

2,400

the amount, in US dollars, spent on two 1964 Chevy Impalas by the makers of the 1977 film *Saturday Night Fever*. The director had insisted on Impalas, but was later told by Brooklynites that they would only drive an old Cadillac



my car Marzooq al Mansoori



Marzooq al Mansoori won two awards at the Downtown Dubai Classic Car Show this year with his restored 1959 Chevrolet Impala. Delores Johnson / The National

pole position Barry Hope

Invest in the people as well

In Middle East motorsport, there's a gulf just waiting to be filled. But while Formula One races are being held here, I have high hopes that an organisation will recognise how a bridge between this top level and grassroots racing really has the potential to kickstart the sport locally. There is no reason why, over time, we should not find an Arab F1 driver.

At the Motorsport Business Forum in Bahrain two years ago, I highlighted the imbalance between the huge investment by governments in motorsport infrastructure and the lack of funding for the development of local racing drivers. As with any sport, motor racing continually needs to draw new generations of competitors willing to learn and hungry for success. It also demands a professionally managed system that backs them as they progress through the ranks.

In Bahrain, KHP Consulting, the marketing and sponsorship agency, had estimated that more than \$11 billion was being invested across the GCC in motor racing infrastructure and sponsorship investments.

That's a heck of an amount for one sport, but quite reasonable when you consider the economic benefits. With the focus pointed squarely on F1 and its massive audience – estimated to be around 600 million for each race – motorsport provides a compelling way to showcase the region with F1's glamour, ambition and high technology.

Consequently, there are now five major race circuits in the region, with Abu Dhabi receiving accolades as the world's best. And as these facilities have become available, a committed and vibrant grassroots scene is emerging.

However, that scene is comprised mostly of "gentlemen racers" in GT, touring and sports car championships. In order for talent from the Arab world to rise as fast as the region's commitment to race infrastructure, a new level is needed that shepherds the best racers through motorsport's traditional "feeder" series towards F1, its pinnacle.

The authorities have worked hard to promote the sport and now it is time for a private group to be formed to help drivers through the experience they gain from a highly organised, grass-roots motorsport programme that covers all levels of participation.

In Britain, there is a layer of drivers' organisations that sits between the circuits and the governing body and serves to plan and deliver national motor racing at a level that we simply don't have in the Gulf. The BRDC, under former world champion Damon Hill, and BARC, which is involved in the Formula Renault BARC top-level feeder, are both significant names in this regard.

If we were to adopt this model, the UAE would be the first to do so among the countries that adopted F1 before having a local motorsports strategy. And more importantly, we could see a campaign that would encourage Emiratis to let their youngsters take up karting – the gateway to Formula One.

As we look forward to the second grand prix here, it is worth taking a look at more mature motorsport markets to see what really drives the organisation, strategy and development plans for motor racing. And with the potential for corporate backing, there is a definite opportunity to fill this gulf.

Barry Hope is a director of Gulf Sport Racing, which is seeking the first Arab F1 driver through the FG1000 race series. Join the UAE racing community online at www.singleseaterblog.com.

Restore and order

This Abu Dhabi car lover is totally dedicated when it comes to revitalising a classic

In 1959 the US saw some eventful changes. The Barbie doll was launched, Buddy Holly died in a plane crash and Alaska and Hawaii became the 49th and 50th States. However, it was also the year that this Emirati's own piece of Americana – the Chevrolet Impala – rolled off the production line in Detroit.

Marzooq al Mansoori's second generation Impala hadn't fared too well over the years, who works for the Abu Dhabi guards, a classic car enthusiast and restorer, has since put the sparkle back into the car's eyes and the bite into the bat wings of this award-winning Chevy.

"Everyone should have a hobby," al Mansoori says standing proudly by the Impala, the second and most recent Chevy he has restored. "For me, I like classic cars. You can easily pay US\$20,000 [Dh73,470] for a fully restored and maintained car, but that is no fun."

Al Mansoori, who had earlier completed a restoration of a 1947

Chevy Thriftmaster in 2007, instantly fell in love with the Impala when he spotted it on the internet. "I like the design and its shaping," he says. "I like the chrome. It is a beautiful car. It is not like the later muscle cars. They have power but I don't like the design."

When he had it imported into the UAE in January 2009, it was far from a serious head-turner as he showed me the pictures of what the car looked like when it first arrived at his Mussafah workshop. The Impala's engine was barely working, the chrome skirts rusted, the fuel tank was rotting away and the bodywork a rather bland pale green. Inside, the upholstery of the seats was ripped.

However, these days it is not as challenging to restore cars with genuine parts as al Mansoori reveals.

"Luckily you can find everything you need to order on the internet so you don't have to search for spare parts with any real difficulty. If you have a friend there too to

check the parts, it helps. I tend to use many companies," al Mansoori says, showing me a file containing every invoice for both of his models, which he adds is useful if he is stopped by the police.

In addition, he even owns the original manuals to both the Thriftmaster and the Impala.

He started his project by completely rebuilding the 3.9L Blue Flame inline six cylinder engine first, mounting it back on to the chassis. He then replaced the rotten fuel tank before renovating the bodywork and then spraying it, in his own trademark colour, a quite dazzling cherry red.

Even inside, he matched the colour scheme on the dash and seats, while sitting there in pride of place is an original "seeking" radio unit.

But how does it drive?

"It is an easy car to drive. I don't drive it above 100kph anyway, but that is because it is fine for cruising. I have driven it on occasions for more than 200km and it runs

well," al Mansoori says, adding that he does use it often during the week.

Amazingly, his second project was finished inside a year, in time for this year's Downtown Dubai Classic Car Show.

"I worked on it nearly every day. You had to fight me to stop, because I wanted to finish it. It is a challenge," he says.

The hard work paid off. It blew the judges and public away, winning two awards; the Emaar Award and the Public Choice.

"It is always the aim of starting these projects to win awards," he says. "Winning the Emaar Award was good, but it makes it all worthwhile when members of the public see what you have done and recognise the car."

And it is little wonder why the public voted for al Mansoori. The sheer enthusiasm, and the dedication to documenting the progress of each project, he has towards his two Chevrolet's is incredible.

However, he doesn't have any plans in the near future to restore a new car. He hasn't quite finished with the Impala just yet as his next, albeit small, step is to put on the original window and check-list stickers – something most motorists take for granted.

After the interview, al Mansoori kindly offered me a lift to my next appointment. Sadly though, the Impala remained under the covers. Instead he used his Toyota Land Cruiser.

After swiftly reversing past the Chevy, using the Cruiser's built-in rear camera and parking sensors, he quipped: "Now don't get me wrong. I do like technology in cars, sometimes."

"When the temperature is 45°C, the Impala's a/c is not good, you have to be comfortable."

He then checked the sat-nav and drove off leaving behind one of the most unique cars here in the UAE.

★ Stephen Nelmes

go gear computer mice



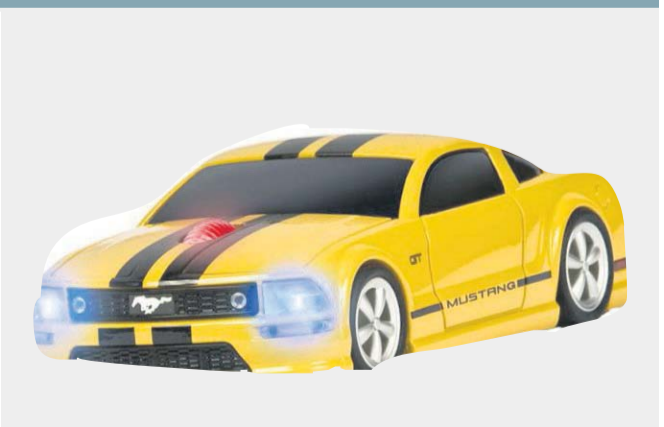
Flying under the radar

Inspired by Italian supercars, the Stealth wireless computer mouse is an ergonomically designed, 800 dpi mouse with two buttons and a scroll wheel to ensure easy navigation around your PC or Mac. It comes with sports alloy style wheels, tinted windows and working LED headlights – in case you need to drive at night. The company also stocks mice based on the old and new Fiat 500s, the classic gullwing Mercedes and the TVR Tuscan. Just like a real car, it needs fuel – two AAA batteries, not included, of course. Available from www.meandmycar.co.uk for Dh114.



A sporty number

The company behind this sporty mouse gained funding to start its business by appearing on the British TV show *Dragon's Den*, where successful, millionaire business people look for budding entrepreneurs in which to invest. The mice come in pink, red, black and silver. They feature the world's smallest 2.4 GHz USB receiver – stored in the boot, along with the batteries – and rubber tyres, with one on the bonnet for scrolling. Motor Mouse are looking to introduce a Mini Cooper S later this year. Available from www.motor-mouse.net for Dh170.



The muscle mouse

This wireless mouse with a USB receiver comes in a Ford Mustang Series mould. The Mustang mice come in various colours and with or without the racing stripe. Based on the high performance motor it comes with high performance accessories, such as 800-dpi resolution for enhanced accuracy and precision movement. They are PC and Mac compatible. The functioning headlights and smooth lines give the car a realistic look and feel. Available from www.carmouse.com for Dh165. The company stocks other models such as the GT, and other makes such as Chevy, Chrysler and Lamborghini.