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Emanuele Olivieri sets the pace in free practice at Imola



Emanuele Olivieri set the pace in Free Practice at Imola in the FIA Formula Regional European Championship. On home soil, the R-ace GP driver posted a late benchmark of 1:39.074, edging out CL Motorsport's Dutch racer Reno Francot by just 0.047s.

Williams F1 Team Academy Driver Oleksandr Bondarev continued his strong form after impressing on his Van Amersfoort Racing debut, having topped the opening session of Thursday's Pre-Event Test. The Ukrainian set the third-fastest time with a 1:39.350, ahead of MP Motorsport's Sebastian Wheldon and Championship leader Kean Nakamura-Berta of PREMA Racing, who completed the top five.

Olivieri's team mate Rashid Al Dhaheri finished sixth, having been the first driver to dip below the 1:40 barrier. Olivieri then moved to the top of the timesheets with a provisional benchmark of 1:39.807.

With 33 minutes remaining, Gabriel Gomez's off-track excursion brought out the red flag and briefly halted the session. Once running resumed, Olivieri improved further to a 1:39.731, with Al Dhaheri following just 0.064s behind. The Italian then lowered the benchmark to 1:39.312, before Wheldon moved into second with a 1:39.377.

With five minutes remaining, Francot vaulted to the top with a 1:39.121. Olivieri responded immediately, going 0.142s quicker in the opening sector before crossing the line in 1:39.142, just 0.021s off the Dutchman. He went one better on his following lap, reclaiming first place with a 1:39.074 that would remain unbeaten. Bondarev then produced a late improvement of his own to take third.

Attention now turns to Qualifying, which will be split into Groups A and B and is scheduled to get under way at 15:15.