

# Speedracer

A shaky start made Matthew Marsh apply the brakes to his racing career in 1987, but his determination to rediscover his dream has seen him take a u-turn back on to the circuit.

**Peter Sabine** hopes that this time, it's for good

Photography by Brian Ching

**C**ity of Dreams-sponsored racer Matthew Marsh's enthusiasm for driving is infectious.

It is easy to picture him, after having failed all but one of his final exams, running into the family living room to declare: "I'm going to be a race car driver!" Most parents would have freaked out, but Marsh's dad, a former racer himself, gave his son his blessing.

But after almost two years on the racing circuit, Marsh realised he would never emulate the success of his hero – F1 champion Ayrton Senna – and quit racing. He moved to Hong Kong to work in telecommunications, but even though he had officially "retired", he still kept the racing flame burning with guest slots as a TV motor sport commentator, and go-kart racing.

"I was talking a lot about my ambition to race in Le Mans [the world-famous 24-hour endurance race]," Marsh explains, "but I recognised the gap between the dream and the reality: over US\$1 million." But after several years off the circuit, Marsh became the first Hong Kong driver to ever complete the race, in 2007. With 18 years in the SAR,

he was proud to sport the Bauhinia flag on his car.

## Making a comeback

Marsh's second stint in racing has been considerably happier than his first, driving both in the prestigious FIA World Touring Car Championship and the Porsche Carrera Cup Asia, among others. While many would regret the lost years, Marsh's admittedly "back to front" approach has worked wonders. His experience has allowed him to successfully fundraise through partnerships, most recently joining the Macau Grand Prix 2008 in association with mega-resort City of Dreams, where he raced on the 55-year-old Guia Circuit; not only did he watch a young Michael Schumacher beat Mika Häkkinen there in the 1990 Macau Grand Prix, but having burned some rubber on it himself, he relishes its "journey, flow, and rhythm, which just feel right."

Driving has also taken Marsh to unexpected places: he once raced in a 1968 Brabham F1 car, finding an original Italian manufacturer to create a suit appropriate to the car's era, while customising an open face 1960s crash helmet from a rather bemused Japanese manufacturer.

## Hot and bothered

An open helmet might seem like fun, but it could also be a little crazy given the conditions racers have to put up with. At Marsh's recent race in Bahrain, the weather was surprisingly cool, but tempers flared when fellow racer and friend Christian Jones smashed his bumper, spinning him from third to 18<sup>th</sup> place and causing over 2,500 euros worth of damage. "I didn't find it funny", he chuckles, "though my confrontation with Christian was apparently funny for the people watching."

But then it's easy to lose your head when temperatures can reach 60°C inside the car. When Marsh momentarily turned off his suit with capillaries attached to an icebox in Malaysia, he says it was "like being in a sauna doing press-ups." The experience reminded him of his old mid-summer training regime, jogging in a woolly hat and thermal underwear, getting odd looks from passers-by.

When asked if he is worried about the dangers of his profession, Marsh just laughs. "Travelling in a cab to the Shanghai Grand Prix is far more dangerous than racing on the race track," he says. Then, Marsh stares confidently into the camera, looking as if he is about to slam his foot down and zoom away. 



