

James Kovacic on driving the Port Macquarie track

A beautiful landscape, stunning scenery, an abundance of trees with rich green leaves, and a feeling of real tranquillity; this is Port Macquarie. The Port Macquarie track is karting's version of Brazilian Sao Paulo circuit in Formula One. It is intricate in some places, yet very fast flowing in others.

The track starts on a fairly fast main straightaway which is riddled with bumps. It ventures into one of the most exhilarating corners in the country. There are two ways to which you can take this corner. Firstly most people tend to drive in hammer and tong. The more effective way to maintain the speed without sliding across the rough track is to slow it down a little with a dab on the brake when entering the first couple of metres of the corner. This settles the rear-end down just enough to keep a tight line coming out which sets you up for the next corner in a much neater fashion than the sloppy all-in approach.

Turn two for most people would be a violent assault, a late braking affair, but from my experience it is much easier to approach the corner tenderly. The main reason for this is to avoid over shooting the corner. There is a very small gap between this and the next corner, which is a hairpin. This is a perfect passing position, because the pass would be a low speed manoeuvre it would be low-risk. The corner is not as simple as it seems. The major reason for this is a reasonably large dip in the middle of the corner. You could either take a very tight line or a faster line which will drag you to the outside of the track on corner exit. The next corner is much the same with a dip in the centre which will make the kart slide severely, but sometimes the harder you accelerate the more grip you have.

After the third tight hairpin, there is a short burst followed by a flat out left kink. This is followed by another tight left which has been covered in a veil of darkness by the tall trees. A tight line is the best way around this turn. Hitting the apex is not vital, but it is preferable. Be sure to watch out for the large ripple-strip, which can destroy a good run. A large right kink follows after the tight left, which leads into the second longest straight on the track. Be careful not to let your mind wander, because the next turn is one of the most difficult on the track. After the quick stretch, a very tricky double apex comes upon you abruptly. Some people choose a very wide line and cut in. However, hitting the apex is very important on this specific corner of the track. So I choose a slightly tighter line which allows me to move up on the corner quickly. After my approach, I have a punch on the brakes which unsettles the kart enough to provide a nice tight line which hits the apex while also providing the kart with an exit from the corner which is not bogged down.

Now for the flowing sweepers, which are not as hard as they appear to be. After the double apex left, there is a fairly long, uphill run followed by a tyre-screaming off-camber right hander. A mid-track approach is best, and to slow down, getting of the gas is more effective than a dab on the brakes (less understeer). This allows you to have a tight line off the corner which sets you up perfectly for a sweeping uphill left hander (again, be careful not to hit the ripple strip).

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