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## **SHAABAN: 'I WAS BORN TO BE A FORMULA ONE DRIVER'**



*Development programme would give me F1 breakthrough, says Arab driver who's spent nine years working towards racing at top level*

Dubai, UAE, 16 June, 2008: Basil Shaaban said today that he firmly believes he has the ability to become the Arab world's first Formula One driver.

Shaaban, who is in his second season in the F3 Euro Series, says he should be ready to test and help develop a Formula One car by the time Abu Dhabi makes its debut in the World Championship towards the end of next year, and be ready to race in F1 soon after.

The Lebanese driver, who grew up in Abu Dhabi dreaming of becoming one of the world's best racing drivers, says his credentials make him a leading Middle East candidate for a place in Formula One, and he wants the chance to inspire other Arabs to follow him.

Shaaban was encouraged when prominent motor sport figure David Richards said recently that there is no logical reason why the Middle East will not soon have its own top Formula One driver.

Richards, former team principal of the BAR and Benetton Formula One teams, said at a motor sports business conference in Bahrain that, with a population of 200 million, the region should be able to produce another Michael Schumacher.

“David Richards is a very well respected figure in motor sport, and I’m hoping that influential people in the Middle East who want the best for the sport here will not just take note of what he said, but begin to act on turning this potential into a reality” said Shaaban. “We now have top class circuits in the region, and with Abu Dhabi following Bahrain into the Formula One World Championship next year, the Middle East really must have its own drivers at the top level.

“This is an essential sporting extension of the region’s development into an international powerhouse. Obviously, I’m not the only Arab driver aiming for Formula One. But I’m well into my second season in the world’s most competitive Formula Three series and I believe I’m the most advanced Arab driver on the ladder to F1. I’m fighting and beating some of the best up and coming drivers in the world, and if anyone is to get a chance to step up, I think I deserve it. If I get the chance, I would hope to motivate the industry here and pave the way for other Arab drivers, engineers and mechanics to follow.”

Shaaban and his sponsor partner Shell, who gave him his chance in the tough F3 Euro Series, are now seeking additional partners to give him a complete Formula One development programme and take him to the top level. “I’m very grateful to Shell for their vision and the support they’re giving me for the F3 Euro Series and beyond,” he said. “They’ve allowed me to prove I have the raw potential, and to show all I need is a comprehensive, fully-financed development programme to be groomed for F1.



*Basil Shaaban wants the chance to prove himself in Formula One and inspire other Arab drivers to follow him.*

“Not having this so far has meant that I’ve not been able to do the necessary intensive test sessions during the season and the winter, nor to compete in winter races, so I’m not developing myself constantly and often spend many weeks outside of a racing car. It’s frustrating because I know I have the ability to be up there with the best. Now is the time for Middle East entities to begin partnering such an initiative, and I know I could prove within a couple of years that I have what it takes to be a competitive F1 driver.”

Shaaban, whose next outing in his Shell Dallara Mercedes will be in the F3 Euro Series at the Norisring in Germany later this month, plans to compete in the GP2 Asia Series this winter. This is the Asian counterpart of the GP2 series, the official F1 support championship won by Lewis Hamilton in 2006. It will allow Shaaban to continue his development while displaying his talents closer to home as it includes a round in Dubai and another in support of the 2009 Bahrain F1 Grand Prix.

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