



ALEX ELLIS & GARY CARLTON LAND JIM RUSSELL'S FUTURE DRIVER SEARCH 2010 TOP PRIZES

- **Two drivers chosen for fully funded Jim Russell Championship Series "prize" drives**
- **Almost forty drivers from 10 countries involved in extensive four-day selection process at Racing School's Infineon Raceway "home" in California**
- **Ex-Formula One & double Le Mans 24 Hour race winner Allan McNish "chairs" judging panel for inaugural Future Driver Search program**

Alex Ellis, from St Catharines, Ontario, CANADA and Gary Carlton, from Marysville, California, USA have today (22 Dec) been chosen from an international field as the winners of the Jim Russell Future Driver 2010 selection.

Ellis (18) and Carlton (23) each receives a fully-funded season in the 2010 Jim Russell Championship Series (JRCS) plus coaching and testing opportunities.

Almost 40 drivers, representing 10 different countries and with an average age of 20 (the youngest being 14), participated in the four-day (19-22 Dec) selection process at the Infineon Raceway, Sonoma (CA) which features the impressive Jim Russell Racing Drivers School complex.

Twenty drivers were then selected to continue in to the final two-days with six progressing into the last day of Jim Russell's new worldwide driver search program which was launched this year to find the best young talent from the worlds of karting and "junior" formula car racing.

Speed, precision and car control were evaluated when driving karts, Mitsubishi Evolution X sedans and the school's purpose-built FJR-50 single-seater. They were appraised on their application of "feedback", technical understanding of each of the vehicles while media awareness, racecraft and fitness were also observed and evaluated in the latter stages.

In addition to Ellis and Carlton, Germany's Bastien Graber (18), James Kovacic (16), from Australia, Brazilian Felipe Polehito (20) plus American Jeffrey Westphal (23) were involved in the final day, six-driver shoot-out today.

Britain's ex-F1 and double Le Mans 24 Hour race winner, Allan McNish, and his fellow panel members chose Ellis because he was considered the best "all-rounder" while Carlton effectively chose himself by setting the fastest lap time in the turbocharged two-liter FJR-50 on the final day.

"I was pleasantly surprised by the high standard of all of the drivers," commented McNish. "Even the ones that didn't progress through at the halfway stage were all of a good standard. It was a very closely fought competition not made any easier by the changeable weather conditions we experienced at times – but that's motor racing.

Alex finished 5th 2006 Sunoco Ron Fellows Karting Championship (F1K), 8th 2007 SKUSA SuperNationals (Rotax Senior), 15th 2007 BTK/Arrows Karts (Rotax Junior), 2nd 2008 F1200 Canada & "Rookie of the Year" (5 wins, 11 podiums, 15 races), 6th 2009 Formula BMW Americas (1 pole, 3 podiums, 2 fastest laps).

"Winning this means absolutely everything to me having dedicated my life, mine and my family's money, in to succeeding in motorsport so you can understand I'm absolutely elated – it's more than a dream coming true, it's a massive turning point in my life.

"I know that I can excel in motorsport and am already looking forward to the opening races of the Jim Russell Championship Series. I learned more in the last four days than I have done from the past two years of racing. The Jim Russell instructors have a wealth of knowledge and are just great guys. It was non-stop action both on and off the track and superbly organized throughout at what is a mind-blowing facility."

Allan on Alex: "For someone with such limited karting and racecar experience at a high level, he really impressed me. He bounced back from any problems and issues very quickly, and importantly, strongly. He has a positive personality. He suffered badly with the weather conditions but nevertheless performed outstandingly."

Gary's career to date is almost entirely in karts. He placed 2nd 2005 SKUSA SuperNationals (SuperPro), 2006 National Stars of Karting champion (ICC), 2007 National Stars of Karting champion (ICC), 2007 PRI All-Stars Karting Classic champion (Karters class), 2nd 2007 SKUSA SuperNationals (SuperPro) and All-Stars Karting Classic (Masters class), 3rd 2008 Stars of Karting (National & West ICC) and SKUSA SuperNationals (SuperPro). He had brief tests in a Formula Mazda in 2008 and an Indy Lights car this year.

"Winning this initiative will literally change my life. I know what I'll be doing in 2010, I can focus and prepare fully for the months ahead which are certainly going to be exciting as well as challenging.

"I've had a great time over the past four days and have learned a great deal in terms of on and off the track. The Jim Russell organization has been incredible. They've somehow made it a lot of fun despite it being an intensive and informative program with the stresses that go with a driver shoot-out."

Allan on Gary: "Considering the lack of time Gary has spent in a single-seater, especially one [the FJR-50] at such a high technical level, was very impressive. He didn't make a single mistake throughout the event and was always running towards the front. In his 'home' habitat of karting, he was extremely quick and very good in traffic."

Meanwhile karting's S3 champion Tyler Bennett (Farmington, UT) and TaG senior runner-up Gustavo Menezes (Coto de Caza, CA), who were awarded Future Driver Search scholarships following last month's Superkarts USA! SuperNationals, both made it through to the final 20 driver phase as did Cody Hodgson (Escalon, CA) who finished third in World Rotax championships recently.

Chip Pankow, President of the Jim Russell Racing Drivers School, who was also on the judging panel, reflected: "The Future Driver 2010 Selection has exceeded our expectations on a number of fronts while the quality of drivers that have taken part has been truly impressive."

The 16-race 2010 Jim Russell Championship Series gets underway in April and features two, 30 minute races staged on consecutive days over eight weekends utilizing a variety of configurations at the world famous Infineon Raceway in Sonoma, California.

The outright 2010 JRCS champion gets a fully-funded prize drive in the 2011 FIA Formula Two Championship. The European-based F2 series was launched this year and features a Williams F1

developed single-seater. The F2 champion is awarded a test with the Williams Formula One team while the top-three finishers in the FIA F2 Championship qualify for an FIA Superlicence and thus are eligible to compete in F1.

Pankow concluded: "We're now looking forward to building the Future Driver Search winners' progress next season when they will be fighting to win themselves a place on the 2011 FIA Formula 2 Championship grid."

(ends)

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