



SMELL MY SMOKE: Controlling his Mazda RX7 superbly, Japan's Miki held off Malaysia's Tengku to take top spot.

TREVOR TAN

DRIFT and roar, sideways

A motorsports formula that's set for success, if Sunday's sell-out crowd is any indication

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JUDGING from the response to the inaugural Formula DRIFT Singapore Championship 2008, the motorsports scene in Singapore is definitely revving up.

All 11,000 tickets were snapped up for the one-day event, which was held at the Changi Exhibition Centre yesterday, while at least 1,000 ticket-less fans were left disappointed when they were turned away.

The event, costing \$750,000 to organise, was won by top Japanese drifter Ryuji Miki, who edged out Malaysia's Tengku Djan in the final, while New Zealand's Mike Whiddet came in third.

Ivan Lim was Singapore's top finisher in 10th place.

Regional tyre distributors Binter Pte Ltd, the event organisers who have a contract with United States-based Formula DRIFT Holdings to stage the event until 2010, are looking to expand next year's edition with increased capacity, more covered seating, more variety of food and beverage outlets and more parking lots, as well.

"The response has been very encouraging and positive, and this shows Singapore and the region

are definitely ready for this type of motor sport. This is definitely a good, solid first step for all involved," said Marcus Lim, 29, general manager of Binter Pte Ltd.

"We're already looking ahead to next year's event. The only question is when and where will it be held.

"But we're looking to have more amenities, like a larger vendor village, multi-tiered covered seating to accommodate up to 15,000 spectators."

The Formula DRIFT Singapore Championship is the first motorsports race here since 1973, when the old Singapore Grand Prix was held at Thomson Road, and the first such event in South-east Asia.

There are plans for the event to eventually become the ninth-leg of the United States Formula DRIFT Pro Championship.

Like the inaugural SingTel Singapore Grand Prix Formula 1 race scheduled on Sept 28, organisers of Formula DRIFT's Singapore leg are looking into the possibility of holding their race at night, particularly as many in the 38-strong field yesterday pointed to the heat and humidity as a factor.

Said Formula DRIFT Holdings co-founder and president, Jim Liaw: "There are cost and logistical issues involved, but if the sponsors

are leaning towards a night race, and the teams are keen, why not?"

"We're open to possibilities."

Miki, who has raced at night previously in Japan, welcomed the idea.

"Why not, I'm all for it," he said, via an interpreter.

Miki, winner of the prestigious D1 Grand Prix in 2004, out-manoeuvred the competition in his Mazda RX7, negotiating the tricky 200m by 120m circuit expertly.

He said: "Not all tracks are perfect or the same, so the key is to use the practice sessions to understand it and adapt the car and my driving to it.

"The heat was a factor today, but if you don't think about it, it's okay. That's what I did."

Drifting, which originated in Japan and now has a huge following in the United States, is a high-skilled, high-powered motorsports event where drivers manoeuvre their rear-wheeled only cars into controlled sideways-slides at high speeds through a marked circuit.

Drivers, or drifters, are judged on their line, impact, speed and angle.

The event's potential for growth has alerted the Singapore Sports Council (SSC).

"It was a well-organised event and despite the scorching sun, it was still a full-house," said SSC chairman Alex Chan.

"This augurs well for the motorsports scene in Singapore, particularly with Formula 1 coming in September and the permanent race track in Changi (set for completion) in 2011. The SSC can be a catalyst in this by helping open doors to relevant government agencies to help grow the event."

Easy win for Geylang

GEYLANG United didn't need to hit full throttle to ease past Sengkang Punggol 2-0 in their NTUC Income-Yeo's S-League clash at Bedok Stadium last night.

Sengkang fought hard in the first-half but just when it looked as if they would go into the break all square, the home side struck on the stroke of half-time.

Slack marking allowed Geylang veteran Mohd Noor Ali to swing in a cross from the right flank for an unmarked Miroslav

Latiak to nod home.

Sengkang clearly missed their central defender, Luis Eduardo Hicks, who was out suspended.

Geylang exploited his absence again just four minutes after the break, when Noor Ali, this time on the left, fired in yet another fine cross for Fazrul Nawaz to knock past goalkeeper Hafez Mawasi, who suffered an injury in the incident and had to be replaced by Joey Sim.

— PAUL GREEN

Li eyes double

SINGAPORE'S table tennis stars were in the running at press time to claim three of the four events at the US\$98,000 (\$134,000) Chile Open Table Tennis Championship in Santiago's Olimpico de San Miguel.

The Republic's world No 8 Li Jiawei beat compatriot Feng Tianwei, the world No 12, 4-1 (11-9, 9-11, 11-4, 11-7, 11-3) in the semi-finals of the women's singles event yesterday.

Li will meet the winner of the other semi-final contest between South Korean's Kim Kyung Ah (world No 16) and Park Mi Young, world ranked No 23.

In the women's doubles event, Singapore's Li and Sun Beibei faced Hong Kong's Tie Yana and Jiang Huajun.

Not to be outdone, Singa-



TODAY FILE PHOTO

HOT FORM: Li is warming up for the Olympics nicely.

pore's male paddlers also feature in the doubles final.

Gao Ning, the men's world No 9, and world No 22 Yang Zi, face Hong Kong's Cheung Yuk and Li Ching in the fight for top spot. — TAN YO-HINN

Marlins four points clear

DEFENDING Netball Super League (NSL) champions Marlins continued their red-hot form with two wins in Rounds 7 and 8 at the weekend to go four points clear at the top of the six-team standings.

On Saturday, the Marlins beat the Mannas 40-26, and fol-

lowed that up with a thrilling 40-36 win over the Sharks yesterday in NSL 2008 action at the Toa Payoh Sports Hall.

They are four points ahead of second-placed Stingrays, who leapfrogged into title contention with wins over the Vipers (43-39) and Arowanas (46-45).

SPORTS BETTING WITH THE LEGAL BOOKMAKER

FOOTBALL - All E Premier, Spanish League, and the following matches are offered for sale

League	Home Team	Away Team	Match KickOff (Singapore date/time)
S.League	Super Reds	Dalian	Mon, 28/04/08 7.45pm
E League Champ	West Bromwich	Southampton	Tue, 29/04/08 2.45am
J League	Kashiwa Reysol	Shimizu S Pulse	Tue, 29/04/08 1.00pm
J League	Jubilo Iwata	Kyoto Sanga	Tue, 29/04/08 1.00pm
J League	Albrx Ngata	Tokyo Verdy	Tue, 29/04/08 2.00pm
J League	FC Tokyo	Oita Trinita	Tue, 29/04/08 3.00pm
J League	Urawa Reds	C Sapporo	Tue, 29/04/08 3.00pm
J League	Nagoya Grampus	Ksaki Frontale	Tue, 29/04/08 6.00pm
J League	Yokohama FM	JEF Utd Chiba	Tue, 29/04/08 6.00pm
S.League	Gombak	Bal Khalsa	Tue, 29/04/08 7.45pm
UE Champions	Manchester Utd	Barcelona	Wed, 30/04/08 2.45am

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