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From pushing to powered starts

KART RACING

KEN SEEBER

In 1999, karting arguably saw the most significant change in technology since the very start of the racing class.

Before this, all mainstream karts were started by pushing.

A mate or father would pick up the rear of the kart, push it for a metre or so, drop the kart on to the track and keep pushing until the motor had fired and picked up enough revs to be able to drive away.

However, if things didn't go to plan the pusher was left to push and push, usually getting slower and slower.

Stop, replace the spark plug, and give it another go. A common conclusion was a non-start.

Primitive ... yes. Inconvenient ... yes. Still happening ... yes.

In 1999, the Rotax MAX 125cc kart engine was released on to the world market.

Rotax is a big Austrian company that also produces engines for aircraft, various motorcycles and SeaDoo jetskis.

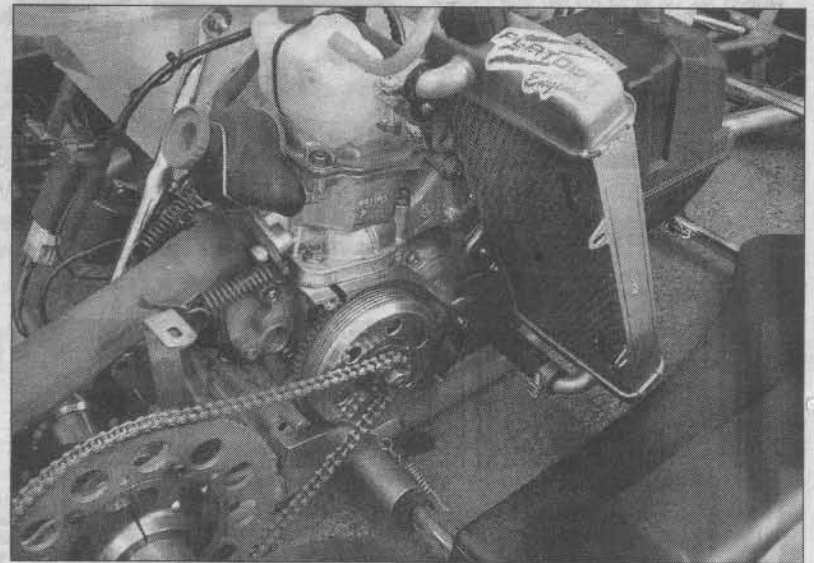
The MAX engine came with a clutch and an on-engine electric starter, combined with liquid cooling and a quiet non-adjustable exhaust system, heralding to karting a user friendliness of the first order.

And with 21kW (28hp) complemented by a wide power band, the MAX engine was fast, quiet, reliable and durable (for a racing engine).

Since its introduction in 1999, the Rotax MAX engine now represents a sizeable proportion of kart racing classes worldwide. Australia is no exception, with the MAX engine well represented in dirt and bitumen racing.

Nothing comes for nothing though, and the Rotax engine costs significantly more than the usual air-cooled, direct-drive (non-clutched) 100cc engines. With the extra power, tyres and chains wear more quickly. Clearly though, the trade-off for user friendliness has won the day for many.

Since that time, other similar engines have now come on to the market, challenging the MAX engine. On top of this, electric start and clutch conversions are now being released for the more traditional existing (read primitive) engines.



Kart racing benefits from improving technology such as the Rotax MAX engine.

The result of all of this is that karting is becoming more accessible and convenient, both for old and new members alike.

Karting is very competitive on the

track and also off the track with constantly improving technologies.

This time around we have Rotax to thank for raising the bar a notch or two.