



## Powering into a new era

The Macau Grand Prix Committee is dead; long live the Macau Grand Prix Organizing Committee!

This is the first Macau Grand Prix under the auspices of the Sports Bureau and without Engineer João Costa Antunes at the helm after a twenty-five year reign. However, not much has changed from last year. The programme has one less race but no-one will miss a wannabe celebrity race powered by unattractive racing cars.

The Formula 3 race is no longer the only FIA Intercontinental Cup in the world, having the FIA attributed it the pompous

status of World Cup instead. Former co-coordinator Barry Bland, whose Motor Race Consultants company has been co-ordinating this race since 1983, recently announced his withdrawal. FIA wholeheartedly took over the role but has been under fire; mainly from the influential British press, which is very keen to take on the French-dominated FIA.

Pirelli has been nominated as the official tyre supplier for this year's Formula 3 race, replacing Yokohama, which had supplied the blue riband F3 race since 1983. Pirelli has a long and successful story in GT

racing and it also supplies Formula One but it hasn't supplied a top Formula 3 series for a long time. Obviously, the choice of the Italian brand by the FIA raised a few eyebrows. The opening of the Guia Race to the Chinese Touring Car Championship cars also caused some discomfort in the touring car community but it should not be an issue during the event.

The sporting highlight of the event is the 50th anniversary celebration of the Macau Motorcycle Grand Prix. This is one of the most dangerous two-wheel races in the world and has tenaciously resisted the critics

and those who have been dooming the race for years. In 1967, the Portuguese Macau authorities were far from believing that this single race would last so long and, half a century on, be as vigorous as it is today.

Motor racing is still a great entertainment show but it has to make sense for the city. This is the only international annual sporting event that puts Macau on the world map and the reason why the government keeps pumping millions of patacas into it. Excluding the Formula One events in the region, the Macau Grand Prix is still the most prominent motor racing event in Asia – and the figures speak for themselves. Total expenses for the Macau Grand Prix this year are budgeted at around MOP200 million, similar to those of last year's event. Fortunately, the private sector understands the positive impact and great exposure of the event.

The city's largest junket promoter, Suncity Group, provides sponsorship of MOP20 million to hold the event, a 42.9 per cent increase from the previous year's

MOP14 million. This year also sees Sociedade de Jogos de Macau's continuation as title sponsors of the Macau GT Cup – FIA GT World Cup, a sponsorship estimated at MOP4 million. Long-time partner CTM also continues its support of the Macau Touring Car Cup, valued at MOP1.5 million. The Macau Grand Prix has invited local and international competitors with the objective of promoting the diversity of the city's tourism industry.

Last year, more than 80,000 spectators attended the four-day event, which generated revenue of MOP53 million, of which MOP12.7 million was derived from ticket sales, making it the bestselling year in the history of the event. Expectations are high for the 63rd edition – but records must be beaten to justify the fat budget on slow economy recovery time.

### What's new this year?

- Sports Bureau to run the event.
- Formula 3 race 'promoted' to FIA World Cup status.

- Pirelli takes over Yokohama's role as Formula 3's official tyre supplier.
- Seven different races instead of eight.
- China Touring cars accepted in Guia Race.

### The absentees

There are plenty of good actors and international stars in this year's edition of the Macau Grand Prix but a few familiar faces will be missing. After helping to take the Macau Grand Prix to the next level, Barry Bland abruptly vacated his Formula 3 co-ordination position in the event. We may see him around as he keeps his racing insurance business. Eight-time Guia Race winner Rob Huff lost out on the opportunity to compete in this year's race after a new rule resulted in the Briton's entry being rejected by the event's organisers.

The Guia Race will also miss local hero Rodolfo Avila. Without the proper means to enter the race, Avila, who holds the best ever result of a Macau driver in the Guia Race, opted to stay away. Rising Canadian star Lance Stroll, who wrapped up the European Formula 3 title last month, will miss the greatest Formula 3 race due to his Formula One commitments with the Williams F1 Team.

Yokohama, who has been a strong partner of the event for three decades, will (almost) vanish from the paddock. Also missing will be McLaren. The British luxury car manufacturer has decided not to risk going head to head with Audi, Mercedes-Benz, Porsche and Lamborghini in the FIA GT World Cup manufacturers battle.

### Promotional activities

- Promotional show at Tap Seac Square, where Macau GT Cup cars and Macau Motorcycle Grand Prix bikes will be on display.
- An exhibition of classic motorcycles will join the Tap Seac Square show on November 12 and 13, as well as participating in a parade around the Guia Circuit on Saturday, November 19.
- Macao Post will issue a set of commemorative stamps in honour of the 50th Macau Motorcycle Grand Prix on November 18. The set of five stamps feature some of the most iconic winners in the history of the event.
- A range of commemorative souvenirs will be on sale at various points around the circuit, including T-shirts, gloves, key chains and leather jackets.
- Other activities include a photo competition for local photography enthusiasts, a poster design competition to which the city's countless artists and designers can apply their talent.
- Accredited media will be asked to vote for their favourite team of grid girls. ■