

In 2001 an aspiring young racer named Mark Wilkins came to AIM Autosport following six years karting and a year in the Bridgestone Racing Series. His first year with AIM saw him compete in the Canadian Formula Ford Championship and finish second in the series. He remained with AIM the following year, graduated to the Formula Ford 2000 Zetec Championship and was teamed with engineer Ian Willis and chief mechanic Matt Wivell. The "Three W's" have been together ever since, going on to compete in Fran Am 2000, Formula Renault and Formula Mazda while forming a great working relationship and strong friendship.

Ian is AIM Autosport's Formula Mazda Team manager. He and his brother Keith, AIM's Formula BMW Team Manager, grew up with racing thanks to their father. Eventually, Ian began preparing and driving open wheel cars, competing in amateur and professional Formula Ford and Formula 2000 races.

In the early 90s, Ian and Keith designed, built and raced a pair of their own chassis. Named the Aero 2, the cars were wildly successful and became a cornerstone when AIM Autosport was launched in 1997. The success of the Aero 2 also paved the way for Ian to become a well-regarded engineer and team manager, heading race-winning teams in Formula Ford, Formula 2000, Formula Renault and Formula Mazda, and engineering Indy Lights and Formula Atlantic cars for Bordin Racing, Brian Stewart Racing, Mike Shank Racing and Sierra Sierra.

Likewise, Matt was exposed to racing from an early age. His father and uncle competed in vintage racing and Matt took enough interest in the mechanical side to pursue a career. He enrolled in the mechanics' training program with the Jim Russell school at Sears Point, California, then spent a year with Brian Stewart Racing working on an Indy Lights car before coming to AIM in 2001. He has worked on crews fielding Formula 2000, Formula Renault and Formula Mazda cars.



Matt Wivell's attention to detail is second to none. In the four years he's been with AIM, his car has never failed in a race.

Hard Work and Respect

Matt loves being around race cars and it shows in his work.

"Matt is committed and always puts in 110%," Mark said. "He wants to win and always prepares a perfect car."

Ian added, "Matt takes ultimate pride in his work to put the most reliable, well-prepared car on the track at all times. In the four years and over 40 races that he has prepared cars for Mark, I can't remember a single mechanical failure in a race."

Mark must take some credit for that incredible record too. Ian and Matt agree that he is easy on the car. Indeed, he seems to view it as a responsibility.

"Having respect for the equipment is important," Mark said. "A driver can reduce wear and tear by truly understanding how the equipment works. I think the best drivers are smooth and know how to go fast without breaking the car."

Perhaps Mark should have applied that philosophy to himself last year. In August he broke his ankle while having a little [fun with a tube and a ski boat](#) and cited that as the low point of his season. He was especially disappointed as it caused him to miss his home race at Mosport. However, that low led to a high when he raced at Road Atlanta, still walking on crutches, and [finished fourth](#).



Ian Willis holds a lot of responsibility. He manages AIM's Formula Mazda Team, engineers for Mark Wilkins and, in his spare time, helps run the company.

Over the years, Ian and Matt have witnessed Mark's evolution first hand. "He has developed into a great driver with tremendous ability to sort out a car," Ian said. "When you work with someone for that long in a pressure situation such as racing, you take a great deal of respect and admiration for the other person's abilities. Mark has a positive attitude and gives 100% at all times."

For Ian, the work must seem endless. He engineers Mark's car and manages the Mazda team, which includes budgeting, contracts, sponsor relations, personnel, and logistics. Furthermore, as a partner in AIM Autosport, he has the responsibility of helping steer the company's operations. He often works long hours tending to his assorted duties.

"Ian does it all," enthused Mark. "From engineering to team operations, he does it impeccably."

Despite the workload and the stress that comes from it, Ian doesn't get worked up. Matt reported that Ian is a very easy-going boss.

Have Fun

Despite the ups and downs of racing, AIM Autosport always manages to have fun. Whether pulling a practical joke at the track, letting loose when the racing's done or laughing at an embarrassing moment, levity is an important ingredient of AIM's success.

"It's always a tough balance between work-hard and play-hard," said Ian. "But I think this is why AIM is successful. We are able to find that balance by being serious and having fun at the same time."

Indeed, it's important to let loose and relieve tension, especially in high-pressure situations. Everyone at AIM wants to win... badly. They make their own pressure in addition to soaking up external pressures. That can lead to stress and stress brings mistakes.

Matt believes having a laugh is essential. "The key to a successful weekend at the track is having fun," he said. "I think AIM Autosport sets the bar. We always have a good time."



Mark Wilkins came to AIM in 2001 and doesn't intend to leave anytime soon.

Probably everyone at AIM has had a go at a practical joke, and drivers love getting into the act too. Ian recalls the time Mark and James Hinchcliffe tried to make it appear someone broke into his rental car and stole the radio. Luckily, they're better drivers than actors, but Ian admits they had him going at first.

What's Next?

Mark will now move on from Formula Mazda and enter selected races in the Rolex Sports Car Series, driving a 2006 Porsche GT3. Watch for Mark's sports car debut in the #71 Doncaster Porsche at this weekend's Rolex 24. Tune in to Speed for coverage.

Mark's graduation does not mean the end of the road for Wilkins, Willis and Wivell. A yet-to-be-announced campaign will see them together again this year. Watch for details soon.

As the end of the winter break comes into view and the lure of a new season quickens pulses, the Three W's are chomping at the bit. They know the season ahead will be very demanding. They know they will experience joy, elation, apprehension, amusement, pride, frayed nerves, frustration, anger, fatigue, bitter disappointment and a thousand other things, good and bad. And, they know they will love every minute of it.