

# THE GLOBE AND MAIL

## Canadian teens hone skills in Formula BMW

Last year's top rookie, Gianmarco Raimondo, helps teammate Alex Ellis make the transition from karting

By Jeff Pappone From Thursday's Globe and Mail, Wednesday, Jun. 17, 2009



### Alex Ellis leads Gianmarco Raimondo through a turn.

PETER BRAND/FORMULA BMW AMERICAS

Forget about math, Gianmarco Raimondo's high-speed lessons bring tutoring to a whole new level. After winning the Formula BMW Americas rookie title in 2008, the 18-year-old, St. Catharines, Ont., driver is now the grizzled veteran helping his close friend and series rookie Alex Ellis through the transition from karting to racing cars. "The racing part to me is more second nature because I have already had a year in FBMW," Raimondo said.

"Alex is still in his learning phase, so he uses my knowledge and experience to help him, but he helps me as well if he's faster in a certain area. But he and I are really competitive so we will try to beat each other no matter what." The arrangement works

well for the Team Autotecnica drivers, who are the only Canadians in the series this year. The lessons have helped bring some positive results for Ellis, who lives down the street from his tutor. The 17-year-old has scored two podium finishes in seven starts and lies third in the rookie standings with 50 points. "It's almost like having a book right next to me telling me what to do when I have a problem," Ellis said. "It's a ridiculous amount of fun to drive the car but I am at a bit of a disadvantage this year because I didn't get a lot of preseason testing. "So, I am really pushing now to learn." Ellis was leading the rookie points heading to the last race weekend in mid-May, but dropped to third after finishing sixth in each of the three rounds in Utah's Miller Motorsport Park. U.S. driver Michael Lewis leads the rookie standings with 57 points. Drivers score 20 points for a win. While learning to race a car from karting is a huge job, Ellis feels that the higher pressure of racing cars is the biggest challenge he's faced this year. "Before it was basically just jump in and drive, now it's training off the track and worrying about nutrition and, because the budgets are much higher, I'm dealing with sponsors more too," Ellis said. "It went from being a sport to a career – it's a big transition in the commitment level and everything that goes with it." His more experienced teammate has four podium finishes and six top-four results in the seven races this year, good enough for third in points with 71. The next two rounds of the season go July 17-18 at Lime Rock Park, Conn. The bad news for the Canadian pair has been the Eurointernational team, which always seems to be a step ahead. Its drivers, Brazilian Giancarlo Vilarinho and Gabby Chavez of Colombia, are the only race winners this season. Vilarinho's five wins has him atop the points standings with 119, followed by Chavez five behind. "I think they are able to get a fast setup sooner than we can," Raimondo said. "We can get close to them in the race, but in qualifying we are struggling a little bit. The team and Alex and I have developed a good base setup to work from, so I think that will change." After losing ground to the leaders early, Raimondo hasn't given up hope of winning the championship, but he knows it will be difficult. Whether or not he pulls it off, Raimondo has already begun exploring a move to a European championship next year, possibly Italian F3. "You have to be at least a year ahead of yourself and I am already looking at what I'm will be doing next year," said Raimondo, who also needs to raise some money to chase his Formula One dreams. "I don't have any official sponsorship – it's mostly my parents. The economy is very bad and I have had people say they want to help but they can't really do anything because of the situation." Unfortunately, the pair will not race at the FBMW World Final after it was quietly cancelled last month due to the economic downturn. Begun in 2005, the world final winner earned an F1 test with the BMW-Sauber Team.

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