

Go-kart star aims to make the grid

Fuelled by personal encouragement from three times F1 champion Max Verstappen 16-year-old Trinity Academy student Rachel Robertson is revving up to take the traditionally male world of go-karting by storm.

Rachel, who began racing go karts competitively just over 18 months ago, has made such rapid progress that on 21 April, at the PF International Circuit, Lincoln, she will contest her first British Championship race in the Senior Rotax class.

That will mean crossing swords with fellow competitors who have been behind the wheel for up to 10 years but Rachel is unfazed.

She says: "I'll be one of the only girls and I'll be racing against some incredible drivers but I know I'm fast enough to compete near the front.

"I know I'm going to keep getting better and I'd love to progress to race professionally at the highest level.

It is an indication of her talent and swift progress that Rachel was identified as part of a group invited to meet Verstappen at a collaboration between Red Bull and Honda Europe.



Rachel gets some inside track from three time F1 world champion Max Verstappen whose mother, Sophie Kumpen, was a top class go karter and dad Jos an accomplished F1 driver.



With Leith garage owner Robert Doig who has been teaching Rachel mechanical skills
Dad Colin explains: "The call came out of the blue and I was asked if Rachel was ok to come down to Formula Fast Karting,

Milton Keynes, and help Red Bull Honda Europe tell the story of how things start for many drivers.”



Rachel shows her competitive style that has made her a hot property in go karting

British world champion Lewis Hamilton started in go karting and coincidentally has hailed Larkhall, where Rachel races, as his favourite track.

“A non disclosure contract was initially involved and when Rachel arrived Max Verstappen was there to offer words of encouragement.”

Now Rachel has hopes reinforced that she might follow in the tyre tracks of fellow Scot Susie Wolff, from Oban, who progressed from karting to Formula 3 and is now managing director of the F1 academy.

But how did this remarkable journey start for Rachel?

“I always loved scooters, bikes and driving games growing up and when I was aged 8 I remember asking my dad to take me go-karting. He took me to a place called Race Land near Tranent which was great but after I went a few times it shut down and we didn't find anywhere else.

“When I turned 14, I asked my dad to take me again. This time we went to Xtreme Karting at Newbridge. I loved it. The team there said I should try outdoor rental karts at Larkhall and, after a few months, I was winning competitions against drivers much older and experienced than me.

“The next big jump was to get my own kart and start racing in the owner kart competitions in Scotland. My dad and I didn't really know what we were doing at first but we learned quite fast and joined a team, LM Motorsport.

“I started podiuming in some of the Scottish races after only a few races so we made a decision to start competing at a UK level. I joined an English team, Guy Cunnington Racing, and, less than a year after I got my own kart, I competed in the British Kart Championships against some of the best drivers in the world my age.”

One of these opponents was Thomas Bearman, younger brother of Oliver, the 18-year-old who debuted for Ferrari in the recent Saudi Arabian grand prix and finished seventh.

Colin Robertson is well aware of the pitfalls to be overcome, not least financial, but this Edinburgh accountant has willingly joined in the quest by serving as mechanic, driver, etc.

“It shouldn’t be possible for Rachel to compete as well as she does after such a short space of time and she is getting better all the time in trying to create awareness and attract sponsorship because it is an expensive sport.

“A new kart can cost around £4000 with the engine about £2500” says Colin who has had to invest in a van and adds:

“Tyres are also expensive – about £200 – and on occasions we have had to practice with used tyres which can take a few 10ths of a second off lap times whereas wealthier rivals are much better placed with budgets that can reach hundreds of thousands of pounds.

“However, before taking the plunge there were plenty of assurances from experienced people in go karting that Rachel was exceptionally quick from the start so she is giving it a go with a back-up plan in place.”

If a professional career doesn’t follow then a job as a mechanic holds appeal to the extent of undertaking work experience last month with local garage Doig Motor Engineers, Leith, where she impressed owner Robert Doig, who says:

“It’s been great being able to support Rachel on her motorsport journey. She’s obviously a very talented driver but we’ve been really impressed at her mechanic-ing skills while she’s been with us for work experience. She picks things up so quickly and I’m sure she could be a top mechanic as well if she wants to be.”