



Fight night

The final demo race of the EMR takes the drivers across the Indian Ocean, to Sri Lanka

Toyota's promise of giving their drivers international exposure has taken its first step with the Etios Motor Racing series heading to Sri Lanka for the Colombo Night Races. Held on a specially made street circuit around the streets of Colombo, the circuit is 4km of fast, medium and slow corners serving up a unique challenge for the drivers. Comparisons to the legendary Monaco circuit will not be very far off.

A busy street in the business district of Colombo, was cordoned off by night to be transformed into a technical, street circuit. This year, a 2km straight has been added to make things a little more interesting. The course itself was quite a difficult one since it was not a purpose built racetrack. The undulations and uneven surface posed a new challenge to the drivers.

The Colombo Night Races are an annual event and features GT3, GT4, SL-GT, Formula McLaren's 1300, and other international racing cars and bikes. This year too there were several GT cars that had lined up including 911s, Supras and Gallardos. Backing them up were Lancer Evos and Civics. The motorcycle races had several two stroke vs four stroke battles. There were also a supermoto

race with several YZ450s and CRF450s and a bicycle race around the circuit. But the most interesting among the races was the auto rickshaw race, featuring all kinds of autos modified with roll cages and free flow exhausts.

For the EMR drivers, this was the first real street circuit they were driving on. The six Indian drivers selected from the previous round held in Gurgaon were joined by two drivers from Sri Lanka - Ravi Mayadunne and Dinesh Senanayake. This presented a new challenge especially since the circuit was quite dusty when the cars first went out. Getting used to the bumps, undulations and the manhole covers also took a while. In fact the track surface was so bad that just looking at the cars coming down the start finish straight you could see them getting unsettled and the drivers fighting to keep them in line. But once they got used to it, they went about setting the track on fire. Akhil Rabindra went on to set a fastest time of 2m 9.79s despite the difficult circuit.

At the end of qualifying, Akhil Rabindra was in pole position followed by Abhinav Bikkani and Mezaan Anees. In fourth place was Binoy John with Amey Rane and Dinesh close behind. Bringing up the rear of the grid was Keith de Souza, Yayati Varma, Hisham Ettol



and Ravi. As the race started it was clear that the tight circuit will be difficult to pull any real overtaking manoeuvres on. Nevertheless the drivers did manage some overtaking. By the end of the race Akhil had held on to his first place while Mezaan had passed Abhinay to finish in second place. Abhinay had fallen to fourth place behind Binoy who took the last place in the podium. Right behind Abhinay was Amey in fifth position and Keith in sixth. Hisham finished in seventh place ahead of local lad Ravi in eighth. Yayati finished in ninth place. Dinesh however was unable to finish and became the only DNF in the race.

Toyota's long term plan for its drivers is to make them ready to compete internationally when they graduate from the EMR series. "Toyota is committed to bringing forth young racing talent in India by grooming them and helping them build a platform for themselves to enter professional racing. EMR's participation in the second edition of the Colombo Night Race has taken Toyota's racing to the next level and has helped us give the young EMR drivers an international exposure," said Sandeep Singh, deputy managing director of Toyota Kirloskar Motors.

So far the demo season has been quite action packed. After intensive driver training the drivers had their first demo race at Chennai and then a ROC styled race at Gurgaon.

The demo round in Sri Lanka is only the first step in Toyota's driver development program. In order to expose their drivers to even more international competition, next year the drivers will compete with the talent in Thailand and Japan. **OD**



The purpose built street circuit was specially lit up to facilitate the night races. The technicians busy making sure the cars are ready for the evening's races. Leela and his team of technicians were always around to make sure the drivers had all the help they would need. The crowd turnout at the event was off the charts with the spectators cheering on all the drivers regardless of their nationality

