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**ART**

**RODRIGUES TO CARRY THE FLAG  
OF MACAU'S NEW RACING TALENT**

RENATO MARQUES

## GBA CUP SPLITS CATEGORIES TO ATTEMPT STABILITY

**T**HE Greater Bay Area (GBA) GT Cup has probably experienced the most changes of any Macau Grand Prix racing event.

This year's GBA GT Cup will feature another change when it is split into two categories, one dedicated to GT4 specifications and the other to GT3 machinery.

Although GT4 and GT3 look similar and often use the same road car model, their specifications differ, with GT3 being the more powerful and, consequently, faster.

GT4s are closer to the homologated, standard road vehicle, sharing most of their parts with common automobiles, while the GT3s are heavily engineered and tuned vehicles with many special parts.

Consequently, racing a GT3 car carries a heftier price tag due to the car itself as well as the team necessary to operate and maintain the car in peak condition.

GT3 category racing also requires drivers to possess better driving skills and experience to control the car and take advantage of its added racing capabilities.

For this year's Macau GP, and due to the split into two categories, the GBA Cup will feature famous names, particularly in the GT3 line-up, including two-time Macau GT Cup winner Darryl O'Young, Fanatec GT World Challenge Asia GT3 Silver champion Ling Kang, and Ma-



cau racer Kevin Tse who won this race in 2019 when it was in the GT4 category.

For the GT4 entries, 2022 winner Liang Jia Tong returns, as does runner-up Luo Kai Luo. Also racing are locals Kel-

vin Leong and Ip Un Hou who have been part of the former Macau Roadsports race, which has been completely revamped this year.

For others like Lai Chi Hou, this will be a new opportunity

in this category after a first taste of it in last year's event.

Although it has often been marred by racing incidents disrupting the normal racing pace, the GBA GT Cup race is popular among fans who easily recog-

nize the sportscar models involved including Aston Martin Vantage, Audi R8, BMW M4, Lamborghini Huracan, McLaren 570S, Mercedes GT, Porsche 911 and Cayman and Toyota Supra, among others.

## TCR Asia Challenge Regional contenders aim for the gold



RENATO MARQUES

**S**TARTING last year, the TCR Asia Challenge will this year continue to bring fierce competition among regional racers of the TCR touring cars category.

Without last year's glamour, when it was launched to represent the historical Macau Guia Race for touring cars, this year the TCR Asia Challenge race's attractiveness is based on the clash between local and Hong Kong racers with many well-known and very experienced names participating.

Hong Kong's Lo Sze Ho, second last year, and long-time Macau Grand Prix competitors Henry Lee Junior and Paul Poon top the list, along with Macau's Wong Kiang Kuan, Ip Tak Meng, Jerónimo Badaraco, Lam Ka Chun, Chan Weng Tong, Cheong Chi On, Ng Kin Veng, and Wong Chun Hao.

The entry list also includes internet star and Ma-

laysian driver, Leona Chin, a racer famous on the internet for her hilariously funny prank videos.

But do not get Chin wrong, she is not on the track to "play funny," fiercely competing in many racing series on her home soil, Malaysia, and also in mainland China.

In the end, all of them are aiming for one thing only, which is the top spot on the Macau podium, with respective laurels and credits.

The race is always interesting for spectators who follow the easily recognized cars: the Honda Type R; Cupra TCR; Volkswagen Golf GTI; Audi RS3 and other models involved in the race.

The TCR Asia Challenge goes out on track on Saturday (Nov. 11) at 8:45 a.m. for Free Practice with two Qualifying sessions on the same day from 12:10 p.m.

Two races are scheduled for Sunday (Nov. 12), Race 1 at 9:05 a.m. and Race 2 at 2 p.m., of nine laps each.



Tiago Rodrigues



Bianca Bustamante

RENATO MARQUES

# Formula 4 Added excitement anticipated for this year's F4 race

RENATO MARQUES

**F**ormula 4 (F4) will be taking part once again of this year's two-weekend celebratory program of the 70th edition of the Macau Grand Prix event.

Initially introduced in 2020 when Covid-19 restrictions made hosting the "Queen of Races" (Formula 3) impossible, the F4 race is poised for its best-ever year, even if the return of the FIA F3 World Cup, featuring some of the rising stars of the sport, has stolen some of its "thunder."

Unlike previous years, the Macau F4 Race will not be featuring the Chinese F4 series but, instead, will be included in the revival of the Formula 4 South East

Asia Championship, with the special addition of some local and talented young bloods and a few experienced Asian racers.

Notable among them are the local two-time winner of the race, Charles Leong, and the rising Philippines star Bianca Bustamante.

Although it will be the first time for Bustamante on Guia Circuit, the 18-year-old Filipino national has been racing in Macau (on Karting) from a young age and has been coached by famous names of local and international racing panorama such as Hong Kong's Darryl O'Young.

Currently participating in several worldwide championships and series, including the inaugural F1 Academy series, Bus-

tamante has won Asian karting championship races in Macau (at the Coloane Karting Circuit) several times, being a constant presence in the region at the beginning of her career.

She will race in Macau under the BlackArts Racing colors in an all-female team that includes Hong Kong racer Vivian Siu.

Another important addition to the entry list of the 2023 Macau F4 Race is the extremely talented rookie, Tiago Rodrigues.

Racing under the colors of Asia Racing Team, Rodrigues aims to show his skills following a season, at the Chinese F4 Championship, first, and the 2023 F4 South East Asia Championship, later, that have delivered nothing but success.

Although it is the first time Rodrigues has ventured into the F4 category, he currently occupies the top spot in both championships and will be keen to go head-to-head with one of his mentors, Charles Leong, who will return once again to the Guia Circuit in F4 machinery with SJM Theodore PREMA Racing.

Quickly adapting to the slightly different F4 car, Rodrigues took the first round of the SEA Championship by storm, finishing on the podium in all three races held at the Zhuzhou International Circuit, China, with two second positions (one by demotion due to penalty after winning the race) and one third place.

To spice things up, another

two top contenders at the SEA Championship, Australian Jack Beeton and Rodrigues's teammate at ART, Kevin Xiao, will also be racing in Macau.

Beeton has won races 1 and 3 in the Zhuzhou round and Xiao won race 2 on the same weekend in consequence of a 10-second penalty given to Rodrigues for causing a collision.

Other names to look out for include UK racers Arvid Lindblad and Freddie Slater racing with Leong at SJM Theodore PREMA Racing, as well as the Taiwanese Ethan Ho and Enzo Yeh.

Japanese Miki Koyama and Ryuji Kumita also join the group of racers with enough experience to make this race unpredictable and one not to be missed.

F4 goes on track from 7:45 a.m. on Nov. 11 for the Free Practice followed by the Qualifying session scheduled at 3:45 p.m.

Two races are scheduled for Sunday (Nov. 12), a Qualifying Race (8 laps) starting at 8 a.m. and the Final Race (12 laps) at 3:40 p.m.

## Interview Local rookie with 'strong desire' for a good result in first GP

RENATO MARQUES

**M**AKING his debut at the Guia Circuit, local teen Tiago Rodrigues is hoping for the best for his first-ever Grand Prix weekend.

The 16-year-old is well aware of the Guia Street Circuit's challenges and the strong opposition of more experienced racers but still, he is keen for a Top 5 finish, he has told the Times.

"I have hope and a strong

desire to reach a good result at the Macau circuit. My biggest goal is to be in the top five and achieve a good result," Rodrigues said.

"Given the level of competition, I understand this could be considered ambitious, but I think this is a realistic goal I can achieve with hard work."

"I understand that I will have a difficult task ahead of me as a relatively inexperienced driver in this type of

Formula 4 car as I only have one race experience with the car in Zhuzhou. This is particularly important since some of my [race] rivals have already had over ten races with this car," he said.

Prepared to take advantage of every minute on track to achieve his goal, Rodrigues noted the importance of being able to quickly optimize the car's performance at the early stage of the event.

"I intend to collaborate

in a very clear and objective way with my engineering team, considering both my individual preferences and the unique characteristics of the Macau track."

The short track time (only 45 minutes of Free Practice before the Qualifying session) can be a conditioning factor, particularly if there are interruptions to this session but Rodrigues is in high spirits and will face any adversity that crosses his path.



Tiago Rodrigues



# MACAU ROADSPORT CHALLENGE NEW CAR, ADDED COMPETITIVITY

RENATO MARQUES

**R**ETAINING only the name from previous editions, the Macau Roadsport Challenge will this year present a completely new racing series to local Grand Prix spectators.

Featuring only Subaru BRZ or Toyota GR86 (duplicate car models), the series has replaced the previous Macau Touring Car Series racing categories that included the 1.6-liter Turbo engine powered cars and the heavily tuned 2.0-liter and above engine categories.

All previous models have

been relegated to the garage to make way for the new 2.4-liter naturally aspirated models.

This new race will be called the Macau Roadsport Challenge on the first weekend and will also be part of the main weekend, this time under the name of Macau Grand Prix 70th Anniversary Challenge.

To learn more about the differences between the series and what to expect, the Times spoke to a veteran local racer participating in the event, Rui Valente.

Valente told the Times that among the major differences between the previous and this

new series is the fact that, for the new cars, the regulations do not allow many changes, having the vehicles keep most of their original parts, as per the road models.

"Both the engines and gearboxes need to be original and cannot be touched," he explained, noting that limited changes are allowed for the suspension, wheels and other parts of the vehicles.

He noted that even the exhaust manifold needs to be kept original, with changes only possible to the final exhaust line.

Limitations also extend to how low the cars sit on the road

as well as on the wheel's camber angles which have also been reduced from the previous series.

Except for the brakes, pretty much all other parts are strictly regulated, which makes the cars "more uniform" in performance terms.

Asked about the costs of the new series, Valente said this is a "less costly" series with a total investment for a car's acquisition and preparation between MOP320,000 and MOP330,000. In comparison, he said for previous 1.6T cars, "to have a competitive car, a racer needed to invest at least MOP500,000."

## ADDED FOCUS ON THE DRIVER

As the new cars are less powerful and consequently slower and more equal on track, this race is likely to produce a tighter contention with cars running at very similar speeds and grouped together, Valente also said. He noted that while this can "produce a better show for those watching" it forces drivers into added physical and mental effort as "there will be no moments to rest."

Asked about his expectations for the race, the driver said the qualifying session will be decisive with anyone aiming to win or to step on the final podium needing to try to start the race in the first five spots.

He also added that the race is short (8 laps) so the first two to three laps will be decisive to establish the final classification so everyone will "attack with all they have got from lights out."

## SCHEDULE

### November 11 (Saturday)

- 6:30 - 7:00 Circuit Inspection
- 7:45 - 8:30 Macau Formula 4 Race - Free Practice
- 8:45 - 9:15 TCR Asia Challenge - Free Practice
- 9:30 - 10:00 Macau Roadsport Challenge - Free Practice
- 10:15 - 10:45 Greater Bay Area GT Cup (GT4) - Free Practice
- 11:00 - 11:30 Greater Bay Area GT Cup (GT3) - Free Practice
- 12:10 - 12:40 TCR Asia Challenge - Qualifying 1
- 12:45 - 13:00 TCR Asia Challenge - Qualifying 2
- 13:15 - 13:45 Macau Roadsport Challenge - Qualifying
- 14:00 - 14:30 Greater Bay Area GT Cup (GT4) - Qualifying
- 14:45 - 15:15 Greater Bay Area GT Cup (GT3) - Qualifying
- 15:45 - 16:15 Macau Formula 4 Race - Qualifying

### November 12 (Sunday)

- 6:30 - 7:00 Circuit Inspection
- 8:00 - 8:25 Macau Formula 4 Race - Qualifying Race (8 laps)
- 9:05 - 9:40 TCR Asia Challenge - Race 1 (9 laps)
- 10:20 - 10:50 Macau Roadsport Challenge - Race (8 laps)
- 11:30 - 12:00 Greater Bay Area GT Cup (GT4) - Race (8 laps)
- 12:50 - 13:20 Greater Bay Area GT Cup (GT3) - Race (8 laps)
- 14:00 - 14:35 TCR Asia Challenge - Race 2 (9 laps)
- 15:40 - 16:20 Macau Formula 4 Race - Final Race (12 laps)