Track Testing
Super Rok race


Super Rok is the most competitive Rok category in Italy and has attracted a number of drivers from KF2

By Carlo Forni

Having spent some time track testing with our Tony EVRR Super Rok outfit I decided it was time for a race... and a lot of effort!

At 41 and after a number of years out of the racing world, it took me quite an effort to prepare myself for racing again. I had no choice but try myself in the Super Rok class, where I usually do my monthly testing. My idea was to try a single-make race. Super Rok is currently the most competitive category in the Rok Series into which the Shifter Rok class has been introduced and we will soon test it.

There were 23 drivers in Super Rok for the race weekend which was well organised with a full Sunday programme of a warm-up, Qualifying, Prefinal and Final. Not an easy day, but many laps of intense driving where all the participants can really vent all their passion for karting.

A big help, compared to other karting competitions, is given by the single brand philosophy where every driver has the same material for racing. It is true that some slight differences appear, such as drivers using special wheels (also a little bit too expensive) or some other details that help performance, but it is also true that lap times were very similar between almost all the drivers.

Since this meeting was part of the Rok Championship, which in Italy is divided into four regions to help drivers reduce their travel time and costs, there were a good number of teams and drivers in the different classes. 60 Baby had 4 drivers, 60 Mini and Mini Rok had 4 and 11 respectively, 125 Junior Rok (12), 125 Rok (12), 125 Super Rok (23), 125 Shifter Rok (9) and 125 Prodriver (10). A total of 85 participants, 71 of whom were racing in the Rok series. It made for a great race weekend with the paddocks really full, generating excitement and emotion in something that was visibly a great event.

Free practice

We worked on rear axle stiffness, going from an N, medium hardness, to an H, which is a little bit harder, trying to improve traction along curves. Caster was reduced slightly to free the chassis exiting curves and camber was increased. Convergence was set at 2mm open at the front. Rear width was set at 140cm, the maximum allowed by the technical rules, and this was needed as I am 183cm tall and the kart's width needs to be sufficiently wide to balance that. The front end was set at two spacers of 1cm each on both sides. However we struggled with the front end all weekend as although a wide value helps along the fast curves it is a little bit imprecise entering tight curves and slows the kart exiting the curve.

We also managed to reduce the weight of the kart by using some aluminium components on non-structural parts such as the front Nassau panel brackets, the radiator brackets and other parts. Help has also come from the Tillett carbon fibre seat, reducing weight by about half a kilo, and the carbon floor tray saving even more weight, almost one kilo. Overall we managed to save nearly 3kg, plus I was on a strict diet and we fine-tuned the amount of petrol in the tank for each session. Finally I was around 4kg over the minimum weight for the class. Considering I started my preparation 10kg over one month ago, this was quite a success. Of course 4kg over still makes a difference, both for acceleration exiting curves and also braking, and generally setting up the chassis is more difficult with more weight on, especially on a very rubbery track.

New tyres

Like many teams we thought the best time to put on new tyres and verify our performance and quality of our set-up was at the beginning of the afternoon. This is because the track has reached the high grip condition similar to that for qualifying and the races. With new Bridgestone tyres I managed to run 55.62s, which was a good improvement but still not enough as I had hoped to knock at least half a second off my best. The fastest drivers were running at 54.40s at this point. Of course these are young drivers, racing almost every weekend, so I was not surprised and actually pretty proud of being just 1.2 seconds from the fastest.

Qualifying

Qualifying is always a difficult time, as you know and think you should improve your best time but there are no guarantees for this. The only thing to do is to take advantage of new tyres, learning to warm them up in the correct way and manage to set your best lap at the right moment. One very important thing with soft tyres is to make them work properly in the first one or two laps of warming up without having them slide all over the place on the track. I managed to do quite well and set my best

lap on lap 4 with a 55.22s, which placed me 16th out of 23. It was a good improvement and I was pleased to see my lap difference from the poleman reduced to 1.1s.

Prefinal

Rok races have a Prefinal and a Final. The Prefinal run over 15 laps determines the starting grid for the Final. It goes without saying that two races are better than one, but this system also gives an opportunity to those drivers that have had no luck in the Prefinal, perhaps because of accidents or technical problems, to have a second chance to improve their result and to race. All kart drivers know that a problem can crop up right at the beginning of a race stopping them from taking part. A second race gives you a second chance.

We changed the set-up, reducing the front end width by 6mm, to help with exiting curves, and would see what happened, having in mind the possibility to change this setting again for the Final.

I made a good start which permitted me to obtain 13th position from 18th after just a few laps. I then lost some positions and was hauled in by another competitor who hit me on the rear bumper in the braking phase, throwing me off the track. This was a pity as although I managed to restart thanks to the touch and go system on the Super Rok I had already lost around 20 seconds. Some competitors should be more correct when racing as the capacity to overtake is part of the skills of a kart driver. Hitting someone's rear bumper is quite easy but at the same time not correct. An official showed a warning flag but at the end my race was ruined by someone else who instead kept his position. Never mind me, but I always think of drivers who invest a lot of time and money and might be just thrown out by some stupidity. At the end of the Prefinal my position was 18th, just where I had started, so I had to start all over again… but it was good to have another chance with the Final.

Final

For the Final we went back to the original set-up at the front, increasing the width again, as I had problems with the rear end gripping the track too much and the chassis understeering.

I again gained some positions in the first turns but then a group of drivers ahead of me pulled away while behind me the next group couldn't reach me. So I kept my position for the entire race and finished 13th out of 23, which was quite an incredible result for my first race this year after so much time out. Making the front end wider again had helped and worked well allowing me to run the 20 laps of the Final at a good constant pace.



Carlo stays calm under pressure from a younger driver

An unexpected prize awaited me. I found out that in the 'Over' category, drivers more than 30 years old, I actually finished 3rd in the Final putting me on the podium and giving me a trophy to take home. Well, how exciting!

So overall the Rok championship, and in particular Super Rok, is an extremely interesting category to race in, with quite uniform performance of the karts and with a good possibility to race and drive a lot during the weekend. Also the organisation was really good and the 'Over' category also permits "ex-young" drivers to race and have a satisfying experience. Super Rok though in Italy is very competitive and has drawn many young and strong drivers from KF2.

A special thanks to Testa racing team for their support during the weekend (*www.testaracing.it*). They finished with good results and podiums for their drivers Gianmarco Ercoli in Super Rok and "Quindicirosso" in Shifter Rok. Also thanks to AIM, Bell, Tillett and of course Tony/Vortex and the Rok organisation for the materials put at my disposal for my participation in this race. ●



A podium place and a trophy - not bad for a return to racing at the age of 41