



# Al Saud shines

## GT3 Cup Challenge Middle East Round 5

Pereira sees double win at Bahrain Interational Circuit in Porsche GT3 Cup Challenge Middle East Round 5

### Manama

Saudi Arabia's Mohammed Al Saud completed a successful weekend of racing, finishing Race 2 in 12th place overall and winning the Bronze Category. His performance secured vital championship points ahead of the final round of Season 9.

Al Saud started the race well and moved up to 10th place in turn one. The young Saudi driver set a good pace and showed some impressive defending skills for the next couple of laps. Al Saud then locked his brakes, meaning that he dropped back to 12th place and gave himself more work to do for the remaining five laps. He crossed the line

in 12th place, earning him first place in his category and topping off an overall strong performance in the penultimate round of the season.

Speaking after the race, Mohammed Al Saud said: "I had a great start today, and gained a couple of important positions in the opening turn. My pace was quick and I felt that I could push on and challenge for an even higher finish. Unfortunately, I then made a mistake and lost out on two of the positions that I had gained.

"From then on, it was quite a difficult race, as the tire conditions were getting worse and it was hard to

keep the same pace. I wanted to finish even higher overall, but I'm happy with first place in the Bronze Category and the points will help towards the title chase. I'm hoping



Al Saud tops category podium in Race 2 of the GT3 Cup Challenge Middle East Round 5

to finish top of my category in both races in the next round, and keep my hopes of winning the category title alive."

Ahead of Al Saud, no one could match Pereira's pace as he pushed himself up to second from his fourth-place start by the first turn, before overtaking Charlie Frijns in

lap two and pulling clear of the grid until the chequered flag. Frijns who started in pole, conceded his place to Pereira before Oliphant forced him to lock his brakes under pressure and sacrifice his tires. Oliphant ended the race in second with Frijns holding out for third.

With Pereira taking

maximum points, championship leader Tom Oliphant's hopes of glory now hang in the balance. As the British driver will not compete in Round 6, his dreams of lifting his first Porsche championship title have almost slipped away. Unless his closest rival Al Faisal Al Zubair of Oman performs

poorly in the last two races of the season, Oliphant is likely to be pushed out of contention for the Season 9 title.

The British driver's fate lies in the hands of Omani teenage sensation Al Zubair, who was given a five-place grid position penalty for colliding with Oliphant in Race 1, which ultimately resulted in the British's drivers DNF. Qualifying in fourth, Al Zubair saw his penalty place him ninth on the grid and with a lot of work to do.

Scottish newcomer Glynn Geddie had a strong weekend finishing just outside the podium in fourth, followed by Al Zubair of Oman in fifth and South African Saul Hack in sixth.

Race 2 of Round 5 at Bahrain International Circuit saw 18 drivers race 12 laps of the Formula 1 track configuration. The series comes to a thrilling conclusion in Round 6 as an official support race for the 2018 Formula 1 Gulf Air Bahrain Grand Prix, 7-8 April 2018.



## Oman's AL-Zubair moves closer to GT3 ME title

### Manama

Al-Faisal Al-Zubair finished an action-packed second race in the Porsche GT3 Cup Challenge Middle East in fifth position and first of the GCC drivers at Bahrain's Sakhr circuit. The Omani now trails Great Britain's Tom Oliphant by just two points in the overall drivers' standings.

The Lechner Racing Middle East driver was given a five-place grid penalty for an incident in the first race on Friday and began the race from ninth position. After initially slipping back to 11th, he was delighted to fight back to an eventual fifth overall.

Oliphant is missing the last two races of the season to take part in the British Touring Car Championship and that leaves Al-Zubair as the firm favourite to clinch his first Middle East



Porsche GT3 Cup Challenge Middle East action in Bahrain.

title next month when the series returns to Bahrain.

Al-Zubair said: "It was a good race. I started P9 and, after lap one, I went back to P11. We finished P5 in the end with good lap times. For me, I am focused on getting good consistent points. We could have been a little more aggressive on the usual basis but I was thinking of the

championship. Someone hit me from the back on the first lap, but I managed to get back on track."

Meanwhile, Khalid Al-Wahaibi tackled the race from 10th on new tyres and finished eighth. He now trails Sweden's Magnus Oehman by just three points in the Silver category and has a comfortable lead in the Rookie section.



Al-Faisal Al-Zubair

"I started P10 after the situation in qualifying where I got my fast lap taken away. I had a good start alongside Al-Faisal and I moved up to seventh.

"After that, we really struggled with the car. It did not feel as good as it did at the previous rounds. It was difficult to keep up with the guys in front and I finished P8.

This was two places ahead of where I qualified, but I wanted to be higher. It was not a bad finish in terms of the Silver category, P3, and P3 in GCC, but I want to do better next time."

The experienced Dylan Pereira won the race from Oliphant. Charlie Frijns and Glynn Geddie rounded off the top four and rookie Saul Hack won the Silver category from Isa Al-Khalifa and Al-Wahaibi.

Jean-Baptiste Simmenbauer rocked the regulars with the quickest time in the morning's free practice session with a quickest lap of 2min 04.169sec. Al-Zubair stayed clear of any problems to record the fourth quickest lap of 2min 04.445sec behind the rookie, Pereira and Geddie. Al-Wahaibi missed the session with a clutch issue.

With the news that Oliphant

would not be competing in the last two races of the season in Bahrain, it was imperative that Al-Zubair qualified strongly for race 10 to stamp his authority on proceedings.

Pole position for the second of the Bahrain races fell to Charlie Frijns with a fastest lap of 2min 03.390sec. Oliphant was second and Al-Zubair slotted into fourth behind Bahrain's Issa Al-Khalifa. Al-Wahaibi returned to action and qualified in 13th position and seventh of the Silver drivers.

"I went on used tyres and finished fourth," said Al-Zubair. "I got a penalty from yesterday and I don't think that was fair. It meant I would start the race in ninth on new tyres. The goal was a top four finish, but I was leading the championship and that changed the mentality."