

Katy's Karters

Gulf Coast Karter Connor Watts was the GCKI Fall Race 4 winner in the CHONDA cadet ages 7 to 12 category



Members of Katy's racing club, the Gulf Coast Karters, have a need for speed

Written by Christina Hoo Fung | Photography courtesy of Gulf Coast Karters

Reaching speeds of up to 85 miles per hour, the karts careen around the track, speeding down the straights and scorching the hairpin turns. Drivers young and old are all hoping to make the cut to the next qualifying round. It's just another day for the Gulf Coast Karters (GCK) racing club.

The Starting Line

GCK is member-owned and member-managed, and everyone involved works as a volunteer in their positions. The Dunlap family, themselves avid karters, envisioned the impressive 0.7-mile road course in 1970. The kartway was born, with the club following soon after, and the land once owned by the Dunlaps was donated to the GCK. People come to Katy from all over - Corpus Christi, San Antonio, Austin, Conroe, and even Louisiana - just to become members of the club. Visitors from Europe who come to Texas to work in the oil industry are also big fans of the facility.

Not Just for Boys

The lone female on the track is an 11-year-old named Ashley Reay. Her namesake, Ryan Hunter Reay, is also her favorite

driver. She and her family travel an hour to race with the GCK and her dad, John Bartos, serves as the volunteer president of the club. She is a force to be reckoned with, having won over 200 awards since she began karting. She is aiming for the big leagues - the Indie 500.

"It takes a lot of practice to be a driver, I started when I was 4 and a half," she says. "A lot of people think it's a guy's sport, but anyone can do it. When I beat guys they get furious, but it's a lot of fun. We're trying to get more girls to race."

Super Koop

The youngest karter is Kooper Hodge, a 6-year-old from Tomball, who joined about a year ago. "I just started out as a rookie," he says. "My dad is a karter, so he gets me prepared. I go about 35 miles per hour. I like the front straight; it's so long that I almost go to 10,000 revolutions per minute!"

With both her young sons actively racing with GCK, Kooper's mother Kaye admits, "It's a little nerve-racking, but it teaches them great responsibility, focus, and they're going to be really



Six-year-old Kooper Hodge loves racing with the Gulf Coast Karters



Gulf Coast Karters racing club competes in the U.S. Grand Nationals



Twelve-year-old Gulf Coast Karter Aiden Green makes repairs to his go-kart



Karter James Gavin hugs the turn as he competes in the Shifter Class 15 and Up

Photo by Avon for the Shots

great drivers when they get older. I think karting helps them to be well-balanced, because they have to be responsible for not just themselves, but the others on the track as well.”

Kooper’s older brother Kade agrees. “It’s kind of a privilege to drive a car at my age. It’s pretty amazing that kids actually get a chance to feel what it’s like to get to drive. I enjoy racing, and the best thing about it is having fun, and going fast.”

Young at Heart

GCK’s oldest member Rick Gero used to race pro stock motorcycles in the National Hot Rod Association. He’ll be 68 in February, and holds his own alongside the younger karters. He shares, “This sport is really growing. I drive 320 miles round-trip just to be here. It’s a great track. It’s the longest one around here, and the people are really helpful.”

Gero believes the best part of being a member of GCK is the camaraderie. “I’ve made some personal friendships,” he says. “But on the track, it’s every man for himself.” He finds the kids particularly amazing. “You see them in the pits, and

they’re playing video games. When they get on the track it’s all business - they really drive! It’s the best thing to be able to run alongside these young people.”

Just Like Family

The GCK is the epitome of high-speed fun in a safe environment with people who have become just like family. Members are very generous in helping newbies learn the ropes. Each karter has invested their time and money in honing their craft. They can quote stats from their favorite drivers, fix faulty parts on their karts, and explain to you how to approach a turn to effectively clear it. Their passion for the sport is evident. “The racing enthusiasts who come here are dedicated, hardworking, and from all over the world,” says John Bartos. “They want to partake in a sport that’s family-friendly, competitive, and fun. This group could very well be Katy’s best-kept secret.” KM

CHRISTINA HOO FUNG is a writer and photographer from Kingston, Jamaica. She moved to Katy in 2011 and enjoys discovering exciting things about her new home.



"I enjoy racing, and the best thing about it is having fun, and going fast."

- Kade Hodge, GCK member



Ashley Bartos, currently the only female Karter, was the GCKI Fall Race 4 winner in the junior ages 12 to 15 category

Gulf Coast Karters Fast Facts

- To join GCK, you must own or have access to your own go kart and adhere to the safety rules and regulations of the club
- Former Houston Oilers quarterback Dan Pastorini was a member of GCK
- Racing club membership fees are \$325 per year
- Racing volunteers do not have to be members of the club
- Karters race on the Gulf Coast Kartway, located at 29726 Stockdick Rd.
- Grandson of four-time Indie 500 champ AJ Foyt, AJ Foyt IV, started racing with the GCK and raced in the IndyCar series and NASCAR Busch series
- GCK members range from 4 years old to 80
- For racing details, visit racekarts.com

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