ISA 2022 Round 5 Race Report

In classic Sepang fashion, the weather played its part in Round 5 of the ISA 2022 championship. Building up to the weekend, the weather was becoming quite predictable - hot sunny day but come evening time dark clouds would gather resulting in a major downpour. On some of the practice days, the wind was so strong that it moved a few of the team tents. At the time, one could only wonder what Sunday would look like.

A total of 32 drivers took to the grid on Sunday. Drivers came all the way from India, Singapore, Philippines, and Indonesia to race with Malaysians for the IAME Asia Series championship. The season is drawing to a close with 2-rounds remaining and soon the ISA 2022 champions will be determined.

Going into Round 5, the main contenders for the ISA 2022 championship have been revealed. In the Cadet category, the title will most likely go to either Travis Teoh or Zarief Rayqal. Conrad Garrow had a mathematical chance but his absence from the recent round would've dampened that possibility. In Junior Category, Katrina Ee has a major points advantage over second place Stefano Pedani and third place Hendra Putra but a poor outing in Round 4 might have knocked off some of that confidence she displayed in the first half of the season. In the Senior category, Akash Neil Nandy has a slight lead over Nik Iruwan with Ferroz Feznil not too far behind in third place. Usual contenders such as Hayden Haikal and Putera Adam have not been present to give Akash a good fight hence this is his chance to seal the deal. In the Masters category, Mohd Jasa has a major lead over Thiru Kumaran who missed the recent round.

The Cadet Final was a clean start from the pack with Travis Teoh jumping into the lead. Closely following behind were Zarief Rayqal and Indonesian driver, Oliver Sini. Estaban Freihuber, who looked very promising in the pre-final, suffered engine trouble at the start and was out of contention from the get-go. However, it was Oliver who put on a show and challenged Zarief for second place. The duo swapped positions a couple of times and it looked like Oliver was closing in on securing the runner-up position. However, Zarief and his bag of experience decided to pull a last-lap lunge on Oliver and it worked. Oliver just lost out in the end by 0.128s. Travis took the win uncontested in the end while Leeloo Freihuber from the Philippines put on a consistent showing and finished the final in fourth place ahead of fellow first-timer Ng Jook Yick.

The Junior Final also witnessed a clean start with Luigi Saw and Jacob Lauter taking an early lead and easily pulling away from the pack. However, the battle in the final was all about third place and beyond. The contest for the final spot on the podium was between Hendra Putra, Mohamad Anaqi, and Katrina Ee with Aldrin Foo Cabiles and Philippine driver Oscar Cura close behind to pick up the pieces. Anaqi led most of the race with Hendra fending off Katrina. Uncharacteristically, Katrina could not find a way past Hendra and the duo fought it out hard with plenty of close shaves and desperate attempts. Amazingly, in all that dueling, Hendra and Katrina managed to keep pace with Anaqi, and eventually, it was his turn to

defend. However, it was not meant to be for Anaqi as a dicey move by Hendra paid off and Anaqi was left spinning out of control with four laps to go. Further down the grid, Oscar Cura put on a final push towards the end of the race to close the gap to Aldrin but it was too late. In the end, it was a 1-2 finish by Luigi Saw and Jacob Lauter from team CW Racing, a masterclass display of pure speed and dominance.

For the last race of the day, the heavens opened up and racers were greeted with the predicted rains and everyone had their wet tires on immediately. The weather looked like it might hold up for the Senior/Master Final but a brief sprinkle in the pre-finals had already sent signals that it might just happen. Cadet and Junior drivers managed to escape it for the final races but not the Seniors/Masters.

After an amazing start by the field of drivers, all of whom survived Turn 1 in the pouring rain, it was Akash Nandy who lead the pack from Raja Ariff and Sergio Noor. Although most survived Turn 1, many didn't survive the first few laps without incident. Notably, Aydan Khaliq, who had a promising run through the heats and pre-final, suffered an early spin in his first proper wet race. But the 'biggest loser' award goes to Nik Iruwan, who thought second place was achievable given his performance in the heats and prefinal, but sadly his wealth of experience could not save him from an early spin and he saw his chances dash away with every droplet of rain hitting his visor. And it was pouring.

In the end, the 'rain master' award went to Sergio Noor for a wondrous display of wet weather driving. Akash, who looked strong for the win, could not hold back Sergio but also displayed some amazing driving skills to claim the fastest lap time in the wettest final seen in a long while. Feroz Fezril held on to his third place after Raja Ariff had a slight mistake towards the end of the race.

The real winner of the day, the one who benefited from the rain the most, is Luke Armstrong. The Masters driver from Singapore used all his 'downforce' to ensure maximum grip in the wet and climbed the field from his eleventh starting position to finish the race fourth overall. On this rare occasion, the Masters driver had an advantage over the lighter Senior drivers and Luke maximized all of it. Masters driver, Lee Lung Nien, did not manage to capitalize on the wet conditions as much as he hoped he would but still stayed ahead of Mohd Jasa to finish second.

Round 5 was undoubtedly one of the most exciting rounds to date, especially with the Senior/Master finals. The wet weather will always bring drama and it didn't disappoint on that fateful Sunday. The crowd was filled with energy as they watched in amazement and admiration. There were cheers of excitement, sounds of sorrow, and applauses for fantastic moves. A great reminder of why we love the sport of karting. With only two more rounds to go at Sepang, who will claim the ISA 2022 Champion title? Time will tell.