

The MAX

Column

by George Robinson

A very welcome guest to the Warden Law round of the Rotax Super 1 was Paulo Mantese from Vega. This was his first visit to a race meeting here in the UK and he has promised it will not be his last. The weather was dry for the main part of the weekend and this meant that the dry tyres that have been the subject of conversation and conjecture of late were in use for the whole of Saturday and Sunday. There were no reported problems with the supplied race tyres.

It was interesting for Mr. Mantese to meet a lot of competitors and team managers, all in all a very positive visit. The UK is an important market for tyre companies and tyres are an area of the sport that can be very political. They will always be a bone of contention, if only people would realise that there will always be variation in every element of the equipment used for racing. It amazes me that tyres are generally as consistent as they are today and as cheap. Honestly we've never had it so good, I can remember paying up to £150 per set that were scrap after a handful of laps.

If some of the energy expended complaining about the equipment was invested in training the drivers to do a better job, the sport would be so much the richer. Will someone please tell those Juniors that a contact lap is a slow lap! While there was some great racing there was also some very low quality driving, long faces and damage. On a positive note the club did a great job and everyone was cheerful and helpful.

The Rotax factory have introduced a few changes to various engine components. Firstly, the clutch assembly has received an improved support plate. The new plate is 1.5mm thick and the clutch shoes have been thinned down by 0.3mm in order to accommodate this. The clutch backplate remains unchanged dimensionally. The fulcrum pins on the backplate are slightly changed as well. These measures are to improve the reliability of the clutch where the biggest single failure is breakage of the fulcrum pin. These usually have a good life in terms of hours of use but can break spontaneously. The clutch shoe then jams causing the engine to be locked in gear.

There is a new type thinner support plate for use with existing clutch shoes, this plate is the same thickness as the outgoing zinc

plated item but is a better material with a phosphate finish to improve reliability. There is also a small change to the new production cylinder barrels. The sealing area for the exhaust flange is now fully machined. This has been introduced to improve the efficiency of the leak down tests carried out by the factory on assembly.

There is also a new gear cover on the way. While the old one was sand cast the new type is die cast and has several new features such as a cast impulse fitting and a separate screw purely for checking the oil level.

Since the introduction of the improvements to the starter motor, I have not heard of any failures of the live carbon brush wire. It is now permitted to put some silicone gasket onto the vulnerable braided copper wire where it is joined to the brass terminal. This reduces the vibration damage almost to nil. It is still worth checking the starter from time to time but the majority of the old problems have now gone away.

There is definitely renewed interest in the DD2 class that started life as the RM-1. The new enthusiasm comes from the introduction of the engine as a separate unit. Mainstream chassis manufacturers are now producing karts to accept the DD2 engine with its 40mm axle passing through the back of the gearbox. Here in the UK we can soon expect to see karts from Gillard, CRG, PCR, Birel, Haase and Arrow taking to the tracks, DD2 powered. This may well be the impetus the concept needs to really get it kickstarted in this country.

Darrell Smith, the Rotax official test driver, looks set to get back into competition with a well sorted team for the 24 hour at Le Mans. The Rotax factory are not calling this a works team but they are passively supportive of the project. The MAX engine is really ideal for this type of racing. Its reliability and ease of use are now really closing the gap to the more powerful Formula A engines. The grid at the 24 hour this year will number 40 and at least half of those are expected to be Rotax MAX powered. There will probably be about ten or a dozen full blown Formula A teams and the rest will be made up of the other 125 TaG engines such as the Leopard, Sonik, IAME X30 and the occasional Biland. Darrell has the support of Arrow Karts from Australia and will be running under the British umbrella that includes a couple of other teams. All three will be Rotax powered and will complete in the region of 100 hours running between them. The idea this year is to take the fight to the 100cc teams with our Rotaxes. For the first time ever I actually believe it is now possible to beat them. What a great feeling that would be!

There is now a lot of non-MSA racing taking place aside from practice and just leisure karting. A recent survey showed that about 35% of all MAX engines sold to date are being used for MSA racing. This means that the leisure and 'fun' racers are an important element of aftermarket business. The

question is how best to serve them. While the best of the MSA drivers racing at British Championship level believe that an engine should be fully rebuilt at 15-20 hours, there is a significant number of leisure karters who are regularly running their engines for 60 hours with no ill effects. I cannot recommend this, although these guys are out there proving it can be done.

to the editor

Sir,

I would appreciate it if you could let your readership know that I am acting as a coordinator for the TKM Festival for the specialist classes of 'Heavy' and 'Veteran' Senior TKM Extremes.

These classes have not been promoted over the last few years and so the odd driver who has decided to race in either of these categories has found themselves mixed in with the grids of regular Senior TKMs.

This year the progressive new committee at Hunts Kart Racing Club have agreed (subject to number of entries) to give the Veterans/Heavies grids split away from the lightweights. The classes will run to normal TKM Extreme rules with the following exceptions:

1 To qualify for the Veteran class a driver must be aged 40 years old or over on August 12th 2006.

2 To qualify for the Heavy class the driver must weigh a minimum of 80kg (including all race gear) and the total weight of the kart and driver at the end of each race must be a minimum of 163kg.

I personally qualify for both of these classes but have decided to run as a 'Heavy'. My only interest here is being able to race against others at the Festival without the penalty of being both old (!) and substantially over the minimum class weight.

I would ask that anyone who might consider entering the TKM Festival (August 12/13th at Kimbolton) in either of these specialist classes drop me a short email to kartingpete@hotmail.com expressing their interest. There is no commitment at this time but it would be nice to be able to judge an interest level.

For anyone who has never come to the Festival, I can promise it really is an exiting and fun event with all drivers taking part in practice, a qualifying session which in actual fact just gives heat points towards final grids, three normal heats and then a Pre-Final and Grand Final.

Yours sincerely, Peter Rankin