**Dutch F4 NEZ newcomers pick up speed with Hankook**

**This season DTM drivers are not the only ones in action at the Moscow Raceway this weekend. The youngsters in the SMP F4 NEZ Championship certified by FIA will also do battle for valuable championship points on the 3.931-kilometre track. Premium tyre maker Hankook provides the race tyres to help the stars of tomorrow on their quest to progress from karting to Formula racing, and will also be an exclusive partner of the SMP F4 NEZ Championship for the coming years. For the 21 regular drivers, the Moscow Raceway is the fifth of seven venues, with the season consisting of 21 races in Russia, the Netherlands, Sweden and Finland.**

***Moscow/Russia, 21st August 2016*** – Jarno Opmeer and Richard Verschoor are currently first and second in their rookie season in the SMP F4 NEZ Championship certified by FIA, and have their sights set firmly on the title. The two Dutch rivals are 16 and 15 years old and took their first steps in motorsport on the karting circuit.

While Jarno was already putting pedal to the metal at just four years of age, Richard made his karting debut as a nine-year-old. In both cases, their fathers were the driving force. Racing had another benefit for Richard Verschoor. “I had not seen my father so often up to that point, as he was often away working. However, that changed when we started to spend a lot of time together at the kart tracks, and I got quicker and quicker.”

At first, motorsport was nothing more than a nice hobby for the two young drivers. However, when Richard started to feature at the front of European kart races on an increasingly regular basis and was crowned CIK-FIA Academy World Champion in 2014, it became clear to him that he wanted to become a professional racing driver. It was a similar story for his compatriot Jarno: “Even as a four-year-old, I always wanted to win kart races. When I realised that I could actually make it in Formula 4, I knew that the cockpit was going to be my workplace.”

Nowadays, the two young Dutchmen are among the fastest in the SMP F4 NEZ Championship. This has also brought about changes in their lives. The talented youngsters regularly practice on a simulator after school. Fitness regimes are also part of the everyday routine, as are mental preparation for coming races and the subsequent post-race analysis.

The Hankook race tyres have helped Jarno and Richard establish themselves in the SMP F4 NEZ Championship. “I had only ever driven on kart tyres before joining this series, so I don’t really have anything to compare them with. However, I can say that the Hankook race tyre is extraordinarily reliable. You can drive quickly on them for a very long time, which is a good thing – particularly for those of us just starting out in Formula racing,” says championship leader Jarno Opmeer, whose goal is to drive in Formula One.

Richard Verschoor is looking to oust his compatriot from the top spot and be crowned this season’s SMP F4 NEZ champion. For him, it is important to always remain focussed, but never forget to enjoy his sport. The 15-year-old: “I am a completely different person when I pull on my overall and put on my helmet and gloves at the weekend. I am no longer the boy next door. I am a racing driver who hits 220 km/h on the straights, even though I am still not allowed to drive a car on the road.”

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