

Mahathir has a passion for cars

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KUALA LUMPUR: Driving is one of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's passions and this includes taking his favourite four-wheel drive vehicle on rough terrain. Instrumental in bringing Formula One racing to Malaysia, the former prime minister said he would sometimes race with other drivers when he goes to the track.

"It is fun trying to drive as fast as you can," he said, adding that he is an ardent F1 fan and a Ferrari supporter. At the moment, his favourite vehicle is a Porsche Cayenne that his son, Datuk Mokhzani Mahathir, gave him for his birthday two years ago. He has tested it out at the Sepang-Silverstone Off-Road Park and was impressed with its performance.

"All these new cars are very high-tech and it is a pleasure to drive them on rough terrain," he added.

With the Petronas Malaysian Grand Prix in its seventh year, Dr Mahathir said it was very satisfying to have something that was previously only available in certain European countries. However, he said, the use of the Sepang F1 Circuit needed to be optimised for it to contribute more to the country. He said Sepang has not lost its shine despite new circuits coming up in the F1 racing calendar.



"Sepang is actually a benchmark for the new circuits," he added. "When it was built, it was easily the best circuit in the world because all the others (at that time) were not purpose-built. "In fact, the people here are being invited to design and build other tracks. Now, all the others have to match Sepang's quality."

Dr Mahathir said this meant that older circuits would have to be shut down. However, he did not foresee that happening to the Sepang F1 Circuit in the near future.

"I was talking to (F1 commercial supremo) Bernie Ecclestone this morning and he said, 'This is a real super track.'"

Dr Mahathir said: "But I am always looking beyond the race itself. "I am looking at how it can contribute to the image and the development of the country."