



AUTO+ WOMEN IN MOTOR SPORT

DEVELOPING SPA TREATMENTS

Nathalie Mailliet, CEO of Spa-Francorchamps has big plans for the legendary Belgian circuit PG 6

JAPAN'S 11-YEAR-OLD WONDER GIRL

Record-breaking youngster Juju Noda is powering towards single seater glory PG 8

CORAL'S RARE GIFT REWARDED

Rally star Coral Taylor on being inducted into the Australian Motor Sport Hall of Fame PG 10



DEVELOPING FUTURE TALENT

FIA wins EU support for new programme to boost female participation in motor sport



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Welcome to this latest edition of the FIA's AUTO+ Women in Motorsport newsletter. In this edition we bring you news of a major new driver development programme being initiated by the FIA to encourage young women to participate in motor sport.

Thanks to securing EU funding through the Erasmus+ programme, the Federation will launch the FIA European Young Women Programme at next year's Geneva Motor Show, in conjunction with nine partners from around Europe. You can read the full story of this exciting project, based around 'arrive and drive' karting slaloms, by turning the page.

Elsewhere, we hear the incredible story of Juju Noda, a Japanese girl who is breaking track records in F4 at just 11 years of age and who is now targeting a move to F3 machinery.

Off track, we speak to Nathalie Maillet, CEO of Spa-Francorchamps about the challenge of running one of motor sport's most famous venues and her plans for a connected future.

We also examine the progress of rising female stars in a variety of different disciplines from karting to rallying and rallycross.

Finally we get technical with World Touring Car engineer Julie Despagnol and we talk to rally legend Coral Taylor about her induction into the Australian Motor Sport Hall of Fame. Enjoy the read!

Your AUTO+ team



FIA Women in Motorsport gains EU Erasmus+ support and launches driver development programme

The FIA, along with nine partners, has been selected to receive EU funding through the Erasmus+ programme, which will enable its Women in Motorsport Commission to implement a competition model for the promotion and development of young women's involvement in the sport at grassroots level.

The FIA European Young Women Programme will also contribute to the advancement of the FIA's educational and social roles, and support ASNs with their efforts to raise awareness of gender equality and increase female participation in motor sport.

"I am delighted the European Commission has recognised our strong commitment to the further development of women in motor sport, as well as our pledge to on-going education, training and community responsibility," said FIA President, Jean Todt.

"The stereotype that motor sport is the domain of men should not be alive in this day and age, and it is an anomaly the FIA has been striving to adjust since the creation of the Women in Motorsport Commission in 2009.

"This is an exciting and ambitious project, one I heartily support, and one that needs a long-term approach to be as impactful as possible. If we can share a successful event model with the IOC and other international federations, collectively we can make a significant impact on the involvement of women in sport worldwide."

The new FIA European Young Women Programme will be officially launched on 8 March 2018 – International Women's

Day – at the Geneva Motor Show.

The two-year project is based on a cost-effective, 'arrive and drive' karting slalom format, a new concept currently being developed by the FIA whereby a small tarmac area in a central urban location will be set up with marker cones to create a slalom course.

During the first year the karting slalom events will be promoted to young females between the ages of 13 and 18 at a national level within eight European ASN partner countries.

At the beginning of 2019, the three fastest girls from each country's events will then pit themselves against each other at the European Final for the chance to be among the six drivers selected for the European Team who will attend the FIA Driver Training Camps, where they will be supported by the FIA through a sporting and educational programme.

"This is an enormously challenging European project we have been working on for over two years and I am delighted we have received this support, allowing us to realise our ambition," said Michèle Mouton, President of the FIA Women in Motorsport Commission.

"We want to help detect new female talent by creating events that are fun and accessible to a wide female audience, as well as being affordable and easy for an ASN to run," she added. "This format of event, with identical regulations and track layout, set up in highly-frequented locations, meets those objectives and hopefully hundreds of girls will be inspired to come along and give it a try during these karting slalom weekends.

"Aside from providing an experience in a kart, the events will also highlight road safety initiatives, open up the work of the FIA, our ASNs and motor sport in general to a new and young audience, and potentially encourage females to get involved in any number of different areas. The opportunity for us to really showcase motor sport to youngsters is very exciting and there is every reason to believe we will attract a new generation of women in motor sport."

The eight ASN partners involved in the project are: Royal Automobile Club of Belgium (RACB); AKK-Motorsport (Finland); Deutscher Motor Sport Bund E.V. (DMSB, Germany); Knac Nationale Autosport Federatie (KNAF, Netherlands); Polski Związek Motorowy (PZM, Poland); Federação Portuguesa de Automobilismo e Karting (FPAK, Portugal); Slovenska asociacia motoristickeho sportu (SAMSŠ, Slovakia), and Svenska Bilsportförbundet (SBF, Sweden).

In addition, the project will be academically partnered by CDES-PROGESPORT at the University of Limoges (the Centre

for the Law and Economics of Sport), which will deliver a crucial aspect of the project. A sociological analysis by CDES will support and analyse the success of the programme and make recommendations to the sport's stakeholders on how to increase their level of female participation and help fight gender stereotypes. This report will become the reference document for the project.

During the autumn of 2019, the FIA will organise its final event, report on the outcomes of the project to the European Institutions' officials in Brussels, and host a spectacular karting demonstration involving the European Team selected during the project.

Click [here](#) to watch the video.



The new FIA Programme will involve karting slaloms such as those staged at FIA Regional Sport Congresses.





Developing Spa treatments

Nathalie Mailliet, CEO of Spa-Francorchamps circuit, has big plans for the legendary circuit, both in the real world and in the digital environment

What does your role entail?

I was appointed on 1 July, 2016 and by the end of 2016 we had executed a new strategy for the circuit for the next five years. So, a lot of the work is going into digital – to have a 100 per cent connected circuit. We are very busy with this, but on a day-to-day basis we are full every day we're open. We make sure we prepare the same standard of track for all of our clients whether they are motor bikes or cars, series and promoters or private people. We make sure that Race Control is operational every day; that the track is ready every morning.

Secondly, we have the commercial side and that involves a lot of track laps with guests. We have a lot of guided tours and we organise different seminars and meetings for companies.

We have 40 people here and every day they have to make sure that the track is perfect. We have 13 people in the workshop – electricians, plumbers and so on. We recently spent a lot of time working on the track surface, as well as installing new water pipes, a new approach to deal with the water and how to treat it before we reject it. We've also changed all the cameras around the track. It's been pretty busy!

What's the long-term benefit of all that development?

It's for the fans. We have some different ideas for fans that we hope will work very well. First, we are going to offer free WiFi around the circuit and for that we've just finished installing 15 kilometres of fibre. Now we're launching an app and a WiFi. So, 2017 is building the digital strategy and 2018 is implementing it. Also, we're approaching our centenary in three years' time, so we have designed a temporary expo that should open in March next year. That will be built through the winter.

The idea is to attract different people; people that don't regularly come to the circuit – families and kids. Historically, men go on the track and drive and families stay at home. But we want them to come, even families that don't like racing, families that maybe prefer bicycles. For them we will have electrical bicycles and they will be able to ride the seven kilometres [of the current circuit] and the old 14km circuit and get the full story with augmented reality. We're going to tell the story of the 100 years of the circuit. In fact, you could connect from the other side of the world and have the experience as well. The target of this is to attract 300,000 visitors per year in three years' time.

What was the thing you most wanted to do when you started in the job?

I was headhunted by the government following the selection by a private executive search organisation. I'm French, I was based in Luxembourg and I'm an architect by profession. However, I'm also a race driver. I was a driver in NASCAR in Europe. I've built big factories and then on the other side, I did a lot of racing. So, both my passions are here.

They thought my profile was good and then, in the last selections, before I was appointed, I decided to propose a project on what the future of the circuit should be.

We need to find an economic model in the digital world, a model that within the coming years will bring us good financial development, a tool to reinvest into the circuit, because we have to be autonomous. I wanted to see what we could do to double turnover.

There is a great opportunity because I'm passionate about architecture and I'm passionate about racing. And there was just a real challenge to transform this circuit and to bring it to excellence and better results. The power here was... when I arrived it was

like using 100 horsepower of 1,000 available. It's a big challenge. Is your idea to let the race weekends look after themselves but to focus on times when the circuit isn't hosting a series?

No, not at all. It's about everything, looking at every aspect. For me, it's important to have a good show for the fans but afterwards we are here for the whole year and then we have to make sure we can entertain clients, at the track or from far away.

We can be real partners with the promoters, but I'm always searching for a good show. And that good show can be on two wheels or four wheels.

As we have a big background in two wheels, that is interesting us at the moment. We are studying the various aspects of bringing two-wheel racing back here, because we had really famous races in the past, such as the 24 Hours of Liege. It's a race I would like to revive.

Has it been difficult in any way being a female circuit CEO? Motor sport remains a very male-dominated industry, especially at executive level.

Not really. I consider myself to the same level as a man; there are no differences.

[As for women in motor sport]: I started very late in racing, so 15 years ago and then I could say there were 20 women in the world racing [at a good level]. I was champion of Belgium. I was vice champion in different categories. I did NASCAR in European series. But today, I have the impression that we are regressing. Here in Belgium we have only one woman or two that still race. Honestly, I don't see things moving for women. There is everything to create and I would like to see more. We should be more active.

Earlier you said that men come here to drive on the track and the families they stay at home. Is changing that the first step on the road to encouraging more women into the sport?

Here we have a lot of women that come to the track at the end of the day but they don't drive themselves. There is a lot to communicate. First, we have to make sure that the woman who comes here, if she doesn't want to drive all day, if she wants to do something else, we have to create a mix and make sure she comes with the kids. We want to target kids as well – education in driving. Suzuka does that very well, for example.

I'm going to Suzuka this year and I would like to bring back elements of what they have. A lot of women like speed, they really like racing but we have to start from track days and develop the business.

Is your side of motor sport – the business and administration side – a good sphere for women to get involved in?

Since I've been here I had a lot of women joining the team. Because they say it's a woman in charge at the circuit, so why not come and work for the circuit. Now we have women asking to work with us and they are saying, you're turning the circuit into half women, half men. We have a good balance now.

If you look five years into the future, what will Spa be like?

In five years' time, I hope we can get two and four-wheel races, official world championships here. I want to get all the FIA championships here.

I want an approach that is more about the family. I will say one thing very simply: The kid who comes when he is three or four-years-old, he's coming with his parents and his sisters and his brothers and they spend their time in our virtual world and he goes with his parents and his bicycle. And he explores the amenities we'll build for him and then he'll hear a sound, racing cars, and he'll ask 'what's that?'

It's that moment we want – having an activity and then he or she will see the racing and will say, 'please let's come back'. That's the goal.





Juju Noda - Japan's 11-year-old record-breaker on a fast track to the top

Motor racing is a sport that specialises in producing prodigious talents, a seemingly never-ending conveyor belt rolling out ever younger champions with almost frightening regularity. Think Sebastian Vettel, Max Verstappen and most recently Lando Norris, who won the world karting championship aged 14 and at 17 is knocking on the door of Formula One with McLaren.

All are exceptional drivers who showed exceptional talent at a young age. Over in Japan, however, Juju Noda might just prove to be the most exceptional of all. Why? Because at just 10 years of age Juju became the only primary school age child to drive a Formula 4 car at race pace. Because Noda is the youngest racing driver in Japan to have signed a professional contract with a sponsor, and because the youngster's run in the F4 car was a record-breaker – smashing the Formula 4 lap record at the Okayama International Circuit with a time of 1 minute 32.8 seconds in the F4 Under 17 category (U17), almost a second quicker than the previous benchmark. And finally, because Juju Noda is a girl.

The daughter of former Formula One and Indycar driver Hideki Noda, who now runs the Noda Racing Academy, Juju has been brought up around, and in, racing cars since she was a toddler – she began in karts aged three – and having conquered karting and taken her first steps in single seaters, the gifted youngster is eyeing an F3 drive when she's legally old enough to compete at 16 and, beyond that, harbours the natural ambition of every prodigy – to be a champion. Here Juju reveals her F1 and Formula E ambitions and why she just wants to go faster...

Why did you start racing and at what age?

I watched my Dad racing and thought it was really cool. So, I told my Dad that I wanted to go ride karts when I was three.

What excites you about the sport?

I love the speed and the G force I feel on my body. I also think that the good thing about sports is that the efforts you put reflects on the results.

What are your ambitions for the future?

I want to drive a faster car. I also want to win every race in the Under-17 series. I want to become the first Japanese female driver to win in Formula One, and I also want to perform well in Formula E.

How do you cope with the physicality of a single-seater, it must be quite tough when you are so young?

I have driven four hours in one day, but have never felt any physical stress. I have heard from high-school-age drivers that they feel the steering is heavy or it's hard on the neck, but I have never felt that. I train hard physically, so I guess that makes me fit. I am going to push myself harder in physical training.

Was it difficult to move from karts to single-seaters?

Karts and formula cars were totally two different things. I needed to adapt to the weight of the car, and the G force in a single-seater.

I also needed to learn and acquire different skills in steering and braking. Since my dad is a former F1 driver, and currently runs a racing academy as well as managing a SuperGT team, I will pursue my career by asking advice from him.

Did the Formula 4 car you drove need to be adapted to your size, and what had to be done?

I needed to alter the steering and pedal positions, and make a special seat. At first, I couldn't climb into the car alone, so I had to use a pedestal to climb into the car.

You set a new lap record at Okayama International Circuit. How challenging was the lap?

It is scary to run a record lap, where no one has ever accomplished before. But the sense of achievement when you accomplish that challenge gives you more confidence.

It also makes me happy when my dad, friends, and the media applaud me for what I have done. I wish that through my challenge, more people who were not interested in motor sports become interested.

How frustrating is it that you cannot compete officially until you are 16?

It is quite frustrating. In the current situation, I can't race even if I give my full efforts to be capable of racing. As you see in the Olympics, younger athletes are more active in other sports, and I hope it will be the same in motorsports in the near future.

What do your friends at primary school think about what you are doing?

In the beginning my teachers and friends did not believe that I was driving a formula car. They all thought I was racing karts. But the recent exposure on the internet, TV, magazines, and newspapers, as well as a sponsorship by [children's clothing manufacturer Miki House], made them understand what I am doing, and they are all surprised by it. I have more fans now, and my friends ask me more about racing now.

GUIDING FORCE

Former F1 and Indycar driver, Hideki Noda explains how his daughter was destined to race and why he's look beyond Japan to give Juju a start to her competitive career

Do you think your own racing career inspired Juju? Was she always interested in racing?

She started to come to the circuit while she was still in her mother's womb, when I was still racing, she started to feel the sound of the engine and the vibration since then. I wasn't surprised at all when she told me she wanted to drive karts when she was three years old.

What makes you think Juju is special behind the wheel of a race car?

Her ability to delicately feel the behaviour of the car is outstanding. She is able to drive the race car at its potential, nothing more or less. Compared with other drivers, her biggest advantage is that her sense for speed is much higher than others, making her less nervous while driving than the others.

Without a driving or competition licence, what is Juju's racing programme and what is she allowed to do?

Juju's racing skills are already at a point where she lapped a course record at Okayama International Circuit in an F4. She is now participating in Okayama's Under-17 exhibition race series,

where she does not need a competition licence. Since she can only get her competition license at 16-yearsold in Japan, we are currently researching other countries where she can acquire a competition licence at a younger age.

What are the targets you are trying to reach in her current programme?

Juju is aiming to win a Formula 1 or a Formula E race in the future. I am trying to make the environment that is required for her to step-up. Currently, the only race track that allows her to run is the Okayama International Circuit. If more race tracks recognise her ability and allow her to run, we would send her anywhere in the world to do that. We are also planning to start her in Europe soon.

You see the success of young drivers such as Max Verstappen and Lando Norris. Is Juju aiming at replicating their route to success?

Yes, Juju is aiming to becoming the first Asian female F1 or Formula E driver, and the first female Champion.



Name: Juju Noda
Date of birth: 2/2/2006
Place of birth: Tokyo, Japan

- 2009 Starts karting, aged three
- 2010 Wins her debut kart race at the age of four
- 2011 Wins her first full season in the 40cc kart championship, aged five. Begins driving in 100cc cadet karts
- 2012 Receives special permission to compete in the 100cc cadet class at the age of six (usual starting age is seven). Wins three races and one third place out of four races competed
- 2013 Is allowed to compete in the in 100cc SS class aged seven (competitors are usually aged 11). Wins three of four races contested. Begins driving 125cc Rotax Max Senior kart
- 2014 Given permission to race in 125cc Rotax Max Senior class at the age of eight (usually 15). Begins driving 125cc shifter KZ karts
- 2016 Aged nine, begins driving Formula 4 cars. Allowed to race in 125cc shifter KZ at age of 10 (usually, 16) Competes in one race and wins.
- 2017 Breaks Formula 4 lap record at Okayama International Circuit with a time of 1:32.8s in the F4 U17 category. Wins debut Under-17 Formula 4 race at Okayama.

The first lady of the Australian Motor Sport Hall of Fame

This year rally legend Coral Taylor became the first woman to be inducted into her national motor sport Hall of Fame. Here, she talks about her illustrious career and her new role in Australian rallying



Coral Taylor with long-time crew mate Neal Bates.



Coral Taylor is half of one of Australian rallying's most famous duos. Through the 1990s to the late 2000s, there was barely a single season where [Neal] Bates and Taylor were not in strong contention for the Australian Rally Championship. Along the way, the pair would take four titles and firmly establish themselves as legends of the sport Down Under.

Earlier this year, Taylor's exceptional career was recognised when she became the first woman inducted into the Australian Motor Sport Hall of Fame – fittingly alongside Bates.

How did you get involved in motor sport?

Co-driving for my father, Norm Fritter... Dad rallied in the 60's and I think I assumed everyone's dad was a rally driver. After Dad competed in the 1970 Ampol Round Australia Trial in South Australia, he retired from rallying. Then in 1979 the Repco Around Australia Reliability Trial was planned and it rekindled his interest in the sport. I was 18 at the time and joked



over dinner that I would navigate for him. I never for a moment thought that I'd really do it... But two weeks later my life savings were put towards purchasing a half share in a Datsun 1600 rally car with my Dad. I had no idea what I was getting into.

From then to becoming the first woman inducted into the Australian Motor Sport Hall of Fame this year – what were your thoughts and emotions when you first found out about the honour? And how do you look on it now with some time to reflect on it?

When the envelope arrived in the mail I assumed CAMS were writing to me asking to help organise the Hall of Fame dinner – I didn't actually open it. I was trying to figure out how to tell them I was too busy with other things, and I threw the envelope back on the table unopened.

When I did finally open it and read the letter, I was shocked.

It took quite a while to sink in... I understood immediately what a huge honour it was, particularly to be the first female to be inducted. When I looked at the list of other inductees – all very famous names in motor sport – to be honest, I felt like an imposter.

You've been involved in the sport for 40 years, outside of the Hall of Fame, what are some of the real highlights that stand out in your mind?

Obviously winning the Championships were highlights/ I remember one very special moment came in my first ARC event with Neal Bates. We were competing against [seven-time Australian Champion, and three-time Asia-Pacific Champion] Possum Bourne and we were leading the event. When we came into service, we were driving down a narrow road with service crews parked on each side of the road, and all the crews stood at the edge of the road and clapped as we drove past – including Possum's crew. It was an emotional moment. To receive that respect from the other crews was something I'll never forget.

As a co-driver, do you get that thrill that drivers talk of behind the wheel? And did you ever have the bug to try driving?

I did drive in a couple of small club rallies in the early 80s and enjoyed it, but my love was always co-driving. The problem is trying to describe the feeling because words do not do it justice – you have to experience it to understand it. The biggest thrill for me is completing the perfect stage... When the timing of the notes is perfect, you are in the zone and just feel at one with the notes and the road, and there is total trust from your driver and total commitment to every corner.

You've spent 25 years working with Neal Bates – who was also inducted into the Hall of Fame with you this year – co-driving and managing his team, winning four national titles, driving World Rally Cars, driving the team truck. It's surely one of the longest standing driver-co-driver combinations in world rallying – how have you managed to stay together all of these years?

As a team we just clicked from the very first event. At the time we had a really tight budget and everyone in the team kicked in and did whatever was needed. We all helped each other, whether it was fitting tyres, washing the truck or making coffee to keep everyone awake during all-nighters at the workshop.

I wasn't much help mechanically, but I could handle the tyre fitting machine, so you just did whatever was needed. Driving the truck was something I loved, so whilst rallying became my career, truck driving became my hobby and it was also a way for me to contribute towards the overall effort.

We have been very lucky to have such a long career together as a team, but we've also been very privileged to have such a long standing successful relationship with Toyota Australia.

Your daughter, Molly, has become a successful rally driver in her own right – as the first female driver to win the Australian Rally Championship last year as well as being involved in the FIA Women in Motorsport programme – was motor sport something that you were keen for her to pursue, or did it just happen?

As a youngster Molly's passion was horses and Three Day Eventing. She wasn't really interested until my husband Mark, who ran a rally school at the time, took Molly and her sister Jane to the rally school one weekend. The aim was driver education and trying to improve their driving skills prior to getting their driving licences.

Molly came home so excited and wanted to get a car to drive in motorkhanas and khanacross. Mark bought her a Holden Gemini for those type of events. A year later she sold her horse and float and bought her first proper rally car!

How did it feel to see her rise to become Australian Champion? Do you think she could beat your total of four championships?

I can't tell you how proud of her I am. I could fill a book of stories of her journey from her first car through to winning the Australian Championship.

She was completely focused and driven. She worked multiple jobs, sought sponsorship, spent her evenings in the garage working on her car, and did everything she could possibly do to achieve her goals. Honestly I do not know anyone that worked harder than Molly to go rallying, and I'm not saying that just because I am her mother!

She took herself to Europe and did it the hard way, but she always made opportunities for herself. They were lonely years on her own, away from home with not much money, but at the end of the day, all of that made becoming Australian Champion even sweeter.

Ironically, Molly is fighting it out for this year's championship with Neal's son, Harry (at the time of writing, there are only three points separating the two). Could you possibly have imagined this scenario 10 years ago?

I know, how ironic is that!? We could never have imagined it. These days we're not known as Neal and Coral, we're known as Harry's Dad and Molly's Mum!

From your personal experience, how would you describe the role of women in motor sport – and how that may have evolved – over the last 40 years?

A lot has changed. In the 1980s I looked at Michèle Mouton and Fabrizia Pons as my absolute idols, but there were still very few women involved in the sport. In Australia, I had [two-time Australian Champion co-driver] Kate Officer to look up to as well.

From the very beginning of my involvement in rallying I went to great lengths not to make a big deal of being a woman in a male dominated sport. I didn't want to be treated any differently. I wanted to earn credibility, and the wonderful thing about rallying is that peers will judge you on your ability to do the job and gender is irrelevant.

In the past girls haven't naturally gravitated to motor sport, but it is changing. As more and more women become involved it's no longer seen as something unusual.

Molly has a huge following of young girls and they are coming to watch rallies. I've met many of them and the common thing that I'm told by their parents is how wonderful it is for their daughters to have Molly as a role model. These young girls don't see it as unusual for a female to be a rally driver.



Sweden's Bäckman crossing over towards the big league

Swedish driver Jessica Bäckman is racking up points and gaining plaudits in her first season in the FIA World Rallycross Championship feeder series RX2.

Jessica Bäckman – make a note of that name. The Swedish teenager is on the fast track to motor sport glory, and is going from strength-to-strength during her maiden campaign of car racing competition this year in the RX2 International Series presented by Cooper Tires.

Bäckman has been consistently grabbing her share of the spotlight in recent seasons, going undefeated en route to the Swedish Karting Championship Junior 125cc class title in 2012 and finishing as the highest-placed female in the KF2 World Championship in both 2014 and 2015, while similarly shining in the International Winter Cup and International Open.

Buoyed by that eye-catching success, Bäckman took the decision to graduate to cars this year at the age of 19, teaming up with Scandinavian powerhouse Olsbergs MSE in RX2 – the fiercely-disputed feeder series to the FIA World Rallycross Championship.

While she endured a challenging start to the campaign, she showed impressive signs of progress in Great Britain and Norway, missing out on the semi-finals by just two points on each occasion.

In the immediate aftermath of Lydden Hill, Bäckman participated in the launch event for next year's SpeedMachine Festival at Silverstone, during which she took occasional World RX commentator Tim Harvey for a high-speed passenger ride around the celebrated Home of British motor sport's new rallycross circuit.

The former British Touring Car Champion subsequently described her as 'mega committed, with a first-class attitude

and approach' – and 'a great natural talent'. High praise indeed.

Undeterred by a nightmare weekend on home soil at Höljes, Jessica bounced back in fine style at the Canadian round at Trois-Rivières. After charging into the semi-finals for the first time, she only narrowly failed to make it through to the final, in the process defeating compatriot William Nilsson, who had been a podium-finisher in the previous round.

To add intrigue to her story, she is competing head-to-head with brother Andreas – both a team-mate and rival – and she has also been showcasing her versatility by dovetailing her RX2 commitments with a successful karting campaign in 2017 that recently resulted in her third Swedish Championship crown. Her prize will be a test run in a Swedish V8 Thundercar – something else to add to her flourishing career CV.

"A lot of drivers go from karting to circuit racing, but that was never of interest to me," Bäckman reveals. "Our uncle competed in rallycross for many years and we followed him round from a young age, so I guess this was always going to happen. It must be in the blood!"

"Andreas and I never raced against each other much in karting – we always tried to avoid direct competition – so this year has been something new in that respect," she continues. "We have a very good relationship, so of course we work together to try to help each other to progress, but at the end of the day, I want to beat him and he wants to beat me."

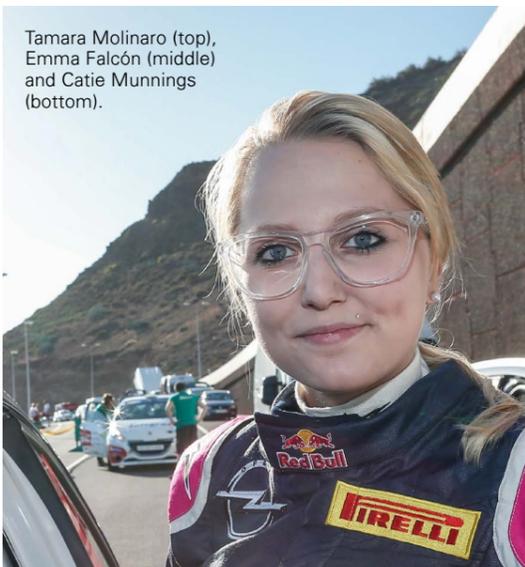
"Every track has been new to me this year, so I've been learning as I go, but I think Trois-Rivières showed that we are moving in the right direction.

"That weekend marked a big step forward. After coming so close before, it was a major confidence boost to reach the semi-finals at last and not only that, but to really put up a fight against a number of drivers with far more experience than me.

"Given that this is my first season out of karts, RX2 was never going to be a single-year project, and my long-term goal is to step up to the world championship. I believe I have the ability to do so, and if I can maintain the same rate of progress between now and the end of the campaign, hopefully we will be in a position to really push on in 2018."



Tamara Molinaro (top), Emma Falcón (middle) and Catie Munnings (bottom).



Trio in training for the big stages

The FIA European Rally Championship is providing three up-and-coming female drivers with a highly competitive platform from which to launch top level rallying careers

Ahead of the penultimate event of the season, Rally di Roma Capitale, Italy's Tamara Molinaro was on top of the ERC Ladies' Trophy division ahead of Canary Islander Emma Falcón and Briton Catie Munnings, the defending champion. With all three undertaking an expanded programme of ERC events in 2017, a healthy but firm rivalry has built up between the trio, particularly when Falcón joined the series on her home round in May in an R3-specification Citroën, a faster alternative to the R2 cars of Molinaro (Opel ADAM) and Munnings (Peugeot 208).

While all three highlight the importance of beating their closest opponent, regardless of gender, winning the ERC Ladies' Trophy would represent a significant achievement as seek funding for 2018.

Nineteen-year-old Molinaro, a Red Bull athlete and part of the factory Opel team in the FIA ERC Junior Under 27 Championship, has the ERC Ladies' Trophy firmly in her sights. "It's the goal we set for this year," she says. "We need to increase our experience and our pace but I want to make the team, make everyone proud of the things they are doing for me."

Unlike Molinaro and Munnings, Falcón's car choice – dictated by the family owning a Citroën dealership on the island of Fortaventura and the support the brand's Spanish importer provides – means she's ineligible for the ERC Junior category and therefore not able to draw a fair comparison with the performances of Molinaro and Munnings. Not that it's a problem for the 28-year-old.

"For me just competing in the ERC is a dream," she says. "I would like this year to be for training only, to learn and practice. It's not easy, but I'm learning all the time and making progress."

When she's not competing, Falcón sells cars at the family dealership and spends the rest of her time finding sponsorship.

"I don't have a manager to help me so I am going to different companies to get sponsors, but it's really difficult and it has taken a lot of hard work to get the budget together for my first season outside the Canary Islands," she explains.

Munnings is no stranger to the trials of finding sponsorship. She launched #projectkt as a platform for attracting funding and works hard to build her media profile. She's also an ambassador for Peugeot UK and for the Institute of Advance Motorists. "The focus this year was not so much the ERC Ladies' Trophy but to gain experience and get closer to the front in the competitive ERC Junior Under-28 Championship," she says.

Driving for Saintéloc Racing, the team behind the Peugeot Rally Academy in the R5-based ERC Junior Under-28 category, gives her access to its highly-rated Spanish drivers Pepe López and José Suárez, who help with set-up and competition advice.

Then there's the ERC Junior Experience training scheme, which Munnings has been enrolled in since its launch in June 2016.

"The ERC Junior Experience has been amazing in teaching me all of the tips and tricks that only come with years of experience," says Munnings, 19. "The teachers are influential industry experts, while the lessons I have learned will stay with me for the rest of my career."

With ERC Ladies' Trophy stalwart Ekaterina Stratieva intent on a full-time return to competition in 2018, the ERC's championship within a championship is flourishing right now, while equipping Falcón, Molinaro and Munnings with the skills they need to progress to the next level.



Amna Al-Qubaisi wins GCC Academy, heads for Formula 4

Abu Dhabi racer Amna Al-Qubaisi recently took two major steps forward in her racing career by first taking top spot in the GCC Young Drivers Academy and then successfully testing a Formula 4 car, with a view to competing in next year's European championship.

Twelve drivers registered for the Academy, two from each of the countries represented in the region-wide talent search: UAE, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar and Kuwait.

Driver training for the programme took place in the UAE and in Bahrain and winners were selected based on their circuit and rally driving skills, which made up 60 per cent of the overall score. In addition to the racing elements, the Academy programme included fitness assessment and other graded assignments such as team work, career development and media training.

And at the end of the programme, Al-Qubaisi emerged as the overall winner and following her victory the 17-year-old racer paid tribute to the Automobile and Touring Club of the UAE (ATCUAE), the ASN that put her forward to attend the Academy.

"I would like to thank the ATCUAE for nominating me and giving me this great opportunity to test my skills, which will enable me to move forward to my next career level," she explained.

"I learned a lot, the fitness and media sessions were very helpful which I will carry with me in my next career stage. It was a new learning curve, and I'm so proud to be the winner of the first edition of the GCC YDA."

Amna's GCC win was quickly followed by a successful test of

Formula 4 machinery, with the highly successful Prema team at Yas Marina circuit in Abu Dhabi.

She completed 60 laps and reached a top speed of 209km/h on the 2.36km South Circuit at the island facility.

"The test went pretty well, there were some small issues at the beginning but it is normal as everything is new for Amna," said Prema team boss René Rosin.

"We worked according to our plan; it was just a run-in to get her some experience with the new car and the new people working around her," he added. "Overall, things look very positive and we look forward now to more testing."

Commenting on the successful test Amna said: "The test went very well. It was more of a shakedown and getting used to the car. Lap by lap there was improvement and the technicians went through the data with me and advised me on how I can improve my times.

"I am getting ready for the new season, I just feel I need a little more time and practice," she adds. "But I think I am ready for it and I'm really excited about the new season. I am really happy with Prema; they have really helped me improve a lot. If it was not for them I don't think I would have improved this much."

Elsewhere in the Middle East, Lebanon's Joanna Hassoun has recently achieved a number of notable results in her national Rotax Max Junior championship.

The 14-year-old claimed two fourth places in the first five rounds of the series and then at round seven in July claimed her first victory in the championship. Ahead of the final round Hassoun was third overall in the standings.



and work together. Alone, you can be faster but together, we can go further.

Have you always been interested in motor sport?

I've been passionate about motor sport since I got a replica Peugeot 306 Maxi. I played V-Rally 2 on my PlayStation and when I'm not at races I follow motor sport. If you want to fully enjoy this job, you need to be interested in motor sport.

Who is your inspiration?

My parents. They are farmers, they work hard, with passion, every day. I have learned the value of their work by working in the harvest since I was able to drive the tractor. They offer me the chance to live my passion and they have encouraged me from the beginning.

What's it like being one of only a handful of females in a male-dominated team?

I feel like a force for the team. Then, I stay myself and just share my point of view. If you want something, say it clearly and sharply. But I have never noticed any problem.

What makes you satisfied?

The victory as a team for the three cars is the most satisfying result. At this moment, I'm happy with the team's progress all along the season.



Polestar engineer shining brightly

With Polestar Cyan Racing, Volvo's factory team in the FIA World Touring Car Championship, locked in a close battle with Honda for the series' Manufacturers' crown, the expertise of the squad's technical personnel is crucial. Julie Lespagnol, a 28-year-old performance engineer from Metz in France, is playing a key role in the Swedish brand's pursuit of WTCC glory

What does your job entail?

I analyse the performance of the car and the driving of the driver. Performance engineers are the first people who receive the data, who analyse it and extract the first details from it. Considering we have a short time to react, my function is also to create new tools and methods for the analysis outside the race and then improve our three drivers' lap times.

Talk us through a typical race weekend?

A health check of the car is the most important thing we do when we arrive. Then, after the track walk, we share the plan of the session and prioritise different points of data analysis, which can focus on the behaviour of the car, the mechanical balance, the brakes, dampers, the starts, the tyres, etc.

During the session, I focus on the team's comments and the sector times to be ready in case of an unpredictable event. I share my data with the other performance engineers. I discuss with Nicky [Catsburg, race driver] about his driving in relation to the data coming off the car and the on-board video and compare it with his team-mates. After the race, I report the different analysis about the performance, the starts, the driving on Nicky's car to the race engineering team. Outside the event the work is never finished because I am always making methods to be faster and more efficient in our performance analysis."

How challenging is the job?

It's intense. You have to be well organised and precise in what you say. You need to be reactive, to find a good answer [based on] your analysis in the shortest time possible. My favourite day is Saturday. It's the day where everybody gives their maximum to reach pole position. You can feel the mood becoming really intense and the pressure lasts all day.

What skills do you bring to the role?

I bring my experience in driver coaching, analysis tools and performance criteria. I have a Masters degree in automotive engineering. I was a data engineer for the FFSA Academy, then I became performance engineer on Mehdi Bennani's car at Sébastien Loeb Racing in the WTCC 2015. Last year I worked for Renault Sport on the development of the new Mégane RS as chassis and handling engineer.

What's more important to you – working in your area of expertise or in motor sport?

I prefer working in motor sport. What I am looking for in motor sport is team spirit and performance experience.

For me, one without the other can't work. I prefer to share all the races with the crew compared to be just an expert in my area. Working as a team, it's the occasion to mix all the ideas

