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Narain Karthikeyan @ Telefonica Nissan Series 2003

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Narain Karthikeyan - Defenceless in Jarama

Narain Karthikeyan entered the last round of the Nissan World Series in his Tata Carlin Team Dallara with one objective - to hold on to the coveted second place in the drivers' Championship.

Karthikeyan has led the Tata Carlin Team all season - taking the fight to the established F1 test and race drivers who are a regular feature in this most competitive of International Formula series. F1 Renault test pilot, Franck Montagny, wrapped up the Championship long ago but **Karthikeyan** has been the main opposition for race wins and the runner-up spot to the talented Frenchman. **Karthikeyan's** team mate, Bruce Jouanny, has also shared the limelight and was leading the second race today but finished a lowly 10th after a mass of confusion surrounding an incident that caused the pace car to be deployed.

Two weeks ago, it seemed unlikely that **Karthikeyan** would even be fit enough to defend his position here in Spain. He was seconded by the Carlin Formula 3 Team to spearhead their challenge for their second win at the Macau Grand Prix but a sudden illness resulted in hospitalisation and a no-show for India's foremost racing driver.

After a difficult start in free practice, **Karthikeyan** managed to qualify 10th and 17th for the two races and whilst Bruce Jouanny crashed out in race one, **Karthikeyan** brought his car home in 7th spot with Enrico Bernoldi taking the race win. Valuable points for the young Indian but his Tata Carlin knew that a good finish in race two was essential in order to keep his hold on second place overall.

Despite the extensive preparation that goes into the mechanical reliability of these cars, when **Karthikeyan** drew up onto the start grid for race two, it was clear that something was disastrously wrong. Tell-tale signs of oil seepage beneath his car were an indication that his chances of starting the race were remote. On the completion of the warm up lap, **Karthikeyan** was forced into the pits for further inspection and the team reluctantly informed their most popular driver that his race was over before it had even begun. A completely unpredictable fault in the gearbox seals meant that the car would not make it to the finishing line and a vastly disappointed **Karthikeyan** stepped out of his car for the last time this season.

"Of course I am upset - who wouldn't be ? This non-start means that I can't even be there to defend myself and for sure, I will lose my second spot in the Championship. I'm not really 100% yet but I was willing to give it my best shot - when the car lets you down then there is nothing that can be done. Nevertheless, it has been a good season. Franck (Montagny) was always going to be a hard man to beat. The Tata Carlin Team are in their first year of the series and they have shocked the established teams with their ability to get me and Bruce (Jouanny) on the pace from the outset. I have no regrets and I'm really looking forward to next year."

Team boss, Trevor Carlin was equally disappointed but also took the long view.

"We have had several of our drivers make the progression to Formula 1. Takuma Sato, Anthony Davison, Jenson Button and Kimi Raikkonen have all passed through our hands. I have no doubt that Narain has the measure to take his place there too one day, when the political and financial timing is right. He has done an outstanding job for us this year and in years passed. I'll never forget that it is Narain who gave us our first success in Formula 3 and put the Carlin team on the international map. I'm behind him all the way."

Narain Karthikeyan's season long hold on second place was finally lost today as a result of his non start. Bas Leinders won the race and **Karthikeyan** slipped for the first time to 4th overall losing by just 10 points. Kovalainen took his place and Leinders 3rd in the Championship.

Such is the nature of racing but nobody in the Tata Carlin camp doubts that next year, **Narain Karthikeyan** is the favourite to win the title.

*** END ***