

COLUMNIST

PAUL SAWYER



The Radio 1 DJ and Krafted label director is wanting more after his debut four-wheeled racing season in Minis and elsewhere

Photos: Sophie Mayes Photography



Fifth in table well surpassed his expectations



All of Sawyer's development came together for Croft finale

Finishing fifth in R53's standings in Mini Challenge Clubsport this year – my first year in four-wheeled racing – was very unexpected. When I started I just expected to be at the back, enjoying myself and learning, but I soon realised that the more I did it, the more competitive I became and in the end I started to really battle with the front pack. It's also been really good fun and something that I wish I'd done earlier.

Experience as the year went on was a big thing in improving, as was getting to know how everybody drives and what you can and can't do. I always remember my first race at Brands Hatch coming into the first corner and being nervous as hell!

I was lucky because Steve Kite, from Misty Racing, is my mechanic and became a mentor as well. We didn't make too many changes to the car straight away; I needed to get used to things before I could really push. So the more the time went by, the more we did to the car, and the more I realised what the car and I were capable of.

And then I got invited to race a Citroen C1 in a three-hour endurance race. My main sponsor Silverlake sponsors the C1 Racing series and runs two cars and asked if I'd like to drive at Brands. The first time I went out I thought the car was going to kill me! It was very, very different to the Mini. But it was such a brilliant way to learn how to keep momentum going and use the back end of a car to bring it round into corners. I brought that into the Mini, and couldn't believe the difference it made.

Then I got invited to drive in EnduroKa, again at Brands. They had a celebrity driver who pulled out at the last minute, and as Steve was running the car they asked if the DJ he looks after could drive instead. That was another really good experience to learn how to keep momentum in a lower-powered car.

I probably first realised I was making a driving breakthrough at Donington Park, the fourth Clubsport round of five. I did a trackday there not long before and realised how much I enjoyed that circuit, then in the actual racing I was up with the lead pack. That was a bit of a turning point.

Then at the last round at Croft everything came together. It was a shame that my last race I had a DNF because it broke down on the startline, and it's a shame the season ended because I'd like to have carried on and done more. But I'm looking at perhaps doing a couple of rounds somewhere else before the next Clubsport season starts.



He also tried a C1, and took learning back to Mini

I'm hoping to do Race of Remembrance in November, and I've been invited to drive the C1 again. They've asked me if I'd like to do Silverstone's 24-hour next year as well. I'm just seeing what opportunities come along for a bit more experience.

I'm going to be testing an Audi TT too, because I'm quite interested in Audi TT Cup. I like the fact it's all equal cars – like with the C1 and the Ka – because you're almost like in a train in their races. But I'm definitely staying in the Mini next year; if I do Audi TT Cup it would either be alongside Minis or for the following year.

When Steve and I were talking throughout this year we were aiming for top 10, which then I achieved in round three at Thruxton. Then at Donington we were trying to get to top six, I was just outside of that. And then I've ended up in the top six of the championship. So for next year I'd like to try and improve on my placings in the Mini, see if I can get above fifth in the championship and get on the podium if I can.

The support I'm getting from the music industry is actually amazing. It's amazing how many people in the industry are interested in motorsport. Lots and lots have been coming to watch, and quite a few watch on the livestream. I get a lot of messages and social media comments.

And Solarstone, a world-famous touring DJ, mentioned my racing on his radio show recently. He played one of my one of my remixes and said 'Paul Sawyer's got into motorsport, we'd better make the most of him while he's still here!'

"It was a shame the season ended because I wanted to do more"