

Jolyon Palmer seals GP2 title among triple British success in Russia

Article

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Palmer pictured racing
this season at
Silverstone
David Davies/PA Archive

Britain has a new world motor racing champion after Jolyon Palmer won the GP2 junior support race in Sochi. Lewis Hamilton was the last British driver to win the series in 2006 – and he is now one of the world's biggest stars.

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It was a day of triple success for Britain in Sochi: before Palmer won his GP2 race to home in on the championship, Hamilton took pole position for the inaugural Russian Grand Prix. But Dean Stoneman continued to revel in one of the motor racing stories of the year by winning his GP3 race.

Palmer chose Sochi for the climax of an astonishing season in which he has scored at every round. The son of Jonathan, the former Formula One driver, his next target has to be the senior series but finding an opening could be tortuous.

Jonathan Palmer was first to greet his son with a hug and the tears flowed as he looked up at the podium ceremony, the national anthem playing around the Sochi Autodrom. The hard work for the pair starts now, though, if Jolyon, 23, is to get into the big time. F1 is the next target and his father knows how hard it is to break into a sport where teams at the lower end of the grid will demand millions of pounds in sponsor backing in exchange for a seat.

“We know it will be hard but Jolyon has done a fantastic job this season,” Jonathan Palmer said. “We are talking to a few people but we are realistic and know what it takes. Fingers crossed something will happen.”

The prestige of winning the GP2 championship – also won by Nico Rosberg, Hamilton’s Mercedes team-mate – should be enough for promotion to F1 but there are no guarantees in a money-hungry sport.

Palmer rounded off an extraordinary day for British motor racing but Stoneman set the ball rolling with a dominant victory in the GP3 series from pole position. Yet he so nearly was not in Sochi at all.

Stoneman was a member of the Marussia Manor Racing team that decided not to race in Sochi for “commercial reasons”. The timing could not have been worse with Stoneman winning last time out in Monza and in confident mood. However, Stoneman wangled a drive with the Koiranen team and produced a stunning lights-to-flag victory.

Stoneman’s story becomes all the more amazing because he has only recently recovered from cancer. The rising star was forced to put his career on hold for two years to concentrate on his recovery until John Booth, Marussia’s Formula One team principal, gave him a chance of a comeback in GP3 this season. With wins in Spa and Monza and now Sochi, the 24-year-old’s career has been resurrected.