

Pau European F3: Esteban Ocon beats Max Verstappen in free practice

By Marcus Simmons

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Lotus Formula 1 Junior Esteban Ocon beat Max Verstappen to the honour of fastest time after 80 minutes of free practice for the Formula 3 European Championship round on the Pau street circuit.

Verstappen topped the first 40-minute session, but Frenchman Ocon turned the tables in the second - which followed immediately afterwards - to beat the Dutchman by 0.171 seconds in his Prema Powerteam Dallara-Mercedes.



"In the beginning I left a bit of margin," said Ocon, who is one of 19 drivers from the 26-strong field never to have raced at Pau.

"On the last lap of the first session I touched the wall a bit and bent something, but the team fixed it and I was able to push a bit more, getting closer to the limit step by step."

Verstappen was spectacular, but never touched the wall in his Van Amersfoort Racing Dallara-Volkswagen.

"I was paying attention a bit at first but every lap I was building confidence," he said.

Felix Rosenqvist was top of the drivers with Pau experience, heading a Mucke Motorsport three-four from team-mate Lucas Auer.

Jake Dennis, who raced here last year in Formula Renault, looked confident from the start and was quickest of the six Carlin drivers, heading team-mates Tom Blomqvist, Ed Jones and Jordan King in the order.

Riccardo Agostini (EuroInternational) and Mitch Gilbert (Fortec) completed the top 10.

As expected there were casualties. [Silverstone winner Antonio Fuoco](#) missed the vast majority of running after hitting the wall at Pont Oscar early in the first session, while fellow Italian Michele Beretta caused the only red flag, halfway through the second period, also at Pont Oscar.

Roy Nissany sat out the second session with damage sustained right at the end of the first period when he hit the barriers at Virage de la Gare.

Due to the short nature of the circuit, qualifying will be run in two groups.

While the odd-numbered session looks more competitive overall (with nine of the top 13 from free practice), Ocon and Verstappen are the two leading even-numbered runners, meaning that whatever happens they will not share the front row.