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## Powerboat GP a splashing success

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THE Formula One Powerboat Malaysian Grand Prix at the Mines Resort City on Sunday was again a success. In fact, never was there a doubt that it would be anything but a success, but it answered some important questions.

According to organisers H2O Sports' marketing and communications manager Lisa Hezila, there were more than 100,000 people scattered around the lake including visitors to the F1 Powerboat carnival and those at the Mines Wonderland.

The race, won by Emirates F1 driver Scott Gillman, was also telecast live to a potential television viewership of 250 million people worldwide.

It was even a fitting tribute to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad who will retire on Oct 31.

But the most important answer the race got, if the organisers had the interest of the sport at heart, was what they needed for Malaysians at large to even garner an inkling of interest in high speed boat racing.

Yes, there was seven-time world champion Guido Cappellini around the paddocks. There was the eccentric 2002 race winner Massimo Roggiero and the friendly Francesco Cantando.

There were 23 men who were made to be "the other drivers", as far as the normal Malaysians who went to the Mines Resort City were concerned.

To them, the man that mattered was their own Simon Saw.

It didn't matter to them if Saw was running severely under-prepared for his first F1 race of the year. It didn't even matter whether he was likely to finish last in the race.

That Viemero Spirit of Malaysia pit was the most visited pit throughout the weekend. There were always small crowds behind the fences facing Saw's pit. Some just took pleasure in gazing at the exotic boat which carried the Jalur Gemilang for them.

Others made their feelings known by offering words of encouragement and snapping photographs with their hero of the day.

During the parade of the boats prior to the race, it was when Saw passed by that the crowd was uplifted. He had already done them proud by qualifying 14th fastest.

During the race, in several parts lined with locals, "Simon Saw" was always part of the discussions.

It didn't even matter that he was later reduced to fighting to avoid a total engine blow and barely managed to bring the boat to the finish after suffering mechanical problems from the 14th lap and finished 16th and last among the finishers.

In sports such as these, it is important to sell by having something regular Malaysians can relate to. And not everybody can relate to powerboats, but they can surely relate to one of their own.

And now, Malaysia awaits a better challenge from Saw when Team Spirit of Malaysia competes in the Singapore Grand Prix on Oct 25-26 to trigger the excitement needed for the sport to grow in this country.