

Gill first racer to reach Arjuna milestone

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AT long last, Gaurav Gill has his Arjuna. It took a bit of time — Gaurav was nominated three times before but was sidelined repeatedly. But the ace rallyist — the only Indian to win the Asia Pacific Rally Championship (APRC) — was finally selected for the prestigious award by a twelve-member selection committee this year.

Gaurav is over the moon and maintains that he took past rejections in his stride. “Obviously as a sportsperson, you are disappointed when you don’t get it, but getting an Arjuna is not your aim,” he said. “As a sportsperson, you have to learn to manage the ups and downs. I respect the committee’s decision and I’m honoured that they think I’m worthy of it this year.”

It’s a momentous achievement for Gaurav, for no other athlete in motorsports has ever been shortlisted for an Arjuna before. To be fair, no one other athlete in the sport has arguably come up with the kind of resume that the 37-year-old has amassed over the years. A six-time national champion, Gaurav has won the APRC thrice — in 2013, 2016 and 2017. But it’s an even bigger mo-



Gaurav Gill (R) got fourth time lucky as he had been nominated thrice before



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Gaurav Gill, India rallyist

ment for motorsports in general. A discipline that has always faced a battle to be recognised as a legitimate sport, motorsports has gone from not having its governing body recognised as a National Sports Federation four years ago, to having its very own Arjuna awardee. “No one from motorsports has ever won an

Arjuna before and it’s huge for the sport,” said Gaurav. “A lot of things will change for the sport now. Youngsters are going to look at this and think I can do this one day. Hopefully, there will be an improvement in terms of sponsorship as well.”

Gaurav’s honour is a win for rallying as well, a discipline

that has long languished as the unglamorous cousin to single-seater racing. Most kids getting into motorsports do so dreaming of racing in Formula One one day. Gaurav doesn’t know if his award will contribute to changing that perception, but he does hope more and more people will get into rallying now. “Rallying is more difficult than single-seaters,” he said. “Obviously the latter is more popular because of the format — it’s an arena sport. Rallying though is like a cross-country or a triathlon, it tests your endurance levels like anything. But yea, now a lot more people will be looking at rallying and there will be more opportunities there.”

Gaurav won’t be celebrating this award for long, for there are bigger things on the horizon. The first of these is a foray into World Rally Championships (WRC) in the Rally of Turkey in September. Then there are all the preparations for next year, when he’ll contest a full season in WRC. As someone who dominated the APRC like he did, a regular drive in the WRC should have come a lot sooner in his career. But then, Gaurav is used to waiting for good things to happen.