

Racing prodigy Mikail with a wheel to go the distance

VISHNU PRASAD @Chennai

AT first, he comes off as an excited kid getting a tour of the pits. But appearances, as a chat with Mohamed Mikail will reveal, can be deceptive. He's all of 14, but the way he rides a bike wouldn't betray that.

No one came close to him during the first race of the Idemitsu Honda India Talent Cup on Saturday, on the sidelines of the MMSC-FMSCI Indian National Motorcycle Racing Championship. He did not have the best of races on Sunday, crashing out early, but Mikail's talent was there for all to see over the weekend. Of the eight riders selected to

race the faster Honda NSF 250R, he was among the few who made that transition most seamlessly. "I am getting more experience on this bike," he said. "The power was a big difference. But position and all, it wasn't a big difference. I was able to adapt fast."

This is not Mikail's first time riding the NSF 250R, which Honda used to race in Moto3, MotoGP's third tier. He's already raced the bike once in the Thai Talent Cup (TTC), an experience he found to be a bit of a culture shock. "Over there, it's quite competitive," Mikail said. "A lot more riders are fighting for positions, so a lot of people have similar lap times. It was a lit-



National Championships: Pro-Stock 301-400cc: 1. Deepak Ravikumar, 2. Amarnath Menon, 3. KY Ahamed. **Pro-Stock 200-300cc:** 1. Anish Shetty, 2. Mathan Kumar, 3. Abhishek V. **Pro-Stock 165cc:** 1. Rajiv Sethu, 2. Jagan Kumar, 3. KY Ahamed. **Novice Stock (165cc):** 1. Abhimanyu Gautam, 2. Venkatesan I, 3. Mohan Babu P. **Girls Stock 165cc:** 1. A Ryhana Bee, 2. Alisha Abdullah, 3. Ann Jennifer AS. **One-Make Championship:** Idemitsu Honda India Talent Cup **Honda NSF 250R:** 1. Varoon Sadasivam, 2. Kavin Samaar Quintal, 3. Geoffrey Emmanuel. **Honda CBR 150:** 1. Lal Nunsanga, 2. Lalrinzuala Tlau, 3. Samuel Martin. **TVS Open Apache RTR 310:** 1. Vivek Pillai, 2. Karthik Mateti, 3. Soorya PM. **Novice Apache RTR 200:** 1. Venkatesan, 2. Manoj Y, 3. Lakshmiopathy Balaji.

tle difficult because it was my first time racing abroad."

Mikail's stint in the TTC is also teaching him how to cope with pressure. "My results there have been quite okay, not so bad. But I have to improve. Until I make a mistake, I just tell myself to take it easy and not push a lot. But when I go behind, I try to push hard to get the position back."

Mikail started off driving pocket bikes when he was just ten and it did not take long for his family to recognise his talent. He was introduced to Honda's racing programme by his uncle and his career is already the Chennai lad's top-most priority. He's already sacrificed the normal life that kids his

age take for granted, preferring to be homeschooled so that he has more time for racing. His fitness regime would already put a lot of pro athletes in the country to shame. "I have to improve a lot on the fitness aspect," Mikail says. "I have to improve my stamina and endurance. For now, it's like I can fight it, but I feel like I do not have the energy for the entire race. I go to the gym in the morning for one-and-a-half hours for cardio. Then, in the evening from around five to seven, I do strengthening."

A fan of Casey Stoner, Mikail grew up following the MotoGP series religiously. With a bit of luck, he could get up there one day.