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Team Proton-Pert zoom home

Zakri Baharudin

TEAM Proton-Pert, steered by rally ace Karamjit Singh, Tommy Lee and Jimmy Low, dominated the inaugural Silverstone Merdeka Millennium Endurance to emerge as overall champions at the Sepang International Circuit yesterday.

The seasoned trio, who flagged off with 55 other cars at 12.10am on Merdeka Day, completed a total of 253 laps in the 12-hour race to finish three laps ahead of Alex Yoong, Adam Lokman and Saladin Mazlan in the TVR Chimera.

Proton-Pert averaged 116.53kph around the 5.54km circuit while Adam, a former Formula Asia driver, secured the race's fastest lap in the 340-bhp TVR with 2:36.69.

Marcus Chye, Glen Zampatti and his brother Ross, in the 1.8-litre Lotus Elise, finished a distant third 14 laps behind the leaders.

The team of Aminuddin Omar, Mokhzani Mahathir and Adam Azman claimed fourth position in their Mitsubishi Evo VI with 237 laps followed by the second TVR entry driven by Jeffrey Zhin, Ron Lim and Admi Shahrul.

"We may have had very little sleep but we are very happy with this victory," said Karamjit after the podium celebrations yesterday.

"Apart from a fantastic car, it was good strategy which won us this race. I am also impressed with the grippy tyres which lasted throughout the 12 hours."

He said the team switched drivers every 1 hour and 10 minutes and that the Proton-Pert machine, with 280 horses, didn't have much of an edge over the rest of the field as it weighs 1,400kg.

"We are just hoping that next year's race won't be longer than it is," he added.

Rookies Norhisham Mahayodin, Halim Razak and Sutan Salihin headed the Category B list to clinch the title in 231 laps. Their Proton Putra 1.8 machine was sixth overall.

* BIG plans are in the pipeline for the second Silverstone Merdeka Millennium Endurance next year but for now, the organisers were just relieved the inaugural event which ended yesterday was a huge success.

At the very least, a good crowd turnout, most of whom stayed until the end of the 12-hour event at noon yesterday, and excellent organisation had enabled SIC's newly appointed general manager Azmi Murad to breathe a sigh of relief.

"I must thank God that this race was completed without any untoward incidents," said Azmi in Sepang yesterday.

"We didn't have much time to put this show on the road but cooperation from the government sector, private corporations, sponsors, media, local NGOs and our experienced staff at SIC had made it all possible.

"Personally, the race was a good training ground for me in light of the Formula One.

"The F1 is a very big event for us and everyone working at SIC and Malaysia Airports Holding Berhad are working very hard for it."

He said SIC will be planning the next endurance race based on the feedback they got.

"We don't know if we would make it a 24-hour race just yet. Maybe we should run a few more 12-hour races before doing that."

Of the 56 cars which started the race at 12.10pm on Merdeka Day, only 40 had managed to last the 12-hour duration.