

For further press information please contact

Tony Lewis / Ahmad Huzayen

Total Communications

Tel: + 971 4 336 9909 Fax: + 971 4 336 9905

Email: tony@totalcompr.ae / ahmad@totalcompr.ae

SHAABAN HAPPY TO BE IN SHADOWS OF F1 STARS IN FRANCE

Arab driver ready for stern Magny Cours test as Hamilton aims to build on world championship lead



Basil Shaaban – sharing the stage in France with Lewis Hamilton and the rest of the Formula 1 stars.

Dubai, UAE: 26th June, 2007: Basil Shaaban is ready for one of the biggest tests of his racing career when the F3 Euro Series shares the stage with the French Formula One Grand Prix at the weekend.

After a challenging three days at the Norisring street circuit in Nuremberg, Germany, the Arab driver and the rest of the F3 Euro Series line-up face a totally different but even more demanding examination at Magny Cours as Lewis Hamilton bids to strengthen his grip on the F1 World Championship.

With F1 dominating the scene, there will be no free practice for the F3 drivers who will instead be limited to a 30-minute qualifying session on Friday morning before two races on Saturday and Sunday which are reduced from the normal 40mins to 30 mins.

“When our series shares a race weekend with F1 we obviously have to take a back seat,” says Shaaban, who takes his Shell Dallara-Mercedes-Benz into competitive race action at Magny Cours for the first time.

“For me though, it’s not a negative thing. Of course, the limited amount of time we have on the track makes things more difficult, particularly for me as time behind the wheel of an F3 car is what I’m most lacking.

“But F1 is where we all want to be, and it takes a tremendous amount of hard work, dedication, determination and time to get there, so when you make it to the top you’re entitled to star billing. This is a great incentive for me, and for all the other drivers.”
Shaaban 2

When Lewis Hamilton entered the F3 Euro Series in 2004, few could have imagined the impact he would make in F1 just three years later, and he goes into the French Grand Prix leading reigning champion Fernando Alonso by 10pts.

Shaaban, born in Beirut and raised in Abu Dhabi, is just three months into his three-year mission to become the first Arab Formula 1 driver via F3 and GP2, and well aware that he has a long way to go, and a lot to learn.

“I put in a strong performance at the Norisring last weekend, but I also made some mistakes in the heat of battle and paid for them,” said Shaaban, who finished 15th out of 22 starters in the first race at the German street circuit after damaging the front end of his Dallara-Mercedes-Benz in a first-lap collision with team-mate Sergey Afanasiev.

“That cost me two laps while the car was being repaired, and so my race was effectively over. In the second race I was really finding my rhythm when there was a three-car pile-up in front of me which forced me to stop completely and stall the engine. Though I lost a full lap and a chance to battle for positions, I learnt a lot and still finished in 12th.

“It was frustrating, but all part of what you go through to make progress as a racing driver. The key positives are my continued improvements in pace and consistency, and my ability to push without touching the barriers that line the circuit. In the second race my fastest lap times were less than three tenths off those set by my quickest teammate Filip Salaquarda who finished in 5th position and is in his fourth year in the series. It was my first time on this unique street circuit, so next year I’ll be ready for it.”

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