**ROTAX MAX READY FOR 2024 BLASTOFF**

*Regional seasons about to get under way across SA*

The South African Rotax Max Challenge karting season is about to get under way as record fields prepare to kick off their regional seasons over the next three weeks. As always, several driver movements up through the primary and high school classes and into the senior categories, will see a shake up in the racing. Some subtle rules changes meanwhile see to that safe, level Rotax Max playing field being maintained as ever through 2024.

As always, each driver’s National championship points, together with a contribution from his or her regional score in most classes, will qualify the champions to compete in the Rotax Max Grand Finals ‘Olympics of Karting’, which races in Sarno, Italy from 19-26 October this year. The wildcard African Open returns as always to give a second opportunity to drivers to qualify for the Grand Finals in most classes. Racing on the Sunday after the Killarney National, each driver's position from the Saturday National will count as his or her Sunday Open grid position.

In keeping with the Rotax Max philosophy of a safe, level playing field, those subtle rule changes have been applied across most classes for 2024. That includes an optional new engine cylinder introduced to all classes. Initially sold as a special discount to ensure an easy change, the new cylinder benefits latest casting and manufacturing techniques to ensure engine parity and durability, and an even better looking Rotax Max engine.

The 2024 Rotax Max karting season kicks off with the Western Cape regional opener at Killarney this Saturday 10 February. KwaZulu Natal follows a week later with its first round at iDube Sunday 18 February, and Gauteng gets going at Zwartkops on Saturday 24 February. The opening round of the 2024 Rotax Max National championship follows at Killarney on 23 March, before iDube in May, Formula K in Benoni in July and Zwartkops end-August.

Looking at the classes, premier DD2 drops 2 kilos to the 175 kg international limit. Cape regulars, SA champ Sebastian Boyd, Joseph Oelz and Jason Coetzee start their fight this weekend. Gauteng rivals Brad Liebenberg, Nic Vostanis, Jamie and Brandon Smith and Wayland Wyman will race upcountry. They will have Senior Max graduates, champion KC Ensor-Smith, Olerato Sekudu, Mo Wally and Cape lads Charl Visser and Ethan Stier to deal with, and prominent wildcard Nikolas Roos too, once the national battle commences.

The DD2 Masters madalas’ minimum weight increases 5 kg to the 180 kilogram international limit with only national championship rounds counting for their Grand Final qualification. It remains to be seen if Kyle Lawrence returns to defend his title, but a strong field of drivers has already registered, including Jozi men Bjorn Roos and veteran Philippe Chapat. They will have stiff competition from Cristiano Morgado and Jono Pieterse out of KZN, and Cape drivers including Conor Hughes Jared and Michael Jordan, and Andrew Thomas.

Besides that new cylinder, Senior Max continues unchanged into 2024. 2023 top three, KC Ensor-Smith, Troy Snyman and Mohammad Wally have once again booked black backed Senior Max numbers, as have Roshaan Goodman and Ethan Bostander. They have extra competition from former Junior Max kids, champion Kent Swartz, and Travis Mingay. And add circuit racing star trio Andrew Rackstraw, Charl Visser and Tate Bishop for good measure.

Under-15 Junior Max drivers must adhere to the class age limit to qualify for a special licence to race in the 2024 ‘Olympics of Karting’ in Italy. Cape lads Jordon Wadeley and Reese Koorzen, and Gauteng duo Amani Kinyua and Georgia Lenaerts continue in the high school class. They will face 2023 Mini Max top five, Jozi kids Caleb Odendaal, Kegan Martin, Spice Mailula and Emma Dowling, and WP lad Keagan Beaumont. Two Micro Max lads, champion Rafael Da Silva and Cristian Verheul may make a double step up too.

Under-13 Mini Max minimum drops 3 kilos to the 115 kg international weight, with a fixed 13:75 sprocket ratio and an 18 mm exhaust restrictor, while rear axle width allowance increases 3 cm to 113 cm. Third last year, Spice Mailula stays in Mini Max alongside Jozi rivals Durelle Goodman and Franco Gibhard, Jack Moore from the EP, and KZN lad Ryan Falconer. They race Micro alumni Ronaldo Koen, Brodi Dowling Cristian Verheul and Callum du Toit, and Cape graduates Aiden Beaumont Michael O’Mahoney and Zach McAuley.

Under-11 Micro Max will race with a fixed 14:75 sprocket ratio, while the new 2024 cylinder can be run with a Mini Max exhaust. With most rivals progressing to Mini Max, expect last year’s top Jozi lads Matthew Shuttleworth, Benjamin Gibhard and Luke du Toit, and Cape kids Jayden van der Merwe, Michael O’ Mahoney, Carter Cedras and Kiyaan Reddi to shine. They however have Bambino champion Adriaan Steyn and , as well as Slater Smith and Yaqeen Gamieldien keen to prove a point.

There’s also a new dawn coming in the baby Bambinos, where most of the top drivers from 2023 have progressed to Micro Max. Cape lad Slater Smith looks to be a fair bet for 2024 success alongside Jozi rivals Aston Verheul, Sebastien Shuttleworth and Alonzo De Oliveira. Also keep an eye out for Smith’s Province compatriots Yaqeen Gamieldien, Radhi Harris, Ebrahim Khalpey and Caleb Lingeveldt, and Connor Falconer out of KZN among a field of racing rookies out for the first time over the coming weekends.

“Rotax Max Challenge karting is growing from strength to strength in spite of a challenging general economic outlook,” series boss Ed Murray concluded. “So, 2024 promises a vintage karting year, starting with out first Rotax Max regional in Cape Town this weekend, through three mega local championships, four thrilling Nationals and the African Open, and on to the ‘Olympics of Karting’ Rotax Max Grand Finals in Italy in October. Bring it on!”