

TRACK TEST

Spirit Evolution & Mike 6

I must be very fortunate to only be invited to test really good karts. I have been reflecting on the various track tests I have carried out over the past couple of years and without exception the karts have all performed very well. When comparing these karts to some of the horrible devices that I am occasionally invited to drive, to see what I think or sort the carburation for its hapless owner, I consider myself fortunate indeed.

Malcolm Budd of Kartell is both the manufacturer of Spirit Karts and the UK importer of Mike Karts from Italy of which more later. The Spirit is homologated for Formula TKM and Formula Yamaha and come in two models. The Meteor and the Evolution share the same basic chassis design, being 4 rail with a double bend towards the waist. This double bend is as pioneered by CRG and has since been adopted by many manufacturers. The Meteor is a 32mm chassis while the Evolution is 28mm and has proved to be the most suitable for the drivers racing at Super 1 events where there is much track conditioning rubber provided by the softer tyred ICA and Formula A classes.

The Spirit is very well presented with the chassis in gun metal grey and the usual areas of chrome plating. Alloy components are anodised blue. The fabrication of the chassis frame is undertaken by one of the proprietary British manufacturers and is of very high quality. There are different grades of tube for different areas of the kart, not surprisingly Malcolm was not too keen to define these specifically. The brake is of Italian origin and is similar to that fitted to the First Racing Monaco that I recently tested. This brake is good and certainly not one of the cheapest available. The rear bumper is an interesting design with the uprights from the bolt fixing sleeved over the main bumper rail. This I am sure much reduces the risk of



breakage and Malcolm reports no failures to date. The kart is supplied with Kart Component Jet wheels, a fibreglass seat, blue suede steering wheel and bodywork in the usual choice of colours.

Malcolm had kindly agreed to meet me at Lydd for this test, starting his journey from Somerset very early and doing battle with the M25 traffic just for me to indulge myself on one of my favourite circuits. Lydd is a well kept secret, we tested on a Tuesday and had the circuit to ourselves. How often can you get a string of laps together unspoilt by traffic? The circuit has a really good selection of testing corners, it is one of the few circuits where you have to balance the throttle on a 100cc kart in two critical places to get a good lap time.

The Spirit was equipped with one of Adrian Coles' Super 1 engines which ran perfectly. The tyres were in good condition, again ex-Super 1, and the gearing had been arrived at

by Malcolm after consultation with Adrian. A Tillett ML seat had thoughtfully been fitted. Mr. Coles uses a smaller version I understand! I was immediately comfortable driving this kart, the grip from the Maxxis tyres is well suited to the power from the engine. The kart makes light work of good progress and inspires confidence. I found the whole package very well balanced and almost impossible to wrong foot. Even the wildest driving was only rewarded with slightly slower corner exit speeds and no offs or spins! We did put on two more teeth which improved the driveability and produced nearly ideal maximum revs at the end of the straight. Is there a formula which defines gearing related to seat size? For every size up in seat go up 2 teeth until you reach XXL when you take up darts instead of karting!

In spite of the very strict technical criteria laid down by the Formula TKM regulations, the Spirit kart has many of the attributes of a



High quality finish to the Spirit's front end



Well made rear bumper on the Spirit with sleeves over the main tube to prevent breakages



Fourth rail with pinch bolt and good brake on the Mike 6

modern design and certainly works the tyres well. The warm-up time was quick and the kart was fully up to speed by lap three. The turn in was good and progressive with a nice neutral balance through the corner. Only crazy manoeuvres produced oversteer out of the corners which although clearly slower was easily corrected. The Spirit proved very stable under braking, another mark of a good chassis. All in all a very capable kart worthy of the results it is achieving.

The Mike range of karts is produced in Italy by the Rakama company, headed by former multiple World Champion Mike Wilson. Although Mike originated from Barnsley he emigrated to Italy in order to pursue his career as a professional works driver for IAME, the manufacturers of Komet, Parilla and Sirio motors.

It is within the IAME factory site that Rakama produce their chassis. The latest in

version is the Mike 6 which is an evolution of the FMK homologated Mike 5 model. The Mike 6 is a 32mm chassis with a permanent cross member between the stub axles and a bar behind the seat parallel with the axle which enables this model to accommodate left hand drive engines. The axle is 40mm running in three bearings. The left hand side of the chassis has a fourth rail which has one pinch bolt to adjust the stiffness. There is also provision for an optional rear torsion bar.

This latest model benefits from an excellent castor camber adjustment system. It has hemispherical washers at the top and bottom of the stub axle yoke which move with the bolt. This negates the usual bending moment on the bolt when the adjusters are opposed to one another, as is the usual practice with most other makes of kart.

The steering column is also interesting in that it has two spades which are designed to give two different Ackerman ratios, plus a standard central position. Ackerman steering is now almost universal on modern karts. Ackerman reduces tyre wear to the outside front by increasing the load on the inside tyre. It also allows lesser castor angles which again make the kart lighter to drive. The only problem is that it also makes the kart harder to drive. The system was pioneered in Italy where it's hot by great drivers like Fisichella, Manetti and co. I just wonder whether it's worth trying the old central position for the not-too-experienced driver on perhaps the Vega 100C tyre to see if it inspires more confidence. The Mike 6 gives you this option so I think it's worth a try.

The test kart was fitted with a RHD Rotax prepared for Kartell by West Country living legend, Pete Newsham. Our first test was with the kart as used by Malcolm at the Shenington O Plate meeting in 100C. The first thing I noticed, having given the engine a great handful of choke, was that it has loads of fuel available at low revs. The engine was stone cold but one choke was nearly too much. Luckily I found the fuel line in time so got the engine clear before a new plug was required. With all systems go I was pleased with the wheel spinning exit from the pit lane

on cold Vegas. This had the makings of being good fun!

After three laps to warm the tyres the kart had the feel of a well sorted outfit but I have never been a great fan of the Vega XLL for this powerful class. The kart, while being fun and easy to drive, had slight hovercraft tendencies. I came into the pits to explain my views to Malcolm who told me that he had taken maximum castor off just to see if I noticed. With the castor back on and a quick check on the tyre pressures the kart became a joy to drive, dead easy under braking on or off the bumps and just throw it at the corner, this kart wants to teach you how to do it, thank goodness!

After two decent sessions on the Vegas we changed over to Bridgestone YEQs to get a comparison. These tyres are well respected and have a good modern carcass with an SL mid grip compound that lasts well through the life of the tyre.

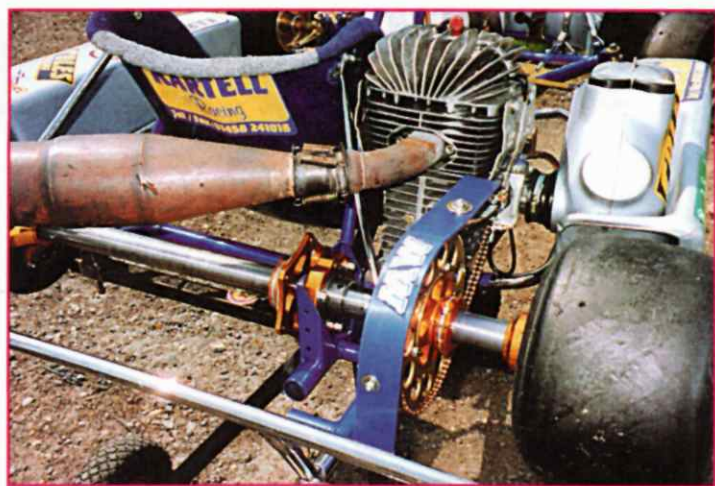
Having fitted the YEQs the kart behaved quite differently. More precision was needed to be quick but this was not difficult to attain since the chassis gives plenty of confidence. Some more fine tuning was required over the 100C set-up. We started by going as wide as possible at the back which improved braking and grip mid corner. We probably should have also taken the castor off again which would have lightened the front and we already had plenty of grip. I should point out that this model, the Mike 6, is not currently FMK homologated but will form part of Rakama's homologations at the end of this year in time for January 2000. However the Mike 2 and Mike 5 are both homologated and are most similar to the 6. The Mike 6 is of course eligible for use in Formula A and 100C. These karts are delivered complete with all gold anodised components, silver alloy wheels, a fibreglass seat and a suede steering wheel. Malcolm wasn't sure of the brand of the neat gold magnesium wheels on the test kart, but he knows where to get them!

Summing up, I was lucky to sample two excellent karts in perfect weather conditions at Lydd, Malcolm even bought lunch!

Report & photos: George Robinson



The Mike has a permanent cross member between the stub axles and a multi-position steering column



The Mike 6 can take LHD or RHD engines