

Ellis Racing

Performance BMW
Lake Street
St. Catharines



MEET ALEX ELLIS with his race car at Performance BMW TOMORROW 11am-3pm



By MOLLY HARDING
Advertising features writer

When Alex Ellis signs autographs at Performance BMW tomorrow, the young race car driver will be flush with success from his latest venture on the track.

Alex is a 17-year-old member of Team Autotecnica out of Vaughan, and races in the Formula BMW Americas series.

Two St. Catharines teens are on the team, the only Canadian drivers in the Formula BMW Americas Series. Gianmarco Raimondo, who lives down the road from Alex and was a high school chum, was the 2008 Formula BMW Rookie of the Year. At 17 and a year younger than Raimondo, Alex is working toward that goal this year, after leading the Rookie Championship up until his race in Utah.

Racing is not a new sport to this young man. His interest was sparked at the age of four, when he loved to watch Formula One racing on television. Alex always wanted to get involved, but it wasn't until he turned 13 that he became an avid go-kart racer, driving at the Hamilton Karting track.

With two years of go-karts, competing in Florida and Las Vegas and winning a lot of regional races, Alex had a whole slew of wins and close finishes behind him. He took another giant leap in the spring last year, competing regularly in the historic Formula 1200 series at Shannonville, Mosport and Calabogie, all well-known Ontario tracks.

He drove a 70-horsepower car with a steel tube framework covered in fiberglass, competing for standout team TLM Racing. Its top speed was about 200 kilometres per hour. But that first race was a real eye-opener for the 16-year-old. He'd never driven a manual shift car before and though the under-sized car was smooth to drive, it wouldn't tolerate a single mistake.

With Alex's aggressive driving style and a real desire to win, he did just that, winning his first race by 18 seconds – in the rain! In all, he won five times in 15 Formula 1200 starts. In an article on the young driver late last year, Standard sports editor Bernie Puchalski suggested Alex would "in all probability would have become the first driver in 45 years to win the rookie of the year title and overall series points if he hadn't missed the final three races."

He missed them by opting to climb to another level in his racing career and attend the Formula BMW Racing Centre in Valencia, Spain. His goal was to earn a scholarship and get into the Formula BMW Series.

The venture paid off handsomely for Alex. At the Centre, he drove sports sedans, Formula BMW cars, and went through various physical and psychological tests, and was one of three young drivers chosen from over 25 participants invited to the qualifying shoot-out at the Spanish Centre and was the fastest driver in the testing.

He also became part of an exclusive group of Formula BMW Juniors with an \$80,000 USD scholarship and is now racing on the Formula BMW Americas series. In all, 24 such scholarships have been awarded all over the world since the Formula BMW Americas series was launched in 2004. The company's Junior Program goes back to the 1970s.

With the scholarship, Alex was automatically enrolled in the BMW

Motorsport Education and Coaching program, a support program that ensures ambitious and talented drivers are given the best possible preparation for a career in international motorsports.

The young drivers learn from exceptional tutors, broadening their horizons, honing their on-track skills and gaining vital guidance about on- and off-track conduct. The foundation of the program is alignment with the Formula One World Championship – unique among entry-level racing series.

BMW offers a great deal of support to the young drivers it sponsors, says Brian Ellis, who has supported his son wholeheartedly since he first climbed into a car. They manufacture all of the race cars, all exactly the same, so the deciding factor in their success is their pure talent and the team's technical knowledge of the car, not having the biggest budget or the most impressive technical resources. They sponsor a fitness and coaching program and bring the BMW Juniors to the Formula One team factory.

The season for Formula BMW Americas opened in March in Puebla, Mexico, and Alex just returned from racing with Team Autotecnica at Lime Rock Park in

Connecticut. August will see them in Elkhart Lake, Wisc., and Mosport International Raceway in Bowmanville, near Oshawa, Alex's only stop in Canada.

While Alex is totally focused on racing right now and is hopefully one day going to be a Formula One driver, he also has a Plan B. He has been accepted at two universities and would like to follow in his father's footsteps as a civil engineer. That's down the road, however.

Right now the young driver is intent on his own major responsibility toward the team and its success. Part of that responsibility is to get sponsors to help cover the \$250,000 US personal costs of racing.

BMW is Alex's largest sponsor. Brian Ellis is hoping to attract local sponsors for Alex, and is inviting everyone, including interested companies or private investors to attend the autograph signing at Performance BMW and talk to Alex about his high-level international motorsport racing ambitions.

Alex's race car will be on display at Performance BMW tomorrow, July 25.

To learn more about Alex, check online at www.alexellis.ca or turn up at the autograph signing at Performance BMW tomorrow between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m.

