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ON MAKING S'PORE GP A FAMILIAR BRAND

Good or bad, it takes drama to fill seats



CHIA HAN KEONG

SECOND time around, this Formula One Singapore Grand Prix already feels familiar with Singaporeans.

Fans holding walkabout tickets knew exactly which spots to "reserve" to get the clearest views of the race.

Team sponsors are more savvy in getting maximum mileage from the F1 drivers, using the drivers' star appeal to launch new products, initiatives and charities.

The drivers are also adapting

easily enough, waking late and sleeping later to adapt to the night race, and clocking faster times after they've stepped into their cockpits.

Even the usual complaints are creeping in from typically disgruntled Singaporeans: inconvenience from road blockades and plummeting business in the Marina area, to name but a few.

No wonder Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong sounded highly optimistic when asked if he can see the Singapore race going on further than its current five-year contract with F1.

He said: "It will still remain a private-sector venture, but the Government will be happy to continue its support if the race achieves the target of branding Singapore and attracting more tourists here."

Judging by the surge of tourists during the race weekend, it will be easy for all to say: "Job well done."

Still, is it possible for the organisers to keep the race constantly fresh for racing fans?

The answer: they can't.

While crowd figures remain commendable, initial sales were slower than predicted until the expected surge closer to the race dates.

How much of the surge was due to the allure of the "Crashgate" scandal, we'll never know.

Yes, the Renault cheating saga has stamped an unsavoury but permanent imprint on the Singapore Grand Prix. In the short term, however, it brought curious eyes to the race.

And, fortunately, this year's F1 championship was not a formality by the time it reached Singapore's shores.

Jenson Button of Brawn GP had threatened to run away with the title earlier this season, but has since struggled mightily to maintain his lead.

So it remains a wide-open title race, and that may have convinced more tourists and fans to purchase tickets to the Singapore leg.

To be fair, the race organisers have hit upon a great formula - filling the race sidelines with parties and concerts galore, so that race-goers can enjoy a night of top-class entertainment even after the races.

But it is clear that fans will come to the races if there is drama, or compelling drivers like the super-relaxed Button, the intense Lewis Hamilton or even the goofy Sebastian Vettel.

With F1 adding up to four more teams next season, it

means more drivers will hop on board. Hopefully, that will mean more engaging personalities to liven up the paddocks.

Good or bad, drama lifts the races from the typical monotony. It is the vital ingredient that will sustain the Singapore race and enrich the folklore that goes with the race.

Let's hope for more to come.

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HELPDESK 我的字典

Mileage: 获取的好处
huò qǔ de hǎo chù

Cockpits: 驾驶座 jià shǐ zuò

Allure: 吸引力 xī yǐn lì

Paddocks: 围场 wéi chǎng

For Ferrari, customers come first

'Customer service' the buzzword at opening of its Singapore showroom, not sales targets

CHIA HAN KEONG

RARE is a car manufacturer that does not place priority on sales projection when opening a showroom for its latest models in Singapore.

But when it comes to Ferrari, the famous Italian motoring company is hardly bothered about how many of its cars it can sell.

Indeed, upon officially opening its Singapore showroom in Leng Kee last Saturday, the buzzword on everyone's lips is "customer service".

Said its chief executive officer, Mr Amedeo Felisa: "It's always been our company's policy to under-supply for whichever market we enter. We want the car buyers to feel the exclusivity of owning our cars."

"Instead of sales targets, we aim to provide the very best customer service to the owners of probably the best cars in the

world."

Previously, Hong Seh Motors had been associated with the Ferrari brand in the Republic, since 1982.

But from today, Ital Auto, a subsidiary of Komoco Motors, will assume the official dealership.

And its principal, Mr Teo Hock Seng, promises total commitment to providing customer satisfaction.

Said Mr Teo, who is also Komoco's managing director and chairman of the Formula One Singapore Grand Prix: "We look forward to offering as complete an ownership experience as possible."

"We will work closely with the Ferrari Club here to bring the best activities and services to our privileged owners."

There is also talk of eventually moving out of the current showroom - which is at the rear of the sprawling Komoco complex - to a more "private" loca-



'PROBABLY THE BEST CARS': Italian motoring company Ferrari's Singapore showroom was officially opened by its F1 drivers Kimi Raikkonen (left) and Giancarlo Fisichella last Saturday. (PHOTO: JAMIE KOH)

tion than the traditional Leng Kee motor belt.

Mr Teo said he has shortlisted one or two locations, and moves are underway to try and acquire the land.

Meanwhile, Ferrari lovers can look forward to the introduc-

tion of its new grand touring sports car, the Ferrari California.

Already, the showroom is attracting famous names eager to own one of Ferrari's prestigious models.

The Sultan of Selangor,

Sharafuddin Idris Shah, dropped by just after it was officially opened by Ferrari's F1 drivers Kimi Raikkonen and Giancarlo Fisichella, quietly viewing the sleek cars on display.

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