

Girl power

REPORT: A. ROCA - PICS: G. COOPER

The second round of the Rotax Pro Tour Australia held in Adelaide marked the history of Australian karting thanks to two fast young ladies: Madeline Stewart and Rianna O'Meara-Hunt. Those who is still convinced that karting is a man's sport very wrong indeed! Nowadays there are lots of girls racing, and some of them are giving their male colleagues their money's worth... Marta Garcia is an evident example here in Europe, she's ready to step into F.4 this year. These two young ladies were outstanding over the weekend at Bolivar Raceway ...



Rianna O'Meara-Hunt



home a second place in the CRC Speedshow Top Half Karting Series. As if this wasn't enough, in the same year she managed to grab third place at the KartSport New Zealand's National Schools Title and in fifth place at the NZ Rotax Max Challenge. The following year she finished third at the New Zealand National Title Sprint Championships and fifth at the NZ Rotax Max Challenge, but she won the WPKA GoldStar Series and the Historical Blossom Series. She also took a fifth place in the Rotax Pro Tour Australia in Dubbo. This year she came first at the South Australian State Championship within the Rotax Pro Tour Australia in Bolivar and she is currently leading the NZ Rotax Series with 4 out of 8 rounds that have been held.

dad raced cars so I grew up in and around race tracks. When I was introduced to karts at the age of 8 and got to emulate what I had seen my dad doing in cars, it just felt natural and I loved it. In another co-incidence myself and Madeline went out on track at Kartsport Wellington for our first races together..."

Who is Rianna off the track? Can you give us a brief description of yourself and your life...

"Is there an "off the track...? With the limited weekends off per year that I am not racing, I love to spend time with friends relaxing in other, shall we say, more 'conventional' ways that a 15 year old girl might. I love to train, going to the gym twice a week with a trainer to



Rianna has been racing karts since she was eight. Wellington's Kaitoke track just north of Upper Hutt is her home town venue and where she spends her spare time when she's not at school or competing throughout New Zealand.

In 2015 she won the Wellington Regional Championship and the WPKA Gold-Star Series and GP Series and she took

"Hard work, determination and a little bit of courage can take a girl a long way. Great to share success with Maddy Stewart who also sealed a round win and state title at the same event in Rotax Light. So many people to thank, but a special mention must go to the TF team, awesome to get the team a blue plate!"

When did you start racing and why?

"I started karting when I was eight. From when I was about four or five years old my

ensure I'm always race fit! When not in the kart myself, I'm generally at a race track somewhere helping or coaching others - but that's what I love doing - to me it's relaxing. I live and breathe racing."

Pros and cons of being a female racing driver...

"For me this is a hard question to answer. Being a female racer you certainly have to prove yourself to the boys and gain their respect by your driving and racing skill -



but once you get that I think it's all pretty even - in karts anyway. My personal view is that girls and guys should be treated the same in motorsport, yes it is a male orientated sport, but once the helmet goes on we are all just 'racers'. The kart performs the same for everyone, the mindset and the determination can be the same and fitness can be equal too - I think the determining factor is probably simpler than gender - it's who is more determined in each race."

What's your aim for this season?

"My aim for this year is to win a seat for the Rotax MAX Challenge Grand Finals... to represent my country in the sport I love would be a great honour for me - not to mention another piece of history for a junior female karter in our country. Unfortunately, a couple of days prior to the commencement of our year-long plan we were informed of the European age group rule changes and my dream sort of shattered. Thinking about it, after a few days, we determined that while the end goal could not be fulfilled it would not change the journey, the challenges faced, or the lessons to be learned from still persevering and trying to win the seat - so we are pushing forward anyway. Who knows - had we not have continued on then the Australian Junior Max state title may never have been won by a New Zealand karter - so some of my goals have already been achieved."

What do you think about recent CIK-FIA changes: OK classes and age rules? Are you thinking of taking part to a CIK-FIA sanctioned event this year? Why? Have you ever tried an OK kart?

"We don't have the OK classes in New Zealand, but as for the age group rule changes - it was extremely disappointing to have gone through two years intensive training with the Junior Rotax class with the aim of giving myself a real shot at achieving my ultimate goal in my final and third year - only to have it ripped away right at the last moment. But...it is what it is - we refocus and we become more determined!"

In your opinion, what should be done to improve karting at national level?

"Karting in NZ is very small compared to most countries, but that's probably mostly due to our population base. I had not heard of karting until I was eight years old, so making it more mainstream and more accessible would be a good thing. Perhaps the introduction of driver training via karting would assist NZ's young drivers in having better skills for the road."

Have you ever competed in Europe?

"I have never raced in Europe but I would certainly love to - it's one of my goals - so we will see if we can make that happen sometimes in the future."

If not a racing driver, what would you

like to be?

"Lots of people ask me this question, and they all get the same answer... I don't know... Maybe things will become clearer as I get older. For now, I live and breathe racing. Whatever the future holds I would like to be involved in racing in some way - even if it's simply helping out young and developing drivers like I do now. Whatever it is, it will certainly be outdoors - you don't often catch me behind a desk, maybe just for homework!"

Who is your favourite driver and why?

"Most people would expect me to name some of the greats in motorsport, but that's not what motivates me. I look up to and respect people that I see helping others - there have been many who have helped me in my karting journey to date - I admire that and want to ensure I do the same."

What is your biggest dream?

"My biggest dream is to be a professional race car driver - I'm sure it is the dream of any racing driver - but on a more tangible level, I want to be part of progressing karting in New Zealand and internationally for all racers - girls and boys. I want to be achieving things that others have yet to do and leave a little footprint that others might choose to follow, like others have done for me, before branching out along their own paths and leaving their own footprints."