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Karun @ British F3 Chandhok ends year with victory



India's teen racing star Karun Chandhok ended his 2003 British Formula 3 (scholarship class) campaign in style with a win on the demanding Brands Hatch GP circuit. The victory on Sunday was his 8th win of the season, taking his tally to a total of 19 podium finishes in all.

The weekend didn't start off in the most positive fashion for Karun and the T-Sport team. During Friday's practice session's things just didn't seem to go right. Team and driver had to work very hard and were ultimately in 3rd place but a little ways away from the front running pace. Karun talks us through ***"The car initially was very difficult to drive. Here at Brands Hatch we have mainly very high-speed corners where you need to have confidence to drive it quickly. By the end of the day though the car wasn't too bad and also we spotted some problems with the way I was braking which I should be able to solve for qualifying tomorrow."***

Indeed in qualifying things started to look better. In the first session with the circuit drying, Karun was building himself up to a big push at the end. The session was stopped and re-started with just 6 minutes to go giving all the drivers just 3 laps to put in their fast laps. Chandhok found almost a second on the last 2 laps to go 2nd fastest ahead of team-mate Steven Kane and just behind Ernesto Viso. In the second session though things didn't go quite as well. Viso, Kane and Chandhok all had set similar best times of 1:20.3 seconds with ten minutes of the session left to run. On his next lap, the 19 year old from Madras pushed just a little bit too hard and spun wide into the gravel. ***"I'm not too disappointed because I was almost 2 tenths up on the split time on that lap and the times were getting faster and faster. You have to push in qualifying and sometimes you go over the limit."*** Viso and Kane ultimately just pipped Karun to pole and 2nd.

Race 1 on Sunday morning wasn't the best of Karun's season. He made a good start and was chasing Viso with Kane just behind. On lap 4 though, Chandhok made a small mistake and went wide, which allowed Kane to draw alongside. Chandhok made it easy for his team-mate to try and help the Irishman's championship chances but was caught out on the dirty side of the circuit and dropped back behind a couple Championship class cars. From there on the race was a fairly processional affair with Viso, Kane and Chandhok all chasing each other around the legendary 2.4 mile circuit.

The second race of the day though was anything but processional. On the grid the atmosphere was tense for the final battle of the year with none of the top 3 contenders saying much. Viso had two Championship class cars between himself and the T-Sport duo of Kane and Chandhok as the field lined up. But as the lights went green the latter two were off like jack rabbits and passed the two cars in between. First every inch of the way on the opening 3 laps the three young guns ran nose to tail. On lap 4 though the race was stopped following a big accident.

This meant that the field would once again line up on the grid but only this time there would be no outsiders in the middle of the fight between the top 3 scholarship boys. As the lights went green on the re-start Viso charged into the lead with Chandhok in chase. The Indian tried to make a move around the outside at the Druids hairpin but ended up losing out to Kane on the way out of the corner. Next time around though Viso made a mistake and damaged the front wing on his car. This left the Venezuelan with less front end grip and meant he had to weave his way from one side of the circuit to the other to defend from the attacking Kane and Chandhok. As the trio headed into the daunting Paddock Hill bend at a 175 Km/h on the next lap, all hell broke loose. Viso went wide to defend his line against Kane. The ever optimist Chandhok made a dive down the inside of both of them and squeezed his car in with two wheels on the grass. All three cars headed three abreast uphill to Druids Hairpin with Chandhok on the inside and Kane on the outside sandwiching the Sweeny racing driver. Chandhok talks us through the next few moments ***“As we approached the braking zone, I still has two wheels on the grass and so decided to try and brake early and hold it tight on the inside. It was a good choice because Viso and Steven ended up going into each other on the outside.”***

From there on the former Indian National and Asian Formula champion just reeled the laps in to score a memorable victory. ***“People in Motorsport always say, that you are only as good as your last result and for me to go into the off season with a win in the final race of the season feels fantastic. I really have to thank everyone at T-Sport for all the hard work they’ve done all season long. It’s been a pretty good season for us – to win races in any Formula 3 championship in Europe is not easy and I’m really quite pleased with the results we’ve had this year.”***



The championship ended with Viso on top followed by Kane and Chandhok – all three separated by just 9.5 points after 24 races. ***“I think all three of us were good enough and deserved the championship. To win races you have to be good but to win a Championship you have to have luck on your side as well. Unfortunately for me I had too many incidents and non-finishes but still I’m quite happy to have finished within 10 points of first place.”***

To sum up his season Karun said, ***“The two races that stick out most in people’s minds are the first and the last one and I won both which is quite important for me. My thanks to all my sponsors JK Tyres, The Vanguard Group, Kingfisher, UCAL, Rolon, Amaron and Parx without whose support I wouldn’t have had such a successful year.”***

Final Championship positions –

1. Ernesto Viso – 324 points
2. Steven Kane – 316.5 points
3. Karun Chandhok – 314.5 points