

**T**o most, it is simply the ground floor, or first step, on the way to racing superstardom. To others, however, karting offers a level of competition that is unmatched by most junior formulae. In fact, there are likely more position changes in your local club kart race in a heat than in a two-hour F1 race.

The super-intense level of professional kart racing usually sees a large turnover of its front runners, as they leave to chase racing stardom. But for some, they are more than fulfilled by the challenges of kart racing. Instead of leaving to chase money, they stick around.

They are the career karters.

It's not that they shun auto racing—although perennial Stars of Karting ICC champion Alex Speed, routinely turns down car racing scholarships and tests that he wins for taking the national championship.

But they are racers—who value the experience of kart racing over the sponsorship chasing.

"I haven't pursued some of the auto racing opportunities I've had, because I didn't want to spend all my money moving from one ladder series to another," says Kyle Martin, Paul Tracy Karting's newest member and ICC hotshoe. "I'm not willing to risk that much money to run F2000. My old teammate (Jason LaPointe) won the F2000 championship, and he still had to pay full price for Atlantics.

"Besides, I think that the competition level in the karting series that we run is much higher than most of those feeder series. So I don't want to take a step backward."

Respected karting veteran Alan Rudolph—who was tipped by Bob



**THIS IS YOUR LIFE**  
There are some karters who stay for the long haul. They're fast, and they want karting to reach its full potential.  
**By Efrain Olivares**

Bondurant to run Bondurant's karting school—has done time in the ALMS and Star Mazda; he continues to race his shifter kart (of his own name) in Stars of Karting competition. A slouch he is not.

"I don't think I intended on being a career karter," he says. "I've always had in the back of my mind that I'd like to race cars. That being said, I don't think I'll ever stop karting.

"Karting is the purest, rawest form of racing," he adds. "I have very high

expectations of myself, and compete with 16-year-olds who are hungry and want to be the next Schumacher. If I can still beat them, I'll continue to race."

But it's a sport that also gives: "I've always said that if I made it in car racing," he continues, "I would always support karting, to give someone the opportunity that I never had."

Martin and Rudolph, heroes in the world of karting, are virtual unknowns outside of the paddock. The sport, it would appear, is not doing its part to promote its own stars. "We've got to be on TV," says Rudolph, "and we've got to be in front of spectators, and until that happens, karting will never be different."



Martin also sees areas where karting needs to improve. "In Europe, they have one championship, and three classes. If you're the champion, you're the champion. Here, we've got too many championships and too many classes. And, those guys in Europe are getting paychecks for racing."

Both guys are among the best, and have been around the sport for a long time, and that's where they want to stay. Career karters they are. **▲**

Kyle Martin (ABOVE), formerly of Trackmagic and now driving for Paul Tracy Karting, is quite happy racing his ICC shifter kart—much happier, he reckons, than he would be chasing money.



Rudolph (TOP, and MAIN) feels that more needs to come from Stars of Karting's association with the IRL.