

further press information please contact  
Tony Lewis / Ahmad Huzayen  
Total Communications  
Tel: + 971 4 336 9909 Fax: + 971 4 336 9905  
Email: [tony@totalcompr.com](mailto:tony@totalcompr.com) / [ahmad@totalcompr.ae](mailto:ahmad@totalcompr.ae)

## **SHELL DRIVES SHAABAN ON PATH TOWARDS F1**

### **Sponsorship agreement gives Basil major boost in bid to achieve Arab breakthrough to Grand Prix pinnacle**

Dubai, UAE, 17<sup>th</sup> April, 2007: Basil Shaaban's bid to become the Arab world's first Formula One racing driver has been given a major boost with the signing today of a sponsorship agreement with Shell. This is the first sponsorship of a comprehensive strategy for developing an Arab towards the pinnacle of motor sport.

The agreement will see Shaaban embark on a two-year assault on the Formula 3 Euro Series, one of the traditional ladder championships leading to Formula One, and the most competitive Formula 3 championship in the world.

"We're delighted to be partnering Basil in what we trust will be a successful campaign to make him the first Arab driver in Formula One racing," said Raoul Restucci, Executive Vice President, Shell Exploration and Production for the Middle East and the CIS.

"Shell wishes to empower young Arabs like Basil to strive for success at the highest levels, whichever career they choose. He has been climbing the motor sport ladder for the last seven years, and his progress in motor racing is unparalleled in the Arab world."

Shaaban, born in Beirut and raised in Abu Dhabi, told an official press conference in Dubai today: "I'm very excited to be partnering a global company like Shell which shares my ambition to showcase the excellence of the Arab world on an international stage.

"I have dedicated my life so far to reaching my goal in motor sport, and Shell are providing me with a wonderful opportunity by partnering me for the next two years in the Formula 3 Euro Series, a critical step in the career of modern Formula One drivers."

Shaaban 2

Shaaban has teamed up with Austrian-based HBR Motorsport for 2007, and spent two days testing with the team in Lausitzring, Germany, last week in preparation for this weekend's first of ten rounds in the 2007 Formula 3 Euro Series at Hockenheim.

"We successfully completed our two-day testing programme and I'm looking forward to Hockenheim," said Shaaban. "It's the first year of a three year programme aimed at developing me towards Formula One. This latest F3 car and most of the circuits are new to me, so we have to be realistic about what we can achieve in this first year."

"I want to establish myself in what is an extremely competitive series, and lay the foundations for a serious challenge for honours next year. The aim is to highlight my potential as a Formula One driver, and I'm very encouraged to be tackling this challenge with the backing of Shell, which has such strong links with motor sport, particularly F1."

Shell has a long-standing relationship with motor sport, particularly Ferrari in Formula One and with Audi's record-breaking Le Mans racing team where Shell supplied GTL fuel to power Audi to victory.

Shaaban spent months putting together a sophisticated sponsorship package, SHAABAN2F1, offering backers major benefits on a Pan Arab and global basis. Shell has become the first SHAABAN2F1 partner, and the support of the global brand with an accomplished history in motor sport highlights the sporting and marketing potential within SHAABAN2F1. This partnership with Shell is now expected to help attract more prominent sponsors with the same vision to promote Arab excellence and advancement.

Shaaban is also excited by the boost that his planned work on road safety in the Middle East will receive with Shell now supporting his campaign. Together, Shaaban and Shell can have a big impact on road safety in the Middle East, which has the highest traffic fatality rate in the world amongst young men in the 15-29 age range.

Shaaban 3

“There are fundamental road safety issues which are being ignored by the youth in the Middle East,” said Shaaban. “These are leading to unnecessarily high rates of injuries and fatalities. With my knowledge and experience of speed and safety, and with Shell’s long-standing dedication to Road Safety education, we plan to help improve the driving attitudes and behavior of the Arab world.”

Added Restucci: “Safety is paramount to a racing driver and road safety in general has become a passion for Basil. As a young professional racer, and role model in the Middle East, his commitment to improving the driving knowledge and safety awareness of Arabs on the roads makes him an ideal partner for Shell in supporting our safe driving initiatives.”

With a focus on his F3 results during the next two years, Shaaban is planning to embark on a season in the 2009 GP2 Series, the official F1 support series, in a bid to secure a drive in F1. Among those who have already followed the trail from F3 to F1 are seven-times world champion Michael Schumacher, the late Ayrton Senna, Mika Hakkinen, and current stars Jenson Button, Nico Rosberg and Lewis Hamilton, Hamilton having secured titles in both the 2005 F3 Euro Series and 2006 GP2 Series.

Shaaban, whose engagement by A1 Team Lebanon ends this year, is primed to concentrate on his intensive three-year programme on the F1 Ladder, but he intends to be back driving for his country in the A1GP World Cup of Motorsport in the winters. “Representing my country in the A1GP World Cup has been a real learning experience, and I want to use that experience to launch my challenge to represent the Arabs in F1,” he said.

Shaaban entered motor sport when he took up kart racing as a 14-year-old in Lebanon, and developed his skills in the US after beginning university studies in California at the age of 19. By the time he had earned a Bachelor’s degree in Astrophysics at Berkeley four years later he had recorded a number of kart racing wins up to the highest level.

Shaaban 4

His karting success led to formula racing trials in 2004 and later that year he moved to Europe to enter the British Formula Ford 1800 series where he became the first Arab winner in the category.

He was promptly invited to take part in A1 Team Lebanon's driver evaluation programme and after a rigorous series of tests was selected to represent his country in A1GP. He then underwent a European testing and race programme in F3 and F3000 cars in preparation for the inaugural A1GP season and scored Lebanon's best A1GP race finish to date when he just missed out on a top ten spot out of 24 nations in Portugal.

After the inaugural A1GP season concluded in April last year he continued his driving education by contesting four races in the National Class of the 2006 British F3 International series, recording two top-five finishes. This past winter he competed in a further three rounds of the second A1GP season and is now focused on successfully climbing the final two steps on the F1 Ladder.

Ends