

Interview to Dave Player, CEO and Founder of KartForce and Team BRIT.

Team BRIT will race at Silverstone 24H with two drivers affected by disabilities: Martyn Compton and Mark Allen.

This is a wonderful story about integration, hope and a bunch of former troops that don't want to live the life slower than before. I'm proud to write about this great story on my blog.

English version (Q&A only)

The Team BRIT's project is about diversity and disability. When did you start to think about it, and why?

After I left the Army I had a diving accident (in 1991) and broke my neck, leaving me paralysed and in a wheelchair.

I've lived a very active life, travelled the world, lived in different countries and set up different businesses.

In 2010 I decided I want to work with injured British troops and started KartForce, a charity that introduces team endurance kart racing.

I designed hand controls for the karts and very soon we discovered that racing had a very positive long-term impact on these guys.

Racing had re-awoken the competitive beast inside them and they realized that they could race on a totally level playing field against non-injured drivers.

Motorsport has given these troops with both physical and psychological injuries a new focus in life, helping them find the drive and motivation to re-build their broken lives.

After 5 years of karting, racing in many 12 and 24 hour races, some of the boys asked if we could step up to team endurance car racing.

This was when we set up Team BRIT.

Team BRIT is not a charity – it is a company and the drivers have to work to generate sponsorship so they can go racing.

This is a very important part of our project as we are helping convert injured soldiers into competitive racing drivers, as well as helping them develop commercial skills that will help them long after racing.

Our aim is to inspire others with disabilities, depression and PTSD to re-build their lives.

You will race at Silverstone for the 24H Series championship. As you know the championship mixes pro and amateur drivers. Some pro drivers are concerned about the skills of their amateur colleagues. How do you feel about this topic - considering also the roster that you choose?

We have spent a full season racing at National Level in the UK and won 8 out of 12 races.

We have now taken a step up to compete in the International 24hr Series, taking us a step closer to the Le Mans 24hr.

Our drivers have been underestimated, right from our early days in karting. This only happens from drivers who haven't competed with our guys.

We enter all sorts of races and compete with far more experienced drivers – sometimes pro drivers.

Some come up and say hello, and wish the lads the best and hope they enjoy the experience.

After the race, they come back with a whole new level of respect.

We have a pro driver in our team – David Pittard – and the lap times are almost the same.

This is part of the process of educating the world of motorsport. We can all talk the talk, but it's actions that earn respect.

This is the only way to break barriers. It's not by complaining – it's by going out and walking the walk.

3) Is the approach to the race of your drivers Martyn Compton and Mark Allen different from the other drivers?

Martyn and Mark approach every race the same as any other racing drivers.

Physical and mental fitness are top priority – we have a Sports Psychologist.

Practice, practice and more practice. Nothing improved a driver more than getting out on track and doing laps and laps and even more laps.

Something that coaches have discovered about Martyn and Mark is they have a very unique ability to learn quickly.

This could be because of their military background.

Coaches give them instructions and they follow these instructions to the letter.

They improve, go faster and come back eager to receive new instructions.

They are always very keen to learn and improve – both on track and off track - so their growth has been remarkable.

Your goal is reaching Le Mans in the future. What are the next steps?

We set our goal to make racing history by becoming the first team of only disabled drivers to compete in Le Mans.

We know where we want to go and we know how to get there.

After a season in the 24hr Series, our aim is to step up to the ELMS or WEC in 2017.

This year will serve to both improve the lads race skills, but also to demonstrate to sponsors that we are a team with serious ambitions, making a big mark, worthy of serious sponsorship.

We aim to race in the Le Mans 24hr in 2018.

We have already a wonderful example of an athlete with disabilities that has shown that a motorsport career is possible: Alessandro Zanardi. His career was not over after the crash and he is at the time improving his relationship with sponsors. Do you think that your project will reach in the future some interest from big sponsors, giving a future to the entire team with the very same modality used by Zanardi?

There are many disabled drivers that no one has ever heard of that have helped racing authorities open their eyes to welcoming disabled people to the world of racing.

These veterans of motorsport have paved the way and made it easier for the next generation of disabled to get involved.

But no disabled driver has made the same positive and long-term impact that Alex Zanardi has done.

Zanardi has been a massive inspiration to us – not just because of his driving.

He has set his aims and goals, and then worked out a way to achieve them.

Many people doubted he could compete at the top level again, but he has proved them all wrong.

By doing this – and not just talking the talk – he has generated the confidence of serious sponsors.

It's a lot about attitude. A deep level of determination. An unwavering amount of drive. And always being positive.

The only way any driver can compete – whether disabled or not – is with sponsorship.

6) Have you dedicated part of your project to motorsport fans with disabilities?

In the UK there is a large amount of disabled motorsport fans.

This applies to all levels of motorsport – 2 wheels and 4 wheels.

By going out and racing, regardless of disabilities, we hope to inspire more disabled people to also get into motorsport.

We will be holding track days for different groups of disabled people, including disabled children.

Our drivers will show that they can also get in the driving seat of their lives and write the next chapters in their lives.

Most of all, the message is that it is mostly about attitude – if you want it enough, you can make it happen.