

The Birel ART Racing Team was looking forward to the start of the FIA Karting European Championships. They arrived in Portimao with a particularly sharp technical package, both in the OK class and in OK-Junior. Kirill Kutskov was constantly at the top of the rankings and could certainly have aimed for better than 8th place in the Junior Final, if he hadn't had a retirement in a Qualifying Heat. And in OK, Cristian Bertuca was close to the top ten when he had to retire.

Barely a week after Giuseppe Palomba and Riccardo Longhi's magnificent one-two finish in KZ2 at the Andrea Margutti Trophy in their Birel ART-TM Racing karts, the Italian team returned to the Algarve circuit in southern Portugal, which had just hosted a Champions of the Future Euro Series meeting at the end of March. "This preparation event was very useful for us and we made sure to analyse all the data

collected to arrive at the European Championship even stronger," commented Riccardo Longhi, the Birel ART Racing Team manager. "From Friday morning onwards, our drivers achieved excellent times in Free Practice, like Karol Pasiewicz, Cristian Bertuca, Harley Keeble and David Yevan in OK, as well as Kirill Kutskov in OK-Junior. The development work has clearly paid off."



OK-JUNIOR: KUTSKOV FINISHES STRONGLY

Always difficult to manage for young drivers forced to make the most of the efficiency of their new tyres in an extremely short time, the Qualifying sessions left the team with some regrets, especially in OK. Kirill Kutskov was the best representative of the Birel ART-TM Racing team, with a magnificent 5th fastest time out of a total of 67 entries in OK-Junior. The young hopeful confirmed his form in the Qualifying Heats with 3rd, 5th, 2nd and 3rd places. Unfortunately, a retirement on Saturday afternoon pushed Kirill back to 15th position overall, whereas he could have kept his place in the top five.

Sunday started with the fastest time of his warm-up session and a promising 4th place in the Super Heat. After a hard-fought battle, he climbed back up to 8th position, thus scoring important points in the European Championship. He also set his fastest lap in the same tenth as the first two.

Reno Francot had a good run in the Qualifying Heats despite a difficult time trial. The young Dutchman became more and more confident after he was able to finish 6th (+10 places) in a heat, and he brilliantly won his qualification for the Final, where he unfortunately retired after an incident at the start. Abhay Mohankumar and Jindrich Pesl made good progress in Portimao. Pesl set the fastest lap in the race, showing his great speed despite his young age.

BERTUCA DESERVED BETTER IN OK

The Birel ART Racing Team was not as successful as expected in OK. Cristian Bertuca is a perfect example of this, making a brilliant run to the Final, with convincing comebacks: 6th, 6th, 4th, 7th and 2nd in the heats, before a 6th place in the Super Heat allowing him to start 13th in the Final. He was hoping to get into the top 10 but had to retire... on the last lap!

The Polish driver Karol Pasiewicz, who finished 5th in his first heat, had too many problems to hope for a better result afterwards. The same goes for David Yevan from Sri Lanka and Ella Stevens from Great Britain. Harley Keeble's task looked complicated after his 43rd time in Qualifying. His comeback to 18th position in the Final confirms the potential of the Briton.

"The standard of the European Championship is again very high this year. Of course we were hoping for a better result overall. There are still some small details that can be improved. The season has only just begun and we will arrive in Spain for the next round with great ambitions," concluded Riccardo Longhi.

