

Rob Bunker – Professional Résumé

born Sept. 8, 1988 in Summit, N.J.
residence Bridgewater, N.J.
web robbunker.com

race highlights

1999 Oakland Valley Race Park class champion and most-improved driver
2001 Oakland Valley Race Park class champion
2003 World Karting Association – three national wins, three top-five national rankings
2004 Formula Renault TR Pro Racing – one pole, two podiums in four starts
2005 Formula BMW USA Championship – eighth, two top-five, eight top-10 finishes
2006 Star Mazda Championship – one podium, two top-five, five top-10 finishes, led two track sessions

notes

- started racing go-karts – "I started young and it was a choice between racing and soccer – on the soccer field I picked daisies, but on the race track I was going pretty fast. When I started winning national events in karting and I realized that I had a good chance to move up the ladder, I knew that this was something I really wanted to do with my life."
- wants to race sports cars – "Endurance racing is definitely where I want to be. My number one goal is to cross the American borders and race in the 24 Hours of Le Mans [France]."
- uses Speed Secrets coaching to enhance performance – "Without coaching, I don't know where I would be. I think it's a critical component in just about every sport. I like to have every opportunity I can to be the most efficient driver on and off the track."
- prepared for Formula BMW standing starts by watching drag-racing on television – "Since I was a little kid, I sat in front of the TV and watched [13-time champion] John Force to the starting light. Every time the light would go down, I'd slap my hand against something."
- interned for Walker Racing Champ Car team – "There was a lot of cleaning involved, but I turned a wrench every once in awhile! It really showed me how a small team operates."

excerpts from race notes

Football players take their cues from the coach. Baseball coaches are an integral part of the game. Olympic athletes rely on coaching to max performance. And a new breed of drivers see coaching as the fast lane to victory.

Rob Bunker represents a generation of drivers who won't race without a coach. He thinks his age may be a factor: He wasn't old enough to drive a street vehicle when he started racing, so he didn't think he was already a hot driver.

"The car itself is able to work at 100 per cent efficiency right out of the box. All it needs is to warm up the engine, the tires and things like that," he noted. "Humans usually start off a bit slower. The idea is to get me warmed up at the same pace that the car is getting warmed up. There are certain techniques we use to increase the amount the mind is working, increase heart rate and keep my vision up and out."

Bunker is a protégé of Speed Secrets Driver Development, which provides comprehensive elite-level training for drivers in racing, testing, physical, mental, marketing and career skills.

"Rob is very, very gifted. You can tell that he's played a lot of sports all his life because he picks things up really quickly," Speed Secrets founder Ross Bentley noted. "If I tell him to brake two per cent lighter in a corner, he'll do it. And it won't take him 30 laps – he'll have it nailed by the second lap."

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Rob Bunker made the most of his rookie season in the Formula BMW USA Championship. He finished the 2005 season eighth in the driver championship and seventh in rookie points, but the results don't tell the whole story.

Bunker started the year with 17 days of track testing and an intense physical and mental training session. He then methodically improved his performance on track, posting eight top-10 results in 14 races. He capped the season by leading the first practice of the final race weekend and finishing fourth in the final race.

From season-opener to finale, Bunker developed his trademark charge. Although his qualifying results weren't as high as he'd hoped, he quickly made up the difference on track. Race after race, he sliced through the field, gaining as many as nine positions in a 12-lap sprint. He was lightning-fast on the Formula One-style standing starts, a skill he honed watching drag-racing on television.

"Looking back on the season, of course there are some places that we could have worked on a little more thoroughly, but Speed Secrets has taught me to always find more. It's what I'm trained to do. This has helped me all season long, because at no point during any event were we ever content with what we had. There was always something to fine-tune. We did our best to outperform the competition in every way," Bunker noted.

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Rob Bunker continues to enhance his race performance with interesting training strategies. He has improved his vision to 20/10 with the help of a visual trainer. The techniques have been used successfully by elite athletes in baseball, basketball, football, golf, hockey, tennis and Olympic sports. Bunker says the training has helped him both on and off track.

"I do individual activities that free up the motion of my eyes," he explained. "It expands peripheral vision, it helps reading up close, it helps reaction time, as well. It does a lot for street driving and it helps at school, too, but for sure, it helps with racing. That was the number one goal, to make sure we didn't leave anything on the table."

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After a steering failure during qualifying for his first Star Mazda Championship race, Rob Bunker charged from the back of the field to gain 26 positions in the 17-lap race. He earned seven positions on the first lap and added four or five positions on each restart.

"I did mental imagery, constantly thinking about what would happen, thinking about everything three or four times through, every possible scenario for the start. I dreamt about it! It surprisingly helped a lot," he said.

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Rob Bunker practiced driving on walls and car-dodging to prepare for the Star Mazda Championship race on the streets of Houston. He went beyond the computer games of his generation, using sophisticated visualization strategies to enhance his race performance.

"I visualize driving on the walls, getting as close to the walls as possible," he explained, then added the technique of car-dodging. "I visualize driving around with cars shooting towards me going the wrong way. It helps me develop quick hands and get used to the sensation of driving around other people."

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Comfort is not one of Bunker's goals: "I've learned that every time I get comfortable with the car, I'm going too slow. I need to be nervous, uncomfortable with being comfortable."

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Some athletes carry lucky charms or talismans in competition; Rob Bunker carries his objectives. He tried a new tactic for the Star Mazda Championship race at Road Atlanta. He recorded his goals for the race, tucked the note in the pocket of his driver suit and went on to post a strong result on the demanding 2.54-mile road course.

"I wrote down what I wanted – to get to the front and do what it takes to get there. I put it in my pocket and raced with it. The theory is if you don't write down your goals, you have a 10 per cent less chance of reaching them. If you do write them down, you have a much greater ability to achieve them," he explained.

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