

Victorious start to Ilott's 2016 F3 title challenge with maiden win

Ilott overcomes fire, car change and grid penalty to secure first outright victory at opening weekend of FIA Formula 3

Young British racing driver Callum Ilott made an outstanding start to his 2016 FIA Formula 3 campaign, scoring his first victory at the opening weekend at Paul Ricard, France. The result was even more remarkable after a fire on Thursday meant Ilott was forced to borrow a chassis from a rival team to take part in the three-race weekend.

With the series organisers mandating Ilott's original chassis be checked after Thursday's events, his VAR Motorsport team was forced to build up a new car overnight around the loaned tub from T-Sport. An engine change triggered a penalty that put Ilott on the back row of the grid for the weekend's first race, making it a substantial task to even score points. From 21st on the grid, Ilott nonetheless mounted an impressive recovery drive to secure a top ten finish and gain a championship point. "Given how quickly VAR had to put together the new car, strangely it felt surprisingly good," says Ilott. "Huge thanks to them and T-Sport for getting me back out on track."

Saturday's second race marked the first triumph for the 17 year old in a race where Ilott was able to master challenging track conditions. Rapid from the outset and having avoided the carnage at Turn One, Ilott climbed to second behind Nick Cassidy from the much favoured Prema squad. Revelling in the greasy and increasingly slippery conditions, Ilott capitalised on a mistake by Cassidy to take the lead. A late safety car then bunched up the field for the final sprint to the flag, but Ilott held his position. "As the rain started to come down I was able to build a gap, and I knew I had the pace. When the safety car came out, the rain got heavier and I was a bit worried as the track was getting more slippery. My ice driving course this winter came in handy!" adds Ilott.

Unfortunately for Ilott, the final race on Sunday was a tale of what might have been; stalling on the grid meant he had to battle hard through the field to ultimately finish 12th after qualifying P3. "I didn't have the right feeling from my clutch on my practice start and when I reacted to it at the actual start I ended up stalling - my fault," says Ilott. "It was a weekend of highs and lows. From having basically no car on Thursday night to a win on Saturday afternoon was pretty awesome though. Looking ahead I've got some time on the simulator planned before the Hungaroring race and with exams next month I've also got to get some revision done!"

In the drivers' championship, Ilott is fourth after Paul Ricard with 26 points. Rounds four, five and six of the FIA F3 Championship take place on the 23rd-24th April at the Hungaroring F1 Circuit in Hungary.

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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.