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Rounds 13 & 14 Preview

Expect Spa-rks to Fly in Belgium

Spa-Francorchamps, a place where every racing driver wants to compete and a track that has become a firm favourite on the British F3 International Series calendar. With over 30 cars taking part in the series and the leading young drivers from eighteen countries, expect the races at Spa to be anything but dull.

Marko Asmer (#7 Hitech Racing) has been the dominant force in the 2007 Lloyds TSB Insurance British F3 International Series, taking seven wins from twelve starts, with one victory on each of the six circuits visited so far. A win and a third at Brands Hatch meant the Estonian extended his lead to a commanding 78 points over nearest rival Maro Engel, who could only manage to finish 5th and 7th on the Kent circuit. However Engel (#23 Carlin Motorsport) was a race winner last year in Belgium and was also the dominant force at Monza last month, so expect the German to bounce back at Spa-Francorchamps.

Sam Bird (#3 Carlin Motorsport) had the worst weekend of his short British F3 career on his home track but still posted the fastest lap of race 2 to underline his pace in his rookie Formula 3 season. The Bucharest race winner has also scored five further podiums and is only five points adrift of his Carlin Motorsport team mate Engel.

Stephen Jelley (#1 Raikkonen Robertson Racing) has yet to take that elusive first British F3 win but a consistent points scoring tally has kept the British driver from Leicester in the title hunt. Jelley has certainly shown the race pace to step onto the top step of the podium and perhaps Spa will be the place to do it.

2006 UK Formula BMW Champion Niall Breen (#21 Carlin Motorsport) has been one of the star finds in this year's series. Not only has the Irish driver adapted quickly to the much quicker F3 car, he took two second places at Donington Park and in Bucharest before scoring his first win at the next event at Snetterton and then following it up with a third place at Monza. The number 21 Carlin Motorsport Dallara will be one to watch in Belgium.

Like his Raikkonen Robertson Racing team mate Jonathan Kennard (#2 Raikkonen Robertson Racing) has scored consistently but has yet to find the pace to win his first British F3 race. The 2004 Formula Palmer Audi Champion has started from pole position, posted fastest laps and has scored two podium finishes but is hoping that Spa Francorchamps will be the venue for that elusive first win.

There is no such problem for Sebastian Hohenthal (#3 Fortec Racing), with the 2006 UK Formula Renault Champion taking his first win at Brands Hatch to add to the podium he scored at Oulton Park when he smashed the British F3 lap record in his debut race.

Albert Valerio (#22 Carlin Motorsport) had a torrid time last time out. He crashed out in dramatic style in Round 11 after clashing with John Martin. The Brazilian's car was badly damaged but the Carlin team got him onto the grid for Round 12 and he repaid their hard work with a hard fought three championship points. The 2005 South American F3 Champion has been a consistent visitor to the podium this season and we can expect him to be challenging for a place at Spa.

Ireland's Michael Devaney (#15 Ultimate Motorsport) has been using the brand new Mygale F3 chassis this season and along with team mate Esteban Guerrieri (#14 Ultimate Motorsport) and the Ultimate Motorsport team has been great strides forward this season. Devaney took the team's highest finish at Brands Hatch, finishing 4th behind Marko Asmer in Round 12. The podium is the next goal.

Rodolfo Gonzalez (#9 T Sport) has been finding the step up from the British F3 National Class to the Championship a hard struggle, but at Brands Hatch the reigning British F3 National Class Champion showed everyone why he was such a dominant force last season. The Venezuelan charged through the field in Round 11 from 13th on the opening lap to finish 4th, on a track that is notoriously difficult to overtake on. Expect the leading Mugen-Honda powered car to be in the thick of the action at Spa.

In joint 10th with Gonzalez is another Formula Renault graduate, Atte Mustonen (#26 Raikkonen Robertson Racing). The young Finn has struggled in the races for a number of reasons but has always demonstrated his pace in qualifying with one pole and numerous top six starts. However it all came good in the last race at Brands Hatch and Mustonen finished 2nd behind Hohenthal after snatching the place from Asmer two laps from the flag.

A famous name has returned to the British F3 grid this season, with Greg and Leo Mansell joining the series their father Nigel took part in the three seasons before his F1 break in 1980. Older brother Leo has been having some dreadful luck this season but 19-year-old Greg has been challenging at the sharp end of the grid at most of the circuits so far this year. Both of them have very little racing experience, with no karting and just one season of Formula BMW on their CV's. However the brothers Mansell have inherited their old man's racing gene and Greg has already been a visitor to the podium, the first time a Mansell has been there since 1979.

While Asmer is romping away with the overall title, the battle for the honours in the National Class is certainly not as clear cut. Sergio Perez (#31 T Sport) and 'Frankie' Cheng Cong Fu (#39 Performance Racing) are tied on points after 12 races, with the Mexican holding a slight advantage over his Chinese rival with five wins to Cheng's four. A perfect scoring weekend of two poles, two fastest laps and two wins for 'Frankie' has put him in the driving seat as the series heads to Belgium but expect Perez to be fighting all the way to the chequered flag.

Michael Meadows (#55 Newnet Raikkonen Robertson Racing) has won two races this year but his championship charge has been blunted lately and the British driver is looking for a return to form as the season heads into the second half.

Bahrain's Hamad Al Fardan (#38 Performance Racing) and Iceland's Viktor Jensen (#37 ADR) have both been regular visitors to the National Class podium, both having five podiums to their credit, with Jensen scoring a win at Snetterton at the beginning of June.

Rounds 13 and 14 will take place on the 4.36-mile Spa Francorchamps circuit in the Ardenne Forest. The first race will be held on Friday 27th July, with Round 14 on Saturday 28th July just before the start of the Spa 24-Hours for the FIA GT Championship.

This weekend Channel 4 will show the highlights from Rounds 11 & 12 at Brands Hatch at 08:00 on Sunday 22nd July. For the full TV listings of when to see British F3 on Channel 4 and Motors TV visit www.britishf3international.com

[CLICK HERE](#) to see the timetable for Rounds 13 & 14

[CLICK HERE](#) to listen to Maro Engel describe a lap of Spa-Francorchamps

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