



Dreaming of Formula 1

There's nothing Jazeman Jaafar won't give up to live his dream as a race car driver, writes **Aneeta Sundararaj**

ASK a little boy of 6 what he'd like to be when he grows up and chances are he'll say policeman, astronaut, pilot, Spiderman or a pirate. Fast-forward 15 years when the boy is in college or has started working.

His choice of career could be medicine, engineering, law or banking and his childhood dream would be relegated to the back of his mind.

But not for Jazeman Jaafar, who had always set his sights on being a professional racing car driver, even at 6. Now, at 20, he is the country's brightest young motor racing star with the potential to be a leading professional racing driver in Formula 1.

Fresh from winning 2nd place in last year's British F3 International Series, Jazeman is excited about his future in F1.

For those uninitiated in the world of race car driving, the British F3 International Series is the recognised feeder championship for young drivers aspiring to Formula 1. Since the series started in 1964, those who have won it have gone on to become grand prix winners, including world champions such as Ayrton Senna, Jackie Stewart, Mika Hakkinen and Rubens Barrichello.

As he tells his story, a phrase that Jazeman often mentions is: "I have



Jazeman in action

to make sacrifices because this is my dream."

He explains that while most of his friends stayed in Malaysia, completed school and pursued higher education, he left home at 15 for Germany and then London where he's now based.

Still, when he gives an example of what he's learnt from the industry experts overseas, it does appear that he's learnt the same thing, but in a different way.

For example, an average Physics student may study Bernoulli's principle which, in simple terms, explains that as the velocity of a liquid or gas increases, the pressure within the fluid or gas decreases.

Jazeman learnt the same thing. He says: "When I meet the engineers in the factories, we'll discuss things like downward force. You know a race car's spoiler? That's the thing shaped like an upside-down wing, with the curved surface at the bottom. That produces a downward force which keeps the car grounded."

The personable young man doesn't have a memory that isn't connected to car racing. For instance, when his

father insisted he read one book in English before he indulged in his hobby (go-kart racing), Jazeman always chose magazines and books on racing cars and champions. When his father went abroad for work, he remembers the DVDs and books on racing car drivers that his father brought back as gifts.

Unlike many who tire of their gifts, Jazeman used them to cultivate his talent. "It may sound cliché but when I read the stories of people like Michael Schumacher and Ayrton Senna, I wanted to see what made them world champions. How did they achieve this success? I saw their dedication and hard work and I knew that I could do the same. I could make the same sacrifices."

In 2008, by accepting the offer made by Petronas to support his career, Jazeman has been experiencing the inner workings of a top Formula 1 outfit. More than meeting the best teams and leaders in the car industry, Jazeman had the chance to train with some of the best drivers in the world. "After all," says Jazeman, "if you train with the best, you'll

someday be the best."

The most important lesson Jazeman learnt from these people was self-motivation. "I have to be motivated. I cannot expect Petronas to call me at 7am and ask, 'Have you gone for a run?'. There are thousands of people wanting to do this and there are only 24 seats. I have only one chance. In Europe, I realised I was fighting in milliseconds. If I have a race, I will practise the race in my mind and I'll do an extra five laps. Or I'll consider changes in weather or what to do if it's a wet setup."

Jazeman then makes a curious statement: "I don't get to do what normal teenagers do." By this, he explains, he doesn't get to hang out at the cinema, play video games or spend time with his friends on weekends. "I'm either training or travelling. On weekdays, I'm at the factory meeting the engineers. On weekends, I'm racing."

Another sacrifice he has to make is diet: "Others can go out and get burgers and fried chicken but I have to make sure I eat healthy food. So I stick to things like brown rice, pasta and

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Jazeman Jaafar

chicken without skin. Nothing oil based is acceptable. And then, there are carrots, broccoli and roast potatoes."

There is a reason why his diet has to be so specific and focused on carbohydrates. "During a race, we burn up to 5,000 calories at a time. This is because racing cars is physically hard. First, you're pulling 6 Gs every lap. Then there's 14 kilos of force. Your heart rate is between 140 and 150 beats per minute for one and a half hours. If you've ever seen the steering wheel, you'll see that there are about 20 buttons and you have to constantly manage things like gear changes, DRS (drag reduction system), KERS (kinetic energy recovery system) and the amount of fuel. And all the while, I'm communicating with the engineer."

Jazeman is grateful to Petronas. "Many companies will invest in people who have already succeeded. What about those who are still young and need help to develop their potential? Not many want to focus on these people. Petronas does," he says.

What little free time he has, he spends with close friends whom he knew from school. "We share music. Sometimes, when I'm about to go for a race, they'll send me a track and wish me good luck. To relax after a race, I suppose I'll listen to songs like Vanessa de Mata's *Boa Sorte*."

At the end of the discussion, I realise that, instead of looking at the sacrifices he's made, Jazeman has embraced every opportunity that has come his way. In so doing, he's one of the lucky few who is living his dream.