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**THE INSTITUTION OF ENGINEERS, MALAYSIA**

Bangunan Ingenieur, Lots 60 & 62, Jalan 52/4, P.O. Box 223,  
 (Jalan Sultan) 46720 Petaling Jaya, Selangor.

Tel: 03-7968 4001/4002 Fax: 03-7957 7678

E-mail: sec@iem.org.my Homepage: http://www.iem.org.my

**Switching Lanes and Changing Gears****By: Ir. Mah Soo**

Vroom! Vroom! Vroom! Every year in March, the Formula 1 (F1) fever would hit Malaysia. The mere thought of the thrills of high speed driving would increase the flow of adrenalin in many Malaysians. Many a time, motorists would forget the difference between high speed professional racing by trained drivers at special racing circuits and the normal driving skills of our motorists on normal roads. This could be at the expense of road safety to the driver concerned and other road users.

The appointed Chairman of the Sepang International Circuit, Datuk Mokhzani Tun Dr Mahathir was quoted in the Star saying "I am hooked on driving fast cars, in a controlled environment and not on the roads. I took advance driving lessons with Ferrari and Porsche. I have above average driving skills as I have developed good habits when it comes to holding the steering wheel, turning corners and even braking. I am constantly aware of what's happening around me to make me a better road driver." We can learn from him before switching to the fast lane.

A Road Safety Trust Fund has been recently set up and we hope there could be outreach awareness programs that could change the mindset of our road users and produce the expected results.

F1 is the showcase for the automobile industry, which depends on the whole process from the high standards in design, production, maintenance and motoring skills up to marketing to the user. Volvo has long associated its brand with safety and reliability through its very successful "Volvo for Life" slogan. Our automobile industry has to know what its niche is and build on this strength. The stewards of our national car industry must know what they really want to achieve and then change gear to the proper perspectives before getting out of the pit stops.

Maybe some tips could be learnt from our four Malaysian students who hoisted the trophy for the Fastest Car in the "F1 team in Schools CAD/CAM Design Challenge" in Birmingham, England recently. It was reported that their magic formula for success was to concentrate on good engineering design and specifications that became superior to the other competitors that focused on aesthetic value. Hence, it is always pragmatic to concentrate on solid engineering fundamentals over the soft aspects of cosmetics and aggressive marketing. ■