



GIBSON/LAT

Formula Ford to get new rules package for 2011

British championship finally commits to new regulations to boost category



FORMULA FORD constructors and teams have welcomed a new set of FIA-approved regulations that will be introduced for the 2011 season and should boost the category.

Ford and the Motor Sports Association have been working with the FIA to finalise a set of rules for tubular steel single-seaters for several years. With that done, British Formula Ford has now moved to implement the new rules after next season, and a final draft was shown to constructors and teams at the Formula Ford Festival last weekend.

The changes include: the addition of a 10mm-wide side impact panel; a standard carbon nosebox; wheel tethers; collapsible steering column; and FIA-spec headrest. Sequential gearboxes will also be introduced to bring Formula Ford in line with other contemporary categories.

Importantly, update kits will be made available by the constructors so all current cars can be upgraded to continue racing beyond 2010.

Because a standard nosebox has been introduced, new cars will only need to be squeeze tested and not crash tested. A current Van Diemen has already been squeeze tested by the FIA and passed.

Ford UK motorsport manager Mike Norton said: "A safer car is better and it keeps Formula Ford modern and relevant."

"There are also emerging nations that only run to FIA rules, so complying with them will open up more markets."

Ford hopes the move will allow the category to be reintroduced into Germany. AUTOSPORT understands there are also plans to have a Brands Festival-style event supporting the F3 Masters at Zandvoort next season.

COMPETITOR REACTION

Responses have been positive and constructors agreed that the news gives them sufficient time to prepare.

Bertrand Decoster of Mygale said: "We are pleased because it was a necessary move – it's important for Formula Ford to progress."

"The changes are what we expected. Without these moves it would be impossible to move into more markets."

Van Diemen boss Lindsay Allen said: "The car changes are not that drastic. We will bring out a new car, but having an update kit means people can use their cars for another three or four years – that will help us sell cars now."

A NEW KENT

Ford has also announced it will start producing Kent engine blocks again. Parts, particularly in America, have become difficult to find and the Kent community is reluctant to switch to the new, similarly powered, lower-spec Duratec that Ford has introduced.

The new block will now be made available and FF1600 prime mover James Beckett believes it will give the category a boost. "It's fantastic news," he said. "We've been wanting this for some time and the future of FF1600 is now secure."

However, some questioned the preference for reproducing a 50-year-old engine over introducing a more reliable modern unit.

Ex-Formula Ford champion Nathan Freke, who runs cars in Kent, said: "If they made a rule for 2010 saying you must use the new Duratec there'd be an uproar, but in the long-term it'd be so much better."

"If the new Kent is better [than current ones] everyone will need to buy it anyway – buying a Duratec would be preferable. The budget for Kents over the last couple of years has gone through the roof and the difference between a good motor and a bad motor is big."

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