

MOTORSPORT NEWS

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COLUMNIST

PAUL SAWYER



The Radio 1 DJ and Krafted music label director is loving his four-wheeled racing debut in Mini Challenge Clubsport



DJ Sawyer has switched from two wheels to four



Photos: Sophie Mayes, Dan Reid

His initial nerves gave way to surprising results

For a long time, since the age of 11, I had been a two-wheeled racer. Before I got into DJing, I did motocross at national level and a few international meetings. Then in my early 20s I stopped competing to concentrate on touring.

I got back into riding in my 30s, but I realised I didn't bounce so easily and started to get quite a few injuries. So I did mountain bike racing instead, up until December 2022 when I had a massive crash. I smashed my collarbone into three pieces, snapped all my shoulder ligaments, and had quite a lot of reconstruction. The surgeon said if I did it again they probably would have a lot of trouble rebuilding my shoulder.

So I thought the best thing is having a go at four wheels instead. I spent time looking for a track car to do some trackdays, and I bought a Mini that was race prepared. I really enjoyed it and met one of the guys already doing Mini Challenge Clubsport, Zac Blackwell, and he talked me into having a go at racing. I decided to take the plunge this year.

I've followed motorsport from a young age, and I've always loved cars. So to finally actually be racing a car is a bit of a dream come true.

I was quite surprised how much I needed to do in preparation, to make sure we met the regulations. I was very nervous about starting, and luckily I was introduced to Steve Kite from Misty Racing. He now looks after the car and comes along to all the meetings as my mechanic and mentor. It's great having that support; if I'd tried to do it completely on my

own I think I would have just crumbled!

I haven't been as nervous for a long time as I was for my Brands Hatch debut weekend. Practice and qualifying gave me a bit of confidence, but for the first race I was so nervous on the startline because I'd never even done a standing start in the car before.

Yet the race went really well. I fully expected to be completely last, but I wasn't! Then things just got better and better, and the third race was as wet as you could imagine, and I'd never driven the car in the wet but I actually got a strong finish and it was my most exciting race of the weekend. The results put me eighth in the R53 championship and 13th in the main Cooper S championship.

And I've never had so much fun in my life. Out of all the racing I've done over the years this is probably the most exciting thing I've been involved in.

I'm on a learning curve too. I was quite cautious coming into the first corner of each



Sawyer more commonly can be found DJing

Brands race because I didn't want to have any crashes or anything. But now I realise what it's like, and everybody's really respectful, there's loads of room for improvement. Also my car was a little bit down on power so I'm having some work done to it.

I'm also bringing my music and racing together because the organisers asked me to sort out music for the Saturday night get together, called Sunset Garden, they do for each round. So I'm putting together a playlist for that and making that into a Spotify playlist, so it'll be the championship's official playlist. I'm happy for other drivers to get involved too.

In addition I've put together a competition to give away a pair of tickets for July's Thruxton round. All the main championship sponsors have got behind it: Airtec has given merchandise for the winner's prize bundle, Ravenol has a £50 voucher, MWUK is giving a free service and Scudo Forte, a detailing company in my area, has a £100 voucher. Silverlake and Garmin are behind it as well. You can find out more, and enter, at: krafted.co.uk/Competition.html.

I can't wait for my second meeting, at Castle Combe this weekend. I definitely want to try and improve on my positions from the first round. My car should have a bit more power and I know what it's like doing the starts and being among it all; I can be a bit more aggressive.

I'd like to concentrate this year on getting as high as I can, and probably then come back next year to improve again. Perhaps going into the main Mini Challenge at some point would be nice but it's early days.

"I've never had so much fun in my life"