

Racing indoors: Karts: the breeding ground of champions

Story by Tim Sharp
Photos by Tim and Kristin Sharp

Go karts used to be crude pipe-framed machines powered by noisy lawnmower engines. If you wanted to race one, you traveled outside the city limits to some godforsaken track at an abandoned industrial park. If you were lucky, you dodged most of the tumbleweeds as they blew across the track.

Well, sports fans, Octane Raceway has changed all that. Located off the 101 in The Pavillions at Talking Stick near Scottsdale, Octane Raceway is freeway-close. Housed inside a spacious 45,000 square foot building, you do not have to brave the elements or dodge tumbleweeds. The one-third-mile indoor/outdoor track has air conditioning inside and cool misters above the covered outside section.

Octane Raceway's 45-mile-per-hour Sodi RTX electric go karts resemble mini Formula One cars, not the pipe-framed contraption your Uncle Elmore built in his basement. The seat and steering column are adjustable for even the shortest drivers, so children 4'6" or taller can drive them. Of course, seat belts are standard and helmets are provided. Safety is a priority at Octane Raceway.

Octane Raceway also has a Trackside Bar & Grille (*no*, you may not have a beer before you race...but afterwards is fine), billiards room, arcade, rock climbing wall, Segway slalom course and a full-sized NASCAR car for the PIR Pit Crew Challenge. In addition, they have four meeting rooms for private parties and corporate meetings, and catered cuisine is available at Octane Raceway.

If Octane Raceway seems more like a country club than kart racing track, this is purely intentional. A wonderful place to take the family or a date, Octane Raceway has elevated kart racing to a whole new level. You can even join league competition as you would at a tennis club.

(Opposite page) The author, a seasoned vintage and SCCA track racer, powers through some laps on the newest Sodi RTX karts at Octane Raceway.

(At right, top to bottom) The track at Octane is new, smooth, safe and fast. • The Trackside Grill is a great place to fuel up prior, celebrate post or grab some tangible memories of the day. • The new next-generation Sodi RTX go kart. • Octane Raceway owner JP Mullan greets us trackside. • Octane Raceway is easy to find, at The Pavillions at Talking Stick shopping complex on the Pima-Maricopa Salt River Indian Community just east of Scottsdale on Indian Bend Road.

Who races karts?

Virtually every Formula One World Champion, most professional road racers and many NASCAR drivers began in go karts. It is the most economical way to start racing, and many pro drivers race karts in the off-season. Thus, you may see some professional drivers at Octane Raceway or other kart tracks around the Valley from time to time. This is the best way to "keep your seat" and get track time for next to nothing.

If you, your spouse or one of your children have a burning desire to race, Octane Raceway is a great way to get your feet wet. It is a fun and inexpensive way to see if you want to pursue your dream. Of course, you can also invite your braggadocio brother-in-law to Octane Raceway, whip him soundly on the track and shut him up about his remarkable driving prowess.

Evaluating the karts and the track

The European Sodi RTX karts wind up to 10,000 RPMs, and the throttle response is instantaneous. These electric machines are not your Aunt Susie's Prius. Octane's pocket rockets are light and lightning fast. They handle extremely well and have superb brakes.

Drifting the karts and maintaining momentum are the keys to cranking off fast laps. Therefore, use the disc brakes sparingly, because they can kill your speed. However, once you get accustomed to the karts and the racing line, your lap times will drop dramatically. We dropped 6 seconds in just 4 laps.

"Are driving the Sodi RTX karts like playing a video racing game?" you may ask. *Not!* You may learn racing lines with a video game, but you cannot get the track feel or chassis feedback from them. Racing karts are the real deal with real feel.

The g-forces in the Sodi karts are substantial, and the chassis feedback from the track is genuine. The drivers you pass are live competitors, and you cannot press the reset button if you don't like your race results. In fact, each kart has a transponder which relays your lap times to a computer and prints them out after the race.

As in real sports car racing, you are only as good as your last race. Therefore, practice and track knowledge are important. As you become one with the kart, you will get faster, more confident, skilled in traffic and successful.

Does success come at a cost? Of course. However the price for an "Arrive & Drive Race" (14 laps) begins at only \$19.95 per race, and a one-day license is only \$1.95. Three races (Monday-Thursday) are only \$44.95, so you may want to go for this package if you have not been on the Octane Raceway track before.

Our thanks to J.P. Mullan and Darin Proszek for showing us around Octane Raceway and the way they have elevated karting to a new level. For more information, visit or contact:

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