

F1 H2O Racing - Ready to Ride into Its 4th Decade in 2011!

ABU DHABI – Saturday, February 19, 2011 – The most riveting sport on water, the UIM F1 H2O World Championship series, opens up the start of its fourth decade on the weekend of the fourth and fifth of March in Doha in Qatar for the inaugural round of the 2011 season. If the story plot follows the same path that it has in the last few years, the fireworks on water should begin right from the opening lap on Doha Bay.

There was a time in recent history when two drivers, Italian Guido Cappellini and American Scott Gillman, dominated F1 H2O racing. During a 15-year period from the early 1990's to just recently these two drivers won 14 of the 15 World Championship titles between them. Well, as songwriter Bob Dylan said in a lyric almost fifty years ago, "The times, they are a changing," and that is exactly what has happened to the sport since these two legends retired in the last few years.

In the past five seasons there have been four different drivers champions headed by two spectacular comebacks by the current World Champion **Sami Selio** of the **Mad Croc** Racing Team. The native from Helsinki, Finland for the second time in four campaigns came charging up from the back of the pack of drivers to win the title at the very last day of the season. He did this the first time in 2007 winning the final two events back to back and did so a year ago at the Grand Prix of Sharjah finishing second in the event which was enough to take the title by a razor thin six points.

The Mad Croc group took the team title, as well as, first and third in the driver standings in 2010. Joining Sami this season will be last year's Rookie-of-the-Year runner-up **Davide Padovan** who comes over from the **Rainbow** Team. The young driver from Vercelli, Italy shows a lot of upsides with five top-10 finishes in six completed races a year ago with just one DNF and a crash in Linyi being the only negatives to his resume. He should definitely take another step forward improving this season under Selio's guidance.

Team Abu Dhabi should be strong once again this season with a pair of young drivers who are also close friends in **Ahmed Al Hameli** and **Thani Al Qamzi** with both careers being steered by the four-time World Champion Gillman who has been mentoring this duo of talented drivers together now for the past five years as their Team Manager.

Ahmed, scored a pair of wins last season winning the opening round in Portimao, Portugal, while capping the season with a win at the final race in his home country at the Grand Prix of Sharjah last December. Thani, who has outpaced his friend Ahmed in overall career victories five to three, is in a bit of a slump himself and hasn't won in almost two seasons, a string that goes back 22 races.

A developing "uber" squad for the upcoming season is the Doha based **Qatar** Team lead by the 2008 World Champion **Jay Price** who has nine career victories in just 45 starts, joined this season by last years rookie sensation **Alex Carella** who arrives via the Mad Croc organization.

The American Price came home with a pair of wins in 2010, including at his teams home race in Doha. He won the race in dramatic fashion, capturing the day from the pole position only to lose the championship lead and the title at the very last round two weeks later. A heartbreaking defeat is only going to make this New Orleans, Louisiana driver more determined than ever to get the crown back as he rides once again in his favorite number #11 hull in 2011.

Meanwhile, for his teammate Alex, the 24 year-old Italian who earned a victory last year in Linyi, China along with four podium finishes, is switching hulls from his more familiar BABA to a Cappellini DAC built boat looking for an edge in an honest shot at the title. Both should have standout performances around a multi-national crew consisting of Qatari's, Italians, American's and Australian personnel.

The **CTIC China** Team will once again match the pair of drivers who make a good impression with their millions of fans from throughout the Far East in Swede **Pierre Lundin** and Frenchman **Philippe Chiappe**. The hi-lite performance of their 2010 season had to have been at the Chinese Grand Prix in Shenzhen when they both reached the podium together, Chiappe, a career best second and Lundin taking third. Each driver is looking for their first career victories having come close many times. Maybe, this will be the season they get their career goals reached with Lundin driving an Italian hull while Chiappe drives a MOORE French built race boat.

It's hard to believe but 36 year-old Italian **Francesco Cantando** of the **Singha F1** Team is embarking on his 16th straight season in F1. He is the winningest active driver on the tour with 12 career victories and three time runner-up performances in the driver's table for the World Championship. A year ago, he snapped a 44 race-losing streak by winning the Grand Prix in Shenzhen in late October. His 41 career podium finishes is third best all time as he continues to race his own BLAZE hull that he has fine tuned in his race shop in Milan for the past eight years.

The most dynamic new "wild card" driver entering the series this season is the American **Shaun Torrente** of Miami, Florida. He will team up with talented lead pilot **Jonas Andersson** as they drive for **Team Sweden** in 2011.

Jonas is a four-time winner on the tour, with his last victory coming at the Grand Prix China in Liuzhou in 2009. He is a twice winner of the F2 World Championship and has 17 top-5 finishes in his career.

The 30 year-old Torrente has won the North American title the last two seasons and has been dominating most events in America since the 2008 campaign. The Andersson camp is a family gathering of sorts; Shaun brings over trusted friend and ex-racer **Ted Gryguc** from Canada to help him out during his rookie season.

Portugal's **Duarte Benavente** arrives for the 12th season with his **Team Atlantic** organization starting his 99th career event in Doha in early March. Joining him on the team will be French driver **Philippe Tourre** who comes for his fourth season sporting three top-10 finishes in his 14 career starts.

Duarte, who is an avid tennis player when not in a race boat, will be hoping to serve up his first victory on the tour having come close as second place some years back at the Grand Prix of Italy in Cagliari. The four time F4 World Champion also has some experience in F2 as does his teammate Tourre, who is still adjusting to the overall horsepower difference between the two classes and who is getting better and better at each racing meeting.

Team Nautica, will be headed up this season by veteran driver **Rinaldo Osculati** along with Norwegian woman driver **Marit Stromoy**. The Italian Osculati is the most veteran driver on the tour and spent most of his time in the Italian F2 series and who will be looking to improve upon his consistency this season.

Marit, who is a professional entertainer when not racing F1 boats, has 31 career starts since coming over from F2 and has two top-five performances to her credit. She will be chasing that elusive first podium finish in her F1 career this season.

The 2010 campaign was marked with robust enthusiasm throughout the season with an always changing drama as four different drivers led the championship table during the nine month campaign including three different competitors in the final four races. If the 2011 campaign can recreate the same drama that the last four seasons have brought, it's going to be a series of special moments for the F1 H2O tour in 2011.

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