

Points Haul in Holland for Ilott

Trio of top six finishes, including a podium see Callum Ilott edge nearer to championship leader

European F3 front-runner Callum Ilott secured three top six finishes, topped by a race two podium, to close the gap to the championship points leader in Holland this weekend. Set amidst the sand dunes at Zandvoort, the 'home' circuit of Ilott's Van Amersfoort Racing team, the event marked the start of the second half of the championship.

Qualifying saw the 17-year-old secure pole position as well as a fourth and seventh at the coastal track, where despite its proximity to the team's base, hasn't always favoured the local outfit. "We managed to make improvements to the car and have a better qualifying run here," says Ilott. "There was also a great opportunity to better the seventh place but late in the session, just as our tyres were in the zone, my team mate in front ran off the track, kicking up a cloud of dust, forcing me to lift and that cost me a second good lap time."

With overtaking limited at the classic Dutch circuit, a good start was crucial to racking up points in the opening race. Ilott was both quick and clean off the line but despite first place starter Nick Cassidy making a good start he braked very early into turn one allowing his team mate and Championship leader Lance Stroll to pass him around the outside. Alessio Lorandi took his chance to jump Ilott and Gunther by following Stroll, also sweeping around the outside of Turn One. Ilott was then down to fifth and remained glued to the rear of title rival Maximilian Günther for the entire race. The battle between the two was the highlight of the race for many but despite trying every option, there was no way past the German's car. "Our car had better race pace than Max's but there was no way past," adds Ilott. "We raced hard but I wasn't able to overcome the aero effect around the fast corners and make a move stick this time."

Race Two on Saturday was less satisfying for the Bishops Stortford teenager, as a chance to control the race from the front was lost at the start. Promoted to pole after the disqualification of championship leader Lance Stroll, Ilott was unable to convert the opportunity into victory. Running on used tyres, Ilott couldn't match the start of front row rival Nick Cassidy. Cassidy, starting on fresh rubber, pulled level with Ilott off the line and with pole position on the outside for Ilott, Cassidy was able to control the run down to Turn 1, with Günther able to follow him through on the inside line to snatch second. From then on it was a case of trying once more to unseat the German over the course of the race. Easily pulling away from the rest of the pack, Ilott nonetheless couldn't find a way to take second but was grateful to bag substantial points. "I was disappointed not to win from pole," says Ilott. "My start was OK but Nick did a better job off the line so well done to him. Again our speed was good although later in the race we developed an issue with the suspension that meant I could no longer maintain the fight with the leaders. With Lance not scoring, we did move a little closer to his leading points tally."

Starting from seventh for Race Three on Sunday meant it would be hard to match the previous day's results. A good getaway however saw Ilott move past Joel Eriksson to take sixth, a position he would hold to the flag. "The track had rubbered in after the earlier DTM Touring Cars race so whilst we had understeer, the car was easier to drive over the first half of the race," adds Ilott. "As the used tyres degraded, I could feel the car develop more oversteer, so I managed them carefully to ensure we could bring home the points we need for the championship."

The series returns to action in two weeks with the next round at the Spa track in Belgium. "This is a circuit I really enjoy; fast and flowing, it should suit us well and it's good to be back out again so soon," concludes Ilott. "I've been invited to test a simulator of a type used by F1 teams before then so it's going to be a busy week."

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About Callum Ilott

Based in the UK and still in full-time education at Haileybury, Hertford, 17-year-old Callum Ilott is one of Britain's upcoming young driving talents. At 12, he secured his first British national karting championship and just one year later dominated the international under 15s KFJ category with multiple championship wins and was nominated as the youngest ever WSK Driver of the Year in 2012. Aged 15, he won the CIK-FIA European Karting Championship, the WSK Super Master Series and finished fourth in the CIK-FIA World Championship. Aged 16, Callum was Red Bull's first ever driver to progress from karts to F3 to race in the FIA F3 European Championship securing a podium at the Nürburgring. In 2016 he will return to the championship with experienced Dutch team VAR.