

JUNIOR SPRINTING

The new 'Junior Sprint' and 'Junior Hillclimb' categories provide fantastic new opportunities for younger competitors to get involved, as Ben Hamer reports



Morgan brakes hard for Flagpole

You may have missed a small but significant change to the rules regarding competitors' age limits

If you haven't read section S of the Motorsport UK Yearbook for 2021, you may have missed a small but significant change to the rules regarding the age limit for competitors. Speed events now allow 14-16 year olds to compete in standard cars up to 1,400cc. (£71.9 if you want to read the details). The main points of note are that the car will need a four-point harness fitting (K2.1.2) and before juniors can compete on a hill, they will need to compete in three sprints.

Once my brother Wil and I had found out about the changes, we were keen to get our sons — 14-year-old Morgan Hamer and 15-year-old Archie Ker, competing by the end of the season. The first thing we needed was a car. We settled on a 2007 Citroen C2 Furio. It was a decent compromise of value for money, performance and availability. £500 bought the car, then a few hundred pounds sorting a few bits — a harness, timing splitter, some List 1A tyres and it was ready to go.

There is no need for any fireproof overalls in standard cars. An old Proban suit and some karting overalls were used and as luck would have it, our sons have the same size heads as us, so they were able to use our lids and FHRs. The final bit of admin was to get them RS Inter-Club licenses and enter an event. In both cases, this needed to be a paper application to allow parents to counter-sign, but other than that, it's no more complex than a normal application.

With the date in the diary for the 9th October HSA double-lapper at Curborough, we needed to teach the boys to drive. They have both done a fair bit of karting so had some driving control basics. To teach them clutch control we took them to Tockwith airfield where you can turn up and pay to drive around for 90 minutes in your own car. Luckily, this is on Wil's doorstep but I couldn't find anything close to me in the Midlands, so a couple of trips up north were needed. Both boys picked it up pretty well, and after three sessions they were ready to go. The hardest thing was trying to stop them looking at the gearstick when changing gear — we knew once they had a helmet and harness on, it wouldn't be possible to look down. Just another thing on the list they had to learn on race day.

Come the day of the sprint, I think we were more nervous about them driving slowly around the paddock than quickly around the circuit. Clerk of the Course Paul Richardson had a quick chat first thing to tell us and the boys how the day would be run. After the briefing, we had a fifteen-minute window, to let the boys drive around the circuit with us as passengers before first practice. This was really useful to get them experienced with the start procedure and track. It enabled us to guide them on which gears to use and where they should be braking. Tockwith airfield had a 40mph limit, so it was also an opportunity get them driving full throttle with a bit more speed.

In the end, both boys drove brilliantly, not only on the track, but also around the paddock. By the second run we were able to leave them to it and just enjoy being spectators and competitive dads. There was no doubt that by the timed runs, they were starting to explore the car's handling. Wheel spinning off the start, understeering around Flagpole and nearly 70mph over the finish. Over the course of the day, their times came down from 91s to 81s, with Archie just pipping Morgan to the class win.

So, what of the future? By the start of the next season, Archie will be 16 and able to drive other cars. Morgan will be 15 and Wil's other son, Jensen, will be 14. So the car will have a few outings in 2022 between our racing commitments. We might even dual drive with them on occasion so they can show us how it's done. It would be great to get the news out there that 14 year olds can now get on track without too much trouble, and encourage more to join in. The HSA will have a class for them in the championship in 2022 and hopefully events will start adding classes for them as well.

Motorsport UK have created a great opportunity to get younger racers on track. I hope more parents are encouraged get their children out on track and that we start to get a few more competing in 2022. I think the success of Morgan and Archie at Curborough shows how easy it is to include youngsters into a normal event. I believe this is just the start and will lead to bigger and better things for junior racers and Morgan and Archie in the coming years.



Archie and Morgan have seized this opportunity to get involved in grassroots motor sport