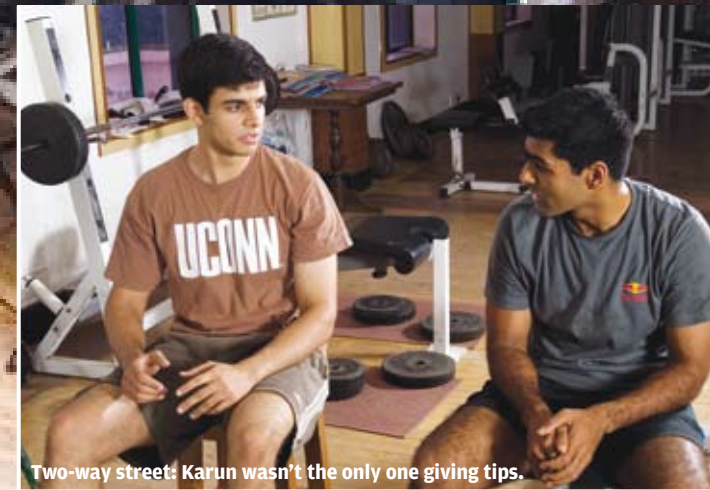


ARE YOU RACING FIT?

Racing drivers are famous for being fit, especially the ones in higher categories of formula racing. So how would a journalist fare against GP2 driver Karun Chandhok? Vinayak Pande went to Chennai to see if he could keep up, if only for a day.

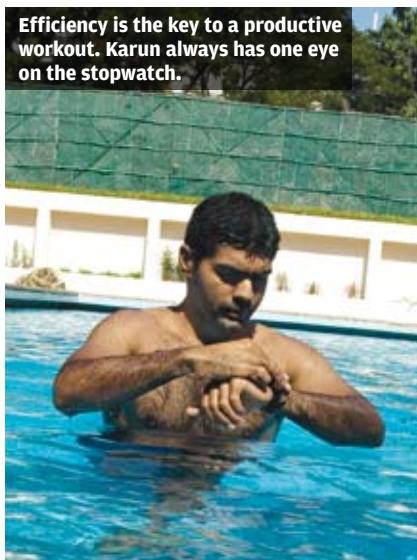


Two-way street: Karun wasn't the only one giving tips.



Karun effortlessly pulls away from Vinayak.

Efficiency is the key to a productive workout. Karun always has one eye on the stopwatch.



A brief but extremely welcome break.



"I'M STILL PRETTY jet-lagged today, so we're going to take it a little easy." Just three days ago, Karun Chandhok had been racing his iSport GP2 car in the heat of Budapest. It had been one of Karun's many weekends of mixed fortunes in the 2008 season. A fourth-place finish in the feature race had set up fifth place on the starting grid for the sprint race. However, an electronics failure on the start line meant he was unable to put the car in gear and had to call it a day. "We've had so much bad luck this year," Karun said. "We could have easily scored 20 to 30 points more with better luck." Fair enough I guess.

First up in his mid-season training programme (Karun follows a different

training regimen during pre-season) is a one-hour swim in the morning, on an empty stomach. I look forward to this segment with a degree of apprehension as I cannot remember the last time I went swimming. "Just swim at your own pace," he said. No worries there, I said to myself. There was no way I was going to be able to match his 100-odd laps of the approximately 22-metre pool. Before we got started Karun explained how a racing driver benefited by swimming. "Driving requires both endurance and concentration. Swimming, and in particular the regimen I follow (Karun requested us not to publish any details of his swim programme) helps a great deal in this aspect," he explained. Karun alternates

between swimming and running about eight kilometres in the morning whenever he is in Chennai — he trains at the Madras Cricket Club. In Europe, however, he prefers to cycle anywhere between 45 to 60 kilometres, depending on the type of terrain, rather than run.

After his endurance training is done, he moves on to weight training in the afternoon. "We (racing drivers) are like tri-athletes with really strong necks," he said, explaining the importance of varying exercises to the conditioning of racing drivers. Extended repetition with an exercise programme leads to muscles getting used to just one particular range of motion, something drivers strapped into a car going at nearly 300kph and being chucked around by as much as four g's in every direction cannot afford to let happen.

It's all about muscular endurance as much as muscular strength. I found that out first-hand when we kicked off in the pool. I inwardly cursed myself for not being as regular a swimmer as Karun effortlessly pulled away while I floundered. Two laps at a time soon became just one lap at a time as Karun kept going like a metronome. I got a slight break when he stopped to make a pit stop in the locker room. I lapped up as much oxygen as I could before Karun came back to resume the grind.

The hour finally passed as Karun checked his stopwatch. Time is of the essence, not just to clear up his schedule for endless sponsor-related activities and media appointments, but also to increase the efficiency of his workout. Everyday, Karun writes a summary of his workout and emails it to his trainer, Giuseppe Sabastini. "I do this so that Giuseppe knows I'm not on holiday when I'm in Chennai!" Karun quipped. I can certainly testify to that. Karun had managed just over two kilometres while I had struggled to around 500 metres (with breaks aplenty I must confess).

The day was done, however, so Karun and I went to get a welcome bite. After a breakfast of eggs and toast (to get some much-needed carbs, I gulped down a glass of coconut water too), I tagged along for a little bit longer as Karun went to a local go-kart track for a TV shoot. Unfortunately for my rumbling stomach, it dragged on for what seemed like forever. I needed →

Karun Chandhok's Mid-Season Training Programme

| | MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | FRIDAY | SATURDAY |
|------------------|--|---|---|---|---|--|
| MORNING | Bike - outdoor medium ride, ie. around 45km or 90 to 100 minutes | Swim | Swim | Swim | Bike - outdoor medium ride, ie. around 45km or 90 to 100minutes | Bike - outdoor long ride, ie. 60 to 70km or 130 to 150 minutes |
| AFTERNOON | Circuit training 3 laps | Bike - indoor low intensity 90 to 120 min | Resistance training 2kg dumb-bells 4 laps | Bike - indoor low intensity 90 to 120 min | Circuit training 4 laps | |

* Neck 3 days per week, lower body circuit 3 days per week.

'Taking it easy' is not what it sounds like when it comes to a racing driver's workout. I had to hand it to Karun for being magnanimous!

← sustenance fast if I was to get through the weight training segment. I rushed back to my hotel for a meal of boiled eggs, *paneer tikka* and toast. There was no time to rest by the time I was done, however. A quick change and a few stretches later, I was in an auto headed back to the club.

I was determined to spring a surprise or two now that I was on dry land and in the familiar surroundings of a gym. Karun walked in with a hurried gait and started to talk me through the workout. "We're going to do circuit training, which means we use light weights with a lot of reps and no breaks in between the exercises," he said. Makes sense if you think about it; driving a race car for almost two hours requires physical endurance that allows a driver to concentrate entirely on driving. Karun was at the start of his typical workout cycle and 'taking it easy'. We would only be doing three laps of circuit training instead of four. You can't say he isn't magnanimous!

It was Karun's day to do upper body training starting off with bent over cable flys. Twenty reps later, I stepped in and matched him rep for rep. Nonplussed, Karun moved on to the bench press, where I matched him again. Still no reaction; so we moved on to the dumb-bell flys where it was the same story, as well as on the bicep curls, tricep pushdowns and so on and on. I was feeling pretty good until we started to do dips. Karun reeled off his 20 reps while I could manage just eight. No matter, I was back on track with the shoulder press, back extension and dumb-bell bicep curls.

"Okay, now let's do something a little different," Karun said. I was expecting that, but Karun was in for a surprise when he revealed it was time to do the steering wheel exercise. Unknown to him, I had

been practicing this exercise with a much heavier weight than he uses. Karun's version involved a four-kilo weight held up like a steering wheel and quickly turned from one lock to another continuously for a minute. My version involved a 10-kilo dumb-bell held up like a steering wheel and turned to simulate a lap of the Monaco circuit for a minute-and-a-half. Karun listened intently as I explained how I had been preparing for this assignment.

"Not bad," he conceded before moving on to core strength exercises. The first segment involved bridge exercises where the entire weight of the body is supported on your elbows and toes. It's held there for 45 seconds to a minute. Once more, Karun met his match. "Okay, now try this one," he said, rolling out a gym ball. You have to hand it to racing drivers, they're really competitive. Karun proceeded to show off the incredible balance and core strength possessed by racing drivers by holding his legs off the ground and managing to hold his position for a good number of seconds without toppling over. Impressive. Even more impressive was when he caught a medicine ball thrown at him without keeling over. I gave it a go as well and thanks to my long legs, saved myself the embarrassment of flopping to the floor.

On the remaining two circuits, I started to fall short on some of the exercises. Oh well, I gave it a go at the very least and went some way towards making up for the swimming pool fiasco. Even the ace racer admitted to that. "Not bad man... you look like you know what you're doing in a gym," he said. "Now if only you can convince your editor to let you come to England and try 45 kilometres of cycling!" Anytime Karun... anytime. **AI**

The Bigger Picture

"So often drivers lose sight of the bigger picture," says Karun. "At the end of the day, you have to drive the car." A philosophy that's helped Karun win the sprint race at Hockenheim. It hasn't all been hunky dory, however. The GP2 Asia Series campaign that preceded the European leg was trying, to say the least. "Everything that could have gone wrong went wrong," he said. Five retirements from 10 races led to just a 13th place in the standings, a long way behind iSport team-mate Bruno Senna's fifth place in the points table.



To his credit, Karun has bounced back in the GP2 Europe Series where he is in a tight race for third place in the standings. However, Chandhok has struggled to find an answer to the Brazilian's qualifying pace. Senna is well clear and in second place in the standings. Karun is hoping his team of race engineers will find a solution to his qualifying troubles. As India's leading candidate for a future Formula 1 race seat, here's hoping he finds the key to consistent success.



Light weights and many reps are the key to building muscle endurance.



I match Karun on the bench press as he moves on to the dumb-bell flys.



It's the same story on the bicep curls and vertical flys.



Tricep pull-downs are key for overall upper body strength.



Lock to lock for 45sec straight. Can't imagine what the real thing is like.



Karun kicks off the next lap of circuit training with bent over cable flys.