

them is racing in America and the other I'm talking to right now! The worst people I find to talk to have been racing J's or Clubman, they've never really won anything and they're wanting you to give it all to them for nothing. It's hard to explain to them 'you're dreaming'.

So often I've seen people who have a reasonable amount of talent go and spend two years driving absolute dog equipment that they're never going to win with, only because they're getting it for nothing. That's two years of their life (wasted). They're still paying to go to all the race meetings, accommodation, tyres, engine rebuilds etc, so they've saved maybe \$3500 on buying a kart which, if they bought it, they'd get most of their money back when they sell it anyway. To me this is a ridiculously stupid financial decision yet time and time again I see it happen.

If you are running CIK, the price to run last and the price to come first isn't really that different and the people expecting to get everything for nothing are in for a rude shock. The ones that are running up the front of the field have usually got some sort of team support but they're still paying their own bills."

What about karters who have 'made it'. How do you regard them?

"I always rate the drivers who have been away overseas the highest. I think it takes some real guts and commitment to go and race in Europe, learn another language and live by yourself. In the last ten years we've seen firstly Jon Targett go away. He's a driver that doesn't seem to have much recognition in Australia but the guy's won at Formula Super A level. There's James, Ryan Briscoe, Ben Horstman, Troy Hunt - they're all drivers that in any form of motorsport would be good. I mean, the fact that someone like Jon Targett comes back to Australia and owns a newsagency, to me, is just a waste of talent. I've seen a lot of people who have progressed into cars who have got nowhere near the talent of any of those sort of drivers and I would hope that when someone like Ben comes home it's to get a drive in something.

To me it's interesting to see people who when they raced karts they crashed all the time, now they're in cars they do exactly the same thing. It staggers me when some of the people that put drivers into cars don't check on the driver's background because what you see in karting is what they're going to get. If they're genuinely good in karting, they're genuinely good. If they're average in karting, no matter how much money you throw at them, they'll be average in cars."

How close were you to getting Senna to race at the Castrol Kart Prix in 1985?

"People probably find it hard to believe but there was a genuine chance. I knew the people at DAP and they said they were coming over so I asked if they thought there was any chance of getting Ayrton Senna to come - bear in mind that he was only just in Formula One in those days. So Angelo

gave me a number in England to ring, which I did. I was expecting to get a secretary but this guy answered the phone. I said 'can I speak to Ayrton please'. The guy said 'yeah, speaking'. Well I just about fell off the chair. Once I got my head back together, I explained what we were doing, it was in his off season, Angelo of DAP would supply all the gear and the mechanics, would he be interested? To my surprise he said he was very interested and gave me all these phone and fax numbers including his home number in Brazil and another one in England. DAP then spoke with him, and I spoke with him again and with his manager in Brazil and all the way along they were keen to race, on the one proviso that he didn't have to do any Formula One testing in the same week. But then as the date got very close Lotus said they wanted to go testing that week so that was the end of it.

We went through a similar exercise with Tony Kart and Michael Schumacher. They said it might be possible to get Schumacher to come out to Australia at the end of the year ('96), but you mustn't talk about it. I didn't take this too seriously but then they rang and said 'we have another big secret, as well as coming to Australia he's racing for us at Monaco, but you're not allowed to tell anyone'. That's a secret that's pretty hard to keep! Then he raced at Monaco and I thought, hang on, maybe this is all for real. He was all set to come for Oceania in January but then Dekra his sponsor put on an indoor meeting the same weekend."

Why do you import Kosmic in addition to Tony Kart?

"Kosmic was started for the Japanese market because Tony Kart felt they could get another part of the market if they made another brand of kart. There's plenty of car manufacturers who do the same thing. They decided to launch a second brand with different shape karts, different colour and an identity of it's own for people who don't like green or don't like Tony Kart or just want something different. There's now quite a following for Kosmic and it has it's own supported team here as it does in other countries. Tony Kart also make a third kart, the Trulli Kart, but there is just one open tyre model."

Is Rotax MAX a good thing?

"I think it's a good thing for what it was designed for, although I'm not so sure Rotax ever envisaged it being a national championship class. I think the concept has been fantastic for a certain part of karting, and some of the drivers will gravitate into normal competition karting which is great. It's only a matter of time before Vortex and all the other manufacturers have a similar style engine."

If a 10 year old rookie driver came up to you and said "I want to be a World Champion for Tony Kart", what advice would you give them?

"That's pretty hard because I think all 10 year olds want to be World Champion. It's not until you get

older that the reality checks start to come in. I've had a few people at 12 or so who have come to talk about their future and I think by that age you can start to tell if they have the potential to go on. Firstly, it's motorsport and motorsport is expensive. Unless they can afford to do it at a reasonable level there's no point in really pursuing them too far. That may sound pretty harsh, but that's the reality of it all. Karting is fairly affordable motorsport but it doesn't come cheap at the top level. The second thing is what sort of commitment do their parents want to make? Not just financially but in terms of support because it's a sport that regularly takes you away for weekends and creates some hardship in the form of schooling.

Unfortunately in karting even the most talented of people need the breaks or some money somewhere along the line and when they get to 18 or 19 years old often their parents say 'well I've spent enough, now you'll have to do it yourself'. It's the watershed period and a lot of talented drivers disappear at that stage. It's the normal weeding out process and the ones that have got the dedication will get through it somehow or other but not everyone's got that dedication or desire."

What's with all the music emanating from the Tony Kart transporter on race mornings?

"The music! We have a CD player in there and I've always had a bit of a passion for things Italian. All the drivers like to play their own 'music', so that usually goes on after practice and they can play whatever they like. Sunday morning I put on something like The Three Tenors. It tells the drivers it's time to get serious and focus on what we're trying to achieve here. It gets up everyone's nose in the adjoining tents, but it's party music after practice and Pavarotti before racing!"

A lot of people regard you as the person who took karting from a club pastime to 'the next level' by managing a professionally run and presented team with its own truck, pit annex etc. Did you ever received negative feedback because of this?

"Over the years we've copped plenty from negative people who think it's a bit over the top, but not much now. Often when we went to a normal AKA meeting, anyone who had a truck had to park as far away from the track as possible. This was the complete opposite to Europe where they were trying to promote the sport and put the best teams and biggest trucks around the edge of the track to make it look better for the media. It's part of the future and we have to make the sport look like it's got something to offer by looking professional. If people want to knock you for it, too bad."

TONY//KART

APS Racing Series - Rnd 3 Formula A
2000 WORLD CHAMPIONS



RV Engines

VORTEX BRIDGESTONE rvengines.com

RV Engines 32 Cresthill Ave Regents Park, Queensland, 4118 Ph: 07 3800 3773 Fax: 07 3800 4895 Email: ralph@rvengines.com



APS Racing Series - Rnd 3
Intercontinental A

YAMAHA **MAXXIS**