**Renault Sport Racing looks to make top drivers out of rough diamonds like Alexander Smolyar**

**At the end of 2018, Hankook entered into a long-term partnership with Renault Sport Racing. Since the start of this season, the tyre maker has supplied the Formula Renault Eurocup with its high-end Ventus Race tyre and supported the young drivers on their way to a successful motorsport career. Formula 1 world champions past and present, including Alain Prost, Kimi Raikkonen and Lewis Hamilton, honed their skills in Formula Renault, which is widely regarded as a training ground for the champions of tomorrow.**

***Hockenheim/Germany, 10th October 2019*** – For the 25 young drivers in the Formula Renault Eurocup, the season began in Monza at the end of April. This was followed by trips to such prestigious racetracks as Monaco, Silverstone and Spa-Francorchamps. The final round of the season, and only overseas event, will take place in Abu Dhabi from 24th to 26th October.

One of this year’s fastest and most consistent drivers at the wheel of the 270-hp Formula car has been Alexander Smolyar. The Russian first took his place in an EasyKart at the age of six. He improved each year thereafter and was crowned Russian karting champion in 2015. After that he turned his attention to racing in Europe, with the support of SMP Racing.

“Initially, motorsport was just great fun. That all changed 2016 when I found myself on pole position in the finale of the Karting World Championship in Bahrain. There were a lot of experienced and good drivers there – my idols, who I had admired on television. And I was the fastest and at the front of the grid. I may have failed to finish, due to technical issues, but from that point on it was clear to me that I wanted to be a racing driver,” said the young Russian.

Alexander Smolyar went on to win the WSK Night Edition in Italy, before moving into Formula 4 in 2017. He was runner-up in the Spanish F4 championship and third in the SMP F4 NEZ Championships. Last year, Smolyar received an invitation from Renault Sport Racing to attend the rookie tests for the Formula Renault Eurocup, where he impressed the powers that be with his speed – so much so that he was offered a place in the starting field.

While he had to learn the hard way in his rookie year, the Russian has developed into a serious title contender this season. “I have almost always finished in the points and often on the podium. Unfortunately, technical issues forced me to retire from the lead in Silverstone. The points I missed out on there could be crucial after the final round in Abu Dhabi,” said the 18-year-old.

He won the second race of the season-opener in Monza on the Hankook race tyre. “The Hankook tyres are completely different to the brand we were on in the Formula Renault Eurocup last year. As such, I had to adapt my driving style, which worked out very well. Unlike the tyres of other manufacturers, you can do multiple fast laps in a row on a set of Hankook race tyres. This is a big advantage in qualifying. In the race, the tyres keep their grip for a very long time. They are particularly ideal for newcomers, as they are predictable and easy to manage.”

Like many of his fellow drivers, Smolyar dreams of a career in a Formula 1 car. However, he is also well aware that very few make it to the pinnacle of motor racing. His goal is to make a living from his great passion, motorsport. “I have no other wishes. I don’t want to climb high mountains or do a parachute jump somewhere. Motorsport is everything for me. I’m living my dream here, and never want it to stop.”

Manfred Sandbichler, Hankook Motorsport Director Europe: “It is nice to see young lads like Alexander Smolyar with such a burning passion for motor racing. For this reason, we are delighted to work together with such a renowned partner as Renault Sport Racing, for whom promoting youngsters is so important. As expected, we witnessed an extremely high standard of Formula racing in our first season in the Formula Renault Eurocup. Very talented youngsters flourish here. We acknowledge the best rookie with the Hankook Trophy and reward them with sets of tyres to practice on. We see huge future potential in the drivers and, together with Renault Sport Racing, we want to make top drivers out of these rough diamonds.”

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