



McGuire: I'll remember that weekend forever.

Max McGuire has described his maiden Playstation Ginetta Junior Championship outing as 'just the most amazing feeling' – though he nearly didn't get to race at all.

The Altrincham ace – at only 14 the youngest driver in the open-top sportscar series, a regular fixture on the British Touring Car Championship bill and as such benefiting from extensive live coverage on *ITV4* – signed a late deal to compete in the championship with Tockwith Motorsport, and as such had precious little time to get in gear before the first round of the 2008 campaign at Brands Hatch.

"It was all a bit of a whirlwind really," he reflected. "We didn't even know we were doing it until a few weeks before I did my first test in the car. We had test sessions at Mallory Park and Croft, I took my ARDS test at Silverstone with the legendary Barrie 'Whizzo' Williams, and then there I was sitting on the grid in front of 30,000 touring car fans at Brands Hatch!

"I knew I perhaps wasn't as well-prepared as a lot of the other drivers were, but I was really looking forward to it. It was just all such an amazing experience."

Though a BTCC enthusiast, Max confessed to not having been able to follow the championship regularly in the past because of clashing karting commitments in BRDC Stars of Tomorrow, the same series that set a certain Lewis Hamilton on the fast track to future Formula 1 glory. Having previously been used to catching all the action on the annual end-of-season DVD, he now found himself very much up close and personal.

"We arrived halfway through Friday in the pouring rain," he recounted, "and the paddock was absolutely heaving. We were the last session out for practice, and we were on the circuit for an hour which was pretty tiring.

"It dried out towards the end and because I had done a track day there before I was fifth-fastest. I was looking to be competitive over the weekend, but then everybody else seemed to find more time and I didn't so I slipped back."

The weekend was certainly not without its dramas, as characterised by Ginetta owner Lawrence Tomlinson sending a helicopter all the way up to the factory in Leeds to bring back some seatbelts that would fit. Max had practised with the belts from the 2006 Le Mans 24 Hours GT2 class-winning Panoz Esperante GT-LM – the only ones that, given his small frame, would fit the HANS safety device in the car – but when the stewards professed themselves unhappy with this somewhat mix n' match arrangement, an alternative solution had to be found to allow him to continue with his weekend. And so the helicopter was deployed.

"Qualifying was my first time out in the wet in the Ginetta," the Altrincham Grammar School for Boys pupil went on. "I was just thrown in at the deep end, and because we run road tyres on the car rather than slicks or wets, you're really on the edge all the time when it rains.

"I thought I did pretty well – there were some places where I just wanted to stay on the track because of how wet it was! I was up in about twelfth place at one point, but then the red flags came out and we all only got one lap more at the end, and I fell back to 15th."

Habituated to rolling starts from his karting days, prior to the weekend Max had only done three practice starts at Tockwith's private facility, but the Yorkshire venue's flat surface was rather different to the undulating nature of Brands Hatch – as he found out when the lights went out in race one..."

"In the first race I didn't even know what the start was going to be like," he admitted. "I got into my position on the grid after the warm-up lap, put it in first and then started rolling forward. I ended up messing it up and losing a few places."

"I made it back to 17th at the flag, and to be honest I was just happy to have finished my first race. I had just wanted to get round and get it under my belt, and then I would have a better idea of what to expect for the next time."

"In the second race I made a much better start, and was up to 13th by the first corner. As the race went on quite a few drivers had spins, and when that happens the ex-karters automatically go to the inside to avoid a collision. Thanks to all my karting experience I got up into eighth, then the safety car came out three times..." "With all the drivers bunching up together, the result was that Max got swamped by his more experienced rivals on the last re-start, losing a whole handful of places in the process, but he insisted afterwards that he had been encouraged by his debut weekend. He did exactly what the team had asked of him – in bringing the car home both times – and kept admirably calm throughout in what was arguably the most high-pressure situation of his racing career."

"I was pleased to have finished again and to have got as high as eighth," he mused, "but I was unhappy that the final result suggested I hadn't made any progress from my grid position."

"I definitely learned a lot, and I will remember that weekend forever. At the end of the race I got out of the car and took my helmet off, but I couldn't get out of the awning because there was just a sea of photographers. They were all pointing cameras in our faces and shouting 'look over here!' I was like 'woah, calm down!'"

"It was just the most amazing feeling, really cool. It makes you feel so professional and want to be there so much. I signed a few autographs, but the one that meant the most to me was a young boy – about eight or nine – who asked me if I drove that car and if I would sign his hat, which had loads of touring car drivers' signatures on it. I was like 'nice one!'"

With a bumper 24-race schedule this year, Max is adamant he will be taking things just one step at a time as he looks ahead, demonstrating a very mature head on such young shoulders.

"The aim is to carry on learning and improving little bits every time I go out there," he insisted. "I'm not going to click overnight and suddenly start winning – it's going to be progressive. It's going to be hard and there will be times when I fall down, but I'm just going to have to pick myself up and get going again."

To keep up-to-date with all Max's latest career news and results, please visit www.maxmcguire.co.uk

