

40 years ago, the opening of the F3 Championship season



The first edition of the FIA Historic Formula 3 European Cup, a new event in the panorama of FIA Historic Championships, will take place over the first weekend of September this year. This provides the ideal opportunity to go back 40 years and recall the inaugural event of the 1978 Formula 3 European Championship, won hands down by Jan Lammers.

On 26 March 1978, for the opening round of the F3 European Championship at Zandvoort, the field numbered no fewer than 42 cars. Jan Lammers and Huub Rothengatter, with their Racing Team Holland's Ralt RT1s, were tipped as favourites, while Arie Luijendijk (Lola T670) and Michael Bleekemolen (Chevron B43) completed the Dutch contingent. Up against the local favourites, the drivers most likely to stand a chance of victory seemed to be Anders Olofsson, Patrick Gaillard, Teo Fabi, David Kennedy and "Slim" Borgudd – all names that would later become famous, and not just in Europe, proving that Formula 3 was a mandatory stepping stone for drivers seeking an international career.

The field was diversified, not only through the nationality of its competitors but also through the variety of manufacturers entered, with Argo, Martini and March joining Ralt, Chevron and Lola. It is worth noting that out of the 42 single-seaters entered, 36 were equipped with the almighty Toyota Novamotor engine, while the other six were powered by BMW.

Whereas Lammers came top of the list in the first timed practice session, which was run in changing track conditions on account of the unstable weather, the second qualifying session saw Italian Teo Fabi in his March 783-Toyota set a time of 1'29"00, which nobody else was to come close to, not even the Dutch favourites Lammers and Bleekemolen who were 4 tenths of a second

slower. Sweden's Borgudd followed close behind them in fourth position, ahead of Italian Oscar Pedersoli.

The 42 competitors were then divided up into two separate groups, each group to compete in a qualifying heat before moving on to the final, scheduled for Easter Monday.

The first heat took place on a wet track. Michael Bleekemolen made an excellent start, leaving Fabi almost standing. After a very good start, Olofsson finished the first lap in second position, in front of Frenchman Gaillard. These two were to go wheel to wheel for the entire race, but the Frenchman, unable to trust his worn rear brakes, never managed to claw his way into second place. Bleekemolen carried off the win without any worries, while Fabi finished eighth after a little off-track excursion at the Tarzan curve.

From merely wet, the track became thoroughly waterlogged for the second heat, so much so that one driver was caught out on the warm-up lap and spun off. In these dreadful conditions, local boy Lammers put on an incredible one-man-show. The Flying Dutchman roared away from the grid, building a lead of 12 seconds by the end of the 4th lap, a lead which grew to 40 seconds on the 8th lap. After a demonstration of pure skill – setting the lap record to boot, almost 4 full seconds faster than the second best race lap – Jan Lammers won the heat in style, way ahead of Borgudd and David Kennedy.

After the qualifying heats, 31 cars proceeded to the final, for which the first row of the grid was monopolised by the Dutchmen of Racing Team Holland. Lammers took the lead in the first corner, after which there was never any real threat to his domination. His teammate Bleekemolen, on the other hand, had to fight hard against Gaillard, Borgudd and Olofsson, even finding himself in fifth place early on in the race. Although he managed to pass the two Swedes again as the laps went by, it seemed that Bleekemolen would have to resign himself to finishing third – until Gaillard had a spin five laps from the finish while trying to pass a backmarker. Whereas Bleekemolen inherited second place and thus secured the one-two for his team, the Frenchman lost any chance of a podium and had to settle for fifth. Teo Fabi made a fine recovery, blasting his way through the field and erasing the memory of his poor showing in the qualifying heat, to cross the line in 3rd place barely a whisker ahead of Oloffson.

At the end of the 1978 season, Jan Lammers proved that his win at Zandvoort was not due solely to his perfect knowledge of the Dutch track. After the 15 rounds on the calendar, he was crowned as 1978 Formula 3 European Champion, with 4 victories and 5 second places. The other race winners that year were Anders Olofsson (4), Teo Fabi (3), Patrick Gaillard (2), Derek Warwick (1) and Alain Prost (1).

Forty years on, the new FIA Historic Formula 3 European Cup will see racing cars that were built and that competed between 1971 and 1984 come together again, in a unique event to be held at Zandvoort. Two categories will feature – both of them for machines with a maximum cylinder capacity of two litres. Category 1 is for cars of the 1971-1978 period, while Category 2 is open to cars that used to race between 1979 and 1984. The Cup will see some legendary racing marques, such as Chevron, Ralt, March and Argo, back in action and battling it out during the Zandvoort Historic Grand Prix, which will take place from 31 August to 2 September.

The Sporting Regulations of the FIA Historic Formula 3 European Cup and the entry form for the event are available on www.fia.com, via this [link](#). Entries are **open until 1 June 2018**.