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ARAB DRIVER CAPTURES VICTORY ON EUROPEAN SOIL!



Basil Shaaban being congratulated by Team MDR owner and ex-F1 driver Martin Donnelly

Two weeks after his formidable 5th place Formula Ford debut, Lebanese racing driver Basil Shaaban has vaulted himself into the history books as the first-ever Lebanese to win a Formula Ford race in the United Kingdom. In only his second AVON Clubmans Formula Ford 1800 Championship event on June 26th at England's challenging Oulton Park circuit, Basil clinched his maiden formula victory on a double-header race-day loaded with learning experiences for the Arab rookie.

Basil's day began with a fresh challenge: to qualify under a pouring rain. This was Basil's first time driving the Formula Ford in the rain, and he used all his skills to set the 3rd fastest qualifying time of the field. The Arab contender illuminates, "it was a real mental challenge to drive out onto the circuit having never driven the car before on rain tires, yet knowing that I had to put a very fast lap together to get as close to pole position as possible." Basil applied his methodical techniques to adapt to the conditions through the 20 minute qualifying session, "I just went out and built my speed up progressively, lap after lap pushing more and more, exploring different lines through the corners to find where the grip was best," comments the young talent. He reveals that, "it was a beautiful feeling to discover how my car behaves in the rain for the first time."

Qualifying set the starting positions for the first race which also took place under rainy conditions. Basil was ready for the challenge as he took off from his 3rd place starting position. "In the start of the first race I executed a great launch," states the Lebanese driver, "where I squeezed my way past the second place car into the first corner. But on the exit of that first corner I gave the car a touch too much throttle, kicking the rear of the car loose which slid me wide and onto the grass. Wet grass is like ice, and I must've looked like I was in a rally as I fought to bring the car back on the circuit!"

The determined Arab recovered swiftly from his error by rejoining the circuit having only lost five places. Basil immediately got back into the rhythm and began closing on the car in 6th place. After a couple of laps analyzing their weaknesses, Basil overtook the 6th place car into the first corner, and two corners later out-braked the next car for 5th place. It was clear that no confidence was

lost during the off-circuit excursion for the clear-headed racer.

By this stage, the four cars ahead had pulled a sizeable gap. Even though Basil pushed very hard exclaiming that, "it was very exciting to dance with the car's relentless desire to slide off the circuit as I caught up," the checkered flag came before he could reach them. He crossed the finish line in 5th, putting him in 5th position for the start of the final race.

For the final race a couple of hours later, the rain had subsided and the circuit had dried enough to allow the cars to run on dry-weather slick tires. At the start Basil got a fantastic launch, forcing his way between both cars on the second row ahead to take 3rd position into the first corner. Into the second corner Basil squeezed inside of the 2nd place driver to take yet another position.



The Arab talent pulling away from the line of cars behind

At this point, only the leader stood between Basil and victory. "The leader was flying, and I was flying behind him. We just left the rest of the field," as the two drivers were lapping over one second faster than anyone else. The gap between the two drivers was almost unmoving, with the charging Lebanese always in the mirrors of the leading car.

"At this stage I was pushing as hard as I could without risking a mistake since it was still moist outside the racing line. I kept trying small things to gain an advantage, but I realized I was going to have to take big risks just to begin closing on him. I was in second place and decided not to risk losing that so I just kept the pressure on him and waited for any opportunities to come up." Motor racing is a strategic game, and it requires a calculating mind to achieve success.

Then, two thirds of the way into the race the clouds opened and began showering the circuit. "Droplets of rain began appearing on my visor, and I knew the race was about to get a lot more exciting," smiles the Lebanese driver. The leading driver had set the pole position in qualifying on rain tires, but Basil proved to be the quickest driver of the field in the rain on slick tires. "I began to close the gap on the leader, corner after corner catching him up a tenth of a second here, a half a tenth there until I was right on his tail, applying hard pressure. Now was the time to take a risk." The crowd was on their feet, watching to see what would happen next.

On the approach to the famous Druids bend, a high-speed right-hand corner, there is a left-hand kink. "It is such a difficult place to pass that most drivers never make a move there, even in the dry," explains Basil. Less than four laps from the finish the duo approach the kink with the Arab right on the leader's gearbox. The leader begins to lift off the throttle yet Basil stays on the throttle, slides his car around the outside of his competitor through the kink and, balancing the car with all the controls, snatches the lead into Druids. The move causes a burst of approval from the spectators, "It was a beautiful pass," exclaims Basil, "I had a smile from ear to ear inside my helmet!"

Basil's brave and skillful move made history for Arab sport as three laps later he crossed the finish line as Britain's first-ever Lebanese Formula Ford victor. The winner tries to express his feelings, "When you rise to the challenge, taking advantage of every opportunity to win in such difficult conditions, it gives an immense feeling of success. Add the fact that I brought my country its first-ever vic-

tory in the home of Formula Ford, and I am really at a loss for words to describe just how happy I am today.”

It was a momentous performance by the young Arab to overcome adversity and fight all the way to the top of the field and claim the win. Basil’s rich display of talent and ambition sent waves through British motorsport and raised the reputation of Arab talent. Martin Donnelly, an ex-F1 driver and the owner of Team MDR with whom Basil races, had this to say about the rising star, “It is very seldom these days that I come across a driving talent as special as Basil Shaaban. It is in my opinion, from what I’ve seen and from first hand experience that Basil possesses all the natural abilities to become the first big Arab motor racing name.”

With such a rapid rise and this stellar performance, the budding talent has proven he has what it takes to make it to the top levels of the sport. “I stand here at the beginning of my formula training having already won in only my third Formula Ford finish, which is a fantastic result. Yet I still have much to learn and to experience,” explains the modest 24 year-old. “My motivation is still to do everything I can to get the most out of myself, and to prove to the Arab world that there is a strong potential in me.”

Concerning the energetic Arab’s need for sponsorship to continue his rise in the sport past July, as always Basil’s positive outlook shines through, “I am optimistic that visionary people from my region will see the potential in this opportunity and capitalize on it. My journey has been a real blessing so I would like to say a deep thank-you to my family who are giving me so much support and have funded me thus far. Without you I could never have achieved this dream result.”

