



Sohail Shah steers his MRF 1600 car.

Sohil grabs pole

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Bengaluru teenagers Sohail Shah and Tijil Rao took pole positions in the MRF F1600 and Formula LGB 1300 categories, respectively, to set alight the third round of the MRF MMSC fmsci Indian National Car Racing Championship at the MMRT, here today.

Meanwhile, Pune's Pratik Sonawane qualified for the pole position in the Volkswagen

Ameo Class (One-Make Championship) and Coimbatore ace Arjun Balu, driving a Race Concepts-prepared Honda VTec, put the hammer down by emerging the fastest in the two practice sessions in the saloon cars category.

Sohail Shah, 18, came up with his best lap of one minute, 39.218 seconds, much quicker than his timings in the two Free Practice sessions earlier in the day. Less than one second covered the top

eight qualifiers, indicating a close fight in all the four races scheduled for this weekend. In second spot was Nayan Chatterjee, followed by Manav Sharma and Nirmal Umashankar.

Tijil Rao (Momentum Motorsports), 16, put in a fine performance in the Formula LGB 1300 class with a hot lap of 01:53.523, nearly a second quicker than his best in the practice sessions earlier today. With the top-five qualifiers separated by less than a second, Tijil led a 1-2-3-4 sweep for Momentum Motorsports as Ashwin Datta, Chirag Ghorpade and Deepak Ravikumar were placed second, third and fourth, respectively, ahead of Viswas Vijayaraj (DTS Racing).

Balu, 44, who made a comeback

to racing last year after a long break, scorched the track to top the timesheets in both the practice sessions as he was two seconds quicker than championship leader in the Indian Touring Cars class, Karthik Tharani, who was piloting a factory-prepared Volkswagen Vento. Tharani had scored a double in the Coimbatore round triple-header while Balu was placed third in two races and fifth in another.

"We had turbo issues in the previous round in Coimbatore and it reflected in our performance. For this round, we have put a new turbo and everything seems to be fine. However, race is another matter, but I am happy where we are at this moment. I could have probably gone faster today but for the traffic as the

ITC cars are running on the same grid as the Super Stock. So, it was a bit difficult to find clean air in front," said Balu.

The VW camp admitted that the Ventos were off the pace as compared to Balu.

"We are having a few issues and so, this weekend is a washout for us as we are very much off the pace. However, I will be happy if we could take at least two other podium spots," said Sirish Vissa, head of Volkswagen Motorsport India.

In the FIA Formula 4 South-East Asia series, Oman's Shihab Al Habsi topped the practice session with a flying lap of 01:37.862 while the three Indians in the fray, Yash Aradhya, Mira Erda and Sneha Sharma were fifth, seventh and eighth fastest, respectively.