**ROTAX GRAND FINALS AGONY & ECSTASY**

*Mixed results for Team SA in early Bahrain running*

Team South Africa spent the first half of the past week preparing, practicing, qualifying and qualifying for the 2023 Rotax Max ‘Olympics of Karting at the Bahrain International Kart Circuit, before the usual mix of first day agony and ecstasy in Wednesday’s first racing action.

The week started with the handover of identical brand new karts before unofficial practice into the Gulf evening Tuesday. Drivers tuned in their equipment, and got to grips with the circuit and racing after dark as the Rotax Max Grand Finals made its night time debut. Most of team SA had never raced under lights before.

DD2 trio Sebastian Boyd, Kian Grottis, and Jamie Smith spent Tuesday and Wednesday in the practice mid-pack, before Boyd qualified a fine fifth, with Grottis 22nd and Smith 28th in their sessions. That placed them 10th, 44th and 56th overall. Boyd then raced home 11th in a tough first heat, while Smith ended an equal 28th and Grottis tumbled to 36th. DD2 Masters man Kyle Lawrence meanwhile qualified 26th before climbing to 20th in his first race.

Senior Max lads KC Ensor-Smith and Erich Heystek showed good pace in practice, before Heystek qualified an impressive eighth, and Ensor Smith 25th in their session, and 16th and 50th overall. Swarts then enjoyed a tough battle to ninth in his opening heat, while Ensor Smith retired after an early pile-up.

Junior Max drivers, Wian Boshoff and Kent Swartz showed top ten pace in practice before Swarts qualified 19th and Boshoff 26th in their sessions, and 38th and 52nd overall, respectively. The high school lads then raced their first heats under lights on Wednesday evening, where Swarts came home 24th and Boshoff 28th.

The primary school action saw Reagile Mailula qualify 22nd and Caleb Odendaal 31st in their under-13 Mini Max sessions to end 44th and 61st overall. Both delivered splendid opening heat drives as Mailula made up nine places to 19th, and Odendaal climbed 10 positions to 21st. Rafael da Silva qualified 20th in under-11 Micro Max and made up a place to 19th in his first heat.

The Rotax Max Grand Finals moves on to its second and third qualifying heats on Thursday, from which combined results the drivers will qualify for Friday’s Pre Finals. The top 36 in each class then go through to Saturday’s Grand Finals to crown the Rotax Max world champions in each class.