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**Following the sensational 2011 Grand Finals, three Rotax MAX Challenge racers received the chance to prove their talent at the “Rotax Scholarship Days” held in Sepang, Malaysia in mid January.**

**O**n occasion of the 2011 Max Festivals in Japan BRP-Powertrain (Rotax) and Meritus.GP (one of the top Asian race organizations and winners of 34 Asian motorsport titles, including seven Formula BMW Asia/Pacific titles) set up a collaboration called the “*Rotax Scholarship Days*”.

Three Rotax MAX Challenge Grand Finals participants received the unique chance to test a JK Racing Asia Series Formula BMW car for two days at the beginning of 2012 and show the racing world their readiness to take the next step in their career.

The purpose of the JK Racing Asia Series (formerly known as Formula BMW Asia from 2003-2008, and Formula BMW Pacific from 2009-2010) is to provide a platform to develop young karting talents towards their Formula 1 ‘dream’. The JK Series winner is awarded a test with one of the leading GP2 Teams, just one step from Formula 1.

The GP2 test not only provides further motivation for JK racers to secure the JK Racing Asia title, but it also gives them an opportunity to understand what will be expected from them in their future careers. The goal of the Meritus/Rotax cooperation was to unlock new possibilities and challenges for the impressive amount of raw talent racing in the Rotax MAX

Challenge worldwide. Rotax racers are proving their talent worldwide and it is only a matter of time before we see one of them sign a Formula 1 contract.

The tests held in beautiful Malaysia at the Sepang International Circuit, stage of the Formula One and Moto GP, gave the opportunity to showcase three of those talented races. The first ones to profit from the Rotax Scholarship days, powered by Meritus.GP, were two-time Grand Finals Champion Ukyo Sasahara and the two DD2 rookies Miika Laiho and Jules Szymkowiak. Besides the all-famous Junior class, young talents continue to enhance their skills in the fastest and most powerful Rotax category, the DD2 class. With its high performance, direct drive, two gear 125cc engine and the renowned shifting paddle configuration, this engine package offers the closest experience to Formula racing in the Rotax karting line-up.

After flying over to Asia, the drivers faced the challenge of adjusting quickly to a different time zone, high humidity and temperatures. Coming from Finland, this is a real challenge when faced with a temperature difference of almost 50° Celsius. But we are talking about professional and very talented drivers so it did not take them long to adjust. After the



The three drivers who won the Rotax Scholarship at the 2011 Rotax Grand Finals in Al Ain were joined by up and coming kart stars such as Aston Hare, Ernie Vdwalt and Aideon Wright. Above, Finland's Miika Laiho during his stint; Aston Hare telemetry study session with Meritus.GP data engineer.

seat fitting and equipment preparation, Formula racing requires the HANS safety system and fireproof racing equipment and the driver's briefing. The drivers had two days of testing. The first day was about getting familiar with a single-seater formula race car, how to change gears, braking techniques and so forth. Those sessions were run on old tyres and times did not really matter; it was all about learning with the car and track. On the second day, every driver received a new set of tyres and they had to set their fastest laps. With changing weather conditions from dry to wet, this was a real challenge but each left a strong message. All three Rotax scholarship drivers showed impressive performances, each with their own personal highlights. Miika Laiho, for example, an ex-Finnish ice-racing champion, excelled in wet conditions and was only 0.3 seconds off the fastest time in the session. He was on a faster lap before the red flag came out, dashing his chances of setting the fastest pace in wet conditions. In dry conditions, Ukyo set the fastest times. Ukyo was impressive out of the box in his first test in a JK racing series car. His maturity and attitude towards his racing are great. Another great quality is his ability to listen and take in information. This was confirmed by a statement from Meritus.GP President Peter Thompson: "We found

*we only needed to tell him something once."* Jules Szymkowiak, a real rising star in the DD2 class, was able to show his natural talent with very fast times as well. He will certainly show his speed in the 2012 Rotax MAX Euro Challenge. As Peter Thompson put it, "Jules has the raw natural talent to be great; he now must learn to perfect and polish." BRP-Powertrain commented: "The love for this sport is pushing everybody to their limits. It all starts with passion and love for racing. Making it into the top series is dependent on many factors, but everyone who races karts learns so much more than just racing. This is what, besides all the intensity on and off the track, we always need to keep in mind."

The tests were a great success for Meritus.GP, BRP-Powertrain and the scholarship drivers Jules, Miika and Ukyo. Everybody's dream at this stage in their career is to race professionally, to finally take the next step. Receiving this kind of validation from an international racing team was very strong feedback for all drivers.

*They will continue to pursue their goal. And so will Meritus.GP and BRP-Powertrain.*

