

TOP 10 F3 DRIVERS

These are the men who were stunning in racing's longest-running junior category – even if that form didn't translate to F1. RICHARD ASHER focuses on the stars who emerged after the current two-litre era began in 1974

10 JARNO TRULLI

TRULLI'S F3 career took a while to get going as he mixed karts with cars for a couple of years, but began in earnest with a serious crack at German F3 from mid-1995. He won twice for KMS en route to fourth behind Norberto Fontana, Ralf Schumacher and Max Angelelli.

The year ended with a stellar Macau performance. Trulli qualified seventh for heat one and picked through some early carnage to take second behind Ralf. With the second heat cancelled after a couple of red flags, the Italian had a Macau podium to his name.

No wonder Flavio Briatore signed him up that winter. With Benetton backing, Trulli and KMS took the following year's German title with six wins,

though the team got lost on occasion and it was tighter than it might have been.

But two showings – if not results – in the internationals put Trulli's speed beyond doubt. Though Zandvoort went badly, he dominated the Monaco weekend on his first visit to the track. He took pole, then built an early lead before picking up some suspension damage. He defended like mad, holding the lead in style until Esteban Tuero had a lunge at Loews and pushed Trulli out.

Then came his second Macau. Jarno didn't win, but he was the moral victor. He led the second heat all the way, but Ralph Firman snared the overall victory when his retirement caused an early stoppage.



RICKARD RYDELL 9

RYDELL DIDN'T take any championships, but wins in Japan, Britain, Sweden and at Macau – in a wide range of cars – make him special.

His long F3 career began with a couple of seasons at home. Though he won races in '87 and '88, he lost both titles to Micke Johansson. At the end of '88 he proved a revelation on his second Macau trip, where he took third in heat one with the team run by his mentor, Picko Troberg.

In '89 he took on Britain, with Eddie Jordan Racing. He didn't hang about, winning first time out at Thruxton. He couldn't repeat that, but ended the year fourth and top Reynard. There was also a podium at Monaco.

Rydell wasn't even half done with F3. In 1990 he focused on

British F3000, but he found time for his first couple of drives with TOM'S in Japan. He also got fifth at Macau in a one-off for Volkswagen Motorsport. He raced for TOM'S GB in Britain in '91, again winning the opening round. But having made history for the marque's 031F, much of the year was a struggle.

In 1992 he competed full-time in Japan, finishing third with a couple of wins after TOM'S caught up with Anthony Reid's Ralt-Mugen. Then he finally won at Macau on his sixth attempt, taking pole and defeating Jacques Villeneuve, Tom Kristensen, Rubens Barrichello and David Coulthard.

A final year in Japan yielded one win, and at last Rydell moved on to life as a touring car driver.

8 LEWIS HAMILTON

WITH MORE than two years in Formula 3, Hamilton had more time than most to rack up success. As would happen in F1, he was an instant sensation – but his form took a dip before he booked his place in F3 history.

Hamilton burst onto the scene in trademark style in late 2003. Having sealed the Formula Renault UK title, he stuck with Manor Motorsport and entered the British F3 finale at Brands. Qualifying seventh turned a few heads, but a Tor Graves-inspired accident put him out on race day.

Then he went east for the internationals. At Macau he started 18th after a qualifying crash, but charged to fifth in heat one before a pile-up in race two ended his run. Then came Korea, where he took

a sensational pole, but an early brush with Nelson Piquet Jr put him out.

Then the dip: a full Euroseries season with Manor. Granted, both team and driver were new to the tracks, ASM had a technical edge and Hamilton outshone team-mate Charles Zwolsman. But Lewis didn't always get the best out of his car and won just once. And at Macau he simply slid out of contention.

Then the lights came on. Two weeks later in Bahrain Hamilton stormed through from the back of a strong field to win. For '05 he switched to ASM. He won 15 of 20 races at such venues as Monte Carlo, Pau and Spa. He ran away with the Masters. Team-mate Adrian Sutil had no answer. Lewis could kiss F3 goodbye.



6 MICHAEL SCHUMACHER

YUP, SCHUMACHER was pretty handy in F3 too. Those who'd been following the lower categories weren't actually all that surprised by the instant impact he made in F1.

He came into German F3 with just one season of Formula Ford behind him, and made an immediate impression with Willi Weber's WTS team. Two wins were enough to keep him in contention against Karl Wendlinger and Heinz-Harald Frentzen, but in the end he lost out by just a point. He went on to win his first heat at Macau, but broke down in the second.

The 1990 German field was less testing, but Schumacher

made no mistakes in taking the title with five wins.

Macau that year is the most famous of all Schumacher's F3 races and a telling glimpse into his future. After winning the first heat, Hakkinen needed only to follow Schuey home in the second, but he got too close on the last lap. It was the first major accident controversy of Schumacher's career – and it won him the race.

Then Schumacher made it a double at Japan's Fuji race. He won both heats, defeating Laurent Aiello and future Ferrari team-mate Eddie Irvine after surviving a fraught dice with Steve Robertson in the second.



MIKA HAKKINEN 7

HAKKINEN'S 1990 British Formula 3 battle with Mika Salo is part of F3 folklore, but there is plenty more to say about the Finn's career in the category.

It's not widely recorded that during that season Mika and his West Surrey Racing team took in one round each of the French, Italian and German series. The French chased them away, but Hakkinen won on his Italian outing at Imola. And at Hockenheim he recovered from a dreadful start to the weekend to defeat German champion-to-be Michael Schumacher.

The pair met again in Macau, of course, where Hakkinen took most of the blame for their famous late collision. It was the biggest and most unnecessary blunder of anyone on this list, but

you can't ignore the fact that he'd won the first heat fair and square.

As for that UK title fight, it was a field brimming with quality, and Hakkinen had a more-than-worthy rival in Salo. But Mika H won nine times to Mika S's six. After a long year's hard racing, Hakkinen ran out a fairly comfortable winner.

The only doubt over Hakkinen is his often-overlooked F3 debut year in 1989. New F3 team Dragon Racing's package wasn't to his liking. Although Mika took a couple of poles in the Reynard-Toyota, he was very inconsistent. But when he moved to WSR for the Cellnet Superprix at the end of that season, he instantly won – with pole and fastest lap. Which suggests his '89 form was more down to the car than anything.



5 JAN MAGNUSSEN

MAGNUSSEN'S 10 poles and 14 wins from 18 races in 1994 with Paul Stewart Racing was domination on an unprecedented scale – he passed the season win tally of no less a man than Ayrton Senna. And nobody since then has been able to match Magnussen's success rate from that year.

He only clocked two fastest laps all year, betraying a knack for winning at the lowest possible speed. His qualifying and getaways were usually enough to get the job done.

Bruce Jenkins was Jan's engineer that season: "He had that ability to get the best out of a car on the day, and his opening laps were better than those of anybody I've ever seen."

One of Magnussen's defining performances came in that year's British GP support race. He lost half his front wing in a first-corner nudge, but stayed with the leaders for much of the race and even held fastest lap for a while. It left everyone gobsmacked.

But the laid-back Magnussen was not immune to mistakes. At Zandvoort he ran with the leaders before throwing it off in a big way. And at Macau he crashed in qualifying, leaving himself 18th on the grid. But he raced through to an astonishing win in the second leg – which gave him an overall third place.

It was enough to say goodbye to F3. Magnussen departed for the DTM in '95 with a McLaren F1 test contract in his pocket.



ALAIN PROST 4

THIS FRENCHMAN was good enough in F3 to jump straight into a McLaren F1 seat. But although the youngster from St Etienne swept to the European F3 title in 1979, it is his performance as a first-year F3 racer in '78 that really marked him out.

He'd already won titles in his first two seasons of car racing (French and then European FRenault) when he got started in F3 in a Martini-Renault MK21B. The Renault was not the engine to have – Novamotor's Toyota was the benchmark – and that's just what helped Prost make his statement.

Not only did he take the French title, but he was highly impressive on appearances outside his homeland. At Jarama he won a European

championship round, the only Renault-powered driver to do so all year. He also turned up at Silverstone for a British championship race, promptly taking a podium finish.

The following year, Renault, Elf and Martini threw loads of cash and resources behind Prost. And the Renault engine took a leap forward too, so Prost had no excuses as he went for the European title.

He won the first four races and five of the first six. The title was as good as won already, but he added another to take his tally to seven. He finished with 67 points; second-placed Michael Bleekemolen could only manage 28! Having added an easy win at Monaco, Alain was en route to F1.

3 TOMMY BYRNE

WINNING A major F3 championship at the same time as you're trying to establish yourself in F1 with a lowly team is a fine achievement. But it probably wasn't the wisest career move for Tommy Byrne.

Byrne won the British title with Murray Taylor Racing in 1982 (despite missing races for F1 duty), scoring seven wins and four poles. It was his first season in F3, the team wasn't the best and it says much that Ayrton Senna – then racing in FF2000 and not easily impressed – was speechless.

That same year, Byrne was struggling to qualify for F1 races with Theodore. He

then had a sensational test with McLaren, but Byrne's straightforward personality just didn't leave the right impression with Ron Dennis.

So he competed in European F3 in '83, taking a couple of wins at Zeltweg and Misano with Eddie Jordan Racing. Byrne did a couple more Euro F3 races in '84, driving Gary Anderson's run-on-a-shoestring Anson. He was outstanding at Monaco that year, galloping from 16th to fourth – despite no first gear – before running out of laps.

That was it for Byrne in F3; his career drifted and he's now lamented as a wasted talent.



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AYRTON SENN DA SILVA

2

EVEN THE most blinkered F1 fan knows the outline of Senna's time in Formula 3. His defeat of Martin Brundle in 1983 is probably the most widely-documented slice of F3 history around.

After winning the British and European FFord 2000 titles in '82, Senna settled on Dick Bennetts' West Surrey Racing team for his F3 campaign. His choice of team was based partly on the fact that WSR's '82 contender Enrique Mansilla, a driver he didn't rate (they'd been team-mates in '81), had been able to compete with champion Tommy Byrne.

It was the right move. Although some feel that Brundle's Eddie Jordan Racing car had a suspicious technical edge, Senna won the

battle regardless. Twelve wins and 14 poles was a pretty convincing return, and it sheds a fair amount of doubt on the popular perception that Brundle (five wins, three poles) really ran him close.

Then came the first F3 Macau Grand Prix. It was a strong field – including F1 driver Roberto Guerrero – and it was Senna's first outing on a street track. He arrived in Macau late and jetlagged from a Brabham F1 test and, after qualifying on pole, he still wasn't well on race day. After a comfortable win over Guerrero in the first heat he went back to bed, but surfaced in time to defeat the Colombian in the second as well. Sickly Senna had begun the Macau F3 legend.



1

TAKUMA SATO

THAT SATO has so often been maligned in his F1 career is really a back-handed compliment to his former existence as an F3 master. So stellar was Taku in F3 that, with high expectations and without a winning drive, F1 was perhaps bound to be a disappointment.

The Japanese is the only man on our list to have racked up a full-house of F3 classics in a single season. In his unforgettable second year of F3 in 2001, Sato won both the Masters at Zandvoort and the Macau Grand Prix. The rest of the time he spent dominating a tough British championship for Carlin Motorsport, where he defeated highly-rated future Super Aguri team-mate Anthony

Davidson. If ever there was an undisputed F3 champion of the world, Sato was that man in 2001.

Not only did Sato get results, but he did so with humility and a smile, leaving a strong impression on those he worked with. His former engineer (and current Double R Racing boss) 'Boyo' Heatt recalls what made him special.

"He understood everything there was to understand about Formula 3 driving. He was never outside the top four in qualifying all year in '01, and that's a true sign of a driver who is in control.

"He was very good technically and he had a great work ethic. If he had a weak area he'd work on it and it didn't stay weak for long."