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Mooresville Little 600 waves checkered flag for the entire community

By Michael J. Solender

PUBLISHED IN: Z COMMUNITY SITES | CABARRUS | NEWS

Celebrating motorsports in the Charlotte region for 30 years, the nonprofit 600 Festival Association annually organizes several free May events before the region's major NASCAR event, the Coca-Cola 600.

One event featured this week is the Little 600, at the GoPro Motorplex in Mooresville on May 20.

Last week, at the GoPro complex in a Little 600 prequalifying event, this writer got a personal introduction to just how much fun it can be to take a few laps along Glory Road, side by side with 30 media colleagues.

Though it was early May, it already was 90 degrees when I arrived at the track, a Grand Prix-style course with 11 turns that looked like tangled spaghetti making up the 0.7-mile course.

The slightly sweet, acrid scent of freshly laid rubber lingered a bit in the swampy, humid air as I donned a protective collar and race helmet.

Sweat immediately began forming on my brow. I began to empathize with the big boys (and girls; don't forget Danica Patrick) and the heat they face when riding much bigger machines for much bigger stakes.

Advice from NASCAR pro

Earlier, Michael McDowell, a NASCAR Sprint Cup Series driver and Huntersville resident, welcomed us to the track and provided a few tips on successfully navigating our Sodi Racing Karts – 13-horsepower four-stroke-engine vehicles – for the day.

McDowell has been a karting enthusiast from an early age and was a key driver in the development of the GoPro Motorplex.

- Want to go?

What: The Little 600 GoKart Race.

When: 4 p.m. May 20.

Where: GoPro Motorplex, 130 Motorplex Drive, Mooresville.

Admission: Free.

More information: <http://600festival.com>.

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“It boils down to one key bit of advice,” said McDowell, breaking into a wide grin: “Keep on the black stuff and keep off the brown stuff, and just have a good time.”

The group ostensibly was assembled to compete for one spot in the upcoming Little 600, a 15-lap go-kart race featuring NASCAR superstars Kasey Kahne, Denny Hamlin, Kyle Larson, Michael McDowell, Justin Allgaier, Ryan Truex, Ross Chastain, Ryan Blaney, Darrell Wallace Jr. and many others.

2 inches off the ground

Most of us were there to have a bit of fun and gain an experience we could share with others.

Michaela Duckett is the features editor for the Charlotte Post. A first-time karter, like me, she admitted to being a little nervous but said she wasn’t going to let that stand in her way.

“We live in race city USA,” said Duckett. “I can’t live in Charlotte and not do some racing. I know this will be fun.”

And fun it was.

I was barely 2 inches off the ground when seated behind the wheel of the kart. The low center of gravity, wide wheelbase, padded bumpers and generously wide track allowed me to feel supremely safe and confident as I put my pedal to the metal.

The top speed of the karts is close to 60 mph, and while I felt like I was flying in the straightaways, the scoreboard told another story.

My best lap time was 84 seconds. My top competitor? 61 seconds.

At least I didn’t wreck.

Michael J. Solender is a freelance writer. Have a story idea for Michael? Email him at michaelsolender@gmail.com.



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