



SPEED

Racer

by Kate Mallord

"So what do you think?" grins the father of the racing driver who has just taken me on a hair-raising spin around the Kartright Speedway in Jurong.

Well, the truth is, I feel queasy, the left side of my body is aching and I'm walking like Charlie Chaplin.

"It was awesome," I reply and, despite the pain, I'm not lying. After all, my go-kart driver happens to be one of the sport's most promising stars. Nineteen-year-old Richard Bradley is a former British champion who's now based in Singapore and is on track for a future in Formula 1.

It all started back in the UK just over ten years ago when Edward Bradley took his eight-year-old son to a go-kart track. "Once I started," Richard recalls, "I couldn't stop."

Three years later, in 2002, he was competing in races all over the country. Father and son would load the go-kart into their RV (or camper) and drive to wherever the next meet was.

"We'd sometimes have to drive for more than eight hours," says Edward Bradley. "It was pretty exhausting for both of us but Richard loved it. After a while I had a good rapport with the other dads on the circuit. We'd let the boys sleep then all meet up for a few cans of beer – and sometimes something stronger – before bed."

Edward is a lawyer who shares his son's passion for motor racing and used to race vintage cars back in the UK. But after a few years of ferrying Richard around, a sponsor got involved and it was time to get a bit more serious.

"I needed to start taking a back seat, to let the manufacturer's team train Richard and look after

the car. It actually wasn't that hard for me as the travelling on the weekends was starting to take its toll and I was confident that he was in good hands."

Good hands indeed. By 2004, Richard was racing on the national and European junior circuit reaching top speeds of 80kph at just 13-years-old. It's an age when most teens start wanting to spend more time hanging out with friends rather than moving all over the country on weekends.

Richard wasn't perturbed: "I loved karting more than my social life, so I didn't even think about it."

His dedication stuck throughout his teens and, after finishing exams at sixteen, he went on to do a two-year engineering course at the same time as taking part in as many races as he could. Richard racked up the podium finishes.

He won the Karting Formula 1 British Open Championship in 2008, having come third at the European Championship qualifier the year before. He also became the youngest ever winner of a Formula A Super One British Championship.

Now 19, Richard has put university on hold and is set on becoming a professional racing driver. The family move to Singapore has been a surprising boost for his career. Motorsports in Asia are growing quickly, the weather is fairly reliable and daily temperatures don't fluctuate like they do in Europe. But there's no escaping the fact that racing is expensive and it takes a substantial investment to reach the top.

Until Richard gets another sponsor, he's relying on his father to foot the bill for his current bid in the Formula BMW Pacific. All things being well, next year he'll compete in Formula 3, the following year Formula 2 and then hopefully he'll quickly move up to Formula 1.

But is there a point when Edward will say "That's enough, I can't afford this anymore"?

"I try to be as objective as possible," he says. "Obviously that's hard when it's my son but he's won both of his first single-seater races. He's on the path to Formula 1 and we've just got to get there as fast as possible. If the good results stop coming in, we will have to have a serious think about his future."

"There's no doubt in my mind that Richard will have a career as a racing driver; if it's not Formula 1 then there are lots of other races to consider. Motorsports are big in the US and I'm sure he'll have opportunities there."



For a teenager, Richard is incredibly disciplined. The physical side of the sport is often underestimated. Temperatures inside the cockpit reach 40 degrees C and his body will experience forces up to 3G many times throughout the race – the force of a 30kph turn was enough to make my side ache. He has to stay fit, eat well and drink between five and 10 litres of water on the day of a race.

Richard says, "I'm a normal 19-year-old: I go out with my friends, I listen to music and watch TV. But racing is a complete addiction; it's amazing to go

fast, but I've got to be safe. It's about being right on the limit but in control the whole time and obviously when we win it feels great."

His next big race is at the Singapore Grand Prix in the Formula BMW Pacific support race.

"I'm really looking forward to it. It's going to be amazing to drive 200kph down the road where I usually go shopping."

Look out for his blue car, but maybe think twice if you're invited to get in it and you have a nervous disposition. ■



Photo by Richard Beadley and BMW Motorsport



Another star in the making

James Pull, the 10-year-old English star of the 2010 Asian Karting Open Championship (AKOC), was born in Singapore at Mount Elizabeth Hospital. He recently took fifth place in Macau after crashing and falling back into last place before working his way up the field. He's also coming second in the 2010 Yamaha SL Cup Malaysia Series.

Kartright

The 750m Kartright Speedway at Jurong is a great place to learn more about karting. You can hire a go-kart to give racing a try and more experienced drivers can store their karts at the track. It's fully floodlit so you can also race at night. It costs from \$32 for a 10-minute session and that includes kart rental.

511 Upper Jurong Road #01-05.
Visit www.kartright.com or call 6265 3303.