

Sundaram Karivardhan



Sundaram Karivardhan or short **Kari** (June 20, 1954 Coimbatore, India–August 24, 1995 in the same town) was a legendary figure of Indian motorsports. Apart from being a successful formula car racer, was also a designer and constructor of several formula cars, his most famous design being the Formula Maruti open wheeled race car. His low cost cars helped other racers, notably Narain Karthikeyan, Karun Chandhok, and Armaan Ebrahim, to their entry into motorsports. A wealthy industrialist, he was later killed in an air crash, aged 41.

Early days

Sundaram Karivardhan was born on 20 June 1954 in Coimbatore to noted Indian freedom fighter G.K.Sundaram from the Lakshmi Millstextile family. He did his schooling in Coimbatore and after graduating in mechanical engineering from PSG College of Technology, he completed his master of science at the UCLA, Los Angeles.

Motor racing

Quiet and shy in nature from a very young age, he showed a keen interest in bikes and cars. In the United Kingdom he attended the Jim Russell racing school. Later, when he returned to India in the mid-70's, he started participating in the Chennai's Sholavaram races and Calcutta's Barrackpore track. His first race was 1973 Sholavaram Grand Prix meet, later he appeared every year in newly constructed formula cars from his own garage. He raced until 1995, the year of his demise. Cars he raced ranged from Premier Padmini, Datsun 510, Sipani Dolphin, Formula Atlantic, several cars of his own design and in the final years Formula 3 cars. His last race was in a Formula Ford, in McDowell's body shell in Chennai's MMSC track.

Apart from Sholavaram he has also raced in Calcutta's Barrackpore Track and in Delhi.

Race Car Constructor

One of his early complete in-house designs was the 300 BHP Formula Monoposto based on the Formula Atlantic Chevron B40 model nicknamed "Black Beauty". But until the late 80's,

motorsports was only for wealthy drivers. In an effort to make racing more affordable in India and improve grassroots level racing he designed and tested a small single seater, dubbed as India's Formula Ford, with a Maruti 800 engine, and adapting easily available parts, sometimes made in-house. His second design was a two seater car named McDowell 1000 using a Maruti Gypsy 1.0 liter engine.

FISSME



A FISSME or Formula Maruti Single Seater racing Car

FISSME (Formula India Single Seater Maruti Engine) widely known as formula Maruti was launched in 1988 in Chennai's Park Sheraton just before the annual Grand Prix races in MMSC track. Notable drivers taking part in the inaugural race were J. Anand, Akbar Ebrahim and R. Gopinath, all of them would later become national champions in Formula 3. The inaugural race was won by Akbar Ebrahim.

Later years saw drivers like Narain Karthikeyan, Karun Chandhok, Armaan Ebrahim and other future national champions making their debut races in a Formula Maruti series, until the class was discontinued from the mainstream championship in 2006. Still these cars race in junior championship, and are the most affordable open wheeled formula cars in the world costing not more than US\$ 300 for a single race.

Motor Rallying

Kari entered in very few rallies, among them the Karnataka K-1000 in Bangalore. He later launched the JK Rally team in 1992, when JK Tyres wanted to enter into rallying which was previously dominated by MRF Tyres. In the 1990 season he spotted a young Hari Singh from Chandigarh taking part in the Coimbatore Rally and, seeing his talent, offered him to tune his car, enabling him to win the Indian

Championship title 5 times. During the early 90's he quickly converted all Maruti Gypsy Rally cars to fuel injection when tuned chips gained popularity.

Racing Team

Kari's racing team was Super Speeds, and the main sponsor was Lakshmi Mills. The early cars had a white and blue body shell which was later switched to black and gold. The company that built his cars was P&B Engineering. J. Anand and N. Leela Krishnan were some of the notable drivers from his team before the duo switched to rival Team MRF.

Aviator

Kari was interested in many areas of mechanics, and that included his interest in aviation as his family owned a Cessna airplane. In 1989 he started a small manufacturing plant near Coimbatore to manufacture Power Gilders using a Yezdi 250cc motorcycle engine, later a Rotax engine. He would often test his gliders flying to the Ooty Mountains, Dindigul, Kovilpatti, or Kayattar near Tirunelveli. The small airstrip in Coimbatore later became the Kari Motor Speedway.

Other projects

In the early 90's he was promoted to be the Managing Director of Lakshmi Mills and held this key management position in several of his group companies. Also he ventured into new areas like development of aerators for prawn breeding. One of his other earliest ventures was to manufacture small farm tractors. During the early 90's he purchased rights from a British based kit car manufacturer to build replica models of the Ford GT40, using a Ford Bosworth, Lotus 7, and AC Cobra. But before commencing production he died in an aircraft crash in Coimbatore.

Fatal crash

He died on 24 August 1995 while flying a Puspak trainers aircraft. The purpose of flying was to log some additional flying time as required to retain his flying license. The accident was widely mourned by the racing scene. He was about to make a full mark in the automobile scenario and his last press interview was with Car and Bike magazine and BBC Motor Show programme days before his crash.

His demise almost created a vacuum in Indian Motorsports with dwindling crowds in the Chennai track and after the 1997 season made the MMSC scrap the All India Grand Prix Meet altogether. In 2002 his long-time friend and co-racer B. Vijaykumar stepped in to build and launch Formula LGB and Formula Rolon race cars and also constructed a race track in his hometown which is a major motorsports hub.

Character and legacy

Widely known as a gentleman racer, his unselfish ways and dedication to the development of Indian motorsports attracted many new talents into Motorsports. Kari also earned admiration from several quarters more for his character than his racing talents. Though born in one of Coimbatore's wealthiest families, Kari was easily approachable by several people irrespective of social barriers. Kari was nevertheless considered a unique man with his soft-spoken nature and publicity shy nature. He was good in spotting new talents and training them to become professionals like Akbar Ebrahim and five time national Rallying Champion Hari Singh.

Kari's Team Super Speeds later became a Limited Company now a part of L. G. Balakrishnan Brothers and today has a motorsports division which constructs the Formula LGB and Formula Rolon cars.

The race track in Coimbatore is named after Karivardhan (Kari Motor Speedway), and in Karamadai in Coimbatore an Industrial Training school is named after him. Some of his former employees have their garages named in his honour. His Intended Caterham based car was named Kari 65 in his honour with 65 being his racing number.