

Press Release

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BSRKC BRAZIL GRANJA 500 RACE REPORT by RON HENRIE

When I was first asked to represent the Brian Stewart Racing Karting Championship Series (BSRKC) at the Granja Viana 500 in Brazil, the only thing I heard was: "*About the Granja 500 in Brazil, do you want to go?*" What the rest of the conversation sounded like was this, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ss2hULhXf04> (but without the music in the background of course).

I had travelled to Sutton that day just to race for fun with the Simcoe Kart Club. My focus was to race, but after that question, my concentration naturally shifted. Afterwards, I went back to my hotel room, and sent a few texts to my friends.

The next night, after talking about this opportunity all day, some bits of the conversation started to come back. The most important one was: "*You have to be able to do 1 hour and 30 minutes straight...*". Then it hit me. Man! I better get in shape! I made arrangements to practice at Le Circuit Quyon (<http://lecircuitquyon.wordpress.com/>) situated in the Ottawa-Gatineau area. The track is owned by Paul Lalonde.

When I couldn't practice at the track, I put mountain hiking on the menu, and then played up to 3 hockey games a week. I really wanted to have the physical endurance to do this as I didn't want to disappoint my teammates, the crew of Sabià Racing, BSRKC, NCKC, nor Canada, as I'd be the only Canadian racer there.

When I was a kid, I used to watch Gilles Villeneuve and I wanted to be a professional race car driver. Well today, at 45, I feel like a kid again. My dream of driving an F1 is not going to happen but racing against some F1 drivers feels the same to me. That's right! F1 drivers, past and present. Barrichello, Massa, Montoya, Piquet Jr, Rosset, Di Grassi, Zanardi, Pizzonia, Zonta, Mauricio, Burti and then Indy/Izod greats like Castroneves, De Ferran, Fittipaldi, Andretti, Junquiera, Kanaan, Franchitti, Viso and Meira are all drivers that participate or have participated in this race. Imagine that, I'd be rubbing wheels with some of these great drivers. I really wished that my friend and tuner for 10 years Kelly (Michaud of KDM Racing) could have been there to share this experience with me.

When I arrived in São Paulo, I met my four teammates; Billy "The Kid" Musgrave and Ryon Beachner, both 21 and from California, and George Moss, 55 from Long Island NY. Luis Ruibal (MG Tires) brought Rubens Barrichello with him. I remembered George as I raced against him in the 2012 FWT Rotax Max Challenge in Ocala. When I mentioned this to him, he took out his lap top and showed me the video of our race, with me ahead of him, and we both laughed.

We all hopped on the same flight to Navegantes. Once we got there, a small bus was waiting for us. There was a little discussion between the bus driver, Wagner Rossi (Luis' partner who got sick during our trip and missed all the action at the track but was there to support us at the hotel everyday), and Luis. They decided we should go straight to the track to see what was going on. Once there (around 3 pm), Luis and Sabià, of Sabià Racing, one of the top kart shops in

Brazil, discussed strategy. That's where we met Rodrigo, our crew chief.

Other teams had already been practicing all day so they decided we should jump in and do some laps. I was first. There were a lot of karts on the track at the same time. I'd obviously never raced there before, and the heavy chassis was new to me as well. But, as I put on the racing gear I remember telling myself, it's better this way, you know, jump right in and get rid of the nervousness. For those of you who've tried my kart, you know that I like it very loose. Well this kart was of a very heavy gauge and not very flexible at all. Totally the opposite of what I'm used to. My best time out there was a 1:01.753 (compared to the fastest lap of a 59.136). I was clearly overdriving it. I adjusted my driving a little bit for my second session and managed to get down to 1:00.840. A lot better but still off the pace. I clocked at 1:00.432 my third time out. We called it a day at 8:30 pm and headed to the hotel to check-in, then met in the lobby at 11 pm for a late dinner.

We got to the track on Thursday at 9:30 am. The temperature was 32°C. The way it worked is every time you wanted to go on the track, you had to stop and weigh yourself. On your way out, a different weigh station was set-up. You drive on it and kill the engine. Then the two mechanics run (super fast) while pushing you. These guys are really in shape. Yelling at people to get out of the way, some even had whistles. Pit lane was long, but very narrow, with people walking and crossing it quite carelessly.

I had the best time for our team, but I couldn't sustain it. The wind had really picked up and the rubber on the track was slowing me down. My best time of that day was a 1:00.999 but my two younger teammates from California were getting a little faster. Billy was the quickest with a 1:00.2** and Ryon a close 2nd with a 1:00.3**. We consistently showed at around 44th or 45th place out of 52 teams (pros and non-pros combined) but that didn't mean we were the slowest team, that only meant that our fastest driver was the 44th or 45th fastest of all the fastest drivers on every team. Maybe our second fastest driver was faster than most of the 2nd fastest drivers and so on.

That day I experienced my first encounter on the track with a professional race car driver. There were 2 long straight-aways and I came out of a corner and saw a fast approaching Hanier Racing kart (Rubens and Tony Kanaan's team). I felt a push the whole straight, then coming into corner one, I saw the guy sneak his nose in. I look over my shoulder to see Rubens. Gave him room, sneaked behind him and then pushed him as well to the next corner (which he then left me in the dust). I can now say that Rubens and I drafted together (even if for just for a short time).

After that practice day, Sabià decided to go with Billy for qualifying. Billy would be the only one driving on the Friday. Compared to other years, there were some Shifter and Rotax classes racing on the Friday so we only had a 30 minute practice for the Granja drivers followed by a 15 minute qualifying session. We still all had to be there in case something went wrong and had to choose another driver but also to cheer on our teammate and get to know the crew. Talking about the crew, I was told that most of these guys don't even own cars. They do this out of passion. They are very proud people. The way they devoted themselves to the team is indescribable. I have an immense respect for those guys. They are truly dedicated.

The day for qualifying had finally arrived. They now had 2 sirens in place, one at each end of the long pit lane. When someone came off the track, someone was there to turn the siren on. When

the kart reached the middle of the pit lane, a person at the other end of the pit lane would start the next siren.

Billy did an amazing job qualifying. He got down in the low 59 seconds (thank God it rained overnight to get rid of some grip), but other teams got down in the 58 seconds. After about 8 or 9 laps, Billy got hit from behind and the body was rubbing against the left rear tire. He had to stop and it was too late to head back out. We qualified 28th out of 52.

The Driver's Briefing was all done in Portuguese (thank God I befriended a few Portuguese ladies in my life). There was a pre-race show with dancers in costumes, dare-devil drivers in cars and on motorcycles, and a band that played the hino nacional brasileiro (Brazilian national anthem).

Come Saturday, the pit lane was even more hectic. Spectators would walk around the garages, ignored the lines that were painted on pit lane, and to best describe what it looked or felt like, well, you have to view footage of "*le Tour de France*" where spectators overcrowd the bike pathways while cheering on the cyclists.

The person who qualifies has to start the race. The starts are crazy. They are done in a "*Le Mans*" style meaning that all the karts are lined up on one side of the track with one mechanic behind them, and all the drivers are on the other side of the track. On '**GO**', 52 karts rush out 2, 3, 4, and maybe even 5 karts wide, all racing into corner 1. I have never seen anything like it before. Billy took us to the 24th position overall and now it was time for our first pit stop. All the stops are 4 minutes mandatory + 1 mandatory 15 minute pit stop (from the last time you cross start-finish to the next time you cross start-finish). Ryon was up next. He also drove very well and we managed to gain a few more positions. Then it started to drizzle. Still on slicks, Ryon was doing great. He was on pace with the pros.

Our other teammate George was making signs of encouragement but Ryon thought we were waving him in because some teams were pitting to put on wets. It was a premature pit stop for Ryon, it was my time to get in. To my surprise, our crew chief decided to leave me on slicks. To his defense, it looked like it was going to stop raining. Two laps after I hit the track, it started to pour. I mean, I had problems going in a straight line. I was doing 1:25's, 1:26's and by then most of the teams were on wets. I was getting passed left and right and it was getting dangerous. Regardless, he kept me out there and didn't wave me in.

After a few laps, I judged it was too risky. I wasn't doing anything good for the team, so I pitted on the next lap. If I recall correctly we were now as low as 38th. Wets went on, and George got in. He got into a good rhythm, made a few passes, then the rain stopped and a dry line started to show. All the teams changed to slicks but we had already made more stops than expected. George had no choice but to race on the wets. George gained a lot of spots with the 4 minute pit stop rule. Fortunately, the Gods were with us. After almost everyone had changed to slicks, it started to rain again. Everyone that was on slicks came back in to mount wets and George gained more spots. With his 1 hour and 40 minute stint over, George got us up to the 14th position overall. WOW!

Our team crew chief Rodrigo asked me to go next. I was really excited to have a chance to show them what I can do because I've always been very fast in real wet conditions, (and on wets of course). I jumped in, and after a couple of laps, it happened... I got into the zone. The kart was

handling exactly like mine. Rodrigo (who was timing every lap) was standing with Sabià, the big boss of the 3 teams under our tent (2 pro teams and us), Victor "The Alfano Guy", and Luis, alongside the front stretch. I will always remember their faces when I did my first fast lap. They were all jumping with fists in the air and big smiles on their faces. I looked down at my Alfano and I see a 1:11.335. I make the first corner and look up at the top ten leader board. Nobody was in the 1:11s. I was even timed as low as 1:10.800 and nobody on the leader board was better than 1:11.500. Most of them were in the 1:12 and 1:13. I climbed all the way to the 11th spot overall. I was passing guys 1, 2, and even 3 at a time, and 2 corners later they were nowhere near me. At one point, there was just this one guy I couldn't get by. Every time I showed my nose, he would squeeze me so tight I had to put 2 wheels on the grass. So a kart was catching us because behind that #99 I was doing 1:13s. The kart behind me puts his nose under me, I give him room, look over and it's Tony Kanaan. I let him by to watch how he was going to deal with #99. I saw his move, tried to follow him but I didn't have enough room. I waited a couple of corners and BAM! I passed him. The next few laps, I'm gaining on Kanaan and just as I'm about to get on his bumper, we get to corner one. I apply the brakes and the throttle sticks at full speed. I spin out, hit the tire wall backwards, try to get off, but the kart wants to keep going forward onto the track and incoming traffic. I had to shut the engine off. Rodrigo jumped the fence, ran to me, unstuck the throttle and told me to go to the pits to lubricate the mechanism and change drivers.

When I got out of the kart, Rob Miller, (a kart race promoter from Texas, who was there to support the team), came over to congratulate me and compliment me on my driving, but what pleased me the most was when I got in our resting area, where there's a screen, and the drivers from the pro teams (including E. J. Viso from Andretti Racing in IZOD) came up to me expressing amazement and giving me compliments. One even said: *"Holy S***! I can't believe how fast you were in the rain"*. Then it hit me. That was my highlight, my time to shine. I just realized what I had done and it was pretty hard to contain myself. I was choked up. In fact, reliving this moment still gives me goose bumps. You get tired physically, you concentrate for such a long time, you get emotionally drained, pretty hard to explain. I think marathon runners or high altitude mountain climbers (mountains such as Kilimanjaro or Everest) can understand, but for anybody else, you have to live it. I will always remember that feeling. How can you beat such a high?

Billy got in the kart. He was pretty fast in the rain too, but after a while, he was getting slower. We were thinking maybe the tires are going away. When he started doing high 1:14's, Rodrigo decided to bring him in. The wets were done. Ryon jumped in with new wets. Billy debriefed with Rodrigo. He told him the engine felt like it had swallowed too much water and was losing power. All of a sudden, Ryon was doing 1:16, then a couple of laps later 1:18, 1:20. They pulled him in. He had a flat rear tire and the engine wasn't pulling anymore.

So we opted to do our mandatory 15 minute pit stop. We changed the engine and it stopped raining. They left the rains on, then put new slicks and in the last minute, remounted the rains again because even though it had stopped raining there was a lot of water and mud all over the track. They picked me again to go out. I was doing ok for a while, but I wasn't as fast as in the real wet conditions. I mean the lap times were quicker than the earlier 1:10's but I didn't dominate like before. In fact I was a bit slower than the others. Then it got really dry. They kept me out there on rains in the dry. I needed to put time on the track because of Ryon's short stint due to the bad engine and flat tire. I was doing just ok for a while then the wets got cooked. It was very hard to stay on the track and be fast. I was a good 3 or 4 seconds slower and by the

time they pulled me in, I was 6 seconds slower a lap. Everybody else was on slicks already and had been for a while.

They put new slicks on for Billy. By keeping me out there on rains for so long, it gave us a brand new set of slicks for the remainder of the race. Billy was super fast. In fact he was on the track at the same time as Rubens, and Billy was lapping quicker than anybody else. He gained a few more positions. He was passing people on every lap. It was beautiful to see. I was in awe. He dominated just like I had in the rain. After his stint, it was Ryon's turn again. The rain had really freed up the kart and we all loved the handling. Even though the tires were worn, Ryon was almost matching Billy's lap times. Ryon was also amazing to watch. I will always remember that.

It was now pretty obvious that we were not going to complete the 650 laps as we would soon reach the 12 hour limit because of the rain. We now had to make a decision. By the way we were 7th in grupo B and 15th overall. We could only catch one guy on the same lap as us and were 1 lap ahead of the guy behind us and 2 ahead of the next one (for the grupo B).

The podium and trophies are for the top 6 of each class. It is going to be very close. Do we stop for gas (remember the 4 minute rule) or take a chance and run to the end. Rodrigo and Sabià were kind enough to let us decide. I thought, we have a chance to lose 2 spots with the pit stop so we all voted to try and make it to the end. The kart in 6th spot signals he's coming in. We are now in 6th and 13th overall. We are all standing at the fence. We keep giving Ryon the 2 thumbs up sign. Every lap that goes by, he seems to look at us with confusion. "DEZ MINUTOS!" was yelled through the PA system (10 minutes). Ryon keeps looking at us. I just wanted to go get ice cream for everybody to recreate the Days of Thunder scene and see the look on Ryon's face LOL!

Then we hear "CINCO MINUTOS!" We all have our fingers crossed. I can't find Rob (Miller) anymore. Victor tells me he can't watch and turns away. We look at the stopwatch, two minutes to go. Ryon is still looking strong. He comes around the second last corner and pulls in to the pits...NOOOOOOOO!!!! His gas tank was bone dry.

We lost 1 position in grupo B finishing 7th and 18th overall. Even though we missed the podium, we managed to finish ahead of both pro teams under our tent, and it was clear we hadn't been expected to do so well. During the practice days, there were teams who looked at us in a condescending way. Heck we had a 45 and a 55 year old driver. I'm 190 lbs, and George weighs 240 lbs. We were clearly the Cinderella story. The most important thing I remember is that we all played a big part in our final result; and we are proud of it. The four of us felt like winners.

I wish everyone would have the chance to experience something like this in their lifetime. That night, we had a celebration. I remember my feelings were at antipodes. I felt like I was on top of the world; yet, I never felt so lonely, sad, not being able to tell my parents about what happened. My dad passed away in 2006 and my mom in 2010. Like any parents, they were my #1 supporters.

Sunday, I have time for one last walk on the beach. As I reflected on what I just went through, the thought of my parents haunted me again. Who knows, maybe they were there to witness the race. Maybe they're the ones who sent the much needed rain. We left the hotel at 1:15 for the Navegantes airport, destination São Paulo. We had a 6 hour and 50 minute layover. Luis

explained to us he does this on purpose so we can all have one last meal together. We shared our experiences and laughed. Then it was time to part ways. It was time for one more final goodbye. We didn't want it to end. We were ready to do it all again. It was like waking up after a beautiful dream... A beautiful dream made possible by Luis, his MG Tires group, and the Brian Stewart Series.

Billy, George, Ryon and I...we are all brothers for life now!

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<http://www.BSRKC.com>

<http://www.SimcoeKartClub.com>

<http://www.WRKC.on.ca>


<http://www.MGTires.com>



(File: BSRKC '13 Granja Report - Ron Henrie)





G. MOSS 

R. HENRIE 

B. MUSGRAVE 

R. BEACHNER 

