

NATIONAL

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BREEZE TO JOIN GINETTA G50 CUP, p88

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REGULAR READERS will have twigged that I have a soft spot for Formula Ford. Multi-marque, low-downforce racing is often pretty appealing after all.

There's no doubt that it still isn't on Formula Renault's level or, at least, it isn't perceived to be, which is the same thing when it comes to the car choice made by many hotshoe karters.

But there's so much happening in FFord that we always seem to be writing about it. With category legend and international sportscar ace Michael Vergers's squad joining in and the revamped Van Diemen marque upping its efforts, British Formula Ford still appears to be edging in the right direction. Just how far it can go, of course, is another question.

It's certainly attracting decent foreign interest. The news that Finnish competitors have not only bought the Comtec Ford concern but plan to come to the UK to race it is a great sign. The chassis proved competitive last year and foreign competitors inevitably add to the credibility of a series.

Of course what Formula Ford, indeed any junior series, needs is successful graduates. There haven't been too many of those recently, so the British F3 efforts of 2007 Brands Festival winner Nick Tandy and 2008 ace Wayne Boyd will be keenly observed by those in FFord this season.

With increasing team quality and a couple of successful Fordsters moving up the racing ranks, maybe the series can fulfil the promise that people have been waiting for since Duratec engines revived the category. One thing's for sure: the racing will always be worth watching.

EXTRA CONTACT DETAILS
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Comtec proved quick last season with Barber

COMTEC FORMULA FORD TO RACE AGAIN



THE COMTEC Formula Ford chassis will appear in the British championship this season thanks to its new Finnish owner.

The D08 machine came into the series last year and scored podiums with 2002 champion Westley Barber. But financial issues within parent company Comtec Racing resulted in the Formula Ford team pulling out before the end of the season.

Now Finnish squad Makela Racing, which has a history in rallying and Formula Ford in Europe, has bought the cars and manufacturing tools. It plans to run the machines, now to be known as Mtech FD09s, in the Finnish and North European Zone series, while a customer squad will race in Britain.

Experienced touring car and rally team LMS Racing has joined forces with Finnish Formula Ford squad s2i Motorsport to run an FD09 in the UK. It will be driven by Antti Buri, 20, who finished fourth in Finnish FFord last year and took second in the Zetec class at the Brands Hatch Festival.

Makela Racing boss Markku Makela, who will run son Miika, daughter Milla, and Miika Hirisimaki this year, said: "Last year I saw an advert in Autosport that Comtec was for sale. I knew the Comtec was a good car so I made an offer and we got it.

"We have only done a few little changes to the design – all the basic things are right. Now we have to start building these cars with the same spec as Comtec built them."

Makela did not rule out a future assault in Britain. "We'll start to race these cars in Finland because this project needs a lot of investment for new premises," he said. "As a factory team we cannot come to the UK this year, maybe in future."

S2i's Per Stenius confirmed that standards at the Festival impressed Buri and his father, LMS boss Risto. "There were lots of cars and very tight racing," he said. "It's a well-organised series – all these were key factors [in coming to Britain]."

"Risto was very impressed by the Comtec's pace last season. We looked at a broad range of [chassis] options – it is a little more risky than other choices, but there is a big upside. We have the support of Mtech, as their only team in the UK."

Stenius also believes that the team will be competitive with Buri, who will be entering his third year of Formula Ford.

"Winning is the target, but we have no real experience of the UK series, so it is hard to know what to expect. These cars showed speed last season and we think it can win if we get everything right."

Makela confirmed that up to four FD09s may contest the Brands Festival this year.

Buri impressed in a Van Diemen at '08 Festival



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