**Alpine Academy**

The Alpine Academy – formerly the Renault Sport Academy - enters its sixth year in 2021 and its first as part of the overall transition to Alpine F1 Team.

The programme has grown from strength to strength each year since it was established in 2016. Its goal from the outset has been clear and remains so: for an Alpine Academy driver to be in Formula 1 and become world champion with the team.

Despite a challenging year for the motorsports industry, the Academy was able to execute a full programme of junior motor racing in 2020 and achieve some excellent results on and off the track. On top of the individual success achieved by its young drivers in each of their respective seasons, the Academy drivers gained invaluable experience from several young driver test days with the Formula 1 team throughout the year, which in turn contributed to the overall development of the race team.

This year the Alpine Academy consists of five drivers. Christian, who is the longest serving member on the programme, enters his fifth season with the Academy and his second year in FIA Formula 2 with ART Grand Prix, on the back of two wins in his rookie campaign. Zhou will start his third year with the Academy, remaining with UNI-Virtuosi Racing for another season in Formula 2 following his maiden win in the series last year. Rounding off the Academy contenders in Formula 2 is Oscar – the reigning FIA Formula 3 Champion – who will be racing his rookie season in the series with defending champions PREMA Racing.

Completing this year’s Alpine Academy line-up is the reigning Formula Renault Eurocup champion, Victor Martins, and the series runner-up Caio Collet. Victor joins the programme for a second time having first signed at the start of 2018, while Brazilian driver Caio embarks on his third year with the Academy. Both Victor and Caio will compete in their rookie seasons in Formula 3 this year as teammates for MP Motorsport, following on from their enthralling title battle last year in the Eurocup.

**Alpine Academy Director, Mia Sharizman:**

**How would you assess Zhou, Christian and Oscar’s ambitions in the 2021 FIA Formula 2 Championship?**

In Formula 2, we have Zhou competing his third year in the series, Christian embarking on his second year and Oscar entering as a rookie. The level and the competition between our three drivers will be very high and we hope that they will push each other and raise the bar. Zhou and Christian are staying with their respective teams from last season and Oscar remains with PREMA. This will give all three of them stability to focus and maximise their package between team and driver. The target is clear: to win the championship. The objective comes with pressure, but we believe Zhou and Christian are experienced enough to handle those demands having already competed in Formula 2, while Oscar has the experience of being in a title fight having won last year’s Formula 3 championship in the closing laps of the final race.

**What are the aims for the Formula 2 trio of drivers?**

Zhou will have nothing to lose but all to gain in entering his third year in Formula 2. With the experiences he has accumulated over the past two years, we believe it will help him to perform consistently at a very high level.

This will be the first time Christian will enter a second year of a racing championship. Since he left karting, he has only done one season in an individual championship. We have full confidence in Christian’s ability in maximising his potential to fight for the title.

For Oscar, we have a driver who has won back-to-back championships in Formula Renault Eurocup and Formula 3. By continuing his development with PREMA, we believe he will challenge for podiums and wins. The three drivers know what is around the corner for them within our Formula 1 structure. The opportunity will come for those who perform the best.

**What are your thoughts on Caio and Victor racing in Formula 3?**

In Formula 3, we believe we have the most exciting pairing with Caio and Victor. We welcome back Victor to the programme after he won the Formula Renault Eurocup title in 2020. We have seen the strong development of Caio over the past two years in the Eurocup and we believe he is now ready for Formula 3. Both drivers were fighting neck and neck last year and we feel by pairing them together in the same team, both will push each other and the team to the absolute limit. Selecting MP Motorsport in Formula 3 was a big decision by everyone, including the drivers. We have been building the partnership with MP in the Eurocup for the past three years with much success and we believe the time is right for us to create and build something together in Formula 3. We expect to see some good and positive results from the Caio-Victor-MP package this year.

**How is the Alpine Academy collaborating with the different junior teams?**

Like MP Motorsport in Formula 3, we are working closer than ever with our partners PREMA, UNI-Virtuosi and ART Grand Prix in Formula 2. We continue to grow and build relationships with them using the expertise and tools that we have with the hope they will develop our drivers and achieve greater success in the junior formulae.

**Will the team continue to use its Formula 1 test team for young driver tests?**

The focus and the target has always been to prepare the drivers at any time when they get the opportunity to be in a Formula 1 car. Likewise, it trains the test team before they move onto the race team. Therefore, the Formula 1 private test programme at various circuits in the Renault R.S.18 car will continue this year to help prepare both sides. The experience the drivers gather from the Formula 1 test programme matched with performing and delivering results in Formula 2, will only strengthen our drivers’ case to be selected to the Formula 1 team.

**Christian Lundgaard**

**FIA Formula 2 Championship, ART Grand Prix**

**Twitter:** @lundgaardoff

**Instagram:** lundgaardofficial

**Age:** 19

**Nationality:** Danish

**2020**

**Wins**: 2

**Podiums**: 4

**Pole Positions**: 1

**Fastest Laps**: 1

**Points**: 149

**Previous Championships:**

**2020:** 7th, FIA Formula 2 Championship

**2019**: 6th, FIA Formula 3 Championship

**2018:** 2nd (1st Rookie), Formula Renault Eurocup

**2017:** 1st SMP F4 NEZ, 1st Spanish F4

Christian remains with the programme for a fifth consecutive year having joined the Academy in 2017. After a promising rookie campaign in the FIA Formula 2 Championship – featuring two wins – Christian remains in the primary Formula 1 support series for 2021 with ART Grand Prix; extending his collaboration with the French team for a third season.

The Danish teenager joined the Academy following an impressive career in European and World Karting Championships. His first year in single-seaters led to two Formula 4 titles – NEZ and Spanish – before he finished runner-up in the 2018 Formula Renault Eurocup as a rookie. In 2019, Christian stepped up to Formula 3, finishing sixth, before progressing to Formula 2 last year.

**Q&A**

**How does it feel to begin your fifth season with the Academy?**

It’s really positive to be with the team for five years. I joined when I was 16, when I was a kid. Now, I’ve grown up with the team, learned and matured throughout those years and developed not only as a racing driver, but also as a human being. I’ve learned so much during this process, but there are still lots of things to do and achieve and that’s why we’re continuing. They see potential in me, and we share the same passion and the same dream, which we want to achieve together. I’m very happy to be with the team as it’s another huge opportunity. I’m grateful to everyone involved to make this possible.

**What are your thoughts on the 2021 FIA Formula 2 campaign?**

Firstly, looking back at 2020, I think it was a positive year. Speaking to the team, we didn’t fulfil the maximum potential of the speed we had with the overall package. We had some good results and, looking at the statistics, it looks better than the outside picture and it proves we had the potential to win the championship. Some things didn’t go our way – that’s no excuse, though – and we’re confident if we put it all together, we can make it work. That’s the objective and the plan for 2021. We have the tools to make it happen.

**What benefits do you get from being on the Academy?**

The biggest benefit is learning to cope with pressure. It’s great to learn how to deal with that from an early age in the lower categories as it helps you throughout the different series. All the tools we have within the Academy and within the team itself is a benefit. Everything is there and available to help us improve, for example the training camps. Anyone can organise a training camp themselves, but to have these camps with other drivers, professional trainers and all those small things behind the scenes is what makes the difference long term. We’re also able to work closely with F1 engineers and that is something completely different to the lower junior categories. We have so many tools to help us develop and improve as people and as racing drivers.

**How is winter training progressing?**

I relaxed over Christmas and New Year and spent time at home. From the 2 January, I’ve been training and working every day. The Covid situation has made physical training a little harder than usual, but I have a home gym and Team Denmark have helped in opening some really good training facilities. My nearest one is one hour’s drive away, so it’s a long day and there’s not much time for rest! I’ve also been going into other detailed things. I’ve been analysing individual races, looking at reports, going into detail from previous years to learn and understand as much as possible. I’ve been doing lots of technical things with the team and the Academy: daily calls and catching up with different people. I feel ready for the season, and I look forward to it starting.

**Guanyu Zhou**

**FIA Formula 2 Championship, UNI-Virtuosi Racing**

**Weibo:** @车手周冠宇

**Instagram:** gyzhou\_33

**Age:** 21

**Nationality:** Chinese

**2020**

**Wins:** 1

**Podiums**: 5

**Pole Positions**: 1

**Fastest Laps**: 4

**Points**: 151.5

**Previous Championships:**

**2020:** 6th, FIA Formula 2 Championship

**2019:** 7th, FIA Formula 2 Championship

**2018:** 8th, FIA Formula 3 European Championship

**2017:** 8th, FIA Formula 3 European Championship

**2016:** 13th, FIA Formula 3 European Championship, 6th Toyota Racing Series

**2015:** 2nd, Italian F4 Championship

Guanyu Zhou continues his Academy affiliation for a third season as he remains in the FIA Formula 2 Championship with UNI-Virtuosi.

Zhou joined the programme in 2019 on the back of three consecutive years in the FIA Formula 3 European Championship. He impressed in his debut Formula 2 season, claiming the ‘Top Rookie’ award after achieving five podiums on his way to a seventh-place championship finish. The potential was there for a title charge in 2020, but Zhou was struck by bitter moments of misfortune, which put paid to his chances. Nevertheless, the Chinese driver took his first Formula 2 race win in Russia, as well as a further five podium visits to cement sixth in the championship. To cap off last year, Zhou took part in the official Formula 1 post-season Abu Dhabi test in the Renault R.S.20.

**Q&A**

**It’s your third year on the programme, how does that feel?**

It feels good to be with the Academy for a third year. There’s a really good relationship between the team and I and I think it’s been going well. We have a lot of trust and we’ve worked well together over the two years, especially last year. We did the Formula 1 post-Abu Dhabi test in December and that was a special moment for me, so it’s an honour to continue and having the team believe in me and in my career.

**What are the main benefits of being on the Academy?**

I’d say having the opportunities within the Formula 1 team. Formula 1 is my dream and my target and the team has given me chances to test the Formula 1 car in my role as Test Driver over the last two seasons. I’ve done a lot of days to develop the car, including simulator work. All of these things are benefiting my future and getting me used to everything already. I feel more ready than I was three years ago when I wasn’t having these opportunities. It also helps me in Formula 2 as I understand things from the engineers a lot more.

**How special is it to have the opportunity to drive the Formula 1 car?**

It’s definitely an amazing experience. I remember my first time jumping in a Formula 1 car and the steering wheel, for example, felt quite complicated as everything was new for me. Now, I don’t have to think about any switches on the wheel as everything is in my head. I also know how I have to change my driving style between Formula 2 and Formula 1. The downforce, compared to any other category, is special. The more mileage I do in an F1 car, the better it is, as it helps me to understand the car and the engineers and they also get to know me and my preferences.

**What are your targets for the 2021 FIA Formula 2 Championship?**

Firstly, I learnt a lot last season. It was clear how much bad luck I had and, while finishing sixth was okay, it was only a few points away from the top three. This year, the target is to win the title. The important thing is to get the superlicense points, but that does not mean I won’t push to win the championship. Last year, I improved my driving and my mental knowledge. I had to adapt to bounce back from the bad luck, but I think that’s made me a stronger driver. This year, I’ll take that experience from the past and put it all together. Hopefully everything will come my way and we can have a good season.

**What do you make of the new FIA Formula 2 calendar?**

We have some new tracks to learn. I like new tracks as it’s not just new for me, it’s new for everyone. Both team and driver will need to adapt to the new circuits and have a strong baseline set-up. The new calendar has three races each weekend, so it’s even more important to always finish inside the points and have a chance for the reverse grid race. Qualifying will be tight as always and everyone will have a chance. You cannot afford mistakes, especially in qualifying or race one as that will compromise the whole weekend.

**How is your winter training going?**

I’ve been in Shanghai and it’s been going well. I’m following a programme I’ve been set by the team, and my physio. There’s lots of things I can do, and I don’t have to go to the gym all the time. I’ve been playing some football, basketball and badminton as well. This winter has been busy with testing and racing in Asian Formula 3, so I feel even more ready than last year!

**Oscar Piastri**

**FIA Formula 2, PREMA Racing**

**Twitter**: @OscarPiastri

**Instagram**: oscarpiastri

**Age**: 19

**Nationality**: Australian

**2020**

**Wins**: 2

**Podiums**: 4

**Fastest Laps**: 4

**Points**: 164

**Previous Championships:**

**2020:** 1st, FIA Formula 3

**2019**: 1st, Formula Renault Eurocup

**2018**: 8th, Formula Renault Eurocup

**2017**: 2nd, British Formula 4

Oscar enters his second year with the Academy as a back-to-back single-seaters junior champion, having secured the FIA Formula 3 title last year and the Formula Renault Eurocup in 2019.

Born in Melbourne, Australia, Oscar already has a wealth of racing experience having started karting in 2011 before transitioning to single-seater racing in 2016. Oscar finished that maiden year runner-up in the British Formula 4 Championship, and, a year later, he finished eighth in the Eurocup with three podiums to his name. He clinched the 2019 title with seven victories from 20 races.

He added a second career championship to his résumé last year, claiming the Formula 3 Championship in his rookie season for PREMA Racing taking two victories and four podiums. The nineteen-year-old moves up the ranks once again this year and suits up for PREMA in FIA Formula 2.

**Q&A**

**How did it feel winning the FIA Formula 3 title in your debut season?**

It was awesome to win the Formula 3 Drivers’ Championship in my rookie season. Looking back, I probably exceeded my expectations a little with the title win. I knew I was in a historically strong car going into the season with PREMA Racing, so I set the bar quite high and started out by at least challenging my teammates. I knew if I could beat them then I would be there or thereabouts come the end of the year. It was a great feeling and I want to continue the momentum into this year.

**Was there a standout moment for you last year?**

I can’t single out one moment, so I’ll choose two! The first one was the season opener in Austria where I took the win on my debut in the series, it was probably my highlight of the season. I couldn’t have started the season any better, especially after such a long break from racing. Then the second standout moment for me was the race in Monza where I went from fifteenth on the grid to finish third. It was probably the defining moment in the championship for me and my best race.

**What are your targets heading into the FIA Formula 2 season with PREMA Racing?**

It’s good to be with PREMA Racing again and build off what we did last year but I don’t have a specific target this season. My goal, as with any year, is to challenge my teammate. It’ll be a similar mindset to last year, where if I at least beat them, I’ll hopefully be near the front of the grid. But let’s see, it’s such an unpredictable series as we saw last year.

**Has your preparation and training differed in preparation for the step up into an FIA Formula 2 car?**

This year the car is obviously a bit harder to drive and the races are longer so that will be a challenge but overall my training hasn’t changed much. For the last two to three years I’ve really been pushing myself to be in good physical condition, so I’m looking to maintain that and build on it where I can.

**You drove the R.S.18 last year – your first experience in a Formula 1 car - how was it?**

It’s something I’ll never forget. It’s a short list of names who have driven an actual Formula 1 car so I’m lucky to have had that chance. The car itself was very impressive, particularly the braking. It was a good experience to learn all the different aspects and processes. It’ll no doubt help me with my progression and career going forward and I hope to get more chances in the future.

**What did you learn the most from your first year with the Academy?**

The biggest thing I learnt was probably the amount of commitment that is required to perform at such a high level. It’s extremely beneficial to be close to the team and take learnings from that. I live close to the factory and even just going into the gym at the factory and speaking with the team most days when I’m not racing has helped to show me just how much commitment is needed. It’s driven me even further to make that next step and get into Formula 1 in the future.

**Caio Collet**

**FIA Formula 3, MP Motorsport**

**Twitter:** @caio\_collet

**Instagram:** caiocollet

**Age:** 18

**Nationality:** Brazilian

**2020**

**Wins:** 5

**Podiums:** 7

**Pole Positions**: 3

**Fastest Laps:** 4

**Points:** 304

**Previous Championships:**

**2020:** 2nd, Formula Renault Eurocup

**2019:** 5th, Formula Renault Eurocup

**2018**: 1st, French F4 Championship

Caio begins his third season with the Academy after another strong campaign last year that saw the Brazilian finish runner-up in the Formula Renault Eurocup following five wins and seven podiums.

Caio joined the Academy ahead of the 2019 season as part of his prize for winning the 2018 French F4 Championship. Born in São Paulo, Caio began his racing career as a karter in Brazil in 2009, moving to Europe in 2015 where he was crowned CIK-FIA Rookie of the Year.

His first opportunity in single-seaters was in January 2018 in the Formula 4 UAE Championship before his successful run to the French F4 title. Caio stepped up into the Eurocup in 2019 finishing fifth that year then claiming second place last year in a tight championship battle with Victor Martins.

Looking ahead to this year, Caio will race for MP Motorsport competing in his first season in the FIA Formula 3 Championship.

**Q&A**

**How pleased are you to enter your third year with the Academy in 2021?**

I’m very happy to remain with the Alpine Academy for another year and grateful for all the opportunities and everything the team has done for me so far. I’ve developed a lot as a driver in the two years I’ve been with the Academy and I’m excited to see what we can do heading into my third year.

**You had a great year finishing as runner up in Formula Renault Eurocup, what did you learn the most from last season?**

There were some strong results last year in a challenging year for everyone, but it ultimately wasn’t quite what we wanted with us just missing out on the championship. I learnt a lot from the experience. There were some really strong races and I picked up a few good wins and podiums. But the biggest thing I learnt from last year is that it’s important to never give up and I’ll take this with me into this year and beyond.

**How do you feel ahead of your debut in the FIA Formula 3 Championship?**

I’m really looking forward to this season with MP Motorsport. The Formula 3 series is part of the Formula 1 weekend, so naturally it has more eyes on it and it’s going to be important to perform to your best every single weekend. It’s also a very competitive series with some of the best young drivers in the world so it’s going to be a fight from start to finish. The target, as always, is to win the championship.

**How’s training going for you ahead of the new season?**

My training is going very well ahead of the new season and we’re currently on a training camp ahead of the start of the campaign. We do one every year with the Academy prior to a new season, but it’s important to be in the best shape physically and mentally ahead of the year. I’m looking forward to it all starting and being behind the wheel again.

**Is there anything you are doing differently ahead of making the jump into slightly more powerful machinery?**

On top of all the usual fitness and physical training, I’ve intensified my neck training in preparation for a faster car this year. I’ve also done more to prepare myself mentally for this season. As we’ve seen last year, anything can happen in a season, and you need to be able to deal with several challenges along the way not only physically but mentally too.

**Victor Martins**

**FIA Formula 3 Championship, MP Motorsport**

**Instagram:** victormartinsfr

**Age:** 19

**Nationality:** French

**2020**

Wins: 7

Podiums: 7

Pole Positions: 10

Fastest Laps: 8

Points: 348

**Previous Championships:**

**2020:** 1st (Champion), Formula Renault Eurocup

**2019:** 2nd, Formula Renault Eurocup

**2018:** 5th (3rd Rookie), Formula Renault Eurocup

**2017:** 2nd (1st Rookie), French Formula 4

Victor Martins re-joins the Academy after a one-year hiatus in 2020, during which he won the Formula Renault Eurocup title. For 2021, Victor will race in the FIA Formula 3 Championship with MP Motorsport.

Victor was on the programme between 2018 and 2019 after catching the eye during his French Formula 4 campaign in 2017 as a young rookie. His raw speed propelled him to a fifth-place finish in his maiden Eurocup effort before he narrowly missed out on the title to Oscar Piastri a year later. The Frenchman set his sights on winning the Eurocup title in 2020 with ART Grand Prix, which he achieved following his seven wins and seven podiums across the 20-race season, ensuring his return to the programme.

**Q&A**

**How does it feel to be back on the programme?**

It feels amazing because when I left the Academy for 2020 it wasn’t easy. It meant I wasn’t able to have all the advice from everyone in the Academy and without access to the simulator, physical training help, preparation advice and I wasn’t wearing the Renault colours when I was driving. It was difficult to accept, but I’m pleased with how I moved on and how I worked hard to be back with the Academy in 2021. I knew if I did a good job in 2020, I could come back and have the valuable things and access again. I had to accept during the previous years that you need to keep going and keep doing the job. From what I learnt with the Academy in 2018 and 2019, I knew I had to deliver good results and keep that going right to the end of the season. I managed to progress and make that final step and won the title.

**How much are you looking forward to stepping up to FIA Formula 3?**

I’m really looking forward to it as it’s been a long time waiting to race in Formula 3. It’s the next step in the junior categories, so I’m looking forward to starting the season. The most important thing for me is to enjoy the season because I have to consider myself as a rookie and an outsider. There’s not too much pressure and I want to use the experience of everyone in my new team. I know them from when I raced for MP Motorsport in 2019, even if it’s not the same engineers or mechanics. I aim to create a positive environment around me and work as much as possible with those around me like the Academy, my team and my family. It’s going to be good to race on the Formula 1 weekends. You see the cars up close and that’s really cool and it makes the ultimate goal feel even closer. When we’re in our paddock, Formula 1 is just metres away and they are watching us. There’s an opportunity to surround myself with important and inspiring people like the entire F1 team, with whom I could exchange productive conversations.

**What are your thoughts on the FIA Formula 3 calendar?**

It’s quite good with seven rounds and three races per weekend. It’s going to be important to bounce back quickly if it’s not going well. There’s time to analyse between rounds and it’s quite good to stay in the zone. I think the three races per weekend will be a challenge and I don’t think it will be so important to be on pole position to have a good weekend overall. It’s always nice to have pole positions for people to see your qualifying pace, but it will be more important to be consistent across the three races and pick up lots of points.

**How is your training going in preparation for this new challenge?**

I’m on it! I’ll keep going with my training up until the beginning of the season and the pre-season tests. I’ve made some changes to my training programme, adding more endurance like cycling and running. It’s about more cardio and more neck training to deal with the corners and G-force. It’s not easy with the current situation but I’m able to do my training in a centre in Paris, so I’m working hard with them. I like going to the gym, I like every kind of sport, so I do enjoy this time of year!