



GENK, BE IT AN EXAMPLE

The Genk World Championship has shown that karting, if well organized, is still able to phattract a huge audience. TEXT: **A.GIUSTINI** FOTO: **CUNAPHOTO.IT**

The KZ World Championship, to which the KZ2 Super Cup and the Academy Trophy, were the “contours”, has left a clear mark on the 2018 international karting scene.

A painting without a frame is an incomplete picture; in the same way, a competition, spectacular and compelling as it may be, without support from the fans remains a melancholy event, deprived of warmth and folklore. In Genk, instead, the good old times seemed to have returned, a time when champions such as Alessandro Piccini and Gianluca Beggio competed on tracks surrounded by crowded grandstands. And in Genk, the races won by Patrik Hájek, Matteo Viganò and Kobe Pauwels were rightly valued by the many spectators who filled

the grandstand, the paddock, and the grounds, proving that karting has not lost its charm, but that the way ahead is via promotion which, in Genk, the organizer proved formidable!

FOUR THOUSAND PEOPLE ONLY ON SUNDAY

Speaking with Dave Ritzen, head of the event’s organization, we learned that on Sunday there were a total of 4,000 people on the track. A result that in the era of TV streaming and internet, is truly noteworthy. But a large-scale promotional campaign was needed, and carried out, one which involved not only the web but also print and ... buses. Yes, public buses in and around Genk showing the event’s posters on the rear.

To this was added working closely with the municipal government bodies that strongly pushed the event, even turning part of the Europalaan, the autoroute that runs along the track, into a parking lot with plenty of staff as support. Traffic problems? None.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INFRASTRUCTURES

The KZ World Championship marked the sixth consecutive appearance of the Genk track in the CIK FIA sports calendar, a result that places it among the tracks of reference on the world scene. Today the success of a track is not only given by the spectacular layout, but also by the presence of adequate infrastructures. In fact, unlike in the past, modern

karting requires much larger spaces (for lorries, tents, hospitality, etc) and buildings able to accommodate a large number of staff, teams, operators, reporters. The absence of such structures risk undermining the success of the event, slow down the setting up and end operations, and hindering the work of operators. The result is the discontent that has been a feature this year on several occasions. Au contraire, this was precisely the strength of Genk; thanks to the large areas available and made available, Genk was able to ensure a comfortable and easily accessible environment with areas that were able to accommodate the entire public.

THE PASSION FOR KARTING AND VERSTAPPEN “FEVER”

Contributing to the event’s success was certainly the great passion that Belgium has towards karting.

This can be seen on one hand through the consistency of the Belgian karting movement, on the other from what can be called Verstappen Fever. To explain the importance of the figure of Max Verstappen for Belgian motorsport was a local journalist, who pointed out to us how it is thanks to the deeds of the Dutchman, adopted by Belgium and the track of Genk, related to his career in karts, that the general public has approached the motorsport disciplines and the karting in such a big way. Many therefore took the opportunity of the World Championship race to see where the champions of F1 are born and to find, perhaps, the next Max Verstappen. In short, the Genk World Championship has shown us that kart is happening, indeed, and certainly has not lost its appeal, as many insinuate. You just have to promote it the right way!

FACE TO FACE WITH DAVE RITZEN

With the manager of the Organization of the World Championship in Genk, Dave Ritzen, we tried to ask and answer a few issues related to the organization of a CIK FIA World Championship.

How difficult is it to organize a World Championship event considering the high standards of CIK FIA events?

It is certainly challenging. The CIK-FIA has very clear guidelines disclosed at the beginning of the year during the organization of the meetings in Geneva. So, as an organizer, you already know in advance what the CIK FIA expects. Of course, organizing this event is very different from organizing a national event. But this was our challenge and I think we succeeded.

I was impressed by the autoroute that runs along the track half of which was used for parking. I saw a similar thing only on the occasion of a Formula 1 Grand Prix.

The city of Genk is very sports-oriented. Karting is one of the sports disciplines that can count on the support of the city. The municipality, besides helping us in the promotion of the event, support us in many other initiatives, such as using a part of the “Europalaan” highway for parking - police officers included.

When did you start working on organizing this event?

Together with my colleague Lise, from our Marketing Department, we started already at the beginning of February. As I said before, this event is not a normal race where we can easily start three weeks before. In this case, everything must be planned in advance. We created a VIP area and a historic village dedicated to historical karting. And since we are the Home Of Champions, our offer must be different. Mounting a tent makes no sense. The small details make the difference instead.

How many people worked on this?

Two weeks before the event, we organized an official press conference to present the event. Two days later we invited over 100 volunteers on the track to discuss things that needed doing. In the end, they are the ones who manage the event. Paradoxically when the event starts my work is over and so I have to trust their experience. Of course I will be on the spot as a kind of reserve, but our volunteers manage the whole organization. I have a lot of respect for these people.

What are your plans for next year?

For 2019 we hope that Karting Genk can organize a round of the European championship for the OK and OKJ classes. If so, we will also organize a Belgian championship trial for OK and OKJ before the CIK FIA continental event. In addition to this, we will continue with the BNL and BMC championship. There will also be some surprises in our national titled events.