

TRACK TEST

FIRST MONACO

First Karts are an Italian product, the brainchild of former Birel design team member Gianni Bianchi. Their presence in Europe has gradually grown to the point where they are known and respected albeit as a relatively small producer when compared with the might of CRG, Birel or Tony for example. Ossy Yusuf is the British importer of First Karts and accessories. Having started in karts seven years ago and following a brief sojourn in Formula Ford 2000, Ossy decided to ally himself to one product and to put his effort behind it. After researching the market place both at home and abroad he plumped for First Karts. Ossy explained that he was very well received on his visit to the factory and had been able to strike up a good professional working relationship with Mr. Bianchi and his staff.

At present First Racing imports one model, the Monaco, which is suitable for Formula A, ICA, JICA, 100C and Formula Rotax. This chassis is common to their 125 model with a change of stub axles to incorporate front wheel brakes and the inclusion of clutch and gear levers. The kart is constructed from 30mm chrome moly tubing with a dismountable 32mm front torsion bar. The axle is supported in 3 bearings with a choice of axle stiffness to suit tyre and track



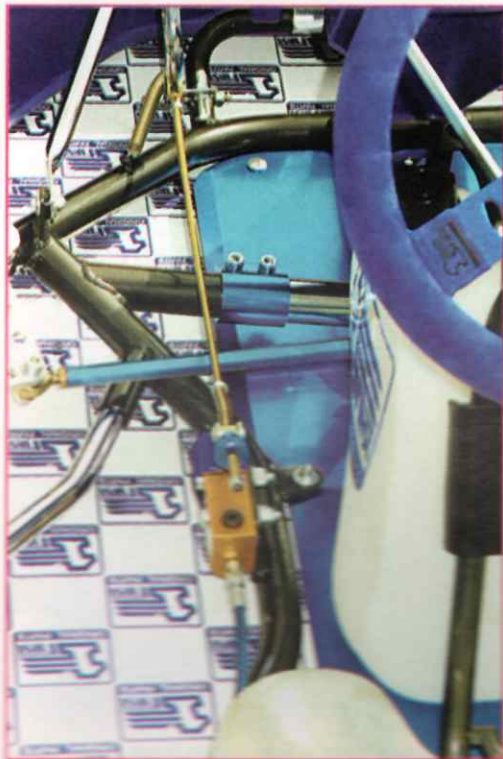
Ossy Yusuf and ICA team driver Steve Quaif (left) with the test kart

conditions. A nine litre quick release tank is supplied as standard which complies with current FMK regulations. The majority of components are produced in-house including sprocket and disc carriers, hubs, bearing houses and stub axle spacers. These are all finished in blue anodise. The chassis is a different shade of blue which added to the usual areas of chrome gives a very pleasing finished product all screwed together with the usual high level of Italian workmanship.

Lydd was the designated circuit for the test, fortunately the day was dry with warm sunshine, although there was a fairly strong cold wind blowing up the straight in your face. Ossy had brought along his ICA driver Steve Quaif who was busy running-in and setting-up when I arrived. The Monaco was set-up with Bridgestone YEQs, a Sirio Reed engine and 24mm Diamond carburettor. As Steve had already been out to warm everything up the only thing cold was me! Lydd is a favourite of mine so I was quite looking forward to my first foray onto the circuit. The YEQ tyres never give you any nasty surprises and always grip controllably throughout their lives. I found the kart immediately comfortable with the seat and steering wheel in just the right place but the pedals were a little too close which was soon rectified. So off we went towards the first chicane. The chassis soon proved to be a vice-free kart, the true worth of which was to be proven later.

We completed four test sessions on YEQs, each following a slight change in set-up and each rewarded with an improvement in lap times. The last lap of the last session was the fastest so there may well have been more to come. We then felt that we should move on to Formula A Dunlops which were bolted on without any change to the set-up. After 6 laps the outfit was quick and well balanced but with a slight tendency to understeer between the two apexes at the pit corner and also on exiting the far right hander before the jump. An extra spacer on each stub axle sorted the problem and the kart was now seriously good to drive. One 5 lap session returned competitive lap times that were still falling when we stopped. The Dunlops measured more than a centimetre smaller than the YEQs and so the gearing had become a little tall, the Sirio seemed to be near maximum revs at the start of the straight let alone the end. We needed to conserve some engine to test the beloved Vega XLL 100C class tyres!

We had made a proper professional decision to test the XLLs last since we really needed to get the good stuff done and dusted before going out to wreck the thing or send it into the lake with the fishermen! No change to the set-up and on to Lydd's version of holiday on ice. First lap, that fisherman is looking worried on the bank just before the jump. Lap completed, must get back to the pits in one piece, prize money to collect! 6 laps completed, while the sensation is completely different the lap times are only three quarters of a second slower than the



The Monaco has 30mm tubing and a 32mm front torsion bar

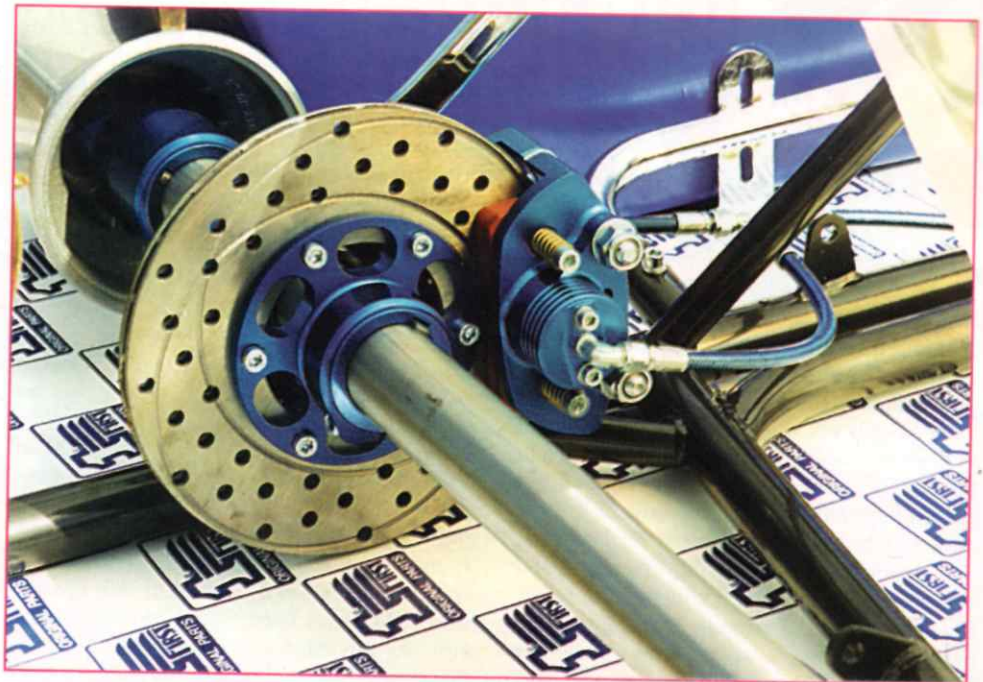
ICA tyres. The kart is dead easy to drive on these tyres, you only need to be half as fit as you do for Formula A.

I have to say that I was much impressed with this kart's ability to run well on all types of rubber. A kart that you can more or less set-up at home is usually the mark of a 'good-un'. The Monaco remained in very standard trim and small adjustments provided rewarding improvements. The test kart was not fitted with castor/camber adjusters but did have an Ackermann column with two ratio positions i.e. pick-ups for the track rods near to and far from the column centre line. This does have an effect and can help dial out mid corner twitchiness on fast sweeping bends. This type of corner is more common abroad but some further testing could prove its worth here in Britain.

While Ossy is totally committed to the success of his venture with First Karts, he is at present only importing the Monaco. There is a second model, the Monza, which is very similar but has 28mm tubing. Ossy wants to establish the Monaco in the market place before introducing the Monza which he feels would be a distraction at this stage.

The factory also believes that the Monaco is most suited to our classes. The majority of Italian karts in use in Britain currently are 30 or 32mm. Some are a mix of the two. Like so many of the imported chassis these karts come with a standard fibreglass seat. I am sure that many British drivers will want to upgrade to a covered seat from Tillett or one of their competitors. If I had a criticism of this test then the seat was probably the only thing I could complain about.

Although Lydd is reasonably smooth, the racing line involves judicious use of some of the kerbs. On Dunlops in particular you need to grit your teeth in a standard seat. Seven broken ribs are my only karting injuries so far! Luckily I did not add any more to my collection at Lydd. I think it was an interesting alternative to my usual tests where I usually try a variety of models. This test on just one kart with tyres for 100C, ICA and FA was worthwhile. I am sure that the kart would also perform well on the Formula



The brake looks the business and performed well too

Rotax MGs. Ossy was quite prepared to run on MGs but I feel that the Rotax MAX engine with its different power and weight characteristics needs careful setting-up. The First Monaco has all the necessary pedigree to be an ideal MAX donor kart.

From front to back the kart has a standard double loop of front bumpers to support the FMK type front spoiler. The pedals offer good lateral support and have properly machined spindles and bores. The floor tray is alloy. The stub axles are opposite to the norm in that the bearings are in a cylindrical sleeve on the chassis and the yoke is part of the stub. This changes the geometry dramatically when fitting castor/camber adjusters since the new axis of the kingpin moves with the stub rather than remaining fixed in the chassis. GoKart and Tecno use this method to good effect. The fuel tank is large at 9 litres and seems to have a good shape to reduce surge. The brake looks familiar and may come from one of the proprietary accessory manufacturers or

indeed could be an in-house product of a similar CNC programme. In any case the brake works very well fitted with hard pads. No wear took place during our test.

The steering wheel in blue suede stamped 'First' again may be home grown but looks 'Freelinesque'. The engine mount is standard Freeline and has a 10mm adjuster bolt coming from the right hand bearing housing. The seat stays are standard with the bottom supports coming back from the central cross bar which makes them easier to drill and you don't need a huge long bolt and stacks of washers. The rear bumper is produced at the factory for the British market and is different in its construction to others I have seen. It looks good and durable. Only time will tell if it's the exception to the rule that they break.

All in all a very tidy package which was a pleasure to test. Thanks go to Ossy and Steve. I wish them all the best. Taking on the establishment is no easy task.

Report & photos: George Robinson



Front stub axle arrangement



On ICA/JICA, 100C or FA tyres the Monaco was vice-free