

Kaufmann Kids

The Josef Kaufmann Academy of Success continues to graduate top racing talents.

The Emmerich Emperor. Nico Hülkenberg. Little Nico came to Kaufmann Racing at the age of 17 in 2005 for his rookie year in Formula BMW Germany after championship winning karting career. The 20-race season saw Nico knock out the competition by capturing 14 podium finishes, which included 8 wins and 9 pole positions.

The prestigious Formula BMW World Finals at season end took place at the Sakhir circuit in Bahrain. Nico nailed this too. But his success quickly turned into quicksand and he was demoted to third. The race stewards gave him 10-seconds penalty for "irrational exuberance", claiming he brake-tested drivers behind him while the race was under a yellow flag.

The young driver shed a few tears and moved on to greater heights and glory in the following years.

The next three years, 2006-'08, were spent in the dog eat dog pound of Formula 3. Winning races and pole positions in his rookie year in every series he competes in has become "Hulk's" hallmark.

In 2006, he also represented Germany in the now defunct A1GP series. A dominating performance saw Nico nab 9 wins and 14 podium finishes from 20 events, including a sensational Senna-like performance in the rain at Sepang.

In the 2007 F3 Euro Series he finished third in the championship with four victories and eight podium finishes. Highlight of the year was his victory in the Masters of F3 at Zolder

In 2008, Nico connected with AT&T Williams as test driver and would ring up more success in his second season of F3 Euro Series. Seven wins and eight podium appearances would give him the title, and in the Masters of F3 he was placed second after starting from pole position.

His GP2 career started in typical "Hulk"-style, from pole position. In the 2008-'09 GP2 Asia Series he would race only two weekends, victory and two podium finishes from four races would give him enough points to be classified sixth in the championship.

In the main series last season, against a field of more experienced and several GP2 race winning drivers, Nico captured the championship by appearing on the podium in half the races, winning five of the 20 events.

This year he will be Willi Weber's latest find on the F1 grid along with his greatest.



Racer and Mentor. Josef Kaufmann. German F3 and Super V driver Josef Kaufmann started his racing team in 1982, while also competing as a driver in the German F3 Championship. Two wins and five podium finishes would give him fourth place in the championship. Finishing just ahead of him in third place was his young Austrian charge by the name of Gerhard Berger.

Kaufmann team has trained and guided many young racing drivers who have gone on to become championship winners in different categories. The list, apart from Berger and Hülkenberg, includes two-time Indy 500 winner Arie Luyendyk, Le Mans winner Frank Biela, DTM champion Timo Scheider, Formula BMW Europe champion from Mexico, Esteban Gutierrez and current Grand Prix driver Sebastian Buemi.

“They don’t have the time”, responded Kaufmann when asked what is the most common mistake young drivers make, referring to the tendency to not take time and learn the business and art of being a racing driver.

And the racing ladder per Kaufmann’s game plan, “Out of experience a good preparation is of course participation in national and international karting series for about 5 – 6 years. A usual career path to Formula 1 would be like: two years in Formula BMW, two years in Formula 3/GP3, one to two years in GP2, and then hopefully the step into Formula 1. So overall in about 6 years a very good driver can make it up to Formula 1.”

Kaufmann’s current crop of future stars includes young Dutch talent Robin Frijns, Rookie of the Year last year in the Formula BMW Europe series. The team is confident he will bring home their second driver’s title in three years. Making their single-seater debut will be Frijns fellow Dutchman Hannes van Asseldonk, a former Benelux Rotax Max Senior champion.

Finland’s Petri Suvanto will fill the third seat. His credentials include success in KF2 & KF3 series. He was also the 2006 Finnish Junior champion.

Mexican Hat Dance. Esteban Gutierrez. Since Pedro Rodriguez it has been a long siesta for Mexican racing fans to cheer a competitive driver from their nation in Formula Uno. Esteban Gutierrez is the “hombre” likely to change that. Esteban first made waves in racing circles in the United States, winning Rookie of Year honors in the 2007 Formula BMW USA, making his motor racing debut with two pole positions in the first two races of his career. Four wins and 8 podium finishes would secure him Rookie of the Year title and second place in the championship.

Gutierrez crossed the Atlantic and sailed to championship victory with Josef Kaufmann Racing in the 2008 Formula BMW Europe Championship. A dominating season saw him win seven races, six in a row, and 12 podium finishes from 16 races.

Kaufmann rates him as quick as Hülkenberg. The 18-year old Mexican from Monterey is one of the pre-season favorites in the inaugural season of GP3 Championship this year.



Champ Chris. The Winning Victoris. The now 20-year old German, Christian Victoris, started his winning ways after joining Kaufmann Racing for the 2006 Formula BMW Germany Championship. While his first season with another team was winless and he finished outside the top 15 in the championship, the 2006 season was a championship winning story. He won half of the 18 races with 16 podium finishes.

The team and the driver saved the best for last. In the prestigious Formula BMW World Finals, Victoris won every heat and the finals from pole position. Their winning ways continued in the ATS German F3 Cup in 2007. Two wins, seven podium finishes and four pole positions were the highlight of the season, resulting in top five finish in the championship.

Victoris is now competing in GP2 Asia where he scored a win in only his second start.



Swiss Timing. Sebastien Buemi. After winning the European and Italian karting championships, Buemi arrived at the Kaufmann stable to compete in the 2004 Formula BMW Germany championship. He finished the season third in the standings, with 10 podium finishes and two pole positions and two fastest laps.

Buemi, now in F1 with Toro Rosso team, comes from a racing family. His grand father Georges raced at Le Mans and his cousin is female racer Natasha Gachnang.

No time for blues and Frauen. Lars Kaufmann. Like his father Lars has serious passion for motor racing and is razor sharp in team management and training young talented drivers as they learn the ropes of single seater racing.

On race weekends he is data engineer and also manages the task of keeping young drivers focused on the job on hand. Not surprisingly he considers Nürburgring and Spa as the two most challenging tracks to find the right set up.

What is the best advice he can give to new comers from karting to single seater racing? Lars explains, "Actually the age of the drivers is very important, so kart drivers shouldn't move into car racing at a too early stage. It's very important that a young driver is mentally grown up enough. Furthermore it's very important that a new driver takes his time to develop himself properly during the switch from karting into car racing. They have to learn everything step by step and absolutely not in a hurry. It takes time to understand the whole functionality of a racing car. Those are the two most important advices for drivers who want to make the set up from karting into car racing."

The 2010 Formula BMW Europe will commence in May as a support race to the Spanish Grand Prix at Barcelona. F1weekly will bring you all the results and interviews with stars of the future from this important entry level series.

For more information on Kaufmann Racing please visit www.jk-racing.de



Story by: - Nasir Hameed (F1Weekly.com)

page 3 / 3