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ART Grand Prix close to victory at the Winter Cup in Lonato



A long weekend at the Winter Cup in Lonato ended with a win that vanished with just a few kilometers to go for ART Grand Prix as the brand made its first official race outing. In the most prestigious class - KZ2 - British star Ben Hanley led for much part of the final as he cruised to the top on lap 2 in front of Thonon and Dreezen. The ART Grand Prix Factory Team driver then suffered from a developing mechanical issue which made his engine lose power. Hanley fought hard and held onto second place before being forced to retire with two to go.

The loss of a possible win felt bitter for the team although it was balanced by the confirmation of the great job done during the winter. At their first international race, ART Grand Prix provided a major performance and effectively joined the front runners pack. In addition to that, good results also came from the other classes.

The results scored by the team's KF3 racers proved outstanding, especially because they were all at debut and far away from home. Sena Sakaguchi lost all his chances to fight for a top-end result due to a contact and also suffered from a fracture to his right radius. The Japanese racer had to withdraw from the rest of the event and will be forced to a three-week period of rest.

Takuya Okada kept running at an high pace and made his way to the front end of the field during all the heats. Then, a small but crucial mistake (he crossed the "red line" during the formation lap) cost him a win. Yifan Xia started his learning time in international kart racing after one season at national levels. The Shanghai-based youngster provided the team with a positive run, improving his performance as the event progressed.

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The ART Grand Prix drivers fielded in KF2 definitely achieved less than they deserved. Both Charles Leclerc and Ben Barnicoat confirmed their extremely high potential. The French racer was slowed down by two incidents and had to fight back from the rear in both the pre-final and the final races. His pace proved to be top-notch though, as he matched the times set by the class leaders. Despite ending up outside the top-10 in the final, Barnicoat kept his name at the front end of the charts in the practice, qualifying and pre-final heats. The Red Steps Foundation racer will definitely have some great chances to express his full potential in the upcoming future.

Despite having suffered a couple of blows, ART Grand Prix ended up the 2012 Winter Cup at Lonato aware of having worked in the right direction so far. Alongside the Factory Team, the same outlook was confirmed by the official teams of France and Finland. A well-deserved podium finish was missed but a great feedback came from both the chassis and the engines compartments.

>> Ben Hanley:

“Going into the winter cup with ART Grand Prix kart I was aiming to be in the top 5, during our testing the ART team did a fantastic job in getting everything professionally organised and extracting all the potential from the ART kart from the KF3 KF2 and KZ. So my hopes were high even though it was the first race for the team. I was delighted with how the ART team coped with the winter cup and our pace during testing, qualification and races was very good. From starting P2 in the final I took the lead until the halfway point and from then remained in second place until 2 laps from the end, when I retired with a mechanical failure. I'm looking forward to the next race already as I know we will keep learning and improving in search of our first win”.