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EARLY SEASON REPORT SHOWS SHAABAN WELL ON TRACK

Arab driver bides his time as Euro Series rivals aims to catch the eye of Formula One



Basil Shaaban continues along the learning curve in his Shell Dallara-Mercedes-Benz.

Dubai, UAE: 29th June, 2007: If Basil Shaaban's driving instructor was to deliver an early term report on his new pupil's progress in the 2007 F3 Euro Series, it would be loaded with positives.

Marc Hynes, who helped guide Lewis Hamilton towards the summit of Formula 1 racing, said before the start of Shaaban's F3 debut season two months ago that the Arab driver would make an impact this year and has the ability to go all the way to the top.

When Shaaban took his Shell Dallara-Mercedes-Benz into pre-season action for the first time in April he was almost three seconds off the pace set by the established F3 stars, most of whom had several years start on him in Formula 3 racing.

Mid-way through his second event of the season, at Brands Hatch, Shaaban was lapping within just over 0.7secs of the lead. At the treacherous Norisring circuit in Germany last weekend he closed to within two places of the top ten in a 21-car field for the world's toughest F3 series.

Tomorrow morning (Saturday), before Lewis Hamilton takes breakfast a short distance away, Shaaban will have just 30 minutes at the wheel of his Shell Dallara-Mercedes-Benz to continue along the learning curve at Magny Cours.

It's the highlight of the season for the F3 Euro Series which shares the Magny Cours stage with Hamilton and the F1 pack chasing him in the French Grand Prix.

"It's a big event for us," said Shaaban, on the eve of the season's fourth double race weekend. "We don't have much time on the track, with the races cut from 40 to 30 minutes after a 30-minute qualifying session and no free practice.

"But a lot of the guys will be motivated by the fact that they have a chance to impress the watching F1 teams. I'm not thinking about that this time. This is a very tough championship and I'm simply focusing on improving in every area and becoming more competitive in my first season.

"I have to be realistic because I have a lot of catching up to do in terms of time behind the wheel. But I'm pleased with the way things have gone so far, and by this time next year I definitely hope to be in a position to catch someone's eye."

Catching the eye more than most at present is championship leader Sébastien Buemi from Switzerland, followed by Frenchman Romain Grosjean, his nearest challenger, and

German Nico Hülkenberg who scored his maiden F3 Euro Series win at the Norisring.

2007 F3 Euro Series leading positions after 3 of 10 events:

1. Sebastien Buemi (SUI) 36pts;
2. Romain Grosjean (FRA)30pts
3. Nico Hülkenberg (GER) 20pts
4. Edoardo Mortara (ITA) 16pts
5. Yelmer Buurman (NED) 16pts
6. James Jakes (GBR) 15pts

Ends