

**ROOKIE TALE**

**CHRIS ‘CHIPPY’ WESEMAEL**

It's quite an achievement to take pole position on your series debut. It's even more impressive when it's your first ever race car meeting. Sadly, snow prevented Chris Wesemael from lining up first at Donington Park in March last year, but the now 23-year old had made his mark on the 750 Motor Club's RGB Sports 1000 series.

He continued to do so throughout the season, taking three wins and finishing runner-up to two-time RGB champion Billy Albone in the standings. Not bad for a rookie who had only competed in karts before 2018.

Wesemael believes key to his success was preparing ahead of the weekend, not necessarily through testing but making sure he knew which direction the circuits – which were all new to him – went.

“I got some footage from Scott [Mittell, 2015 RGB champion] himself from his seasons before most meetings,” he says. “Especially at the start of the season I went on the simulator games, like Aspetto Corsa, anything like that. I've done thousands of laps before I turn up for a race meeting on those things. While it doesn't simulate where I'm braking or anything like that, it shows me where the corners are. So when we turn up to go qualifying I don't have to worry about learning the track as much.”

Wesemael's very impressive rookie season wasn't without its mistakes and mishaps. He stalled on the grid at Croft as he wasn't familiar with the starting procedure, which differs between the two RGB races every weekend, and felt he lost a win at Brands Hatch after losing time in traffic when lapping slower cars. Both are things he intends to improve on ahead of his return to the series in 2019. “Race weekend format and traffic management for me were the two things that as a rookie were very evidently things I need to work on,” says Wesemael.

And despite battling hard at the front, he believes there remains a friendly nature and camaraderie within the RGB and other paddocks, which is something new drivers should attempt to become part of. “I think the community of club-level racing is what makes it great and everyone always seems willing to help anyone as much as they can,” he says. “Asking questions is another thing, I think. Not being afraid to ask questions, even if you think the question is silly.

“There are no stupid questions as far as I'm concerned in racing because everyone does something slightly different than everyone else, and no one will ever help you if you don't tell them you've got a problem.”

**STEFAN MACKLEY**



## IS KARTING THE RIGHT FIRST STEP FOR YOU?

Karting may be the entry point for many into the world of motorsport, but that doesn't mean would-be drivers can simply turn up and compete. Just like car racing and rallying, there are certain steps that need to be taken first.

“People tend to think they can buy a kart, go to a kart track, go round and that's it,” says Nigel Edwards, championship director of Karting UK, the motorsport governing body's new karting division.

Instead, Edwards says it's important that prospective drivers take stock and assess if karting is really for them.

Visiting local kart clubs is

the traditional route into the discipline, allowing drivers to view the classes available – with those aged six to over 66 catered for – but Edwards reckons getting behind the wheel at an indoor ‘arrive and drive’ event can be even more useful as it provides the chance to try karting out without needing a licence.

“You can head to your local club to have a look at the different categories, but if you want to get your bum on a seat to see if it's something you want to do, the first port of call would be to go to one of the indoor facilities,” he says.

For those who are interested, the next step is to pay the £66 fee to

get a ‘Go Karting’ starter pack, with the ARKS (Association of Racing Kart Schools) test the next item on the agenda.

This can be undertaken at ARKS centres throughout the country, some of which can be found at kart tracks, others at racing circuits (such as Thruxton and Castle Combe) and the rest at bespoke facilities.

Edwards compares the test to getting your road licence, as it features theory and practical segments. And you don't need your own kart.

“It can be pretty much done in a day – for the theory you sit down in a classroom and that

takes about an hour or so,” he explains. “Then with the practical you're put with a karting examiner and they will monitor you throughout the session and give you some feedback. At the end of the day it's a benchmark, normally within 10% of an average lap time [that you need to achieve to get the licence]. They're not looking for the ultimate lap time.

“That would give you a probationary licence and then you have to get six signatures from events to get your full licence. “You need to do the test to make sure you can go on a track safely and you're not a hindrance to others.”

Despite the large age range of karting competitors, the test is pretty much the same for all but is “tweaked a little bit for young kids”.

Edwards then recommends joining your local club, but warns against rushing to progress too quickly through the ranks.

As well as karting, under-15s can also get a taste for driving through the Under 17 Car Club's events that allow youngsters to develop their driving skills in a non-competitive environment. Meetings are held throughout the country.

**STEPHEN LICKORISH**