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INTERVIEW

‘TO LEARN AND ENJOY’ ARE THE GOALS

MAXI MANHÃO, GBA GT CUP DEBUTANT

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FIA F4 WORLD CUP

Young blood and hungry for wins

RENATO MARQUES

Dires Van Langendonck



THIS year marks the second edition of the FIA F4 World Cup on the streets of Macau. Junior racers from around the world will converge on the Guia Circuit to prove themselves against one another in a showcase that could help them earn a place in a Formula 1 driver academy.

The 2026 event features an expanded 24-car grid representing 12 teams from 10 countries, a significant change from the inaugural edition, which followed an arrive-and-drive format.

This time, established teams are competing under their own names and with their reputations on the line, selecting their strongest drivers to represent them in the World Cup.

On paper, several drivers stand above the rest of the field based on their proven skills and season results. Yet Macau is no stranger to turning favorites into footnotes and outsiders into heroes, which is why the FIA has selected the Guia Circuit as the stage for this showdown.

Dries van Langendonck – The man to beat.

Few drivers arrive in Macau with higher expectations than Dries van Langendonck. The Belgian has established himself as one of Formula 4's standout performers in 2026, having won both the Formula Winter Series and the British F4 titles.

A member of the McLaren Driver Development Program, he has also benefited from the guidance of four-time Formula 1 world champion Max Verstappen.

With 17 race victories during his 2026 campaign, van Langendonck has the credentials to challenge for the title.

Racing with Prema Racing, one of the most successful teams in junior single-seater racing, the Belgian has both a strong record and the backing to turn his potential into results.

But then there is the Guia Circuit. Unlike any other track on the conventional F4 calendar, it is treacherous and ruthless. It leaves no room for errors and no time to make amends. Any mistake, even a small one, can seriously affect the outcome, and many would-be champions have learned that lesson.

Close behind van Langendonck is Luka Sammalisto, the Finnish Italian F4 champion and another serious candidate for the World Cup title. He will be eager to use the opportunity to prove his worth.

The Finnish driver arrives in Macau after a successful campaign in one of the world's most competitive junior single-seater championships and will want to add a major trophy to his record.

Representing US Racing, a team co-founded by former Formula 1 driver and 1995 Macau Grand Prix winner Ralf Schumacher, Sammalisto has demonstrated his ability to deliver under championship pressure, a quality that could prove important around Guia.

Teaming up with van Langendonck at Prema, Turkish driver Alp Aksoy will also aim to benefit from the team's support and expertise as he seeks to showcase his qualities and contend for a top finish.

Alongside Sammalisto, he was one of the best performers in Italian F4, finishing second in the championship and topping the rookie classifica-

FIA TCR World Tour

Title showdown as Azcona leads Hyundai's charge

RENATO MARQUES

Miikel Azcona and Norbert Michelisz



Santiago Urrutia



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THE 2026 Kumho FIA TCR World Tour heads into its final rounds on the streets of Macau, where Mikel Azcona must defend his narrow championship lead against Norbert Michelisz and Santiago Urrutia.

The battle for the TCR World Tour crown will go down to the wire as the championship's top contenders face their final test.

After seven rounds of intense competition, Mikel Azcona arrives at the season finale as the championship leader with 445 points, 33 ahead of his teammate Norbert Michelisz of BRC Hyundai N Squadra Corse.

Geely Cyan Racing's Santiago Urrutia remains firmly in contention, six points behind Michelisz and 39 behind Azcona.

With two races scheduled on the 6.12-kilometer Guia Circuit, the championship remains open, and Macau's narrow streets could prove decisive in determining the champion.

Azcona heads into the final weekend in the strongest position. The Spaniard, who was crowned World Touring Car champion in 2022, has amassed a points advantage that could prove vital to retaining his lead and securing another title.

However, the Hyundai driver cannot afford to take a defensive approach in Macau. His teammate Michelisz, a multiple touring car champion and Macau specialist, remains a close challenger. With his experience and proven ability to perform under pressure, he poses one of the biggest threats to Azcona's ambitions.

The biggest contender outside the Hyundai camp is Uruguay's Santiago Urrutia. With 406 points, the Geely Cyan Racing driver has kept himself in the championship fight and will be determined to close the deficit in the final two races.

Only 39 points separate the three leading contenders, making qualifying positions, race starts and incidents potentially decisive.

GEELY 'ARMADA' COULD SHAPE THE OUTCOME

While Urrutia leads Geely Cyan Racing's championship challenge, his teammates could play an equally significant role during the final weekend.

Thed Björk sits in fourth with 353 points, followed by Yann Ehrlacher in sixth with 333 and Ma Qing Hua in seventh with 286. Although their championship prospects are more remote, their presence gives Geely a four-car lineup of experienced drivers capable of challenging at the front and putting pressure on Azcona's title bid.

Geely also arrives in Macau leading the teams' championship with 911 points, 48 ahead of BRC Hyundai N Squadra Corse. That battle adds another layer of intrigue to a weekend already charged with championship tension.

Still, Hyundai has its own strengths. In its bid to


Alp Aksoy



Luka Sammalisto

tion. His greater experience with the team, as well as his communication and strategic skills, could give him an added advantage.

MP Motorsport's Kasper Schormans and Rocco Coronel are also two names to remember. Both have been leading contenders in Spanish F4, and the Dutch pair have shown they have the pace and preparation to challenge the favorites.

A member of the Red Bull Junior Team, Coronel also benefits from the expertise of his father, Tom, a long-time racer who has competed at Guia in both Formula 3 and touring cars.

Schormans was crowned Spanish F4 champion, finishing 47 points ahead of Noah Monteiro. The title alone makes him a driver to watch.

Racing in Macau under the well-known and successful local banner of SJM Theodore Racing will be Noah Monteiro and Oleksandr Bondarev.

Like Coronel, Monteiro also has the benefit of his father's experience. He is the son of former Formula 1 driver and Macau Grand Prix winner Tiago Monteiro.

Noah finished second in the Spanish F4 championship behind Schormans and will be looking to end the season on a high note with a stronger result in Macau.

Bondarev, a member of the Williams Driver Academy, brings experience from Italian F4 and an impressive victory on his Formula Regional European Championship debut at Imola in October.

He has shown he can adapt to more powerful machinery and deliver immediately, making the Ukrainian a particularly intriguing prospect at Guia.

The F4 World Cup will also feature a local team, Asia Racing Team RFN, and one local driver: 15-year-old Vernice Lao, who will make her Guia Circuit debut after a brief stint in the Chinese F4 Championship.

defend the title, the team will also field Néstor Girolami, winner of Macau's first race last year.

The Argentine has claimed four victories in TCR South America this season and will join Azcona and Michelisz for a three-car assault on the finale. His experience could prove especially valuable as Hyundai targets both titles.

EXPANDED ENTRY INCLUDES REGIONAL WILD CARDS

As usual, the TCR World Tour event will feature an expanded entry list that includes regional competitors, among them Hong Kong's Lo Sze Ho, a runner-up in the 2022 Guia Race, and local driver Marcus Cheong.

The regional entries bring the field to 30 cars, the largest grid since 2020. The larger field will add to the challenge, as traffic, safety car interruptions and potential incidents could also significantly influence the outcome of the two races.

GP Memories
The car and the legend

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BACK in 1990, before he went on to win seven Formula 1 world championships, Michael Schumacher made his mark on the streets of Macau.

Driving a Reynard 903 powered by a Volkswagen engine, Schumacher secured one of the Grand Prix's most dramatic victories in a wheel-to-wheel battle with Finn Mika Häkkinen.

Today, the iconic Formula 3 single-seater is a standout attraction at the Grand Prix Museum and is arguably among its most valuable exhibits.

Powered by a 2.0-liter engine producing about 200 horsepower, the lightweight Reynard 903 combined advanced aerodynamics with a chassis made of carbon fiber, aluminum and Kevlar, and weighed approximately 550 kilograms.

Despite being an impressive piece of engineering and technology for its time, what makes this car special is above all its history at the Guia Circuit.

Schumacher's fierce battle with Häkkinen culminated in a controversial last-lap collision during the second leg of the 1990 race. Despite damage to his rear wing, Schumacher crossed the finish line to claim a victory that became part of racing folklore.

Now on display at the Grand Prix Museum, the restored Reynard 903 is more than a historic racing car. It stands as a reminder of the determination, talent and fierce competitiveness that propelled Schumacher to the pinnacle of Formula 1, while underscoring Macau's historic role as a proving ground for future champions.

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GP INTERVIEW
MAXI MANHÃO, GBA GT CUP RACER

'To learn and to enjoy' with next year in mind

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LOCAL racer Maximiano Manhão, son of veteran Macanese touring car racer Manuel Manhão, is competing at the Guia Circuit for the first time.

With a racing career centered primarily on karting and brief stints in F4 and touring cars through the Roadsport Challenge, Maxi has taken a major step this year by entering the Greater Bay Area (GBA) GT Cup, which uses GT4-spec cars.

In an exclusive interview with the Times, the driver shared his ambitions and expectations for his debut and his plans for the future.

Macau Daily Times (MDT): For your first race at the Guia Circuit, what are your expectations? How are you preparing for this challenge?

Maxi Manhão (MM): I am excited, but I don't expect much beyond enjoying the experience and learning as much as possible from the professional drivers. Each time I drive, I learn something new: what's good, what's bad, what causes damage and what makes for a good lap time. It's all part of the learning process.

MDT: Like several other racers this year, you're following in your father's footsteps. How does that feel? Is it an advantage or added pressure?

MM: It is not just because I am following in my dad's footsteps; motorsport, or cars in general, has always been my passion. As for pressure, I handle it well because it pushes me to go faster.

MDT: Moving from karts to a GT car is quite a step. How were your first experiences in the car, and what have you learned in the qualifying races that you can apply during the Grand Prix?

MM: Karting really helped me learn the fundamentals of motorsport, but GT racing is quite different. While I still rely on the basics I learned in karting, I need to learn more about the McLaren's characteristics. But in some ways, it is much more comfortable than driving a kart.

Following faster drivers in the qualifying races also taught me about my car's limits and the differences in driving style between GT cars, karts and formula cars.

MDT: Six years ago, we spoke with you in another interview about your dream of racing at the Guia Circuit. At the time, that dream was still some way from becoming reality. Now that you have achieved it, what's next?

MM: Fulfilling one of my childhood dreams, or ticking off one of my bucket-list items, is something I could never have imagined. My next step is to improve as a driver for next year, since plans are already in place.

I want to thank all my supporters, especially the LW World Racing team, for supporting me throughout the year.

GP FEATURE

Same names, different rides for two World Cups

RENATO MARQUES

ALTHOUGH the 73rd Macau Grand Prix continues to feature two formula racing World Cups, F4 and FR, as its main attractions, the cars taking to the Guia Circuit from Nov. 19 differ significantly from those used last year.

In 2025, the FIA F4 World Cup used the Ligier-branded Mygale M21-F4 chassis and a 1.3-liter Alpine turbocharged inline-four engine, a specification that, as the Times reported, was used only in the French, Chinese and Indian championships.

Oreca prepared the Renault/Alpine-based engine, which was reported to produce about 160 horsepower on average.

This year, the same racing category will use the Tatuus F4-T421 (F1A) chassis, paired with a 1.4-liter turbocharged Abarth engine prepared by Italian company AutoTecnica Motori (ATM). ATM will supply all engines for the FIA FR World Cup and the FIA F4 World Cup.

According to ATM, this engine delivers 174 horsepower, unless restricted by championship regulations.

The engine is based on the Abarth (Fiat) 500 road car unit but has been specifically tuned for racing in this category.

On paper, although the cars are from the same generation, this year's F4 cars could be faster than last year's, with a higher top speed potentially giving them an advantage on the long straight from the R Bend, the last turn before the start-finish line, to the Lisboa Bend, as well as on the uphill section from São Francisco to the Maternity Bend.

As for the chassis, the F4-T421 is the same model used in several F4 championships this year, as well as in the FIA Motorsport Games.


F4 new car

FR, BUT DIFFERENT

For the FR category, ATM has also announced plans to bring its new ATM163T engine to Macau this year. The FR Gen2 engine is the first three-cylinder engine used in a formula racing category.

It debuted this year in the FR European Championship alongside the new Tatuus T-326 chassis, which will also make its Macau debut.

The ATM163T is based on Toyota's G16E engine, originally developed by Toyota's Gazoo Racing (GR) division and first introduced in a road car in January 2020 in the GR Yaris.

ATM developed the ATM163T for FR racing in collaboration with Japan's renowned TOM'S Racing.

According to the company, the 1.6-liter engine delivers 270 horsepower, replacing the first-generation 1.75-liter turbocharged Alfa Romeo engine, which could produce between 280 and 350 horsepower, depending on the championship specifications.

In summary, both the F4 and FR World Cups will feature different chassis and engines this year, with the new packages expected to offer improved performance.

According to Tatuus, the T-326 "brings a major step forward in terms of performance, aerodynamics and safety." The new chassis is designed to be lighter, more stable and more responsive.

The car also features an updated chassis architecture and revised suspension intended to improve steering precision and overall balance through corners. Its aerodynamics have also been revised to maximize downforce while reducing drag.

THE BOOST BUTTON

The new Gen2 FR car also has a technical feature that produces an effect similar to a system introduced in Formula 1 several years ago.

Known as the Drag Reduction System (DRS), it was used in Formula 1 between 2011 and 2025. The system allows a driver to press a button on the steering wheel to open a hinged flap on the rear wing when attempting to overtake.

Opening the flap reduces aerodynamic drag and downforce, giving the car a straight-line speed boost, typically of 4 to 12 km/h or more, to help with overtaking. Although F1 replaced the system this year, DRS is still used in F2 and F3.

While not exactly a DRS system, the push-to-pass (P2P) feature used in FR allows drivers to press a button to boost their cars' performance by temporarily increasing engine power.

The system gives drivers a limited number of activations per race, typically five, with a maximum of 15 seconds per activation, to access additional engine performance. Its use is restricted during qualifying and subject to specific rules covering race starts and safety car periods.

According to available information, each activation provides about 20 to 25 additional horsepower for 10 to 15 seconds. Drivers must therefore decide when and where to use the extra power to maximize its effectiveness during a race.

SCHEDULE



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FR 'push-to-pass' button