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Local pool of racers untapped

HAVE young Malaysian motorsports talent been ignored when compared to those in soccer, badminton, hockey or swimming?

Motorsports are growing at such a rapid pace in Malaysia but the pool of local talent is left largely untapped. There is a definite need for some form of assistance from the relevant bodies if the desire to attain Formula One class is to be achieved.

The biggest obstacle to the young motorsports talent is the lack of financial backing, which led to a lack of participation in local events.

"What needs to be established is a scheme for promising young drivers. Racers are selected, groomed, financially-assisted and given the proper exposure to turn them into professionals," said Shah Alam Motorsports Paradise joint managing director Hanifah Yoong Abdullah.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's keen interest in promoting Malaysia as a hub for motorsports in the region is reason enough for extending more assistance to our motorsports talent.

The new Sepang circuit, currently under construction, and playing host to the opening round of the 1999 Formula One World Championships has also meant a leap in sponsorship and advertising dollars by Malaysian firms.

Hanifah suggested motorsports be included in the list of Rakan Muda or Rakan Sukan events, because of their appeal to the younger generation.

He strongly believed that motorsports are one area Malaysians could excel in provided they are exposed to the right opportunities.

"What the Youth and Sports Ministry should do is re-examine where their funds are being directed to. They should identify sports where Malaysians can do well and concentrate on building their strength there," he said.

Today, the only scheme for young talent is the one introduced by Marlboro three years ago, where the top riders in the Marlboro Malaysian Cub Prix are given the opportunity to train in Barcelona with former motorcycle champion Kenny Roberts.

The proof of Malaysian motorsporting ability is in riders such as Chao Kit Choong and Tai Seng Kooi.

Karamjit Singh is today regarded as one of Asia's best rally drivers.

Twenty-one-year-old Shahrol Yuzy from the Petronas Sprinta team once beat a field of more experienced riders to win a race in Australia.

Other notable young motorcycle racers in the Asian region include Wazi Abdul Hamid, Shahrizam Tamin, Chao Chee Hou and Chow Yan Kit.

Alexander Yoong, billed as Malaysia's best hope to qualify for Formula One, is currently in the United Kingdom participating in single-seater racing to gain experience.

The latest example of Malaysian excellence abroad is seen in our very own Proton Satria team which earlier this month competed in the Safari Rally in Africa finishing top of its class.

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