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Karun @ British F3 Chandhok impresses in the wet

Spa, England

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India's racing star **Karun Chandhok** came up with an impressive performance at the legendary Spa circuit in Belgium during rounds 19 and 20 of the British Formula 3 championship (Scholarship class), where he secured a pole position, fastest lap and two second places.



The 19 year old was one of the few drivers on the grid making his first visit to the 4.3 mile circuit in the middle of the Ardennes forest. After a brief look around on his cycle on Thursday Karun said *“I’m still in awe of the whole place. Ever since I was 5 or 6 years old I’ve watched F1 races here and played computer games of Spa, but I never dreamt that one day I’ll be racing around what is one the greatest circuits in the world. I’m really excited but also I know this is going to be a very hard weekend for me because (championship rivals), Viso and Steven have been here before and I haven’t.”*

Friday’s test session set the trend for the weekend when rains soaked the circuit for the two hour-long test sessions. The T-Sport driver though was surprisingly fastest in the opening session despite his lack of track knowledge. Chandhok later said, *“Coming from India where it’s always hot and dry, I normally struggle in the rain and especially being at a place I’ve never seen, I must admit it’s a pleasant surprise to be fastest today. It was a bit of lottery because the track was drying up in places and I was able to maximise the grip in closing stages better than the others I think. Although it’s a good start it doesn’t really count for anything.”*

Saturday was a long day for the teams and drivers with two qualifying sessions as well as the first race of the weekend being held on the day. In the

first session, Chandhok recovered from a trip into the gravel trap to put in a stunning lap with 2 minutes of the session to run, resulting in his first wet weather pole position. For second qualifying though the sun came out and the circuit dried. This meant that while his rivals were able to get down to qualifying, Karun would be driving the circuit in the dry for the first time. He talks us through his session ***“I knew I’d struggle for sure because all the lines, braking points, everything is different in the dry. On the whole I got just 5 timed laps of the circuit after which we had an electrical problem, which resulted in me stopping out at the back of the circuit. It’s quite disappointing because I really needed every second I could get in the dry.”*** He ended 3rd on the grid behind Steven Kane and Ernesto Viso.

The circuit was very damp at the start of race 1. Chandhok made a great start to take the lead and stayed in front, battling with the faster Championship class cars. On lap 6 as the pack came into the La Source hairpin, his former team-mate Clivio Piccione made a half hearted attempt to pass Karun and knocked him into a spin. This allowed Viso into the lead with the frustrated Indian in pursuit. A lap later the race was stopped when rain engulfed the region once again. Chandhok reflected on his win that got away ***“Things were looking good. I had less than half distance to go and there were 5 Championship class cars between me and Viso. It was unfortunate what happened with Clivio. I didn’t think he’d try and pass there because there wasn’t really much space but anyways, atleast I managed to recover and finish second.”*** The premature stoppage of the race meant that the drivers were only awarded half of their normal points.



Sunday started bright and sunny and for once it looked like the drivers will have a straightforward dry race. But with minutes to go for the start, the heavens opened and a torrential downpour meant the teams were scrambling to change the settings on the car for the wet weather. Chandhok explains ***“This place is unbelievable. Every half hour we’ve had different weather. The team at T-Sport did a fantastic job in difficult circumstances. They did what normally takes half an hour in just 10 minutes !!”*** This was going to be the young Indian’s first ever proper wet weather race. Karun takes us through the eventful race, ***“I’ve never experienced anything like it. People here could not believe this was going to be my first full wet race because it’s normal for drivers to have done dozens of wet races by the time they reach Formula 3. There was so much water and spray, I couldn’t see anything for the first three laps. I was looking at the trees and walls on the side of the road to get an idea of where I was on the***

track. As things settled down I learnt more and more about racing in the wet and in the end I got the fastest lap of the race, which was very satisfying. It was very good experience which will be beneficial when I have my next wet race.”

Chandhok now heads into the final 4 rounds of the championship just 3 points behind Steven Kane and just half a point ahead of Ernesto Viso. The next round of the Championship is just a week away at Donington Park. ***“Things are getting really exciting now – 4 races to go and just 4 points covering the top 3. It’s going to be a really massive fight to the end between all three of us.”***

Results –

Round 19	Round 20	Championship Posn.	
1. Ernesto Viso	1. Ernesto Viso	1.Steven Kane	270.5
2. Karun Chandhok	2. Karun Chandhok	2.Karun Chandhok	267.5
3. Justin Sherwood	3. Steven Kane	3.Ernesto Viso	267