captain Brian Frank marked a solid 5th place run.

In the Stock Heavy Shifter class, the battle was between Bruce McKean (Parkers sponsor) and Brandon Brock. McKean established he would be the guy to beat by throwing down yet another track record of 40.569. The two drivers battles within the combined shifter field with McKean coming out on top all of the track sessions of the weekend. McKean's two victories give him a commanding lead in the stock heavy shifter class, where surely more of the Seattle contingent will make next months race.

Dorion Ford was the lone pioneer in the Stock 125 Jr (S5) class. By weekends end, Ford had established a very respectable track record of 41.835 seconds. National front running Seattle native Kelly Baker also made a solo effort running the 125 Formula class (G1). Baker had some great battles as well running in the mixed shifter class.

In all, the weekend was a big success, kicking off a new era of Shifterkart racing and Rotax/Tag racing in the Northwest. The quality of both the racing and talent of the competitors that showed up was very obvious by the number of track records that were shattered. Every single Rotax and shifter class track record was broken with two new classes (Micromax and 125 Jr/S5) establishing record marks to shoot at. The vibe was good all weekend long and a very strong foundation for this new series to build on was established. The I-5 Corridor Series will resume next month on June 19th-20th at the beautiful new venue at Pacific Grand Prix in Seattle WA. The PARC staff would like to thank all who attending the inaugural event and we look forward to next time.