



adventure

man

Text and Photos by Jadrian Klinger



Drivers burn around the Lehigh Valley Grand Prix track, reaching speeds as high as 45 mph.

The Need for Go-Kart Speed



With full-faced helmet on and three-point safety belt securely buckled, Adventure Man prepares to experience the rush of go-kart speed.

Adventure is everywhere. It's born by overcoming fear and breaking through comfort zones. It thrives on risk, danger, excitement and thrill. And it lives within all who are willing to be brave.

In that split-second moment when you're finally away from the pits and free to smash the gas pedal down as far as it goes, any and all assumptions that the go-kart you're strapped into is like the same old lame bumper car found at a carnival blur away as the rush of acceleration forces your body against the seat and you suddenly realize that you need to hit the brakes quick because the first hairpin turn is coming up so much faster than you ever anticipated. Your adrenaline spikes as you jam the brakes and slam the steering wheel to the right. Tires squeal. The kart gets a little sideways, but responds perfectly as you slide around the corner. The urge to, again, floor it is simply impossible to resist. And just as you prepare to take another 180-degree turn way too fast, the car behind

you takes the inside line. Bumpers scrape, just a little, and the chase is on to do some passing of your own. Your reflexes take over for the remainder of the race. By the time the checkered flag is waved, that mildly amused smile you had prior to the race has transformed into a big goofy grin, and you know that you will never again be able to look at go-kart racing the same.

Even before experiencing the speed and intensity of the race, there are several indicators that the gas-powered go-karts at Lehigh Valley Grand Prix (LVGP) in Allentown are closer to actual competitive auto racing than anything else. First, everyone must sign a digital waiver before racing. Then there's the five-minute safety video that details all the rules and potential dangers. Finally, there's the fact that you must wear a full-faced helmet and buckle in with a three-point safety harness, which goes over both shoulders and buckles between your legs.

As far as true adventure goes, it doesn't get much more exciting than piloting one of the speed demons at LVGP. "The adrenaline rush you get here, you can't get anywhere else," says Ryan Suchon, LVGP's competition director. "It's loud, you're racing other people side by side at 45 mph with maybe a little contact. You're not going to have that anywhere else, or do anything else like it. Sure, you can go on a hike or something for adventure, but what will that do for you? I mean, nature's beautiful and all, but you can't get a rush like this walking through the woods."

LVGP offers two kart options: the 5.5 horsepower Sodi GT2s with a top speed of 35 mph for ages 10 to 15 and the 6.5 horsepower Sodi GT5s that peak at 45 mph for the adults. The concrete-surfaced track is exactly a quarter mile long with 11 turns. Each race is eight minutes long, which consists of anywhere from 10 to 14 laps, depending on your skill level. Once finished, a printout with your lap times will be waiting for you at the front desk. A respectable lap time for a beginner driving a Sodi GT5 runs somewhere around 35 to 40 seconds – my best lap was 36.946 seconds, placing in second. The track record sits at 29.954 seconds.

"The difference between us and other concession places with go-karts is that our karts are a lot faster," explains Suchon. "Most tracks you go to, they can govern your speed electronically; we can't do that at all. It's completely in the control of the driver. You can go as fast or as slow as you want. That's why the flag system is so important."

Each race is governed by a five-color flag

system waved by track marshals observing from three separate platforms: Yellow cautions drivers to slow down if there's an accident ahead; green indicates full-speed racing; blue signals a slower driver to move over to let a faster pass; red means stop so that an accident or breakdown can be cleared safely; and black is reserved for those breaking the rules by excessive bumping or ignoring the other flags.

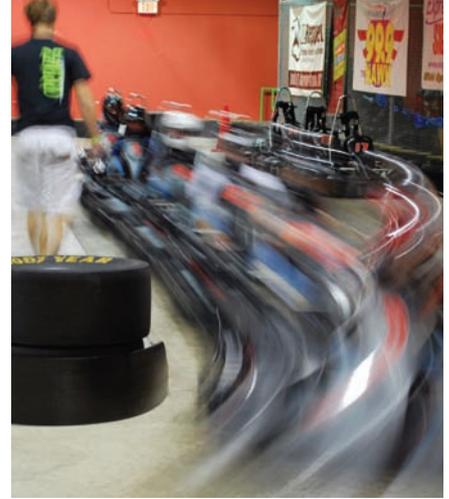
Adrenaline junkies and serious kart racers come out on most Wednesday evenings to compete in the Adult League for bragging rights and racing points. The grand prize for the top point-getter at the end of the season is a Pocono Racing Experience, valued at \$1,200. There are different levels of racing in the league, from less experienced to more experienced.

Kevin Carney, 58, is the oldest driver in the league. With previous auto racing experience, Carney loves the speed of the karts and the excitement of the competition. "The way I describe this type of racing is, I tell people that you hold your breath for eight minutes because that's how exciting it is," he says. "At 58 years old, it's the last thing I am going to try that I'm still pretty good at. In a kart, the machine does a lot of the work, but you still have to have the reflexes and the overall stamina. I guess I do it for the work out – to stay in shape. About two years ago, I brought in a heart monitor that tells you what your caloric burn is, and for four hours of racing, I burned 3,650 calories."

The youngest league driver is 14-year-old Andrew Pettijohn from Hellertown. Pettijohn started racing three years ago and quickly moved up the ranks from the Junior League to now racing with the adults. "When I first started, I was in a junior car and I started getting faster times," he says. "So I moved up and then started beating up on the adults. I like racing because it's competitive and fun. When you're like mad, you just come here and race."

Keeping the often testosterone-heavy league honest is Ashley Giroux, 21, and Samantha Greco, 16. "I've always been into the more male-dominated things," says Giroux. "You can walk in here and there are some guys that are like, 'What is she doing in here? She doesn't know what she's doing.' Then you learn and it's OK. The first two times I was out there, I was so scared. I was terrified. And it was noticeable. The people who work here told me to just go full throttle. I did, and once the adrenaline started pumping, everything just flowed."

To learn more about the adrenaline rush of burning around the LVGP track, check out lehighvalleygrandprix.com. 



Drivers leave pit row in single file, but as soon as they reach the track, the race begins.



Adult League drivers (l) Samantha Greco and (r) Ashley Giroux.



The youngest and oldest Adult League drivers, (l) Andrew Pettijohn, 14, and (r) Kevin Carney, 58.