

The Formula Kart Racing Florida Winter Tour presented by Tony Kart Florida rolled on this weekend as two days of Formula Kart racing put the first events of the 2009 FWT Formula Kart Championship into the history books. One hundred twenty-one drivers covered eight classes at Homestead Karting, and the facility was blessed with another fabulous weekend of weather. Ten different drivers from four different countries climbed to the top of the podium, and with four races down, Bill Wright is pleased with the start and looking forward to the next round in February.

“Given the concerns about the economy I’m pleasantly surprised at the numbers, and absolutely thrilled with the depth of talent” said Wright, exclusive owner and promoter of the Florida Winter Tour. “ We exceeded our expectations in every component. Based on the number of inquiries and requests I’ve received it looks like February will have bigger numbers and more big names. The Euro’s are coming!”

Also pleasing Wright was the continuing emergence of KF classes. Introduced in 2008, both KF2 and KF3 have experienced respectable growth and accounted for 25 entries per day this weekend. “Last year I worked very hard and spent a good deal of money to introduce the classes. This year I told the importers/manufacturers it was up to them, and so far they’ve done an excellent job. Andre Martins brought over the top people from Vortex to make sure the customer support was there. Peter De Bruin from PDB was here again supporting his people on the Parilla. Franklin had XTR representation. Vortex, conscious of the rumours of “suitcase” motors, publicly announced that any Vortex can be bought off any kart at any time for distributor cost. They stated that every motor there was straight out-of-the-box, with no upgrades, and I think that says a great deal about the program and it’s future.” he said. “ The competition got tighter as the weekend progressed, and I have no doubt this category will show even better racing in February.”

On the track, there were seven sweeps, including one that made Florida Winter Tour history as Alessandra Madrigal became only the second, and now most prolific female Finals winner in the history of the FWT. The J3 Competition/Kosmic driver swept TaG Junior on Saturday, and then backed it up with another sweep of the class on Sunday. Alex Speed, Jack Hawksworth, Gustavo Menezes and Santino Ferrucci were the others to run a perfect race-day, and eight more championships are underway.

Formula ProShifter - sponsored by Team pslkarting.com

ProShifter kicked off the schedule and provided a definite sign of things to come as Speed’s TonyKart edged Hawksworth’s Energy kart by the slimmest of margins: 0.003 seconds! The pair then battled for the top of the box through the remainder of the weekend. Jose Zanella made his presence felt in his ProShifter debut as the Venezuelan TonyKart driver actually took the prefinal lead in the early stages, but Speed duly took it back, and by half distance Hawksworth was back to P2 to set the front row for the main. The Brit then dropped a clanger at the start of the prefinal and slotted fourth behind Speed, Zanella, and Italkart’s Hayden Duerson. It was lap nine before he recovered to second, and Speed took note by dropping his fast lap to that point on ten. Hawksworth kept up the hunt, but he had to think as much about Zanella behind as he did Speed in front. The leader then found the groove and cruised home, punctuating the run with his best lap of the race on sixteen, which took him to the white flag, and ultimately the checker.

Hawksworth was second and Zanella completed the Saturday podium.

Kicking off the Sunday rotation Speed all but matched his pole time from a day earlier, but Hawksworth produced a blinding 45.308 to take pole position. He then went flag-to-flag in the prefinal to maintain the spot with Speed doing the same in second and Fritz Leesmann turning every lap in third. The lead pair then wasted no time in the feature as they had established themselves after the first flier with Hawksworth leading and Speed in tow. After playing lead-follow through the first half of eighteen laps, the pair then got down to business in the second, and blinding quick business it was. First Hawksworth dropped a 46.2 on lap ten, only to have Speed rebound with a 46.1 on eleven. Lap twelve settled nothing before they matched each other on thirteen. Hawksworth then put down the quickest lap of the race on fourteen when he timed 46.0, and while Speed wasn't gaining any ground, he wasn't giving any either. In the end they came side-by-side to the line, with Hawksworth winning by a nosecone. After sparring through the early stages, Leesmann completed the podium with Cody Hodgson fourth and Pier-Luc Ouellette fifth.

Formula KF3 - sponsored by International Racing

The second act was KF3 where twelve karts were chasing OGP/TonyKart driver Nick Neri from qualifying. Lead among them was fellow TonyKart driver Gustavo Menezes, with Alessandra Madrigal timing third and teammate Tristan DeGrand completing row two. The prefinal was unfolding much the same until Neri suffered a DNF working twelve and Menezes drove through the open door to secure pole for the main event. Madrigal was also there for second, while DeGrand had worked his way back forward after falling at the start. That cued the Saturday final where a quartet broke free at the front. Menezes maintained his pole, followed by DeGrand, Jack West and Pietro Fittipaldi da Cruz. As they worked through the first half, the lead pair slipped off the front and just as their shifter counterparts had done they set to settle matters in the back half of eighteen laps. First Menezes set his best lap of the race on ten, but DeGrand countered with the fastest lap outright on eleven. He was on the bumper of the TonyKart through twelve and stole the point working thirteen. The J3/Kosmic then worked free running to the flag, and DeGrand had the race one win by just over a second. Menezes then led in a trio of TonyKarts with West completing the podium and Fittipaldi crossing fourth.

Menezes, the most experienced with the category, having raced it in Europe in 2008, began Sunday with the KF3 pole while Neri was back in the action with second and DeGrand not far in third. Emerson Fittipaldi made an appearance just before the start of the pre-final to show support for his grandson Pietro, making his Junior category debut. Emo wasn't feeling too well but stayed around long enough to spend some time with the other KF participants. The front row held station through the prefinal, while DeGrand took third from Jaime Ortega after following him through the first half of fourteen laps. After a pair of waved starts, the third time proved the charm as Menezes took the lead with Neri and DeGrand running nose-to-bumper. The trio was inseparable and as one could expect, when Neri made a move for the lead beginning lap three, DeGrand was able to follow him through for second. They remained nose-to-tail until DeGrand suffered a DNF working six, and on the next tour Neri momentarily pulled off with a broken throttle cable, then soldiered on to an 11th place finish, operating the throttle butterfly with one hand and driving with the other. This gave Menezes a free reign, and he capitalized to win round two by over four seconds. All of the drama from that point on was centred on Madrigal. Sitting at

the back of the pack working out problems through five laps, the Kosmic pilot managed to right her situation and proceeded to uncork the fastest lap of the race on six. She cracked the top ten working seven, and took three spots on eight! Madrigal broke into the top five not long after and ran down Taylor Miinch to take fourth with two laps remaining. Biting as much as a half-second per lap out of those in front, she had just reached the tail of the line when Ortega took second and Fittipaldi the final podium spot. A thriller to be sure.

Formula KF2 - sponsored by Rvsa Racing

Matching his effort from ProShifter qualifying, Alex Speed put his TonyKart on pole in KF2 yet in much different fashion as the Californian was shaping to lay a beating on a big-name international field. Brazilian Victor Pedrosa was off-pole for OGP/TonyKart and leading Puerto Ricans Richard Benitez, third for J3 Competition/Kosmic; and Victor Cabrera, fourth with Team pslkarting.com. Joey Collins was on the inside of row three and Japanese driver Shinnosuke Iguchi was sixth. Nothing changed in the prefinal as the front five settled in quickly and crossed the stripe in the same order they began. The final though, shook things up. Through a couple of botched starts, Speed just couldn't find the launch he wanted and he continued to fine tune his carburetor into the race - falling all the way to the back in the process. He found the sweet spot on two, and the charge began. Meanwhile, Benitez was at the head of the pack as the field slotted into line. Pedrosa was second, but joined Speed at the back of the field on two allowing Cabrera into second and senior rookie Jarvis Gennari to third. Retirement shook the order again on six as a spark plug wire ended Gennari's run and Collins moved into podium position. By that time though, Speed was about ready to make his presence felt once again. He took third working eleven, and moved into second on fifteen as he consistently lowered the quick lap of the race. Benitez simply had too much time and opportunity though, and no mistakes were made coming in. Though Speed bit major chunks of time from the leader in the dying laps, and set the fastest lap of the race on the final tour, the Kosmic would not be caught, Benitez winning from Speed, and Cabrera completing the podium.

No such drama early Sunday where Speed took pole before winning the prefinal by nearly a second with fast-lap in his pocket. Then the formative stages of the main event were simply electric as Speed led into one with Gennari second. The senior rookie hounded the veteran, and took the lead on two as the top five karts raced in a train. They lost its caboose when Cabrera spun his way out of the line at the final turn, and two laps later Speed recovered the point to lead a TonyKart four-pack into the late laps: Speed, Gennari, Pedrosa and Collins. The leader slipped away to secure his second win of the weekend as the laps wound down while Pedrosa nipped second from Gennari in completing the podium.

Formula Comer Cadet - sponsored by Maranello Racing karts

The youngest of the charges in Florida put on a customary fantastic show and as expected produced some of the longest racing lines of the weekend. Colin Warren took the first pole of the season and added the first prefinal as well. In the Saturday main, the lead line was eight karts long from the drop of the green and one second on the clock covered it completely! Warren provided the engine through the initial stages before Austin Garrison took over and led it all the way to the white flag. Surely one of the pair was headed to victory, but it all went wrong in the final turn. Garrison was clinging to a winning bid when Warren rode up the back of him and both limped to within just a few feet of the finish line, stopping on the track, in the racing line. Both

drivers then caused some tense moments as they jumped out of their karts and desperately tried to drag their connected steeds across the line. Fortunately all the karts coming into the area saw the stranded pair. Into the void came Jimmy Cabrera, for Team pslkarting.com to take the checker ahead of Derek Sobel and defending class champion Santino Ferrucci.

The champ then had the broom out on Sunday, as he swept the day and added a win for his second podium. On pole ahead of Warren and Garrison from qualifying, Ferrucci then crossed first in an epic prefinal where all three crossed in less than a tenth! The situation resumed in the final where Sobel and Ashley Rogero joined the fray and through seven laps all five karts had a best lap time of 55.5 seconds. Garrison, in fourth, was the one looking to move. He reduced his quick lap on eight, and set the best lap of the race on nine looking to take a run at the win. On eleven he took third going into turn five, and then had second before hitting the back straight. As the white flag waved, he was taking a run at Ferrucci to kick off a wild final lap. Ferrucci held, through one, and they were nose to nose through parts of the lap before the champion took the checker; Garrison second and Warren third ahead of Sobel and Rogero.

Formula TaG Senior - sponsored by firstkart.com

Will Martindale took the first TaG pole of the season as the only senior kart to crack the 48-second bracket. The effort led a field twelve rows deep at the opening round. Edward Fortier had plans though, and after taking the lead from off-pole on the opening lap, never relinquished it over fourteen. Mike Giessen looked to be producing a similar act in second, but Martindale came back from what was fifth on the opening laps to take second on the final tour. Giessen took third, with Andrick Zeen completing the first two rows. The start of the main proved identical for Martindale as he fell to fifth. Fortier led proceedings until Martindale worked his way back and stole the lead working eight. Things got worse for Fortier late as both Pat Iannucci and Wes Philips got past - moves that actually set the podium, when the Tony Kart/Vortex of Martindale failed to make it through tech.

Iannucci began Sunday in the same spot, taking pole from Giessen and Fortier. Giessen then one-upped in the prefinal, only to meet the same fate as Martindale the day before and fall afoul in tech. That gave the main event pole to Fortier, with Cyndie Allemann also on the front row and the second row created by Sean Meier and Philips. This time the main was all Fortier as the Puerto Rican slipped his Arrow into the distance as Allemann and Iannucci had a massive scrap over the remaining podium steps. Allemann led to fifteen, but Iannucci countered and had the spot racing under the white flag. On the final lap, Allemann made good for second on the day for Maranello. It was an incredible race for the podium, and Giessen had one himself as he came from the back of the pack all the way to sixth.

Formula TaG Junior - sponsored by Franklin Motorsports

TaG Junior was all about Alessandra Madrigal. The Kosmic driver swept both days beginning with Saturday where she led every lap but one. She was the only kart sub-48 in the prefinal and was over four seconds up the road when Alex Baron and Taylor Miinch crossed in the heat race. In the main event, Miinch led the first lap before Madrigal resumed command. She led the rest of the way, another fast lap to boot, and was six seconds to the good over eighteen laps. The final proved doubly sweet for J3 Competition as Tristan DeGrand worked his way to the runner-up spot and Baron completed the podium for Sodi.

Sunday brought a new challenge as Birel driver Austin Self almost pipped the pole from Madrigal. The Texan then took the point on lap one of the prefinal, and held it past half until Madrigal swapped the spots. Miinch went the distance in third, and Top Kart driver Tyler Thomas did the same in fourth. The final was flag-to-flag Madrigal as she assumed control and never let go. The fastest lap of the race on seventeen confirmed the speed, and the margin was well over seven seconds. Miinch, Self and Thomas had a race-long scrap for the podium, crossing in that order on day two.

Formula Masters Shifter - sponsored by Grand Products
& Formula Stock Moto - sponsored by RDD Motorsports

Started “heads-up” but scored separately on Saturday, Brazilian Victor Carbone used his Legree Stock Moto package to post top qualifying time on day one ahead of Masters Shifter drivers Doug Cox and Jorge Fernandez. In the prefinal Carbone followed with the quick lap of the race, but Cox turned the tables to earn pole for the main event ahead of Carbone and Canadian Michel Legrand. The Martins also forced their way into play as Eduardo was fourth and Andre fifth. Further making the point in the main, Eduardo stormed all the way to victory. Second after the first lap, he followed Cox until half distance where the pair swapped and set the first two positions of the podium. Completing it on the first day was Canadian Masters Shifter Champion Denis Lechance. He had the spot through lap one, and kept it to the checker. Carbone took pole again on day two, but once again Eduardo Martins came calling, this day winning the prefinal from Legrand. He then took the checker for the second straight day as he went green-to-checker to win by two seconds. Andre Martins was second, and Legrand completed the podium.

The 2009 Florida Winter Tour Formula Kart event-weekends are now through the first two of six races. Discounted on-line registration is now open for the remaining rounds. Races three and four of the International Rotax Max Challenge set the Tour back in action beginning February 13th at Homestead Karting. For all the latest news and information, please visit www.floridawintertour.com