

GIANLUCA BEGGIO

One of the most talented and winningest drivers in karting history. Between 1995 and 2000 he won five Formula C world titles, but his trophy collection also includes numerous European and Italian titles. Since retiring in 2003, he's undertaken various experiences on the manufacturing side (with the "Spirit" brand) as well as in the management of several important teams.



MY THIRD WORLD TITLE, DESPITE THE ACCIDENT

We came to Ugento in 1997 as the favorites to win the 125 Formula C World Championship (Beggio had won the '95 and '96 world titles as well – Edit.). Unfortunately, however, on the Thursday before the race something totally unforeseen happened: I flipped over.

I'm testing the first set of special tyres that Bridgestone had provided for us. I come up behind a slower driver, and in order to avoid wasting the lap (I wanted to see what our potential really was), I pass him a bit recklessly.

He doesn't know I'm there and blocks my trajectory. The result? I end up with some pretty serious physical damage: a dislocated shoulder and an arm that's out of commission. I sit tight on Friday, while on Saturday morning, after trying a few laps, I'm sure I'll have to throw in the towel: I simply can't apply the necessary force with my right arm. I have to drive one-handed, and switching gears is terribly difficult. I'm really discouraged and now resign myself to seeing my title bid end right there. Ronni Sala (Birel's go-to man on the track at the time; now, Birel Art's president – Edit.) and the doctors of the mobile medical unit start doing everything they can to motivate me not to give up. They try convincing me at least to give it a shot, to try to register a decent time in the Saturday qualifiers and then put everything on the line on Sunday.

Eventually they're able to convince me and, despite everything, I record the fourth-fastest time during qualifying. But the truth was that I was in incredible pain. That night, in fact, I was able to sleep for an hour at most: me, who usually sleeps for about ten hours straight on the night before a race!

On Sunday I come in fifth in the pre-final, holding back and trying to save all my strength for the final. An excessively-raging engine was causing me problems given my condition: the more aggressively the engine performed, the more I struggled to keep hold of the wheel.

So I ask my mechanic to install a "calmer" engine to make things easier on me. It was practically a training engine, three or four-tenths slower per lap.

During the first few laps of the final I'm really suffering, my arm is killing me.

When I manage to pass Danilo Rossi (another great driver from those years, and another five-time world champion – Edit.), however, something clicks inside of me that gives me a tremendous boost. I feel my body responding well and the pain disappears as if by magic. That day I realized that we all have hidden resources to call on and that there are certain situations that can help us exploit them.

Once I pass Danilo, I feel like I've already won my race, because finishing third in these conditions ... but then, all of a sudden, there's contact between the two frontrunners, Belicchi and Piccini. Belicchi is now out of the race, and then Piccini sees the black flag.

I'm in the lead!

As soon as I cross the finish line I collapse, struggling just to make it back to the lot because my arm was literally dragging on the ground. I collapse emotionally as well, because all the tension that's built up during the week overflows and I burst into tears.

When I got hurt I thought a year's worth of work was going to go up in smoke.

And now, in that moment, realizing that I was the world champion, despite everything that had happened ... it was amazing!

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