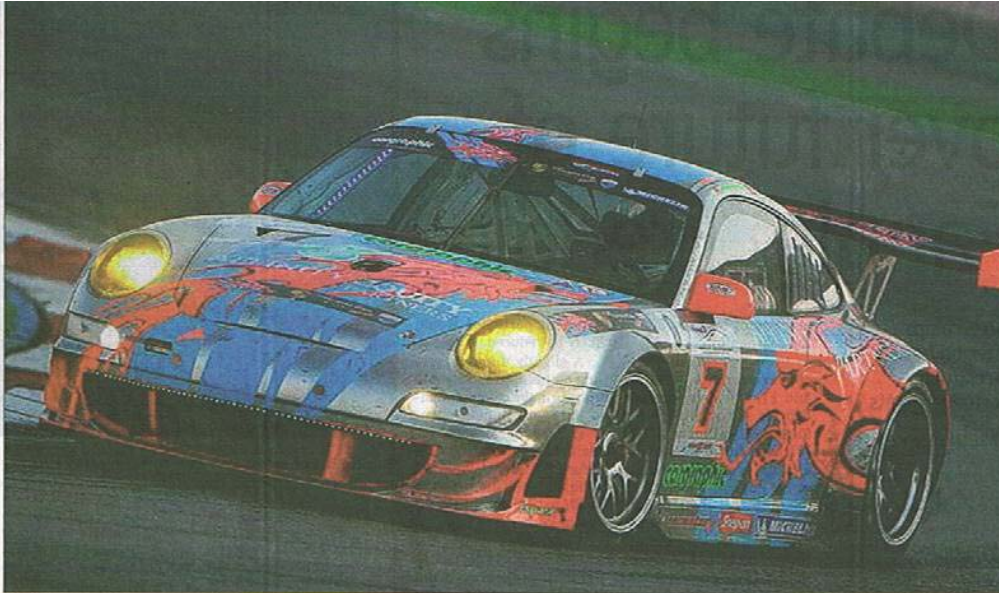


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Making a good impression: A car of Team Porsche Club Singapore at the recent Merdeka Millennium Endurance Race in Sepang. The team scored a coup by becoming the first foreign team to win in the race's open class category

Motorsports victories help rev up car sales

Racing events raise awareness of car brands and tout the reliability of the cars

By **SAMUEL EE**

MOTORSPORTS activities and victories may not have a direct impact on car sales, but carmakers admit that indirectly, they do help to boost volume.

"Racing activities are not easy to directly relate to car sales figures, but indirectly, it is a definite yes," says Porsche Asia-Pacific's managing director Christer Ekberg.

In this region, the German sports carmaker is involved in the Porsche Carrera Cup Asia (PCCA), a one-make series which is also an official support race at the Malaysian and Singapore Grand Prix.

In addition to this high-profile series, Team Porsche Club Singapore scored a coup by becoming the first foreign team to win in the open class category at the Merdeka Millennium Endurance Race in Sepang two weekends ago. At the same time, the team led by driver Mok Weng Sun set a

new record in a Porsche 911 GT3 RSR.

Porsche says such events raise awareness of its brand and tout the reliability of its cars.

"These activities build the Porsche brand image the way we want Asia to perceive it," says Mr Ekberg, who explains that the marque does not believe in traditional advertising, relying instead on racing and its "great motorsport tradition" to make a name for its cars.

He adds: "Indirectly, this helps us to expand the target group, reach out to our customers and attract new buyers. We give them more reason to buy our products."

Those sentiments are similarly echoed over at Mercedes-Benz. The German luxury make is involved in numerous motorsports events, such as DTM or the German touring car championship. But its most recognisable presence in Asia is as the engine partner of the McLaren F1 team, and McLaren's Lewis

Hamilton is currently leading in the drivers' championship.

"Being in F1 helps to boost the image of your brand because it says the brand is sporty and technologically driven," says a source at Daimler South-east Asia. Daimler owns Mercedes-Benz.

According to him, being closely related to Formula One also allows the brand with the three-pointed star to be seen as being a "true sports car".

"Motorsports creates greater awareness for the Mercedes-Benz brand. It highlights your technology and your products and that image eventually rubs off on your street cars and helps you to sell them better," he says.

But involvement in motorsports does not come cheap. In F1 alone, it reportedly costs Mercedes-Benz £100 million (S\$252 million) a season for engine development and production.

For Porsche, the costs are rationalised even though there may not neces-

sarily be the promise of profit.

"The Porsche Carrera Cup Asia is our main marketing and brand building tool in Asia," says Michae Dreiser, Porsche Asia-Pacific's motorsport manager. "Hence, the objective is not to make profit but we see this activity as an investment in the brand."

Whatever the end-result, holding the regional series seems to be paying off. Since the PCCA series began in 2003, sales of Porsche cars in Singapore have steadily risen, culminating in a record 301 unit last year.

In the first six months of 2008, the sales of 174 units were already 10 per cent higher than H1 2007's 157 cars.

At the same time, M Dreiser points to another important measure of the motorsports event's success. "If one looks at the generated media value coverage in terms of print, online, TV and radio, the PCCA is definitely very successful," he says.