

CLOSE BATTLE FOR SUZUKI SWIFT CUP HONOURS

Expect some frantic battles between the evenly matched Suzuki Swift Sport Cup cars if the early rounds of this one make championship are any indication. The closely fought races at Pukekohe and Ruapuna underlined just how healthy this class is.

The three top contenders - William Bamber, Ben Dallas and Cody McMaster - are locked together with only a handful of points separating the trio while there are several other drivers ready to pounce. Now in its third season, the Swift Sport Cup Championship has matured into an exciting series and this summer carries extra weight with its own stand alone races. Not only is this championship a relatively low cost formula but it provides a great nursery and training ground for young drivers. Just look at the average age of the Swift drivers and the sort of experience it is providing. William Bamber is only 16 yet he is already driving beyond his tender years, mirroring the sort of pace shown by older brother Earl. Last season Will narrowly missed out winning the Swift series but he is showing even more determination this summer and a level of confidence that's inspiring. "Last season I learnt how to win a championship," says Bamber who reckons that while the little Swift is not especially fast on the straights, it is a forgiving car with great braking and is not difficult to drive at racing speeds. Watch this Wanganui lad closely.

Aucklander Ben Dallas is 19 and another driver with a lot of talent. He is smooth and steady, and scored a fine second place in the closing stages of one of the Ruapuna races last November. Dallas was third in the Swift Cup for the 2008/09 season and a former winner of the Castrol Swift Sport Cup Scholarship. Cody McMaster, the 22-year-old Christchurch driver, has the experience and skill to win again this weekend. He is a two times winner of the series and has again shown he has the ability to lead the field home.

Eighteen year old Matt Gibson is well placed in the points after training in karting, Formula First and Formula ford. The promising Cullinane College student from Wanganui is highly focused on winning and shows he is prepared to go the extra mile to achieve his ambition to win the championship. "I know that to win a championship I must know when to settle for second and when to push for a win," says Matt - a clear indication he is a thinking driver. Other drivers to watch include Hamish Cross, Grant Ryan, Alan Dunkley, Craig Innes and Mike Turley.

Scott Harrison from Whangarei has come through after a spectacular accident at Pukekohe in November to finish second in one of the three Ruapuna races. Hamilton's Shaun Lawrence has racing in his blood - his dad is Graeme, a former New Zealand open wheeler champion. The Swift Sport Cup is a firm stepping stone into motor racing and the philosophy remains that the driver matters, not the size of the entrant's budgets. The 1.6-litre front wheel drive hatchbacks all comply with rigid rules that guarantee no one has a power advantage. You could say this series has really come of age, as the tight competition this weekend will surely prove.

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