



A saloon car in action during the MMSC-FMSCI national racing championship.

Patel back on track

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The MRF MMSC-FMSCI Indian national car racing championship flows into a critical phase with the fourth and penultimate round scheduled to start at the MMRT on Saturday as the battles for points escalate. Incidentally, international Aditya Patel of Chennai is set to make his saloon car debut in the championship and will be racing at this track after a lapse of 11 years.

With the front-runners in the championship stakes tightly bunched in all the categories that will be on view over the next two days — the premier MRF Formula 1600, Indian Touring Cars, Super Stock and Volkswagen Ameo Class — the expectations of exciting and close racing are sky high.

In the previous rounds, winner-picking was a hazardous guess and it would be much the same this weekend with a clutch of India's top racing drivers, ranging from bubbling teenagers to battle-hardened veterans, one inking up on the grid, each seeking precious championship points.

The MRF F1600, with four races scheduled over two days, and a maximum of 100 points on offer,



Aditya Patel

has four drivers — Nayan Chatterjee (Mumbai, 63 points), Chennai's Vishnu Prasad (58), teenager from Bengaluru Sohil Shah (56) with two wins from four starts and A. Bala Prasath from Coimbatore (43) — heading the leaderboard, but wary of others who have them in their sights.

The popular Indian touring cars category, a triple-header for this round, has developed into a bitter fight involving veteran racer from Coimbatore Arjun Balu (80 points), driving a race

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concepts-prepared Honda Vtec car, and championship leader Chennai's Karthik Tharani (86) in a factory-supported Volkswagen Vento. However, Tharani, winner in two of the five outings and serving a one-race suspension, is sitting out this round.

Tharani is replaced by Aditya Patel, the 2007 Formula Rolon champion, who has been a participant in various international touring cars series abroad (VW, Audi, GT Asia) in the past decade.

“Obviously, I am quite excited to be racing at the MMRT, virtually my home circuit, after over a decade (his last outing was in 2008, a one-off race). Interestingly, my Formula Rolon car in 2007 when I won the championship for NK Racing, was prepared by Arjun Balu and his brother Sanjay. So, it's quite

extraordinary that this weekend, I am racing against Arjun!” said Aditya.

The super stock category, to be run on a combined grid with the ITC class, presents a similar picture with Bengaluru's Rithvik Thomas (Race Concepts) leading R.P. Raja Rajan (Performance Racing) from Chennai by eight points. The pair has won three races apiece and with three more to be run this weekend, a thrilling battle between the two is on the cards.

The VW Ameo Class, which was upgraded to national championship status, and boasting of 18-car grid, has three drivers, Pratik Sonawane (Pune), Jeet Jhabakh (Hyderabad) and Saurav Bandyopadhyay (Mumbai), in that order separated by eight points with Delhi's Anmol Singh Sahil in fourth, a further nine points behind.