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Sports-Motorsports (MME)

TEAM MERITUS RACING WINS 12-HOUR ENDURANCE RACE

SEPANG, Aug 30 (Bernama) -- The Team Meritus Racing, a Malaysian-Irish owned team formed in 1995, with 12 Asian motorsports titles, won the fourth edition of the 12-hour Merdeka Millennium Endurance (MME) Race 2003, held at the Sepang Circuit here today.

The team, which deployed two units of their latest Porsche Carrera Cup GT3, won the race through the trio of Firhat Mokhzani, Chin Tzer Jinn and Eric Yeo by clocking a total 12 hours, 1 minute, 46.492 seconds to finish the 268 laps.

Naza Racing team, which fielded Nigel Peter Albon, Craig Mark Albon and T.Hammam T. Sulong, secured the second place by in 12'04:08.685s.

The Honda Malaysia Racing team, comprising Kunimitsu Takahashi, Hiroki Kato and Hidetoshi Mitsusada in their Honda Integra, snatched the third place by clocking 12'04:20.362s.

Jinn, who was driving the winning round for the Team Meritus, said he did not expect to win the race although he was very excited of today's race.

"In fact, I'm just 19 years old. Maybe I'm the youngest among the 231 MME drivers," he told reporters after the race.

Firhat, who is also the team manager for Team Meritus, said the team was using the same car which won the race last year.

The 12-hour endurance race started at 10am today with Genji Hashimoto, Charles Kwan and Mathew March of Amprex Motorsports leading the race from the beginning and continued their domination for nearly five hours or 115 laps.

Trailing them closely for the first three hours or 73 laps were the trio of BSA Racing team, Stuart Moseley, Simon Moulton and Kozi Kalaitzidis, who started today's race from the pole position after leading the qualifying rounds yesterday in their newly imported BSA-Radical SR3.

The Jaseri Racing team, comprising Datuk Mokhzani Mahathir and Alex Yoong and Faizal Hakimi Jaafar, was trailing both teams during the first two and half hours or 70 laps in their Porsche GT3.

However at the 93rd lap, the Jaseri Racing team took over the second placing for the next 20 laps before taking over the lead during the 135th lap.

The second team of BSA Racing comprising Jimmy Low, Marco Seefried and Wolf Henzler in the Porsche GT3, trailing for five rounds by Hashimoto and Kwan during the first hour, suddenly put a superb performance by overtaking most of the drivers to secured the fourth placing in the 45th lap.

Jimmy and Marco continued to push their Porsche to the limit and ended in second place after 133 laps, two laps behind the leaders of Mokhzani and Alex.

Team Meritus Racing through its drivers Firhat, Jinn and Eric Yeo in their Porsche GT3 stepped in the race for the top three placings in the 91st lap.

At 5pm or after 160 laps, the first three placings were dominated by the BSA Racing, Team Meritus and Jaseri Racing.

Two hours later or after 202 laps, Low and Seefried of BSA Racing took over the lead followed by Team Meritus and Naza Motorsports.

At 7pm, 10 cars were out of the race, mainly due to mechanical problems.

The Naza Motorsports drivers comprising Albon, Mark Albon and T.Hammam

in their Porsche GT3 later secured the second place during the 222nd lap, a lap behind the leader of Team Meritus. Trailing in third placing was the Jaseri Racing team, two laps behind the Team Meritus.

At 8pm or after 223 laps, a mechanical problem forced favourites Jimmy, Seefried and Henzler out of the race.

Among the teams that were forced to retire due to mechanical problems was Eon Motorsports with their four-wheel drive turbo-charged Proton Waja.

The team comprised two MME winners -- Tommy Lee, the only driver to have won the 12-hour race over three successive years and Keifli Othman who won in 2000 -- and seasoned MME contender Tengku Djan Ley.

At 9pm, Team Meritus was still leading the race, leaving Naza Motorsports team one lap behind, while Jaseri Racing still trailing at the third placing, two laps behind the leader.

However, half an hour before the finish, the Jaseri Racing with Alex Yoong driving the Porsche GT3, was out of the race when the car was rammed from behind by a Honda Civic EK, driven by Azman Hussin.

Azman Hussin suffered light injuries in both legs while Alex suffered a concussion. Both drivers were sent to the Putrajaya Hospital.

The other drivers in Azman team are Rossli Mohamad Yatim and Samsudin Kambali.

With Jaseri Racing team out, the race was open to Team Meritus, Naza Racing, Honda Malaysia and Amprex Motorsports.

During the last lap, Team Meritus pushed their car to the limit to win the race, followed by Naza racing and Honda Malaysia.

The MME is an annual 12-hour endurance race since 2002, organised by the Sepang International Circuit (SIC). As its name suggests, the event is held in conjunction with the National Day celebrations.

For the first time since its inception, the race started at 10am on Aug 30 and finished at 10pm on the same day.

During the first three years, the race was held at 10pm on Aug 30 and finished at 10am on Aug 31, the Merdeka Day.

-- BERNAMA

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