

# SA motorsport hero Tschops excels in US

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**P**ORT Elizabeth's Tschops Sipuka has just returned from yet another successful foray in international motorsport. This time Sipuka tested with the Brain Stewart Indy Pro Series Racing team at the Phoenix International Raceway in the US.

Stewart is one of the most respected team owners and was 2005 and 2006 Indy Pro Champion.

Tschops, originally from Qumbu in the Eastern Cape, put up the second quickest time in the test session and impressed Stewart and other team owners with his professional approach and talent.

The Indy car that Sipuka drove has a 3,5 V8-litre engine pushing out 335kW and is the fastest racing car that he has raced in.

"I covered 150 miles (241km) in total, clocking speeds up to 305km/h on the very tight one-mile (1,6km) oval track. This was such an eye opener and it's not easy to comprehend a car cornering at 300km/h," said Sipuka.

"Some of the more experienced drivers came testing at Phoenix and the quickest time of the day was 23,6 seconds. I put up the second quickest which was 23,9.

"I was quite amazed by this as it's a different discipline to what I am used to back home. I seemed to have impressed everybody around here as they kept on congratulating me and wanting to know more about myself and South Africa," said Sipuka.

"Without Wesbank and the Nelson Mandela Bay municipality sponsoring me, this highlight of my life would have not been possible," he said.

"Initially I battled to get a seat that was comfortable, but after trying



**ALL SMILES . . . Tschops Sipuka and Brian Stewart, Indy Pro Series Racing team owner at the Phoenix International Raceway, after the Port Elizabeth driver put up the second quickest test time on the oval track.**

many I was able to get one that, although not ideal, was reasonable. After all, to spend the whole day in an uncomfortable seat would have played havoc with my concentration and times," he said.

And afterwards there was a glowing tributes all round. "I think he did awesome," said Stewart.

"Tschops was very impressive for a guy who had never seen an oval before. He was flat around Phoenix and running times that were comparable to the other guys there."

IndyCar Series technical director

Kevin Blanch oversaw the test and came away impressed with Sipuka in and out of the car.

"He had never seen an oval before, so he had no preconceptions of what to do," Blanch said. "We told him about his line and then showed him where he was doing wrong and he was right on the line. He was told he could run flat out and within a few laps, he could drive flat out."

Race engineer Douglas J Zister of the Stewart Racing Team was also full of praise.

"Tschops's approach to the race car and circuit was very systematic, allow-

ing him to quickly adapt to the challenge of oval racing. Less than one third of the way through this test Tschops had the car up to speed, improving his lap times during each outing on track.

"As race engineer, I found Tschops very accepting and disciplined in following the test plan and rules. His communication skills and technical knowledge of the car's performance were very apparent during all engineering debriefing sessions. Tschops's understanding and interpretation of race data was clearly demonstrated by his progress on the track," said Zister, who

has a mechanical engineering degree from Canada's Waterloo University.

"I consider our test with Tschops very successful, and have a great deal of confidence in his driving ability. Tschops exceeded my expectations during this test session and I know that he would have a front-running season if he were to compete in the Indy Pro Series," said Zister.

And it wasn't only the team owners and engineers that Tschops impressed.

There was ex-Port Elizabeth resident Gayle Allen who was at the track and who wrote to him before he left to return home.

"I had the brief pleasure of meeting you on the infield at Phoenix International Raceway yesterday. You may recall that a group of 10 smiling, boisterous, and enthusiastic Cub Scouts asked you to autograph their posters and then proceeded to grin broadly when you allowed them to have their photo taken with you.

"I want to thank you for your generosity of time allotted to these young boys as it will be a fond memory that will remain with them for a long time to come. It will give them a very positive impression of our sport.

"Thank you. It was lovely to meet you. As I said, I spent 18 months in Port Elizabeth, South Africa back in the 1970s and the beauty of your country and its people will always be one of my most cherished memories," - Gayle.

Sipuka, who has national Motor-sport Colours, has proved to be a great ambassador for Port Elizabeth and South Africa.

**After all, to spend the whole day in an uncomfortable seat would have played havoc with my concentration**

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## Young Bay driver burns up track in tests at start of international career

### MOTORSPORT CORRESPONDENT

NELSON Mandela Bay schoolboy Simon Moss swapped his Daniel Pienaar High School desk for a single-seater BMW racing car and his metro home for a hotel in Malaysia for the last five days — and burnt up the track in the process.

The 16-year-old was taking part in test sessions for the Formula BMW Asian Pacific Championship series with Team Meritus as part of a scholarship for which he has been selected. The race cars are powered by 105kW BMW engines, can reach top speeds of up to 230km/h, and exceed international safety requirements for the class.

"During the five-day testing Simon was faced with the challenge of fitting in with the team and learning the circuit," a spokesman for the formula said.

"He responded to an intense coaching programme by improving in leaps and bounds, competing neck and neck with older more experienced top drivers.

"On occasions, he set the pace and finally finished the testing on new tyres with a time of 1 minute 10,4 seconds, which is 0,1 of a second under the lap record for formula BMW at the Sepang circuit." The first



**SPEEDING ALONG . . . Simon Moss was in top form during testing in Malaysia, which ended yesterday.**

race in the formula is on March 22 and 23 during the Malaysian Grand Prix weekend at the circuit.

"A test ban now falls into place and only four selected official test days will be allowed during the season. These will be before four of the future race events, during the six-race calendar, of which three are on Grand Prix days," said the spokesman.

"Simon has been awarded a scholarship contract with BMW and is not allowed to compete in any other series, so his racing will be confined to Asia during 2008."

Simon's dad, Terry, a former national champion who has also raced overseas, said the Daniel Pienaar High principal and his staff had been very accommodating in return for an assurance that Simon's schoolwork remains a priority throughout the year.

Simon is among four "juniors" selected from 25 candidates who took part in trials. Each has qualified for €50 000 (about R210 000) of financial assistance towards the cost of a season in the single-seater series, as well as training and coaching.