

A photograph of two young men standing side-by-side, giving thumbs up. The man on the left is wearing a red racing suit with white accents and various sponsor logos including 'PREMA', 'FREC', 'Pirelli', 'SPORT', 'Williams F1 TEAM', 'Driver Academy', and 'infinity'. The man on the right is wearing a black racing suit with white accents and logos including 'BIG MACHINE RACING', 'ACI', 'SPORT', 'MP', 'Prop.com', 'TWG', 'MOTORSPORT', 'imaginarijmandCO.com', and 'S. WHELDON'. Both suits have 'NAKAMURA-BERTA' and 'KEAN' printed at the bottom. The background is a blue and white wall.

18 July 2026

Kean Nakamura-Berta secures fifth pole of the season



A super-fast Kean Nakamura-Berta claimed top honours in Qualifying 1 at Paul Ricard, securing his fifth pole position of the FIA Formula Regional European Championship season. The PREMA Racing driver will line up on pole for Saturday's opening race after setting a best lap of 1:57.824.

Joining him on the front row will be MP Motorsport's Sebastian Wheldon, who bounced back from a difficult Hungaroring weekend, where he failed to score points, by topping Group B ahead of championship leader Rashid Al Dhaheri (R-ace GP).

GROUP A

With just over two minutes remaining, Nakamura-Berta became the first driver to dip close to the 1m58s barrier, posting a 1:58.076. R-ace GP's Emanuele Olivieri slotted into second, two tenths adrift, while MP Motorsport's Alexander Abkhazava was third, a little further back.

In the closing moments, Nakamura-Berta embarked on his final flying lap, setting the fastest first and third sectors before stopping the clocks at 1:57.824. Olivieri also improved, initially retaining second with a 1:57.912, before being edged out by Abkhazava, who finished just five thousandths of a second shy of Nakamura-Berta's benchmark.

Marcus Saeter secured an encouraging fourth place, although the G4 Racing driver narrowly missed out on breaking the 1m58s barrier. Behind him was the second PREMA Racing driver, Salim Hanna.

It proved to be a difficult qualifying session for Yuki Sano, who had claimed his maiden victory of the season at the Hungaroring. The R-ace GP Japanese driver could manage only tenth in his group, behind the three ART Grand Prix drivers Kabir Anurag, Mattéo Giaccardi and Alexandre Munoz, as well as RPM's Jan Przyrowski.

GROUP B

CL Motorsport's Reno Francot was the first to post a representative lap with a 1:57.960, but Sebastian Wheldon immediately went three thousandths quicker. The MP Motorsport driver then improved again to a 1:57.832, while Gabriel Gomez climbed to second with a 1:57.898, 21 thousandths ahead of his Rodin Motorsport team-mate Alex Ninovic. Behind them, Al Dhaheri moved into fourth

with a 1:57.945, dropping Francot to fifth.

As the chequered flag approached, Al Dhaheri produced the fastest opening sector of the session with a 32.226, backed up by another strong final sector, to climb into second with a 1:57.854. Wheldon was unable to improve but comfortably held on to the fastest time in the group. Gomez completed the top three ahead of Ninovic, with Francot rounding out the top five.

Kean Nakamura-Berta (PREMA Racing): *"It was really close in the end, especially watching Group B from the pit wall. I think we did a really good job in our group. We looked consistently quick throughout the whole session and managed to come away with pole, which wasn't something we necessarily expected. It's a great way to start the weekend and now we'll see what we can do in the race. The team did an incredible job with the car, as always. Hungary was a bit of a difficult weekend for us, but we've bounced back strongly. The team has done an excellent job and we've felt competitive around Paul Ricard ever since pre-season testing. We knew this circuit could suit us, and I think we've shown exactly that."*

Sebastian Wheldon (MP Motorsport): *"Overall, it was a positive session, especially after what happened in Hungary, which was a real disaster for us. It was good to bounce back. I'm a little disappointed because I knew I had the pace to take the overall fastest time, but a small mistake on my final lap cost me that. Still, we're in a strong position, so now the focus shifts to the race. I'm not thinking about the championship at this stage. It's still too early for that. Right now, my only focus is on doing the best job possible and maximising every opportunity."*

The first of the weekend's two races will get underway at 12:55 CEST and will be broadcast in more than 200 territories worldwide, with live streaming also available on the championship's official YouTube channel, @fiaformularegionaleu.

Full broadcast details are available [here](#).