



# young post sunday

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MATTHEW SOLOMON (MAIN PICTURE AND INSET, RIGHT) AND LAI WAI-KIT DREAM OF BECOMING FORMULA ONE DRIVERS.  
PHOTOS: JONATHAN WONG



## Speed and focus

Two young boys show that age is no barrier as they enjoy life in the fast lane, writes **Miranda Yeung**

**T**he engines roar as the starting flag is waved. Matthew Solomon and Lai Wai-kit step on the accelerator and their colourfully painted karts charge ahead at full speed.

Wearing protective gear, like helmets and neck guards, gloves and bright blue suits, the pair could be mistaken for professional racers. It's their youthful looks that give them away.

"It's all about speed and the rush of adrenaline. I can drive the kart at a maximum speed of 110 kilometres per hour," says Matthew, from Chinese International School.

Matthew and Wai-kit, 11 and 16 respectively, are the rising stars of the city's kart racing scene. They have already won trophies in international races and set their sights on the Formula One championship.

"I have been fascinated by cars and watched car-racing programmes since I was young. My dream is to become a Formula One driver," says Matthew.

Many top drivers, such as former F1 champion Michael Schumacher, started their career by taking part in kart events at a young age.

Even the world's leading racing teams have switched their

attention to the kart scene as they search for talented drivers.

While car racing has been a popular sport in western countries for decades, it has yet to catch on in Hong Kong.

"Many of my classmates don't believe that I am a kart driver. They think I'm only bluffing," says Wai-kit. The teenager is now ranked in the top five among local adult drivers.

Wai-kit, from Heung To Secondary School (Tseung Kwan O), was introduced to the sport by his father. "The training is not difficult, but it's physically demanding - you have to endure the heat and the intense pressure on your body during a race," he says.

When a driver turns a corner at high speed, he experiences as much as three times the gravitational force.

"Besides, you have to be

mentally fit [and alert]. In some competitions, you are required to drive 20 laps and you need to concentrate all the time," says Matthew.

Both Matthew and Wai-kit take their own karts to events around Asia. A kart costs at least HK\$60,000, and maintenance can be expensive. But top drivers can easily find a sponsor to cover their costs.

And the secret to success is simple - practice, the boys say.

"I spend most of my weekends practising on the track. Also, I learn from mechanics about the cars and how to do the stuff myself," says Matthew.

While his dad supports his ambition to become a race-car driver, his mother is a "little scared" about life in the fast lane.

"But I don't think it's

dangerous since I can control the car. It's safer than many other sports like horse-riding."

Karting is not only for serious drivers like Matthew and Wai-kit.

It can be a weekend hobby for those aged 11 to 70 with a healthy body, according to Gerry Wong, operations manager of Diamond Coast International Kart Circuit, the only legal kart track in Hong Kong.

"It is not only for boys; we have an eight-year-old girl driver as well. This track was established to build up a positive image of car racing in Hong Kong," says Mr Wong.

The circuit provides training programmes for novices.

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