

Carma

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AUTODRAG GOING FOR THE WIN

GARAGE R

Mention Fong Mui Auto Trading and many car enthusiasts will go "Huh, simi ah?" But say Garage R to any boyracer who has 0W-40 pumping through his veins and he'll immediately know what you're talking about.

Looking more like one of those charismatic and suave gangsters in a Hong Kong movie than a workshop owner, Lester Wong has been doing this for the past 12-odd years and while the fruit of his labour is beginning to bloom, he reveals that it has been really hard work – tuning cars into the wee hours of the morning and meeting ambitious sales targets for the various brands they represent.

The recent arrival of a baby girl has not changed his hands-on attitude towards tuning his customers' cars – and of course preparing for AutoDrag. His unadulterated passion can be seen in the way his face lights up like a drag-strip Christmas tree when he manages to take an hour off his busy schedule to talk to us about the business, AutoDrag and his expansion plans.

Wasting no time, he immediately shows us the pride and joy of Garage R, a certain red Mitsubishi Evolution VI that will be taking part in this National Day's AutoDrag. It is officially the fastest drag car in the world in its class, running a 9.29sec in the quarter-mile in Japan. And this is not at some illegal backstreet but an officially sanctioned NHRA event. The car uses 92 percent HKS parts, with the remaining 8 percent custom-fabricated by Lester and his team of mechanics after much trial and error. The result is 820bhp at the crank at 2.2bar of boost! While I was trying to digest this figure, Lester casually turns and points to a customer's road-going Evo VIII and says, "I think this car has nearly the same bhp but even more torque as it has a 2.2-litre engine..."

Okay, so now we know what kind of clients go to Garage R. Around S\$120k had been spent modifying the Evo VI to get it to this state of tune, with the four carbonfibre doors alone costing \$10k. The car only weighs a tonne, some 300kg lighter than stock. Of course, just making the car lighter is just part of the equation – working closely with HKS, Lester customised some parts and the result is HKS actually incorporating some of the mods into their latest line-up. Being the authorised dealer for HKS,

Garage R has the advantage of procuring parts not seen within the pages of the HKS catalogue. An example is the wonderfully intricate exhaust manifold for the Mitsubishi Evo. The items used in many of their customer cars also cannot be found in the catalogue but are bespoke HKS specials.

One of Garage R's trademarks is the workmanship and look of a project car's engine bay. As Lester opens bonnet after bonnet, it is apparent that making a car go fast is not enough – it has to look the part as well. All the vacuum hoses, electrical wiring, ancillaries etc are very neatly run and the engine looks like it stepped out of a glossy Japanese parts catalogue. Garage R also has a very close working relationship with Carbing (Okuyama), makers of high-quality products such as roll cages, strut bars, chassis reinforcement braces and whatnot which not only look good, but help performance as well.

With a proven track record built over the years, Garage R is now the authorised distributor for Carbing C-West, Endless, HKS and Tein. But the tuner which Garage R works closest with must be HKS, which is why HKS kindly loaned Garage R its Silvia drag car to exhibit at the Dreamcars Asia Motorshow and to take part in the August AutoDrag.

"Working closely with the Japanese is very important in order to maximise the performance mods done to a car," quips Lester who incidentally is taking Japanese lessons twice a week. "A good example is the HKS F-CON V-Pro which is used by many of the fastest modified cars in Japan. A lot of people who use a fully programmable ECU do not use up half of what it can do. The V-Pro has 1400 mapping points and we normally use over 1200..."

When asked about future expansion plans, Lester confirms that they are moving to a larger location within the Tagore area and that a four-wheel-drive dyno has been ordered. However, when asked about the rumours of Garage R joining forces with the Japanese and becoming HKS Singapore, he just gave an Ekin Cheng-like grin...

A comprehensive review of AutoDrag, Singapore's first ever FIA-sanctioned drag race, will be in next month's issue of Carma. Don't miss it!

