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Open battle for 77 cars in 12-hour MME

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YESTERDAY's qualifying saw the number of cars reduced to 77 for today's Merdeka Millennium Endurance Race (MME) at the Sepang Circuit, and it promises to be a cracking 12 hours on the 5.542km circuit.

And while the battle for honours in the lower classes are no less interesting, the main course, the challenge for the overall title has never been as interesting.

As in previous years, pole position is almost meaningless in such races and the BSA Motorsports Radical SR3 could find itself down the order of things should rain or reliability become an issue.

But the BSA team maintained a confident stance after qualifying yesterday with both their cars in one-two positions, and that could well spell trouble for the would be contenders.

Among those who will be strong contenders are the legion of Porsche GT3s, which are the most proven endurance machines in the line-up.

While BSA are counting on works drivers Stuart Moseley, Simon Moulton and Kozi Kalaitzidis in what is the Radical's first outing in Malaysia, team-mates Jimmy Low, Wolf Henzler and Marco Seefried are also able contenders.

The combination of Charles Kwan, Genji Hashimoto and Matthew Marsh in the Amprex BMW M3 may well impress, as well as the Porsche's of the Crest Jaseri Racing Team, G1-Meritus and the other Radical SR3 of Clive Bate, Nick Thomas and Kenji Kawagoe.

Crest Jaseri is made up of Datuk Mokhzani Mahathir, Alex Yoong and Faizal Hakimi Jaafar.

Nigel Albon - the current Porsche Carrera Cup Asia championship leader - is partnering brother Craig and Tunku Hammam Tunku Sulong in the Naza Racing Team Porsche GT3, which could make an impact given the potential of that combination.

Albon and Hammam are the defending champions, as they partnered Tommy Lee to victory in the Naza Jaseri Porsche last year, and this time Lee has been replaced by Craig.

If superstitions counted for anything, then Lee would be favoured to take his fourth title in a row, but that would be a surprise this time around as with Tengku Djan Ley Tengku Mahaleel and Keifli Othman on board the Shell-JRD Eon Motorsports Proton Waja 4WD Turbo. Lee only returned a 17th fastest time in qualifying yesterday.

In any case, all cars have 12 gruelling hours ahead of them, and it remains to be seen which of the 77 cars will be up on the podium to receive the prizes from Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad when the race ends at 10.0pm tonight.