

RACECRAFT – WINNERS MINDSET

The mindset of a racing driver

As you gain experience, you may come to realise that there is more to race driving than going as fast as you can. How you deal with differing conditions, karts that feel different, traffic, and very importantly your opponents are a key tool in the racing drivers armoury. Here, we are going to look at a few factors that will, hopefully, help you develop into an effective driver.

- **Conditions** – No matter where you are driving, and how often you drive a particular track, no two days will be the same. If you are driving outdoors, factors such as temperature, moisture levels, wind level and direction, will all come into play and have an influence on the performance of a kart or driver. Even indoors, you will have changeable conditions. Indoor tracks are susceptible to variable grip levels depending on temperature and level of use. How the driver is feeling will also be a massive influence. To deal with these factors, you have to be able to evaluate and adapt your driving to deal with the conditions. You can't change the conditions, so deal with what you can change.
- **Karts** – Kart performance can be variable. Rental karts have to deal with a huge amount of abuse, so will inevitably feel different. TeamSport's mechanics have a rigorous servicing schedule and work very hard to provide as close a fleet as possible, but even karts that are very closely matched can feel different. The feel of a kart may even change whilst you are driving it. The best drivers will always try to adapt their driving to deal with the feel of the kart. Do you need to be more aggressive with the kart, do you need to roll it into a corner, what is the best way to bring the power in? If you constantly seek to get the best out of the kart, you will be more effective. Drivers that simply turn around and say that the kart is rubbish will hamper their development. Don't fall into that trap.
- **Lap times** – Whilst lap time is a very visible measure of performance, it does not define a drivers performance. There are a load of factors that can be used to measure performance. A lot of our lessons will look at technique, and when you get into racing other drivers, your lap times will not necessarily be as quick as you expect. Your lap time will also vary depending on track conditions, which will change from day to day. Don't fixate on lap time.
- **Driver Attitude** – This is a big one! As we have already mentioned, a driver's mindset can be a huge influence on how they perform. You can defeat yourself, even before you get into the kart, if your mindset is wrong. Too often, drivers have a preconception about a kart or another driver or occurrence on track that will make them emotional or influence how they approach a race. If you think you are beaten, you already are. Drivers can also get very emotional. Whilst emotion can help, too often, a driver can allow their emotion, whether it be anger or frustration, to cloud their mind. This can have a negative effect on their driving. It is important to keep

yourself calm and analyse how you deal with a situation. Get your head down and do your best.

- Confidence – Belief in yourself is very important. You've worked hard and developed your skill, so have the confidence to use it. However, don't overdo it. A lot of drivers can be so confident that they fail to acknowledge when they have made a mistake. Don't fall into that trap. If you make a bad move, or don't do as well as you thought you would, try to examine what went wrong. It is very easy to blame the kart, the weather, the opposition or the Race Director and these may well be valid, but it is very likely to be the driver. Try to get into the habit of examining your own performance and don't be afraid to admit your mistakes. This will enable you to learn
- Learn from your opponents – There will always be someone faster or better than you. Try to learn from them. This will help you, and there is no downside to it.
- Enjoy your racing – Just remember, it is supposed to be fun. You will take part in a lot of races, and not all of them will go your way. Driving karts is a fantastic hobby and the highs and lows will give you great memories. Don't take it too seriously. This has a performance benefit as well. If you are relaxed and enjoying what you are doing, you will perform better. So don't forget to enjoy it and have a good time.

Just to finish, racing drivers are renowned for coming up with excuses. For a bit of light relief, let's have a look at a couple:

You head out for qualifying, and for 20 intense minutes, you're on the limit, banging off the kerbs and cutting people up. Of course, you must be on pole, but when you return to the pits with your victory walk, however, your dreams of a career in professional motorsport are crushed. You're in the middle of the pack, Mr Average, and suddenly, your manhood recoils in disappointment.

But obviously, the poor result wasn't down to *you*. The kart was slow, the visor steamed up and you got caught behind someone on your fastest lap. But wait, there are more excuses that you might use, and they include the following:

1. "The corners were too tight" - The speed was okay, but the corner was too tight". Juha Kankkunen certainly had the self-belief needed to be a WRC champion. So much self-belief in fact, that the corner itself was in the *wrong*.
2. "The officials were way too harsh on me" – If you're constantly being called to Race Control, it's probably not the officials....It's probably you!

3. "The car/kart wasn't working right" - In recent years, Ken Block has perfected this technique. On stage 4 of New England Forest Rally, Block described the crest as a "pretty normal thing" but unfortunately the car "bottomed out and shot" him off to right. So not a misjudgement then...
4. "I was fighting for the lead" - James Hunt, Tony Stewart and AJ Foyt are just some of the drivers who have got in a tussle after an accident. Of course, they let their aggression cloud their judgement, but it's *always* the other man's fault.
5. "I'm too heavy" - Complaining about your weight advantage/disadvantage is probably the most common excuse for go-karters. This can work in one of two ways. You're either embarrassingly heavy for this low-powered machine or you're too light, which means the kart can't produce enough grip. If you weighed the same as everyone else you'd obviously be dominating.
6. "Yellow flags ruined my chances of winning" - This excuse is the one that's overheard in every racing paddock the world over.
7. "My tyres weren't up to temperature" - This one comes in many forms. But by far the most popular is that the driver's tyres were too cold, which caused you to spin out. That definitely wasn't anything to do with your lack of judgement. Oh, no.
8. "The other guy got in the way" - This excuse is another classic and is used often when one driver punts the other one off the track, usually because he was carrying too much speed or if the guy in front braked too early. Again, this wasn't *your* fault.