

Team MRF dominate Day 1 of Nashik Rally

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Team MRF, led by Gaurav Gill (co-driver Musa Sherif), topped the overall time charts in the Super Special Stage with colleagues Arjun Balu (Sujith Kumar) and Amitrajit Ghosh (Ashwin Naik) all clocking 1 minute 45 seconds as the Rally of Maharashtra — the first round of the Indian National Rally Championship — commenced here Friday.

Also tying with the three MRF cars in the 2000cc (N+) class was Arjun Rao Aroor (Satish Rajagopal), who until last season drove for the Reds before making way for Ghosh who shifted from Red Rooster Racing after the Bangalore outfit pulled out of motorsports at the start of this season.

The fourth MRF entry, Lohitt Urs (PVS Murthy) was two seconds behind the leaders with 1:47.

Gill, currently the leader in the Asia Pacific Rally Championship, and driving a Mitsubishi Cedia, said: “I was drifting the car through the corners as I wanted to provide some spectacle for the crowd. Basically, I had a lot of fun, but the serious stuff begins tomorrow (Saturday) when we will be running the Special stages.”

Saturday and Sunday will see the actual stage rallying on tarmac roads consisting of 351.22 kms of which 72.32 kms will be the three Special Stages which will be run twice.

In the Group N category (unmodified) of the 2000cc, Bangalore’s Vikram Devadasen (co-driver Somayya AG) topped with a 1:51, ahead of veteran Rahul Kanthraj (Vivek Bhatt) and Shailendra Hegde (Prajval Pai), both of whom clocked 1:56.

All the three are first-timers to the 2000cc class and are supported by Yokohama tyres that came in for wholesome praise for the grip levels, especially through the corners.

“We went out for a photo shoot this morning and the car stalled on the highway with a malfunctioning ECU. We just about made it to the parc ferme, but couldn’t get a replacement ECU and hence the five-second difference. We have to live with this problem,” said Kanthraj.

In the 1600cc class, Anirudha Ranganekar (Anjay rpt Anjay Kapadia) led the field with two minutes flat while Vincent Tom Vineet (George Sob) topped in the 1400cc Star Cup and Sachin Singh (Ramesh Venu) led in the Maruti Gypsy (T2) class with 2:07.

Fancied Gypsy contender Sanjay Agarwal (Jeeva Rathinam) from Bangalore, returning the championship after a year's break, lost precious time when he took a wrong turn about 100 metres from the finish and then had to reverse before continuing. He clocked 2:14.

In all, the event has attracted 27 contenders, though the 1600cc class has just four starters, while the 1400cc Star Cup has six entries as against seven in the popular Gypsy class.

The event is being organised by Western India Sports Association under the aegis of Federation of Motor Sports Clubs of India (FMSCI) and is promoted by IMG Sports and Pro-Sports Promotion.

The Federation of Motor Sports Clubs of India (FMSCI) has hiked the prize money with winners of each class now receiving a Rs.1 lakh purse.

The other major changes for this year's championship include the introduction of the Open Cup for diesel and petrol vehicles (up to 3000cc). The diesel class will be run on two categories – 1600cc and 1601 to 3000cc. The turbo charged induction factor will also apply to the class which will become a part of the support class for the INRC as in the case of the Gypsy Cup and 1400 Star Cup.

However, there are no takers for the Open Cup and it remains to be seen whether this ambitious move will attract any entries at all in the other rounds considering the cost-factor of preparing these highly modified vehicles.

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