

A DAZZLING FIGURE

BY GEORGE DAS

HARVEY Yap was all drained after an exerting test run of his newly acquired Ford Escort BDA.

He only took delivery of the Escort a day earlier. His mechanics Mike Webb and Liew Chee Chong worked overnight to get the car all set-up.

Harvey was restless before the run but had great faith in his mechanics and confident of the car's performance.

This practice run was Harvey's first time piloting the Ford BDA and for me this was the earliest recorded meeting with him the year 1974 at the Batu Tiga Circuit.

Our meeting took place in the paddock. I was then a raw and naïve sports reporter for the Star, a tabloid newspaper.

And Harvey was a rising star making waves on the racing scene. I was totally out of the water and in awe of him.

That year's Malaysia Grand Prix was my initiation to the world of racing. Not for Harvey though. He had starred on motorcycle sprints, organized road races in borrowed cars in the late 50s, later to be signed up by Tan Chong Motors.

He won numerous awards in the Datsun SSS and 240z before being snapped by Ford.

Though steering the BDA with very little knowledge of the car, he was highly confident: "I'll adapt to the car. I'm raring and restless to join the fray on race day."

The sun shone and hit the shimmering cars lined up for

the start of the super saloons event. Sitting comfortable in pole position was Japan's prolific driver K Takahashi in his works Datsun.

Breathing down his tail were Harvey and Abdul Malek, the backup for Takahashi, in another Datsun which was well setup and track tested.

There was excitement in the air. The spectators were looking forward for a treat of individual skills, as all of them would be competing under similar conditions but in different makes. Any one of the machines was capable of outpacing the other.

The pre-race media hype had drawn a capacity crowd for the duel between Harvey and Takahashi.

However, Takahashi's machine did not live up to its billing, leaving his teammate Abdul Malek to challenge the Ford. Eventually it was Harvey's crown and was hailed as the "Saloons King."

Harvey adapted very well to his new car, handling with style and tenacity. He was totally focused on the race and his physical and mental endurance played a great part.

His performance drew praise from all quarters.

My relationship with Harvey slowly developed into friendship. There were many highs and lows in his career but he was not caught up with the glitz, glamour and glory of the sport.

You were always comfortable around him. He was a very warm guy under the "cool exterior."

When he put himself behind the wheel, he was transformed but away from the "speed machine", Harvey was quiet and unassuming.

In his own way he was "race star" many wanted to emulate on the track. He certainly motivated many a young driver.

He was just plain good at what he did. A raw talent of the late 50s, who polished his skills to be a domineering racing icon in the 70s.

The younger generation will have no clue of the dazzling, charismatic character who was admired by thousands during the 70s. He "burned rubber" on the track like no other."

Harvey has left an indelible mark in the region and has earned a "star spot" in Malaysia's motor racing history.

