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Customs impounds race cars

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THE Malaysian Super Series (MSS), initiated by the Sepang International Circuit in its efforts to boost development of motorsports, has given Malaysia a lesson in the organisation of a regulated national motorsports agenda.

Unseen by many during the Japan GT Championship last weekend, a party from the Royal Customs and Excise Department impounded all cars competing in the Supercar and Super Sixteen category of the MSS, a support race for the JGTC.

Cars competing in that category, except one of a local make, weren't allowed to leave the circuit until cleared of all tax requirements. Until yesterday, nine cars (seven Honda Civics and one Porsche) were still impounded.

One of those is believed to have been brought in from Singapore, while the others were reassembled half-cuts from scrap yards, a common practice among local racers which lowers the cost of racing by almost 70 per cent.

However, such a practice does not make these cars road-legal and the Customs and Excise Department officers are said to be "figuring out ways" to tax these vehicles since they are basically imported body parts of cars that are reassembled locally.

Another common practice is the tube-frame chasis, which means the shell of the vehicle is reconstructed with lighter material, thus relieving the car of its registered chassis, making it a thoroughbred racing car.

No official statement has been issued by the SIC but one is expected from Sports Minister Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein who was present at the circuit when the incident occurred.

It is believed that Hishammuddin may soon announce some form of guidelines which would relieve local racers from such a situation in the future.

However, the excitement generated through the MSS, which is still in its infancy after only two legs, may be staring at being limited to an all-local make race judging from the despairing responses from most Supercar and Super Sixteen teams.

Their argument is simple. Based on this year's budget announcement by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, motorsports products are exempted from tax and these vehicles (reassembled half-cuts) have been rebuilt from scrap.

A door is now open for local motorsports authorities and those in power to look at the Malaysian Super Series as an avenue to build Malaysian motorsports. The drivers and local mechanics are clearly beginning to find ways of making motorsports more accessible to all and they should be supported.

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