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SPEED BREAKER

Lockdown repercussions: Sponsors slam brakes, racers' budget plans fishtail

VISHNU PRASAD @ Chennai

CALL most athletes up during the lockdown, and you'll hear some familiar buzzwords about keeping fit and improvising training routines. Not Raghul Rangaswamy though. The six-time national champion has a more existential crisis on his hands. "Working on how to financially come back after the lockdown gets over," he says. "There is never a good time for a global pandemic. But for India's racers, the outbreak and the consequent lockdown could

not have had worse timing. April and May are their preparatory months. They reacquaint themselves with their cars and tracks, after a few months of off-season. More importantly, this is when they find finances for the year ahead. In Indian racing, a good chunk comes from their pockets. But many do get a significant chunk from sponsors. The prospect of losing that has at least some of them sweating over their futures. Take Raghul's case. As someone who has been in the title

picture of JK Tyre FMSCI National Racing Championship for the past five, six years, it's difficult to find too many faster drivers than him in the country. "We would have been working on the budget, sponsorship and everything. But right now, we have no idea about how the scene is going to be." "If we are able to get a sponsorship of at least 20 per cent of our budget, that's a very big deal. Motorsports is still developing in our country. Unless you have a lot of spectators and exposure, it's tough to find full sponsorship. But this year, even that 20 per cent will be difficult." For Ashwin Datta, who won the Formula LGB 1300 category

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Raghul Rangaswamy, India racer



will be really difficult." The JK Tyre driver is confined to his home like everyone else. But that hasn't stopped him from trying out unorthodox means of securing sponsorship. "April and May are when we do most of the work," says Datta. "To drive in any championship, you need money. Since everyone's sitting at home, you can't go and find sponsors. I've been trying to mail some companies and contacts to see if something can be worked out. But I've been unsuccessful." Raghul believes that the lock-

down and its economic repercussions will see a decline in investment in motorsports. This, he feels, will increase competition among racers for sponsorship. He fears that older racers like himself will be at a disadvantage. "We have a lot of young drivers coming into the sport, 15, 18-year-olds. It'll be more viable for companies to sponsor them since there's always the possibility of them racing in international series. So the competition among drivers for sponsorship is going to be difficult."

in MRF series, the percentage is even higher. "I get around half of my budget from sponsors. The rest comes from my pocket. Spending any more than that