

# From Shillong to Bengaluru and back: Phoebe's happy uphill ride

VISHNU PRASAD @Coimbatore

IT'S not hard to spot Phoebe Dale Nongrum in the pits — the turquoise highlights in her hair ensures that. Her backstory makes her stand out as well. She is the first woman from the North-east region to participate in the JK Tyre-FMSCI national racing championships and she wouldn't have been here unless for a curious turn of events.

The Shillong girl was always interested in racing and says she honed her craft while still in school, by drifting along the Shillong-Guwahati highway. "I've loved cars and bikes since

when I was a young girl," she says. "I started driving by the time I was 12. These highways, the one from Guwahati to Shillong were my practice roads. I used to drive a gypsy."

But then life came calling and she had to leave her hometown after school for further studies. "The whole family was someone or the other, so you have to live up to that," she says. Bengaluru was her destination and she ended up sticking on there for ten years. But in 2017, a burnt-out Phoebe decided to take a break from a hectic career and go back to the hills of Shillong. Her parents, again, had plans for her — her

dad, an IPS officer, wanted her to follow in his footsteps and become a cop. She started preparing for the PSC and IAS exams.

But then fate intervened again and she participated in an autocross event organised by some old friends. "I ended up picking the winner's trophy in ladies' class and I was hooked. I then went as co-driver for a friend at a couple of rally events and we ended up winning again. So pretty soon, I made the progression to the driver's seat." Last season, she secured a drive in Formula LGB4 category with the all-female Ahura Racing but this



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## RESULTS

**LGB Formula 4 (Race 2):** 1. Raghul Rangasamy (MSport) 18:28.329; 2. Vishnu Prasad (MSport) 18:31.673; 3. Sandeep Kumar A (Dark Don) 18:32.848.

**LGB Formula 4 (Race 3):** 1. Vishnu Prasad (MSports) 20:02.742; 2. Raghul Rangasamy (MSport) 20:02.810; 3. Ashwin Datta (Dark Don Racing) 20:05.316;

**JK Tyre Novice Cup (Race 3):** 1. Mohamed Ryan (MSports) 23:44.056; 2. Aaroh Ravindra (Momentum Motorsports) 23:47.212; 3. Mihir Avalakki (Birel Art) 23:47.330.

**JK Tyre Suzuki Gixxer Cup:** 1. Syed Muzammil Ali 14:19.609; 2. Tanay Gaikwad 14:25.458; 3. Sidharth Sajjan 14:27.480

year she has made the switch to Dark Don Racing.

Phoebe may have taken some time to get to racing but she is wasting none of it now — the current season will see her juggling single-seaters, autocross and rallying. "I am doing a bit of everything," she says. "I wanted to do the Indian National Rally Championships as well. I got a drive for the first round where they agreed to sponsor fifty per cent of the expenditure, but I couldn't come up with the remaining amount. I tried to make it for the second round as well but that also is not happening. Hopefully, by the third round, I'll be able to

work something out. And if there's an autocross happening somewhere, I'll definitely go. They are three different skill sets," she says. "My mind can work in different ways. For me, somehow in a weird way, racing is very personal. It's like therapy in a way. If I don't go racing, I feel very low. I need to get in a car and hit the track. I like the fact that they're all different and adapting to all three is a lot of fun."

And does her dad still want her to become a cop? "No," she laughs. "I just kept bringing home trophies and my dad was like 'you don't have to write the exams anymore'."