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CASSELS TAKES HER GP3R MOMENTUM INTO THE SEASON'S BIGGEST WEEKEND

Sydney Cassels has spent her first national season learning circuits the rest of the field already knew. Round 4 is the first one nobody knows.

MARKHAM, Ont. – Sydney Cassels turned her first competitive lap of Canadian Tire Motorsport Park in May, her first of Calabogie in July, and her first of Trois-Rivières eight days ago. She is 17, she is from Coldstream, British Columbia, and 2026 is her first full season of car racing.

"Everyone has been to CTMP or Calabogie or even GP3R, and it's my first time at all these tracks, so it's definitely a challenge always feeling like a step behind," said Cassels.

She is seventh in the Pro standings of the Emzone Radical Cup Canada presented by Michelin on 92 points, ahead of five drivers in a 12-car class.

// FROM THE WEST SERIES TO THE NATIONAL ONE

Cassels came up through karting in Western Canada, moved into a Radical SR3 in 2025, and ran the Radical Cup Canada West season finale that year at Area 27 in Osoyoos, British Columbia, in a record 26-car field. Area 27 is a 4.8-kilometre, 16-turn permanent circuit designed by Jacques Villeneuve with 357 feet of elevation change. It is a single track, and drivers in the West series run it repeatedly.

That is the change she describes, and it is not primarily about speed.

"Out west it's competitive, but it's very selective," she said. "We only race at one track, so you have to run laps to be fast. Where here it's more of a level playing field. You literally have a battle up front, in the mid pack, to the back of the mid pack, and there's always racing going on no matter where you are."

She qualified fifth on her first attempt, a 1:21.698 at Canadian Tire Motorsport Park in May, in a session that set the grid for her first car race. She finished seventh in both races that weekend, seventh again in Race 3 at Calabogie, and eighth in Race 5 at Trois-Rivières.

// THE RESULT AT TROIS-RIVIÈRES

Race 6 at Trois-Rivières was her first top-four finish. Two Pro cars retired from the race and Alex Tagliani lost three laps, but Cassels also held Jesse Lambert, sixth in the championship and a Calabogie podium finisher, 0.561 seconds behind her to the flag.

It is the fourth-place finish she names when asked what she wants more of, and the part she says she is still missing.

"I do want to have a battle, because I haven't really battled with anyone this season," she said.

// HER STRENGTHS, AND THE CORNERS SHE'S REBUILDING

The Radical SR3 XXR runs a 232 bhp Gen 5 engine in a 620 kg car, over 350 horsepower per tonne, with a six-speed sequential paddle-shift gearbox and LMP-derived bodywork. Cassels arrived in one from two-stroke karts.

"Radicals are such a high downforce car, low horsepower, so you really have to trust the aero and roll as much speed as you can," she said. "I feel like a lot of my strengths are high speed commitment corners. I really struggle in the technical low speed."

She traces the gap to a step she skipped. In karting she moved from the momentum classes into the higher-powered categories quickly, and the slow-corner rolling speed those momentum classes teach is the thing she is now rebuilding.

"That was the hardest part for me, just the slow corners, because it's something totally different," she said. "The high commitment stuff, when you're on the edge of going flat or not, I think I have that down now."

Markham has 12 turns and neither she nor anyone else has driven them.

// RADICAL ACADEMY CANADA

Cassels drives for Radical Academy Canada, which launched in 2024 as a female-forward program in partnership with Radical Canada and ran its first race at Canadian Tire Motorsport Park on 17 May of that year. It is the only all-female team on the grid. April Burgess is team principal.

"Radical Academy will provide opportunities for girls and women as drivers, technicians, or in supporting roles," Burgess said when the program launched. "Racing has been male-dominant, and it's time that changes."

Alana Carter runs the team's second car and mentors Cassels. Carter won the 2022 Formula Woman competition, was the first woman to compete with Radical Academy in the Emzone Radical Cup Canada presented by Michelin in 2024, and took a podium on her TC America debut at Barber Motorsports Park in September 2025. Carter is tenth in the Pro standings on 60 points. Cassels is seventh on 92.

Three of the twelve Pro entries at Markham are women. Cassels is the highest-scoring of them.

"My whole team is females. I never would have imagined that would ever happen when I was a little kid," she said. "Seeing all the little girls walking around in the paddock, it's so cool that they would look up to me."

Asked what she tells them, she does not reach for the category.

"You're just a racer. You're not a female racer," she said. "You have the exact same ability as the guys."

// THE YEAR OF TESTING, AND WHAT SHE WANTS FROM MARKHAM

Cassels spent a year testing before she entered a car race, which she describes as the decision that made this season work.

"I did a year of just testing, practice, running laps by myself, not jumping into the deep end and doing races," she said. "It totally put me in the right spot for this year."

Her target for Markham is narrower than her result at Trois-Rivières.

"Staying clean and maximizing all the opportunities that are given," she said. "Realistically a top five, stay clean, race my race."

Races 7 and 8 run on August 15 and 16.

// ABOUT FEL MOTORSPORTS

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