



Press Release

Zuera, SPAIN – 2nd April, 2009

EXCITING END TO SPANISH ROUND OF THE EURO IN SUNDAY'S FINALS

The opening round of the 2009 Rotax Euro Challenge at the Zuera International Circuit, saw the first of four exciting editions of the championship get underway for the new season, with 150 drivers in total competing, representing almost 30 nations. The Spanish fans witnessed their inaugural taste of international Rotax competition, accompanied by the professional organisation that RGMMC Establishment brings with it now in its 6th season.

Following the first days of practice, qualifying and heat racing, the finals on Sunday were nothing short of dramatic, while the changing spring conditions had temperatures ranging from cool and windy to sunny and hot, then back again. The lengthy 1700 metre circuit was incredibly fast, allowing no room for error, as captured by the nine race control cameras monitoring the action. For many drivers, Zuera was their debut into the Euro Challenge and competitive racing at this level, but for others it was the continuation of their campaign to make this year the one to take the title.

Luke Varley steals the win, as Tonykart make it a podium clean sweep in Senior Max

With Joseph Reilly (Strawberry Racing/Tonykart) on pole and quickest overall in Saturday's heats, the Brit was looking dangerous to make a white-wash of the round if he got away at the start of the pre-final. Fastest qualifier Tom Fawcett (RL Race Team/Tonykart) running out of the same awning shared the front row, but was beaten to the first corner by Mats Van den Brand (Team TKP/Intrepid) on the inside, as Joey van Splunteren (de Feyter Racing/Gillard) and Josh Hart (Intrepid Force Rotax/Intrepid) made up the first 5. Some early-lap racing incidents saw the likes of Martin Pierce shuffled down the order, after he'd finished amidst the front-runners in all three heats to start on row 4. Chasing Jack Swinkels who was off grid 31 after coming through the Second Chance Race, the pair did well to eventually end up 14th and 15th in the 14-lap race.

French driver Antoine Barthon (MD Competition/Tonykart) maintained his position to be running just outside the first three, but was unable to prevent another Englishman James Greenway (Strawberry Racing/Tonykart) from passing. Luke Varley (Strawberry Racing/Tonykart) was the race pacesetter, carving his way from grid 17 to assume P2 with two laps remaining. The green, red and white colours of the Italian manufacturer who won the Chassis Make Trophy in 2008, dominated the senior field led by Reilly, taking the top five places across the line. However, the winner's team-mate was handed a 10-second penalty for unsportive behaviour, therefore dropping Varley back to 11th. Van Splunteren moved into 5th as a result.

The final was shaping up to be a battle of the Tonykart Titans, but it soon appeared obvious they were working together as the lights changed. Reilly held his lead and Fawcett slotted in front of Greenway in P3 as they rounded the first sweeper. The next corner is where the drama unfolded, seeing Reilly go sailing off-track then rejoin rear of field, leaving Greenway to snatch the lead. Van Splunteren was also a major casualty, which left Barthon 2nd ahead of Van den Brand. A coming together in the fight for 3rd between the Dutchman and Hart several corners later resulted in a failed attempt by the Kiwi to secure 3rd. As he spun, Fawcett was unable to avoid clipping the kart and suffered a bent axle, while Hart was forced to make some repairs and restart three laps down.

By lap 5, Varley had worked his way into 2nd and passed Greenway for the lead, with a gap to Barthon, as the three pulled away from the chasing pack. An incredible shuffle of positions saw Luke Caudle (Mira Motorsport/Sodikart) up from start grid 21 trying to hold off Pierce for 4th, who were then both overpowered by Eduardo Moreira (Korridas/Intrepid). Pierce came back fighting, joined by Guillaume Chaumont (GKS Gem Sport/Birel) who started way down on row 15, as the three-way battle continued for the closing laps across the finish line. The top 10 was a mix of drivers from the second row to the last when the chequered flag was waved and the laptimes of the entire field, bar the damaged kart of Fawcett, were all within one second of the best. Varley took the victory ahead of team-mate Greenway, then Barthon 3rd, who's previously had two 4th places in the Euro Challenge. Portugal's Moreira was too good for Pierce and Chaumont, with little separating them, then Caudle was 7th to an elated Karol Dabski (Uniq Racing/Intrepid), who started the race beside Chaumont and pushed hard to pass Van den Brand for 8th. Another amazing drive was from Tom Oliphant (Paul Carr Racing/Kosmic) who had come from the last row to finish in the first 10.

Varley had been fastest again until lap 12, when Reilly put in a flyer before retiring to set the best lap of the round 1 final. Was it his way of saying he would have won? In any case, it was a great result for the team and the 17-year old former British Junior Max champ. *"I knew that I was fast all week and in the final I had the advantage of the new tyres, so I just put my head down and got to the front; then I sat behind James [Greenway] to get the slipstream until I was ready to take the lead. It's a good achievement for me, as I see the Euro Challenge as the next step up from the British championship. I started with StrawberryRacing last October and have had nothing but good support from the team. It's also a good working atmosphere, which is important."*

Josh Webster proves he's unbeatable in Junior Max

Although he qualified 11th in Friday's official timed practice, Josh Webster (Strawberry Racing/Tonykart) claimed three wins in the heat races to take pole in the pre-final Sunday. Fellow English driver Matthew Parry (Paul Carr Racing/Kosmic) was the fastest in Friday qualifying and shared the front row, with Kay van Kemenade (Team TKP/Intrepid) of the Netherlands and Germany's Maximilian Gunkel (Intrepid Force Rotax/Intrepid) on row 2. Two additional formation laps were called for by the starter, who was unhappy with the speed of the junior field for the first of the finals, but once they were racing, it was Webster and van Kemenade who got the break.

Aavo Talvar (Team TKP/Intrepid) of Estonia featured in the heats and was quick to take P3, leading the unlucky Ed Brand (Coles Racing/CRG), who'd recovered well Saturday with some top 5 finishes after his tyre dislodged when leaving the pitlane in the timed practice two days prior. The best progress of the outside row starters came from Raoul Owens (Protrain Racing/Gillard), shadowing Brand in the latter stages for 5th, while frontrunners Parry, Gunkel and Russian Artem Markelov (IPB Spartak/Kombikart) dropped out of contention. Clocking the best lap of the race, van Kemenade slowly reeled in Webster to reduce the margin to under half a second by lap 10.

A red flag signalled a halt to proceedings following a collision on turn 2 in the Junior Max final, which almost left Myles Collins (HRS Motorsport/CRG) sidelined until officials allowed extra time for repairs before a complete restart. Having made the choice to use his new set of MOJO tyres for the pre-final, Webster was well aware that there were others who would be on his bumper if he wasn't able to pull a gap in the opening stages. It was van Kemenade and Talvar who led the chase, then came Brand, Lorenzo Singh (Nivo Karting Rocli Racing/Energy) and Owens. Within three laps Parry was already making ground from starting P14, up to 5th, while Talvar was raking in the positions, setting the fastest lap by half-race distance and relegating Webster to 2nd soon after.

Four laps to go and Webster regained his lead, only to have Talvar try to take it back unsuccessfully. Van Kemenade took advantage of the situation and went into 2nd, as Parry joined in the dice for a place on the podium. They continually swapped positions drawing closer to the end of the race, leaving Webster to strengthen his chances for the win. In last lap desperation, van Kemenade overtook Talvar as his team-mate passed him back, but there was contact going through the right-hander three corners from the finish that forced Talvar to run wide. It was Webster's weekend, as Parry won out for 2nd, then van Kemenade, Ferenc Kancsar (Kalman Motorsport/Birel) 4th and Brand very near behind in 5th. South Africans Aidan de Nobrega (HRS Motorsport/CRG) and Owens fought with each other for P6 and 7, with a small gap to Erwin Montfoort (VZ Racing/Gillard), Jamie Dzyra (Intrepid Force Rotax/Intrepid) and 10th was Talvar. An altercation in the final lap saw Gunkel actually lose P10 when he was crashed out, having come through from grid 30.

Now racing in a new team and driving a new kart, Webster admits they put in the effort to get the ultimate result. *"I qualified badly, only 11th overall, but Warwick Ringham and David Gregory worked hard to get the kart set-up right. I won every heat and started the pre-final on pole, where we used the new tyres to get the most points and a good position for the final. We were confident we could win it."*

South Africa's Ralph Odendaal fights off the challengers to take the Rotax DD2 trophy

Ralph Odendaal (Korridas/Intrepid) topped the timesheets in the 2-speed DD2 class at the Euro event in Zuera, just as he did at the Rotax Winter Cup also in Spain the month before. With a full grid and some experienced national and international champions amongst the drivers in the line-up, it was going to be a great competition. It was ironic also that the polesitter for the pre-final after dominating the heat races was Denis Thum (Wildkart Racing Team/Wildkart), who took the honours at the first event of the season in Campillos. The German driver had Odendaal alongside him on the front row Sunday, with some tough rivals behind them in French DD2 champ Damien Vuillaume (Freekart Racing/CRG) and Ian Young (Kalman Motorsport/Birel) from South Africa. Odendaal was quick to take the lead in the first of the finals, but the row 2 drivers were involved in an incident on lap 2 that saw them drop back eight or nine spots.

Poland's Seweryn Szczepanik (Schepers Racing/Zanardi) capitalised on this to grab 2nd, until he came under pressure from Thum and lost out at the start of lap 3. One of only three to break the 1:03 minute mark, Vuillaume cruised back up to P5 by lap 6, unfortunately then suffering a mechanical problem that ruined his hopes for a good result, as was the case for Szczepanik who had to retire before the race was over. Mirco Rossi (Motor One/CRG) drove his way into 3rd ahead of Maik Barten (PDB Belgium DFK/Gillard) and last year's vice champion Dominik Kraihamer (Intrepid Force Rotax/Intrepid), who was in a close battle with the leading DD2 Master Danny Brand (VZ Racing/Maddox) in 6th. Posting the best time of the race just one lap from the end, Thum gradually narrowed the gap of two seconds that Odendaal had built up out in front, with less than 2-tenths between them across the line.

Cool, gusty winds continued to blow across the Zuera circuit under the cloudy skies on Sunday afternoon, as the anticipated DD2 final began. Interestingly, Odendaal had a full set of new MOJO D3 tyres, whereas Thum had only two, having used the other two of his new set in the pre-final. The South African led from the lights and never looked back, as he stayed out of reach from his rivals for the entire 17 laps of the long circuit, setting the quickest time on his sixth lap. An early collision on the notorious turn 2 shuffled middle-order positions with some of the former Euro prizewinners losing too much ground to recover. Rossi, Kraihamer and Barten were mixing it at the front, joined soon after by Davide Favaro (Parolin Racing Team/Parolin), who moved through to P4. By lap 3, current Masters World and European number one Dennis Kroes (Arrow Europe/Arrow) sitting in 12th looked set to take the class win in the DD2, but was involved in an incident that ended his race towards just laps from the finish.

Thum tried but couldn't run Odendaal down, later saying he was lacking a little on power as the race progressed. Further back however, the racing was close and there were some fantastic battles raging as the pace-setters made their way through the field. It was an impressive drive from Italy's Daniele Maccini (TJ Emme/VRK) coming from

19th at the start to steal 3rd from countryman Favaro, as they got the chequered flag with a mere 18/1000ths the difference. Justin Allison (Kalman Motorsport/Birel) did well to take 5th, but it was Szczepanik on a mission from almost the last row and a time second-only to the winner Odendaal, who had an incredible result to take 6th. Rossi had to settle for 7th followed by lower-order drivers Riccardo Brutschin (Team Norbert Bruckner/CRG) and Tiago Ribeiro (Korridas/Intrepid) who closed in for P8 & 10, split by Vuillaume, who gained 13 positions during the 18 minutes of action-packed racing. Barten and Kraihamer fell off the pace in the final laps to be back behind Masters winner Danny Brand in 11th.

Odendaal was victorious in Spain without question, having held a comfortable lead just over three seconds, which was outstanding in such a competitive field. *"We took a gamble in the pre-final and it worked, but we still had to find that bit extra. I had saved my new tyres for the final and the kart was going very well. It's really a great result and I'm looking forward now to the next round in Italy!"*

Drama in the Max Masters Final makes winning even easier for Jerome Bourquard

It was Christophe Adams (GKS Gem Sport/Birel) who was both the quickest in Friday's timed practice to start from pole in the heats following and the most successful in the racing leading up to finals day. The Belgian was also doing twice as much driving as anyone else, doubling-up to compete in the Max Masters and Rotax DD2 classes at the round 1 event. He was joined on the front row for the pre-final Sunday by long-time arch rival Jerome Bourquard (BRK/Sodikart), so the first lap was bound to be nail-biting. Starting on the outside did Bourquard no favours; the French driver dropped some places as Steve White (SMP Racing/Intrepid) pushed passed and slotted into 2nd ahead of Goncalo Gaivao (Sportkart/CRG) and Ikuta Katsuhisa (Protrain Racing/Gillard).

The dicing for positions got pretty intense between the drivers from up to P7 during the 14-lapper. Just over half way, Bourquard and Gaivao went head-to-head in the fight for 2nd, seeing them leave the track and Bourquard rejoin ROF, but the Portuguese pilot's race was finished with six laps still remaining. Although Adams was far from being the fastest in the pre-final, he had the benefit of the breathing space due to the ongoing challenges for minor placings. White was handed a clear 2nd with a gap to Rui Viera (Korridas/Intrepid), who'd worked his way up from row 5, closely followed by Pedro Loures (JPL Consulting/Intrepid) and the Japanese driver Katsuhisa. Bourquard clocked the best lap near the end of the race, managing to come through to 7th.

The final was shaping-up to be an interesting one, as Adams kept his lead ahead of White, who had looked for the opportunity to overtake on lap 1. Nuno Santos (Sportkart/CRG) and Viera were unable to prevent Bourquard from passing as he hunted down the front-runners. In a controversial moment on the following lap, Adams came under fire from White and did his best to cover his race line, but the pair collided and Adams spun at the second corner. White's newly gained lead was ended abruptly when he was given the harsh penalty of being excluded, as the black flag signalled his punishment. Bourquard, almost in disbelief in seeing the officials' reaction, set-into keeping his momentum to be assured of taking the honours in the Masters class.

A determined Katsuhisa moved into 3rd in front of Gaivao, while Viera looked confident of a possible podium finish in 2nd. It all came to a disastrous halt for the former Masters champ when a wheel went bouncing past him at the far side of the circuit. Loures then swapped places with Gaivao for P3, chasing Katsuhisa. A late campaign by Gerry Hargitai (Hargitai Racing/Birel) saw the Hungarian driver join the foursome from Portugal in the top 6, going on to claim a place from Santos soon after. With only two laps left, Katsuhisa seemed to slow, which let Loures and Gaivao take 2nd and 3rd. Hargitai also overtook, but the Protrain driver made a comeback for his position, unfortunately overshooting the mark and rolling off the edge of the track. Luckily he was only shaken a little and more disappointed by the loss of his Masters trophy. Santos snatched back 4th and Hargitai came home in 5th. Afonso Gomes (RS/Tonykart) was 6th, with Katsuhisa classified 7th to Viera, then Anton Chupinin (Promarmatura/Zanardi) and Christophe Adams making up the first 10 although he'd already come into the pitlane.

Bourquard is no stranger to the podium and hopes he can find the luck this year to be the Masters Champion. He was fastest once again in the final, with the best laptime for the class on the day. *"It was difficult to make the set-up for this track, but we found it in time for the pre-final today. The issue between the two drivers in front of me in the final let me take first without having to fight for it for the win. I just took my time at the start of the race and waited for the right moment, as I knew I was fast and wanted to make no mistakes. I'm happy for Sodikart to win the first race of the season with their new 2009 chassis. It's a great beginning for me in the championship, but I know from past years that every weekend is different. The last round in Salbris will be to my advantage though."*

If the first event on the Euro Challenge calendar offers any indication of what is yet to come, the close competition will undoubtedly continue to push the level of the Max racing even higher this year. Round 2 of the Rotax Euro Challenge will take place at Kart Planet, Busca (Cuneo), Italy from May 27 -31 and with 14 invitations up for grabs for the winners from engine manufacturer BRP-Powertrain, Austria, it's bound to be another excellent event.

All the race results from the recent Euro round in Spain can be found by going to www.rgmmc.com and clicking on the *Kart-Data Live Timing* logo. Championship points will be updated on the homepage with the info listed under "Results" for RACE 1. There's also a link to the new *RGMMC IP TV* for a selection of short videos with interviews and lots more from around the paddock, plus the 2009 Rotax Winter Cup and racing from the recent seasons of the Euro Challenge as well. The direct link is www.kartworld.tv

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