



POWER RIDE: Car modifications are a big part of motor racing.

TNP PICTURE: JOYCE LIM

Can we modify the rules?

Every Monday and Wednesday in the Singapore at Large series, The New Paper profiles the Singapore sports scene with a national or grassroots perspective. JOYCE LIM asks if Singapore's motor sports culture can thrive because of strict rules on car modifications

YOU have paid over \$50,000 for an average "performance car".

And you want to change the car modifications so as to go tracking and maybe use it for racing one day.

One of the easiest components to upgrade would be the exhaust system, with a view to increasing the horsepower.

But first you need the Land Transport Authority's (LTA) approval to modify the exhaust system of your car.

LTA requires you to submit a certification from the product manufacturer stating that the proposed aftermarket exhaust system is suitable for the make and model of your car.

Hence, if your car is made in Japan, you will need to ship it back to Japan for the test and certification.

It is a costly process, but absolutely necessary under strict LTA rules.

Under LTA rules, vehicle owners found modifying or tampering with the exhaust system without the proper certification may face a court fine of up to \$1,000 or 3 months' imprisonment upon conviction in court.

Last October, the government announced it will facilitate the private sector in building a permanent race track in Changi as the motor sports industry has been identified to have both sporting and economic growth potential.

But can motor sports thrive under strict LTA rules?

"Yes," said Lawrence Lee, 29, managing director of Fong Mui Garage R, one of the market leaders in car modifications.

"Register your car as a race car and you will have more leeway for car modifications."

Special provisions

An LTA spokesman confirmed that LTA has special provisions available for vehicles used solely for motor sports.

"While LTA supports the growth of motor sports in Singapore, we have to ensure the safety of regular road users is not compromised," said its spokesman.

Despite LTA's strict regulations on vehicle modifications, Lee feels that the motor sports culture will pick up once the Changi racetrack is completed.

He said: "Motor sports is a rich man's sport. People who are into it have the money to spend. They form an elite group who want to challenge themselves and bring the sport to a higher level. That will in turn stir the interest among the general public."

Lee, who started racing at the age of 19, owns three race cars and he is planning to buy a fourth one next year.

As race cars are exempted from all vehicle taxes such as the Certificate of Entitlement, insurance and road tax, they are not allowed for regular road use.

Hence it has to be towed to the racetrack.

Just how feasible is that?

And how many car enthusiasts who make up the more than 4,000 registered members of Singapore Motor Sports Association and its affiliated motoring clubs, can afford to own cars for racing purposes?

The Singapore Sports Council (SSC), the lead agency for the Changi Racetrack project, has been working with relevant government agencies to grow interest in motor sports in order to create a thriving motor sports culture, said Fan Chian Jen, SSC's deputy director of motor sports.

"Reviewing various government policies to create a positive motor sports experience is one of the many areas we're working on. This would have to be balanced with ensuring that safety is not compromised," added Fan.

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— LTA spokesman