

RACING AS ART

For 19-year-old Max Fedler, racing has proven to be a joy on so many levels | WORDS James Heine | MAIN IMAGE Courtesy Max Fedler



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Like many young SCCA racers, Summit "Max" Fedler has loved motorsports for almost as long as he can recall. Not only because he is from an extended SCCA family that has its roots in Elkhart Lake, Wis., or because he's been racing karts since the age of 8, but also because racing provides an intense sense of joy and accomplishment that he "finds hard to describe," he says.

"For however many laps I am driving at any given time, I am freed from the world around me," he explains. "I am able to focus and be absolutely immersed and engaged in the present moment. It is a beautiful form of self-expression and freedom to me."

Based on his conversations with other drivers, he is not alone in this assessment, he adds. "The SCCA has taught me that I am not the only one who values this feeling, and that we are all friends at the end of the day."

Now embarking on his second quarter as a freshman at the University of California, Santa Barbara, where he plans to major in economics, the 19-year-old Rocky Mountain Region member has already established a formidable motorsports resume that includes SKUSA, Rotax, and KF titles, multiple SCCA U.S. Majors Tour and Hoosier Super Tour wins, multiple World Challenge top-10 Touring Car finishes, and a class win at the 2017 Creventic 24H Series race at the Circuit of the Americas with Vess Energy Motorsports.

That win, along with his inaugural World Challenge race at Road America in 2015 - just before his 16th birthday - are first among the highlights of his career, he says. Not that the latter was an easy intro to pro racing.

First, Max explains, he wanted to make a good impression with everyone, from his family to his team and sponsors. Then it rained during qualifying. "I ended up qualifying second-to-last, or something like that. It was ridiculous," he recalls. "If I remember correctly, it was a 20- or 22-car field. So, I drove from 20th or 21st to seventh, and I got the Hard Charger Award. That's when I knew I could do this."

The motorsports arrangement Max has with his family is straightforward. His parents, David and Annie, provide the T2 BMW M235i he races, but he has to find the money to go racing. To that end, he's created Max Fedler Racing and styled it as an "experiential events company." It's a result, he explains, of the reality that it's "exceptionally hard" to find partners to help fund his racing efforts.

"Unless you're like a Rahal at Rahal Letterman Lanigan, it's hard to just ask people to slap a logo on your car and give you money," Max says, adding, "because, at a certain point, there's really no value in just slapping a logo on a car. Even though it might look cool, it probably won't convince people to stop everything they're doing and look up your company."

Rather, Max says, he proposes to potential sponsors that instead, for example, of a traditional company outing, where a company might take staff or clients golfing or to a major sporting event, they consider a weekend visit to a racetrack.

"We present a platform in which they can come to the racetrack and have a VIP experience and have

GOING FOR IT

(LEFT) For Max Fedler, being on track is an opportunity to be fully immersed in an incredible experience. (BAR LEFT) From karts to his Touring 2 BMW, racing has been a lifelong affair that shows no signs of slowing.



RACING AS AN ANTIDOTE TO BEING BULLIED

As a middle-school student, Max Fedler recalls he was frequently the target of bullying. He doesn't know the reason, but as an eighth-grader, he "was bullied a ton," he says.

The antidote to that bullying turned out to be racing. "I don't know why I was picked on, [but] that's not the point," he says. "Regardless, it really shook me up. So, as a 14-year-old, the only escape from the stuff that was going on at school was karing. I remember there would be weekends where I was so peed up and so angry at myself for having these things I couldn't control, or at other people for making fun of me, that I could hardly stand it. But whenever I'd hop in the kart, it would all just flow away. There would be nothing to focus on but the driving. That's what I love about racing. For the 45 minutes you're out there, nothing else outside of the helmet matters. It simply can't matter. If it starts to matter, you'll crash and get hurt. That's really why I liked racing - it offered me an escape."

Today, Max is well over that phase of his life, he adds. He doesn't get bullied, and he doesn't need an escape - but the satisfaction, joy, and sense of peace offered by racing still exists, and it motivates him. "It's still nice," he says. "That sensation hasn't left me."

his 2019 efforts, which include double Super Tour T2 victories at Laguna Seca, as a "re-grounding" of his race craft.

"We put a lot of emphasis on me just figuring out what I need to do to drive the car at a winning pace every single time I get in it," he explains. "So, there was a lot of practice - definitely more practicing than racing, which I actually didn't mind. We went back to basics, and I think it really paid off, because now I'm at a position where I really feel like I can step in the car anywhere, at any time, and put the car up top. It was a confidence-booster for sure."

On paper, he adds, it might look like he took things back a notch last year

because he didn't do as many races and he didn't travel as much as he'd done previously, "but we still won four out of six races, and we improved a ton," he says.

So what should we expect to see from Max in the coming year? "I definitely want to keep doing some SCCA Majors," he's quick to note. "The June Sprints and the Runoffs would be incredible races to do. I'd also like to try some GT4 stuff or some GT3 Cup stuff and get my feet wet in the world of GT racing. I've done a lot of testing in GT4, and I think I'm experienced enough to take a GT4 car and be competitive with it. But I still want to get results in the car that I'm driving now, and just clean up in whatever race I run." ●

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MAX FEDLER

that bonding experience with me and the team," he explains. "For the weekend, it's their racecar."

And it's been working nicely, he adds. "It's cool to see them get excited about this thing that represents them," he says, "but they also represent themselves. They feel like they're part of a team, and that really puts a smile on their face."

Looking toward 2020, Max describes