

## Turning a New Page in Portimao!

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**PORTIMAO**, Portugal - Thursday, May 19, 2011 - If you ask any F1 powerboat competitors, more likely than not, they'll tell you that the Algarve River in Portimao, Portugal is their favorite place to race on the UIM F1 H2O World Championship tour year after year.

Why, is it the atmosphere? Possibly. The racing paddock is right downtown within the lovely narrow streets of the port city of Portimao, which is one the oldest communities on the picturesque Southern Algarve coast of Portugal.

Professional fishing has been the mainstay, along with boating, which has been a big part of life here for over 1,000 years. And the sardines? They are to die for and worth the trip just to enjoy their flavors night after night with a fine glass of Port at your side.

Tradition? This now plays a major part in the enjoyment of the experience with this Grand Prix being the longest continuing event on the calendar. Having started in 1999, this year marks the 13th annual event and the 14th Grand Prix race in this seaside city.

With that tradition comes the knowledgeable race fans, who turn up by the tens of thousands each year, knowing the sport and picking out their favorite drivers to cheer for and most knowing how each pilot has done on the circuit year after year. When the race weekend comes to a close, they show up in great numbers to celebrate with the winning drivers for the podium celebration.

As for the history of the race? Well, it seems that winning success has been one of dominance. Winning streaks have become the norm here. In the spring of 1999 at the first Grand Prix of Portugal, Hall-Of-Fame World Champion **Guido Cappellini** of Como, Italy had a point to prove. Guido, who hadn't won an event in his first five years of F1 racing, started to dominate in the 1990's having taken four titles in the previous six seasons. More importantly however, he hadn't done so since 1996 and was in a two year dry spell when he arrived in Portimao.

Newcomer to the series, **Scott Gillman** of Los Angeles, California, brought his skills over from America and took away Guido's four year title domination in 1997 winning five of the eight races and putting notice to the rest of the world that he was going to be a real threat to Cappellini's dominance.

Meanwhile, in the 1998 season, a four way race to the championship saw **Jonathan Jones** of Wales steal victory in the jaws of defeat at the very last race in Abu Dhabi winning for the first time that season and earning his second and final UIM F1 H2O world title.

Guido Cappellini, now knew he needed to do something spectacular to regain his momentum and turn the tide in his favor that first time he set eyes on the Algarve River.

After a long winter of constant testing, Guido arrived in Portimao at the season's first event and won! He dominated the race and led every lap of the event. But, this was only the beginning of this story. He won again in 2000, when pole sitter Gillman broke down. In 2001 he won again from pole. Are you starting to see the picture here?

Guido made it a little tougher on himself in 2002 winning from the fourth starting position, winning again from pole in 2003. Five straight victories and he owned the circuit. Even his most spectacular blow-over, coming in qualifying didn't deter him when he landed upright and would go on to win the next day.

In 2004, it was Scott Gillman's year to shine, as he dominated that season winning six of nine events including being the first driver to defeat Guido in Portugal since the races inception back in the 20th century! The crowd went wild at the podium celebration that afternoon, cheering a new driver who's warm and laid back "SoCal" personality was in stark contrast to the husky Italian that they had become used too.

2005 delivered a magical race and one that stands out more than any other. It is one of the select Grand Prix events that everyone looks back on as one of best in the four decade history of the sport.

Scott Gillman was coming off his championship season and Cappellini wanted it back in the worst way. These two giants of the sport fought from the opening lap of practice to the final two turns of the last lap of the Grand Prix event.

Guido earned pole for the race while Scott lined up next to the Northern Italian. Guido held point from the start and kept the Southern California driver behind him. The four-time North American champion wasn't going to let his rival get away. Just past the halfway point of the event Gillman tried to pass Cappellini on the right hand turn on the back straightaway. Scott arrived too fast and spun out killing the engine while almost tipping the boat over in the process. Scott re-fired the engine and took off after Cappellini, who by now, had built back up an almost insurmountable 11 second lead.

But it wouldn't last.

The Abu Dhabi Team driver slowly reeled in Cappellini and with less than seven laps to go passed him and took the lead and started to pull away. It looked as if Gillman was going to take his second straight victory in Portugal.

Then, on the very last lap, his engine hesitated and started to misfire and with just two corners to go Cappellini jumped past him like a cat and with less than 50 meters to go nosed him out for heart stopping victory and a jump start to another championship year.

The 2006 race was Cappellini's seventh and final race win in Portimao. The ten-time World Champion watched as other newer drivers started making their mark on the Arade. Meanwhile, Scott Gillman would win his 23rd and final race of his F1 career in Portimao in 2007. Sadly, he was forced to retire because of health reasons two races later while leading the championship.

In 2008 another American driver **Jay Price** from New Orleans, Louisiana, who had proven to be such a dominate driver in the up and coming F2 ranks, won for the first time in his career on his way to his World Championship season.

Price's driving was almost as eventful as the 2005 race, as he charged up from the fifth qualifying position and made a classic move on race leader **Ahmed Al Hameli** who had led from the start to slide past him with just a few laps to go giving his Qatar Team their first ever Grand Prix victory celebration.

Al Hameli, the 31 year-old native of Abu Dhabi, has had the magic touch in Portimao since that point, winning every race he's finished since then and is the current defending champion winning last season and now is growing with confidence and is expecting to do the same this year as well.

The 2009 season was unusual in the fact that the UIM F1 H2O World Championship ran back to back events on both Saturday and Sunday. Team Abu Dhabi dominated with Al Hameli winning on day one while his teammate and friend **Thani Al Qamzi** winning on day two. Team Abu Dhabi has now won the last three races and four of the last five since 2007.

Other racers have made their mark on the edge of the Algarve coast as well. Starting with last years fastest qualifier Italian **Francesco Cantando**, who has never won the race, but who has finished second, five different times, including last year. Francesco's six podiums in Portimao are only second to Cappellini's eight for the three time runner-up to the championship title for the man from Milan.

In the meantime, all eyes every year are on the native son from outside Lisbon in **Duarte Benavente**. His Atlantic Team always seems to be in the mix year after year looking for a first taste of victory on home ground.

The diminutive driver from Azietao qualified third last season for the second time in his career but disappointment set in once again when he failed to finish once and classified 12th. Duarte's high water mark came in race number two of the 2009 season when he collected his first podium in front his thousands of followers triggering parties all throughout the city that night honoring their new hero.

Drivers not having good success at the Grand Prix of Portugal and hoping to find a solution to their struggles include the defending World Champion **Sami Selio** of the Mad Croc team who in 12 previous starts in Portugal has no victories and just one podium dating back in 2002 when he finished second to Cappellini.

Sami, in his last four race starts in Portugal, show him being disqualified in 2010, failing to finish either race in 2009 and being penalized into 8th place in 2008. The 35 year-old from Helsinki is hoping for better results this time around after gaining no points so far this season.

The opening round of the current 2011 season started two months ago at Doha in Qatar and the story couldn't have been written any better for the home crowd. The Qatar team drivers Jay Price and second year racer Italian Alex Carella came home with a 1-2 finish with Jay now leading the championship with 20 points to Alex's 15.

French rider **Philippe Chiappe** of the CTIC China Team was third in the race, while newcomer and a driver to keep an eye on, rookie **Shaun Torrente** of the USA, driving for Team Sweden, came from the back of the pack despite a broken propeller finishing a fine four place at races end. Shaun's teammate **Jonas Andersson** was right behind him in fifth as he searches for his first European victory since St. Petersburg, Russia in 2009.

Riders from ten countries and three different continents are expected to be arriving in mid-May for the longest running Grand Prix site on the 2011 calendar for the Grand Prix of Portugal in Portimao on the 21st and 22nd of May. Who will win this time? This race is known for "streaky" drivers. Will this tradition again continue? We are about to find out.

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