ISA-MKC 2022 ROUND 4 Race Report

Our first race outside of the Klang Valley and what an adventure it was. ISA 2022 went all the way north, near the border of Thailand, to the state of Perlis. Round 4 took place at UNIMAP Racing Circuit - a 1.2km high speed circuit with one of the longest straights in Malaysia. Some drivers even managed to reach top speeds over 120km/h. The rest of the circuit had high-G turns that required strength and laser focus to nail that perfect line while carrying the speed throughout the corners. No stop-start driving in Perlis that's for sure. Plus the weather played its part in creating more excitement for drivers and organisers.

The Cadet category was filled with plenty of drama with battles going on at the front and back. Two major duels were happening throughout the weekend. One between race leaders Travis Teoh and Zarief Rayqal. The other between Joshua Walker and Didi Tse. The battle between Travis and Rayqal seemed to go Travis' way after he won both heats and the prefinal, despite Rayqal being the fastest in time trials. But in the final, things changed and Rayqal's patience paid off. The start was clean from all drivers with Rayqal jumping ahead for an early lead only for it to be retaken by Travis, all within the first few turns. Travis led most of the race and Rayqal stayed close behind, both slowly pulling away from the rest. It seemed like another procession from the heats and prefinal. But with two laps to go, Rayqal made a lunge for the lead at the end of the straight and went full defensive. Travis did manage to gain his position back but just before the start of the last lap while entering the last two turns, both drivers were side by side and Travis was forced out wide onto the grass giving Rayqal some breathing space and eventually the win. There may have been some contact between the two as Travis received a three second penalty for a dropped front bumper at the end which resulted in Conrad Garrow taking second place - a reward for Conrad and his clean, stay out of trouble, driving style. The funny thing is, the duel between Joshua and Didi was exactly the same! Joshua was faster in qualifying, Didi finished ahead in all heats and pre-final but it was Joshua, after a late lunge on the last lap, who won the duel. These drivers may be the youngest of the lot but their fighting spirit, racecraft, and perseverance can rival the most experienced of drivers.

In the Junior category, it was all about Chanoknan Veeratacha. Complete domination by the driver from Thailand. There was no contest as Chanoknan drove home the perfect weekend. Fastest in qualifying, won all heats, and cleaned up both pre-final and final. As for the rest, it was a topsy turvy weekend. Usual podium contenders such as Katrina Ee and Hendra Putra had a dramatic clash in the final which saw Hendra bowing out after a knock by Katrina, who managed to chase down Hendra after a poor start. Unfortunately for Katrina, she was penalised a total of 10 seconds for the incident (5s for a dropped bumper plus another 5s for the knock on Hendra) which bumped her down to last place. Stefano Pedani and Adhithiya Arvind also had a tense battle. The two did make contact after a lunge by Adhithiya which he managed to hold onto and finished the final in second place but the contact was too great as he was ultimately penalised 5 seconds, giving Stefano second place on the podium. Jacob Brown and Aldrin Cabiles managed fourth and fifth respectively. Mohamad Anaqi had a weekend to forget as he was the first casualty in the final, running wide and never recovering. A tough weekend for the Viper Niza Racing team.

The Senior category saw the return of champion drivers Putera Adam, Hayden Haikal, and Sergio Noor. And they definitely did not disappoint. The trio set the track ablaze with their raw pace while reminding the competition where the benchmark is. However, it wasn't a straight forward weekend for the trio as they too were reminded that a single mistake can be costly especially when the competition is always ready to pounce. And they did. Adam learned that in Heat 1 after just one mistake running wide onto the grass and a whole swarm passed him which pushed him down to 8th. Hayden learned that in the pre-final, also bumping him down to 8th. Sergio's lesson came in the final after going wide just a bit which resulted in him finishing 6th. Similar lessons were also dealt out to Chia Wing Hoong in the final despite his strong performance in the pre-final. However, it was Putera Adam who managed to pull away in the final but only by a slim margin. Hayden Haikal had a stellar drive after his 8th place starting position in the final. He charged through the field, somehow survived the heated battle between Akash Neil Nandy, Wing Hoong, Sergio, and Mohamed Feroz Fezril, and then set his sights on Adam. The chase was movie-worthy but it was not meant to be as Adam just managed to hold on to the win by 0.409s. Two laps more and things might have been different. Lee Wai Cong, another champion driver returning to karting, had a difficult weekend after a DNF in the final with technical issues. Raaj Bakhru from India finished in 7th while Kabir Anurag and Louis Morghan from Singapore managed to finish the final 8th and 9th respectively. Further down the field, Aymaan Xavier Erba and Foo Tun Yik had an unusual incident together which resulted in Foo bending his chassis so badly that he was running on three-wheels back to the pits. Thankfully, both drivers escaped injury.

In the Masters category it was Mohd Jasa who dominated the weekend. Other than a small blip in heat 1 due to changing weather conditions, it was a clean sweep for Jasa. Luke Armstrong drove home a solid 2nd place in the final after managing to pass Al Farouk and Thiru Kumaran, making up for his poor race start. Thiru, who managed 2nd place in the pre-final, was suffering from a slightly bent chassis and made the most of it, finishing 3rd in the final followed by Al Farouk in 4th. Tengku Ridzman had a casual weekend at Perlis to bring home the field in 5th.

ISA drivers who raced in UNIMAP Racing Circuit all had plenty of good things to say about the course. They enjoyed the challenging turns, the high speeds, and the neck bending G-forces that came with it. Some even likened it to a European style karting circuit. And to add some spice to the weekend, the weather was unpredictable and torrential to say the least. But all in all, everyone had a great time with no major incidents to ponder. Should it be a mainstay in the karting calendar? Time will tell.