

Paniccia dominating the karting track



By Jake Courtepatte

At age three, Marcello Paniccia had convinced his mom he was going to be a professional race car driver.

At age ten, the young phenom is turning heads on the track and competing at an international level.

Paniccia, whose family lives in Aurora, recently booked his ticket to compete in the Rotax Max Challenge in Portugal, a world championship held in early November.

"All I want to do is make Canada proud and do my best in Portugal," said Marcello. "Racing is my life and I will race in Formula 1 and be the best Canadian driver ever."

Showing such a passion for driving at such an early age was a challenge for the Pinaccias, who put in "many phone calls" before finding a track willing to put a kart together for Marcello at the age of six, according to his father, Steve.

"That very day the track owner, Russ Bond, was impressed with his ability in a kart," said Steve.

Just one year later, Paniccia won the track's championship, and quickly advanced into faster karts.

He won his first Eastern Canadian Championship in Quebec at eight years old.

"He was always a front runner with the veterans of the track that were at very least one year older," said Steve.

In the lead in points in last year's season, and on his way to qualifying for the worlds, Paniccia backed out to get a special license to race with groups age thirteen and up at only nine years old.

"The season became a half year of driving development," said Steve. "This year it was his rookie year again in the Mini Max division, and finished third overall in Canada and also earning his ticket as the youngest driver to Portugal."

Reaching the world championships required a certain amount of cumulative points through the Eastern Canadian Karting Championship series, spread out among Ontario and Quebec tracks.

With just two months to go before the competition, Paniccia is on the track a minimum of twice a week, training mostly on tracks in Hamilton with his team leader Trevor Wickens, and the home track of Robert Wickens, a Mercedes Benz DTM driver and one of Paniccia's idols.

"I could never do this without my family who believe in me and take me to all my races and practices," said Pinaccia.

A GoFundMe page has been set up to help cover the enormous cost of the trip, and can be found at www.gofundme.com/representing-canada-in-portugal.