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Narain Karthikeyan @ Telefonica Nissan Series 2003

A1-Ring – Races

The Tata Carlin Team drivers, India's **Narain Karthikeyan** & Frenchman Bruce Jouanny, were poised to dominate this weekend's round of the World Series Nissan Championship held at the ultra-fast F1 A1-Ring in Austria after stunning pre-race testing performances which suggested that the fight for race wins would be exclusively between the more experienced Karthikeyan and Rookie driver to the Championship, Jouanny – but form & potential mean little in a sport in which the results are determined by mechanical reliability and on-track incidents which can spin the dice in a most unpredictable fashion.

Narain Karthikeyan is at his very best when faced with daunting high-speed corners and proved his potential as one of the quickest professional international Formula racing drivers in the world today right up to the point of qualifying for race one, when an engine misfire caused by a faulty fuel pump regulator, forced him to sit out almost the entire session in the pit lane and take the last slot on the grid.

Tata Carlin team mate, Bruce Jouanny, fared better achieving 4th slot but was clearly disappointed having been caught out in the braking area and suffered 'flat spotting' of his tyres.

The regulations in the series demand that a driver must forgoe his worst four results of the year and a decision was taken in advance of race one that as **Narain Karthikeyan** could not hope to achieve a podium finish from 19th place on the grid, that he would instead run low fuel, run just a handful of laps and go for the fastest lap time. He did this without drama, even starting from the pit lane to avoid the almost inevitable first corner collision but was later usurped for fastest lap as the track conditions improved and his fastest lap was eclipsed whilst he sat powerlessly in pit lane.

Tata Carlin driver, Bruce Jouanny, made a dreadful start from 4th on the grid and dropped down to 10th place – his error possibly exacerbated by series leader Franck Montagny, who jumped the start and had to come into the pits for a stop-go penalty later.

Jouanny recovered and was running in 4th spot when an unforced error saw him spin out of contention, both Tata Carlin drivers retiring from race one after just 8 turns of the circuit.

The situation was looking much better for race two; Jouanny was on pole position and Karthikeyan 3rd with series leader Franck Montagny sandwiched between them on the front row.

Jouanny' s start was better than race one, but not good enough in this most competitive of series, and first Montagny took him and then team mate Karthikeyan, the young Indian hounding the Championship leader lap after lap. Jouanny was lying in 3rd spot and being hounded by Bas Leinders who was clearly confident after winning race one.

Race leader Franck Montagny and **Narain Karthikeyan** pulled into pit lane on the same lap for the compulsory tyre changes and at pit exit, Karthikeyan was inches from Montagny' s gearbox. Karthikeyan clearly sensed that he had the pace advantage over Montagny and hounded him always threatening to overtake when the racing duo came across a back marker, Norbert Siedler, who moved off the racing line allowing Montagny to pass into a clear lead but then shut the door firmly on Karthikeyan who was forced onto the dirt and lost over ten seconds and had to scramble back on track behind Jouanny and Leinders. Despite his pace, Karthikeyan could do nothing to regain position and a potential fight for the race win with Montagny, who he had pressurised throughout the race.

So, Montagny won again, Leinders was a credible second and Tata Carlin driver, Bruce Jouanny took 3rd spot on the podium with **Narain Karthikeyan** finishing in 4th position.

Many nations have sought to push their racing drivers forward to Formula 1 success and Karthikeyan, by his own merits and with the support of the Tata Group, remains the Indian most likely to succeed. There are younger guys coming up behind him and hopefully, one day, an Indian will have the chance to compete in the highest Formula of all and sets his sights on the ultimate challenge – Formula 1 World Champion. **Narain Karthikeyan** is the driver to fulfil this desire. He has the talent; he has the speed; he has proved through his racing history that he has exactly what it takes to mix it on the world stage.

After a race weekend that promised so much and due to circumstances produced so little, Karthikeyan still holds 2nd position in the driver' s championship of World Series Nissan and whilst this, more than ever, could have been the weekend where the young Indian scored two first place results, he did, as always, produce an exemplary performance under very difficult conditions.

Narain was, as always, philosophical after the race. *"I deal with on-track incidents at over 150 mph in the best way that I can- which of course, is to try and avoid collision. When Siedler moved out of the way for Montagny then blocked me, I had no choice but to go off-track, control the car and recover for 4th place. These things are not predictable – we are not playing chess out there ! I know that I have the pace and the racing skills to win and the Tata Carlin Team give me full support. I am racing against the best drivers outside of F1 and that is my next step."*

Race One

01 BAS LEINDERS 0' 00"000
02 STEPHANE SARRAZIN 0' 07"766
03 ANDER VILARINO 0' 10"343
04 ENRIQUE BERNOLDI 0' 18"524
05 BRUNO BESSON 0' 20"842
06 NORBERT SIEDLER 0' 23"166
07 FRANCK MONTAGNY 0' 23"464
08 HEIKKI KOVALAINEN 0' 26"044
09 POLO VILLAAMIL 0' 37"818
10 DIDIER ANDRE 0' 41"780
11 ANGEL BURGUENO 0' 42"709
12 FELIX PORTEIRO 0' 44"458
13 JOSE M.PEREZ-AYCART 1' 01"939
14 SANTIAGO PORTEIRO
15 **NARAIN KARTHIKEYAN**
16 BRUCE JOUANNY
17 JEAN-CH.RAVIER
18 VITANTONIO LIUZZI
19 PAUL EDWARDS

Race Two

01 FRANCK MONTAGNY 0' 00"000
02 BAS LEINDERS 0' 00"446
03 BRUCE JOUANNY 0' 15"037
04 **NARAIN KARTHIKEYAN** 0' 15"685
05 BRUNO BESSON 0' 19"109
06 HEIKKI KOVALAINEN 0' 20"044
07 STEPHANE SARRAZIN 0' 21"195
08 ENRIQUE BERNOLDI 0' 21"980
09 VITANTONIO LIUZZI 0' 23"977
10 NORBERT SIEDLER 0' 31"506
11 FELIX PORTEIRO 0' 35"956
12 DIDIER ANDRE 0' 40"443
13 POLO VILLAAMIL 0' 47"242

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- 14 ANGEL BURGUENO 0' 49"020
- 15 ANDER VILARINO 0' 49"607
- 16 JEAN-CH.RAVIER
- 17 PAUL EDWARDS
- 18 JOSE M.PEREZ-AYCART