



Race for Impact

You don't have to haul yourself to the Singapore Grand Prix to watch some real motor racing. Go to Zhuhai next weekend and do it for free, says Adam White

Sun, speed... Zhuhai?

Zhuhai may not be a city that we think about much in Hong Kong, out of SAR loyalty: if you're going to China, why not go to Macau? But aside from being a gentle, sleepy coastal city, Zhuhai has its own petrol-filled charm. It's the home to the Zhuhai International Circuit, China's first permanent race track—and with it, Asia Formula Renault racing.

Sure, "Formula Renault" doesn't sound quite as glamorous as "Formula 1." The cars may be a touch smaller than their F1 or their F3 cousins. The 200-odd horsepower engines may not push out quite as much torque. But when they go from 0-100kph in 3.5 seconds; when you're stood at the pit wall as a dozen of these machines scream down the straight at 230kph—the differences whip away. It's powerful, terrifying speed, and it's happening 20 meters from your face. And let me promise you something: unless your name happens to be Schumacher Wong, they're sure as hell not going to let you hang out on the pit wall during a Formula One race.

Asia Formula Renault cars are what Formula One champ Kimi Raikkonen was driving before he made the leap to F1, and they're the jewel in the crown of the Pan Delta Super Racing Festival. The festival takes place a few times each year, and the next one blows into town next Saturday and Sunday, September 14-15. Race weekends are packed with superbikes, touring cars, drift cars and Formula Renault—qualifying sessions, drift battles, demonstrations, and bumper-to-bumper racing. It's hot, it's sticky, and it's all in front of you.



Getting Some Track Time

While it's free to get in to the grandstand, RMB180 gets you entry into to the racing paddock and occasional access to the pit lane. Want to upgrade again? For just RMB500 you've got a VIP pass and pretty much free-roaming rights across the circuit. The crowd floods on to the starting grid itself just before the race. You weave between cars on a baking hot grid, as all around you the business of racing goes on: tire pressures are checked. Last-minute adjustments made to wings and surfaces. In one corner, a whole spool of orange wire is yanked from around the gold-plated rims of a touring car. I have no idea why. And a whole load of umbrella girls pose for photos in their implausibly small, implausibly leather outfits, in implausibly vertical heels. I wonder what's harder: throwing a race car around a circuit, or staying upright in a leather miniskirt in spite of the sun, the heels, and the flash bulbs. But then a five-minute warning goes up, and you're chivvied off the circuit as engines lights up and racers block you out of their minds. Get off, get off: it's time to race.

Doing it for the Money

You always assume it's a glamorous sport full of lucrative deals, of cash exploding out of private jets as champagne sprays from the winner's podium. But the truth, of course, is that running a racecar is expensive. At this level, all the drivers are paying for their high-octane thrills. These enthusiasts, many Hong-Kong-based, do it because racing is in their blood. As Pekka Saarinen, head of Zhuhai-based team PS Racing, tells me: "You don't get into racing for the money. You get into it for the heart."

The racing is fast (of course), frenetic (naturally). I'm torn between watching the cars explode past the pit wall, and craning my neck to see the action on the big screen. Races are short—10 laps or so, about 15 minutes—so there's no time for anything other than hard racing. At Zhuhai the hearts are all on the track, beating at 230kph as they fly past.

Getting there

The Ferry: Ferries run every two hours or so from the Macau Ferry Terminal in Sheung Wan or the China Ferry Terminal in Tsim Sha Tsui, to Zhuhai Jiuzhou Port. Tickets start at \$210 one-way; visit www.cksp.com.hk for ferry times.

The Visa: If you're only visiting Zhuhai and you need a visa to enter China, you can apply for a three-day local area visa when you arrive at the port. Prices vary by nationality, between RMB180-500.

Getting to the Circuit: Hop in a taxi. It's about a 20-minute, RMB80 drive from the pier, most of it stretching along the lovely palm-tree-lined "Lover's Road" which lines the coast.

Getting in: Entry to the public stands is free. The shaded portion fills up fast, and that's where you want to be unless you like roasting in the sun. Alternatively, VIP passes cost RMB500, and allow you to roam free all over the circuit, as well as giving access to a VIP suite.



Pete Olson on the grid

Racing for Children

My trip here was at the invitation of racing driver and instructor Pete Olson. Pete does what he does for two reasons: for the speed, and for the kids. Olson races for Zhuhai-based team PS Racing (facebook.com/PSRacingChampions) and the weekend I visit, Pete grabs two podium finishes to boost him to 3rd in this year's series. He's also the founder of Racing for Children, an organization dedicated to raising awareness of ChildFund International. The charity sponsors children in need across the globe, encouraging one-to-one sponsorship of children in need. Olson himself is now sponsoring his third child, Trang, a 12-year-old girl who lives in a ChildFund community project north of Hanoi. Last summer he went to visit. "It was a bit surreal to finally meet in person the girl that I'd been sponsoring for a half-dozen years," he tells me. "It really put things in perspective, especially being involved in the most expensive sport in the world. It especially made me realize how little it really takes, relatively, to make a real difference in the world to those less fortunate than ourselves." Pete's planning to head back when the racing season ends to talk at the local school. Perhaps he'll talk some of them into becoming racing drivers.

Sponsor a child for just \$220 a month. You can exchange letters and photos, and even visit.

www.childfund.org



Victory



PS Racing cars lined up



Last-minute repairs on the grid

Win Two VIP Passes to the September Race Weekend!

Thanks to Sideways Driving Club and PS Racing, we've got a pair of VIP passes to give away for the next Pan Delta meet on Sunday, September 15! The passes get you free run of the pit lane—and the track before each race—and access to the Sideways/PS Racing VIP room, complete with food, booze—and very welcome air-con. Competition closes September 12.

To enter, email us at competitions@hkmagmedia.com and tell us your best driving story.



Go Sideways

Can't make it over to Zhuhai? Or maybe you've always wanted to squeeze yourself into a car but can't afford the petrol. Grab some mates and head to **Sideways Driving Club** in Central, instead. Sideways's hyper-realistic diving simulators are the same ones that the Red Bull F1 team uses, and all 15 are networked so you can face your friends in your own grand prix. Prices start at \$200 for 30 minutes of driving, or if you want to simulate a real race weekend, a 5-hour session starts at \$1,000. Best of all, there's a full bar. Just don't drink and drive.

LG/F, 1-2 Chancery Lane, Central, 2523-0983, www.sideways-driving-club.com.



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