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Lebanese racing driver Basil Shaaban has made his first mark on British formula racing by scoring a top-five finish in his first ever Formula Ford race. It was the fourth round of the AVON Tyres Clubmans Formula Ford 1800 championship and was held at the historic Brands Hatch circuit. Basil had only gotten 4 days of testing experience in the Formula Ford before the start of the race, making his formidable debut performance all the more astonishing in his first year of formula racing.

The Formula Ford 1800 is one of the most popular formula cars raced worldwide in the junior categories on the ladder to Formula One. The formula is based around the 150 hp, 1800 cc "Zetec" engine supplied by Ford Motor Company. The chassis can come from a choice of various manufacturers and is an alloy-tubing space-frame design. Basil's team, Martin Donnelly Racing (Team MDR), use the highly successful Van Diemen chassis manufactured in Norfolk, England. Formula Ford has been a stepping stone in the careers of many F1 drivers such as the late Ayrton Senna, Michael Schumacher, and Jenson Button.

After being given only 60 minutes to learn the challenging Brands Hatch circuit, Basil focused himself in qualifying to emerge 7th out of 19 drivers, thus out-qualifying many of his more experienced competitors. About his qualifying performance Basil said "Brands Hatch is a very technical circuit, and requires a specific driving technique to be on the limit through its undulating corners. With the limited testing I was able to do here, I was still experimenting with the car and learning during qualifying. Even though I know there was more speed to be extracted from the car, I am very happy to have qualified seventh for my first Formula Ford race." His debut qualifying performance attracted significant attention, inspiring the crowd's eagerness to see how the fresh-faced Arab driver would stand up in the race.

The next challenge was Basil's first Formula Ford start. "With the relatively narrow rear tires on the Formula Ford 1800, it is quite easy to get too much wheelspin on the start and lose track position," clarified the Lebanese pilot, "so for my first start I was relying on my natural instinct to quickly find the optimum throttling balance." At the start, Basil launched the car with accuracy and immediately began pressuring the 6th place car ahead of him. After 2 laps, Basil made a daring pass on the inside under braking for the second corner and took the 6th place spot. "It was a fairly straightforward move," explained Basil, "I carried more speed than the other driver through turn one, allowing me to get past under braking for the turn two hairpin."

Once past, Basil began driving away and closed in on his competitor in 5th place. "The driver in 5th position just wasn't as quick and consistent as I was at this stage of the race," described the Arab talent, "so once I caught up to him, I watched to see where I had an advantage. After a few laps I got a very clean run out of the long final corner while he was sliding his back end around. I tucked into the slipstream behind him down the main straight, pulled to the inside at the last minute and out-braked him into turn one."

With the end of the 15 lap race approaching, the cars in front of Basil who had been slipstreaming each other had gotten out of his reach. Having pulled out a comfortable gap to the cars behind, Basil stopped pushing and brought his car through the checkered flag to the cheers and applause of his team. "It is a fantastic feeling to finish 5th here at Brands Hatch for my first Formula Ford race," revealed Basil, "It is also very emotional for me that the great Ayrton Senna had also finished 5th in his first Formula Ford race in 1981 also held at Brands Hatch."

Basil and Team MDR are looking forward to his continued progression in Formula Ford over the next month. The Lebanese driver is running on a shoe-string budget funded by his family allowing him to compete until the end of July. Even though the season doesn't end until November, Basil requires sponsorship in order to continue his attack on Formula Ford past July. About his situation, the Arab talent is philosophical, "It is a mental challenge that while I am working very hard to hone my ability and make as much progress with my skills as possible, I am aware that my fight to climb up the ladder of formula racing could be cut short due to funding limitations. I don't let this distract me and I am doing my best while hoping that a visionary sponsor will see my potential and decide to capitalize on it. Either way, I am honored to be representing the Arab world while living my dream and making the most of it."

