

Is Formula One™ technology on the right track?

ESPN STAR SPORTS F1 commentator Steve Slater, 51, arrived from the UK to deliver a talk on the current rules and regulations surrounding the F1 racecars at a Design for Speed seminar hosted by the National University of Singapore's (NUS) Faculty of Engineering's Mechanical Engineering Department last Thursday.

The 350 participants which included students from junior colleges and polytechnics, members of Singapore's motor sports community, staff and students from NUS Faculty of Engineering were treated to the latest updates in the technical arena of F1 racecars as well as news on FIA's (Federation Internationale d'Automobile) new direction.

The engineering students nearly 'stumped the Slater' with questions that showed they were clearly up to speed on F1 which is encouraging as Singapore looks to establishing a legacy in motor sports with hosting the 5-year long Formula 1™ Singtel Singapore Grand Prix and the upcoming Changi Motorsports Hub due in 2012.

Asked if Singapore can have its own racing team, Slater replied: 'Currently the background in motor sports is not present in Singapore. In other countries such as Europe, motor sport and car ownership has been established for several generations. Many who work in motor sport, first started as children, working on race cars with their dads. Singapore is just really starting to develop that culture. Singapore's time will come.'

Two award-winning NUS Formula SAE (Society of Automotive Engineers) racecars were also on display to give visitors a chance to view the final products of the university's unique engineering curriculum based on formula racecar engineering processes. The racecar project allows students to completely design, build and race their cars each year in USA. This May, their 2009 model and seventh racecar, ranked 19th out of 119 worldwide entries. For the last four years, the NUS FSAE racecars have remained the top entry from Asia competing at the intervarsity FSAE competition held at the famous Michigan International Speedway, where the NASCAR races are held.

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Slater believes: 'For over a century, Grand Prix motor racing has been the pinnacle of engineering and competition. However, recent rules have constrained creativity and cost money unnecessarily. They have not been consistent in recent years either'.

'I feel that the problem in F1 is that the rules are too constrained. They have reduced design creativity to simply exploring loopholes in ever more complex regulations.'

'My answer to the parameters set by the rule makers? – they are not ambitious enough. The good news is that for every rule, there is a race between rule makers and engineers. So far the engineers win the race every time.'

Karen Hoisington



Steve Slater giving his seminar at the National University of Singapore's Engineering Faculty's lecture theatre on August 20, 2009.





Steve Slater being handed his “first trophy for F1” by Prof Chan Eng Soon, Dean, Faculty of Engineering, National University of Singapore, after the seminar.



Steve Slater with students from Catholic Junior College pose with the 2009 NUS FSAE racecar at the Design for Speed seminar at NUS on 20 August 2009.