

McGuire excited about making the step up

After being forced to prematurely draw the curtain on his karting career, Max McGuire is now eagerly anticipating the next challenge in his fledgling motor racing development – closed-top sportscars, where he will go up against none other than the son of Britain's last Formula 1 World Champion Damon Hill. The young Altrincham ace has been karting for almost five years since the age of eight, and in 2006 achieved success on European soil at Genk in Belgium, victory in the prestigious 'O' Plate meeting at Rye House in Hertfordshire and a superb fourth place in the BRDC Stars of Tomorrow Championship, the same series from which a certain Lewis Hamilton first sprang to prominence a little over a decade ago.

Last year he stepped up from cadets into the JICA category, and shone once more en route to an impressive seventh position in the end-of-season standings at his maiden attempt in the far more powerful class. Such was his potential, Max was swiftly signed up by leading outfit Millennium Motorsport to compete in JICA's new guise of KF3 in 2008, but the change in regulations for the new campaign also brought with it unforeseen complications for the Altrincham Grammar School pupil, who at just 35kg suddenly found himself too light to meet the minimum weight requirement for the new karts.

With that weight – driver included – to be no less than 145kg, a heavyweight suit, two layers of clothing, gaffer tape and 1kg weights attached to his ankles were still not enough to make up the difference in winter testing. After a special application to the ABkC – the sport's governing body – was refused on safety grounds, Max and his family found themselves forced to look elsewhere.

"It just didn't feel right," the recently-turned 14-year-old admitted. "I could barely walk with all this stuff on my body, and the kart wasn't handling like a kart should handle. We saw we were starting to go backwards, so instead of that we decided to get out and do something else. I always wanted to become World or European Champion in karting and I'll definitely miss the atmosphere, but it's just one of those things I've got to accept and move on."

That 'something else' will be a year's competition with Tockwith Motorsports in the highly-rated Playstation Ginetta Junior Championship – a series claimed by fellow regular Stars' front-runner Nigel Moore in 2007 and one that, as part of the prestigious British Touring Car Championship support bill, will receive national television coverage on ITV4 this year.

After initially eyeing a purely testing-based campaign, having decided to go ahead and race Max is now getting set to rapidly learn the gears, full-size UK circuits and general feeling of being behind the wheel of a car, with minimal opportunities to practice before the start of the season at Brands Hatch on 30 March.

"When I had my first test at Tockwith, I got to grips with driving the car and using the gears really quickly," the tin-top fan explained. "I didn't stall too many times and just concentrated on learning the track. After that I thought to myself 'if I'm going to be testing all year I'm going to get bored and want to race'.

"The fact I'm going to be racing in front of 40,000 touring car fans around Brands Hatch is just mind-blowing! The series is a great showcase, with all the team owners keeping an eye on the younger guys, and just to be doing this kind of thing at my age is amazing. I probably won't realise the full significance of it until I start the first race and go around the warm-up lap thinking 'Oh my God... 'c9'"

What's more, Max will be one of the youngest drivers in the series' history, and has resolved to give up his second love of rugby in order to focus wholly on his burgeoning motorsport career. Belying a rare maturity beyond his tender years, he is ready to learn and ready for the challenge that lies ahead, and looking forward to one day maybe following in the wheeltracks of such as current BTCC front-runner and 2001 champion Jason Plato, who was plucked from the supporting Renault Spider Championship to join the crack Williams-Renault squad in 1997, and has never looked back since.

"I'll just be taking every race at a time," Max reasoned, admitting to feeling both nervous and excited at the same time and particularly looking forward to discovering Silverstone and his home circuit of Oulton Park. "What's even better for me is that there's no pressure, because I can stay in the championship for up to three years. It's a whole new thing for me and I just want to learn.

"I think it's going to be very tough; it was going to be tough anyway, just getting used to the whole concept of driving a car rather than a kart. It's almost like starting again, but one good thing from having done karting is that I already have a fair amount of knowledge and racecraft. It's very exciting and I think it's going to be a really good experience."

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