

Stepanova Nekeel – 2010 Race Schedule and Driver Profile

2010 Schedule

After a totally cool experience racing in the Rotax World Finals in Egypt last month, Stepanova Nekeel's 2010 race schedule is coming together. Look for the # 22 Mach 1 kart to run in Senior Rotax at Andy Seesman's Challenge of the America's (COA) series, during Jan-Feb-March. In the meantime, the rest of the year's schedule will be will be firmed up from the list of races below, trying to make as many as possible.

Rotax classes are continuing to grow and get more and more competitive every year. 25 racers have pre-registered in Senior Rotax for the first COA race in Phoenix. The other Rotax classes in Phoenix are loaded, too. The top North American drivers always show up for the COA series, in part because the class winners get a paid trip to the World Finals (someplace exotic, the Worlds have been in places like Italy, Portugal, Dubais, Malaysia...).

The COA series provides an early jump for drivers aiming for the U.S. Rotax Nationals, and the Worlds. The Florida Winter Tour is the other Rotax series in the U.S. that has offered a direct transfer to the Rotax World Finals. Historically, the fastest drivers at the Nationals have raced in one of these two international series, staged at the same time of year on opposite coasts. Last year, two of the four U.S. Team Senior drivers qualifying for the Worlds raced in the COA series to start off their year. This pattern was repeated in the Junior and DD2 classes.

The Rotax Nationals will be in New Castle, Indiana this year, in mid-July. New Castle will stage two prestigious national Rotax races this year. The Rotax Pan American series race in June will give racers the opportunity to get tuned up for the later Nationals, making this Pan Am race almost as important as the Nationals. Another draw for top drivers to show up, the new Pan Am series becomes the 3rd international series in the U.S. to offer a straight transfer to the Rotax World Finals, along with the COA and FWT.

And running two big races at the same track gives a little home-track advantage, so why not add another high-caliber race, like one from the WSK/CKI North American series, the acknowledged highest level of racing in the U.S., at New Castle in August? Then, just for kicks, there's another WSK/CKI race not too far from home in Reno, NV in mid-May. It should be worth the trip to race with the best in the U.S.

Looking forward to other races in the 2010 season, there are several economical opportunities for Northwest drivers to run in big, fast fields in Rotax and TaG. For drivers wanting to improve their racing skills by mixing it up with the best (that's how you get better!), there's a nice selection of top level events within a day's drive of Portland.

The last COA race weekend is the kart track at Infineon Raceway in Sonoma, CA. Infineon is a great driver's track, and in mid-April, the SKUSA North American Pro Tour will stage the first of its 3-event series there. Since this race series includes the biggest race in the country, the Supernats in Vegas, it's sure to attract a deep field. And it's also a race where a little home field advantage can be claimed, coming right after the COA race there. On top of that, Infineon will also host a

Rotax Pan Am race in September, so that's three national level races that can be reached in one day from Portland or Seattle.

The NW Gold Cup/Rmax Challenge in Richland, WA should be an exciting race, especially in the Rotax classes, and the Tri-cities track is great. It feels a lot like the track at Infineon, actually. Look for a good race at the 2nd Tri-cities NW RMC race in mid-April. The NW RMC will visit another great track, and should be a great race, also attracting fast Canadian Rotax racers to Chilliwack, BC in July. Those are two good NW RMC races to make.

The new "I-5 Corridor" series will include a couple of races at the Pacific Grand Prix track in Kent, in mid-June and late August. This series should result in some good racing, a little more relaxed, and close to home.

Capping the year off, the Supernats in Vegas is the chance to stack up against the biggest field of the best drivers from around the world. The Supernats always has a big contingent from the Northwest, and the depth of this region's talent is proven by the so many from here finishing this biggest race up front.

Stepanova's tentative full race schedule looks like this:

Dates	Location	Class	Series
1/22 - 1/24	Phoenix, AZ	Rotax Sr.	Gatorz' Rotax Challenge of the Americas
2/26 - 2/28	Fontana, CA	Rotax Sr.	Gatorz' Rotax Challenge of the Americas
3/26 - 3/28	Sonoma, CA	Rotax Sr.	Gatorz' Rotax Challenge of the Americas
4/16 - 4/18	Sonoma, CA	TaG	SKUSA North American Pro Tour
4/23 - 4/25	Richland, WA	Rotax Sr.	Northwest Gold Cup / Rotax Max Challenge
5/14 - 5/16	Reno, NV	TaG	WSK/CKI North American
6/11 - 6/13	New Castle, IN	Rotax Sr.	Rotax Pan-Am
6/18 - 6/20	Kent, WA	Rotax Sr.	I-5 Corridor
7/12 - 7/17	New Castle, IN	Rotax Sr.	Rotax Grand Nationals
7/23 - 7/25	Chilliwack, BC	Rotax Sr.	Northwest Gold Cup / Rotax Max Challenge
8/13 - 8/15	New Castle, IN	TaG	WSK/CKI North American
8/24 - 8/26	Kent, WA	Rotax Sr.	I-5 Corridor
9/3 - 9/5	Sonoma, CA	Rotax Sr.	Rotax Pan-Am
10/22 - 10/24	Las Vegas, NV	TaG	WSK/CKI North American
11/15 - 11/21	Las Vegas, NV	TaG	SKUSA North American Pro Tour - Supernats

Driver Profile

The Pacific Northwest, including neighboring British Columbia, has always produced some of the best drivers in North America. This region sent a more than its share of drivers to the Rotax World Finals in Egypt last December, including three of four of the Senior Rotax drivers on the U.S. Team, and Stepanova was one of them.

Stepanova was fast at the Rotax World's, landing in the top 5 in his timed-practice sessions, and things were looking pretty good before the racing started. Unfortunately, his first two heat races ended up as DNF's, not making it past the first corner or two. His last heat also began very badly, as he was punted off track (again) in the first corner. This time he recovered to finish the race, passing a dozen or so karts, and setting the 3rd fastest lap time on the way. But not good enough to make the cut from 76 to 36 karts going on to the main.

The 2009 version of the Supernationals had a little better outcome for Stepanova. He provisionally qualified 8th fastest overall in TaG Senior, out of 80 drivers, but lost his Leopard motor battery on the track, and came across the scales just slightly under weight. Of course, that meant he started all three qualifying heats dead last. He had a good run in every heat, and ended up 13th in the Final, starting from 24th, a good accomplishment.

The 2009 Rotax Nationals in Norman, OK took some good and bad turns for Stepanova. He finished in the top 5 in all his heats, but in a rainy, rough Pre-final, he finished 11th, and then had to fight to move up to 7th in the Final.

Stepanova had a great learning experience in 2009, running with the Mach 1 factory team in KF2 in the German Championship series in Wackersdorf, Germany. He finished the 2009 NW Rmax Challenge series in 2nd place, behind Joey Wimsett, following his 1st place finish in the 2008 NW Rmax Challenge.

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Additional details of Stepanova's racing career are shown in the table below.

Year	Class	Series	Results
2009	Rotax Sr.	Gatorz Challenge of the Americas, Southern California Tracks - National Level Series	6 races, 27 drivers, 3 top 5 finishes, 5th in series points
		Amsoil NW Rotax Max Challenge, Pacific Northwest Regional Series	5 races, 42 drivers, 1 win, 2 2nd's, 2nd in points
		U.S. Rotax Max Summer Shootout, Norman, OK - National Level, warm-up for Rotax Nationals	1 race, 34 drivers, 3rd place
		Puget Sound Go-Kart Club, Tacoma, WA	1 race, 7 drivers, 1 win
		West Coast Kart Club, Chilliwack, BC	1 race, 17 drivers, 1 win
	TaG Sr.	West Coast Kart Club, Chilliwack, BC	1 race, 15 drivers, 1 win
2008	TaG Sr.	Stars of Karting, Seattle - National Level	1 race, 21 drivers, 2nd place
		SKUSA Supernationals, Las Vegas - National Level	1 race, 95 drivers, in 4 heats and main, a 5th place, a 10th (& 3 mechanical DNF's - due to bad dad and @#\$%#@ Leopard motors)
	Rotax Sr.	U.S. Rotax Max Grand Nationals, Shawano, WS - National Level	1 race, 46 drivers, all 3 heats and pre-final finished in top 5, DNF in final
		Amsoil NW Rotax Max Challenge, Pacific Northwest Regional Series	6 races, 45 drivers, 2 wins, 2 2nd's, 1 3rd, 1 6th, won series championship
2007	TaG Sr.	SKUSA Supernationals, Las Vegas - National Level	1 race, 75 drivers, in 3 heats and main, 13th, 16th, 19th, DNF
		IKF Region 6 Gold Cup - Pacific Northwest Regional Series	6 races, 29 drivers, top 5 in all races, 2nd place in series points
		Puget Sound Go-Kart Club, Tacoma, WA	7 races, 19 drivers, 5 wins, 2 2nd's, won series championship
		Hub City Street Race, Centralia, WA - Regional One-off Event	1 race, 31 drivers, 2nd place
		Cascade Locks Street Race, Cascade, WA - Regional One-off Event	1 race, 11 drivers, 2nd place
		Seattle Karting Club, Monroe, WA - Winter Series	3 races, 19 racers, 1 win, 1 2nd

2006	TaG Sr.	SKUSA Supernationals, Las Vegas - National Level	1 race, 80 drivers, 3 heats and main, 2 12th place, 2 DNF's
	TaG Jr.	Puget Sound Go-Kart Club, Tacoma, WA	7 races, 10 drivers, 5 wins, won series championship
		SKUSA Cascade Regional Series	8 races, 20 drivers, 3 wins, 2nd place in series points
		Seattle Karting Club, Monroe, WA - Winter Series	4 races, 14 racers, 2 wins
2005	TaG Jr.	SKUSA Cascade Regional Series	8 races, 17 drivers, 2nd place in series points
		Seattle Karting Club, Monroe, WA - Winter Series	4 races, 11 racers, 1 win
2004	TaG Jr.	SKUSA Cascade Regional Series	8 races, 11 drivers, 2nd place in series points
2003	Cadet 80 cc Comer	Puget Sound Go-Kart Club, Tacoma, WA	7 races, 10 drivers, 2 wins, 2 2nd's, 3rd place in series points
		IKF Region 6 Gold Cup - Pacific Northwest Regional Series	1 race, 7 drivers, 1 win