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Posted By **BERNIE PUCHALSKI**, STANDARD STAFF

Posted 1 day ago

Being one of two winners of the Jim Russell Future Driver 2010 selection is a life-altering moment for 18-year-old St. Catharines native Alex Ellis.

"Winning this means absolutely everything to me. Having dedicated my life, mine and my family's money into succeeding in motor sport, so you can understand I'm elated. It's more than a dream coming true, it's a massive turning point in my life," Ellis told eformulacarneews.com.

Competing on the Formula BMW Americas circuit last season cost Ellis and his family an estimated \$140,000 of a total cost of \$300,000. The rest was covered by sponsorships.

"The way racing works is everybody pays at the lower levels and the guys that are really good indirectly get everyone else's money. Once you make it, it's such a turnaround and you start making so much money. Once you crest the hill, it's a massive acceleration," the St. Francis Secondary School graduate said.

As one of two winners of the selection process, Ellis receives a fully funded (\$135,000) season in the 2010 Jim Russell Championship Series, plus coaching and testing opportunities.

About 40 drivers from 10 countries paid \$8,000 to attend the four-day selection process Dec. 19-22 at the Infineon Raceway in Sonoma, Calif. The field was whittled down to 20 for the final two days and six for the final day. Ellis and

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American Gary Carlton were selected as the winners.

The winners were chosen based on their speed, precision and control of karts, Mitsubishi Evolution X sedans and singleseat race cars, as well as technical understanding of the vehicles. Media awareness, race craft and fitness were also evaluated in the latter stages of the process.

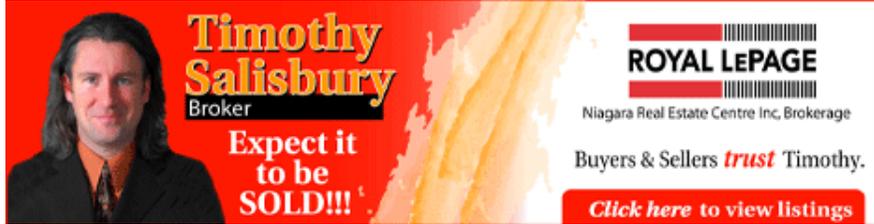
Selection panel member Allan McNish, an ex-Formula One driver and two-time Le Mans 24 Hour race winner, told eformulacarne.com Ellis was chosen because he was the best all-around driver.

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

Reached in Whistler, B.C., last week where his family was enjoying a skiing and snowboarding vacation, Ellis was still figuring out how he would approach the upcoming season. He's not sure if he will remain in California for the entire season or commute between California and St. Catharines. He will begin testing on the Formula Three cars in January.

"I want to get enough testing done before the season starts that I can be one of the top guys if not the top guy. The winner of the championship gets a free Formula Two ride. It would be worth about \$600,000," he said.

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Competing last season on the Formula BMW Americas series, Ellis felt he started behind the eight ball. Testing cost \$5,000 a day and he only did one day of training compared with more than 20 days of training for many of the other drivers.

"I compared it to going to the gym for the first time and trying to compete against someone who has been competing for three months. It's impossible to keep up and I was the real underdog this year. But I think that helped me a lot more because I made a lot of rookie mistakes in tough positions than I would have if I had tested a lot."

In his first season competing on the now-defunct Formula BMW Americas series, he placed sixth overall with one pole position, three podium finishes and two fastest laps.

"I learned patience and keeping a calm head in the car and concentrating on what I have to concentrate on," Ellis said.

Patience is crucial in not pushing beyond the limit all the time and planning out every move before you make them.

"It's using a lot more thought process in every decision that I make," Ellis said.

In St. Catharines, he will do a ton of laps at home on his race car simulator while working as a detailer at Performance Cars.

The 16-race Jim Russell Championship Series starts in April and involves two, 30-minute races on back-to-back days over eight weekends. All races are held at the Infineon Raceway, using different configurations of the track.

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The winner of the series gets a fully funded season on the 2011 FIA (Federation Internationale de l'Automobile) Formula Two Championship, a European series launched this year using a Williams Formula One singleseat race car.

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