

MACAO SINGLE SEATER STAR MAKES GT DEBUT



CHARLES LEONG HON CHIO IN THE HARMONY RACING FERRARI 488 GT3 (IMAGE SOURCE: QIAN JUN MOTORSPORT MEDIA)

Home-grown Macao talent and two-time Formula 4 Macau Grand Prix winner Charles Leong Hon Chio has the classic motorsport background of a champion. Climbing the career development ladder from go karts through junior single seaters, Charles has excelled at every level, repeatedly proving his undoubted talent both at home and across Asia.

While in the second year of studying online for his university degree, the 2022 season brought an unexpected new opportunity for the 21-year-old Macao driver in the form of an invitation to enter the world of GT racing for the first time.

The invitation came from respected Chinese GT competitor, team owner and Macau GT Cup

podium finisher David Chen Wei'an. The car was a stallion of a Grand Tourer, the Ferrari 488 GT3.

Having not turned the wheel of any race car since his 2021 Formula 4 Macau Grand Prix win, Charles first got the chance to test the mighty Ferrari GT in May this year, and the sessions went well.



DAVID CHEN WEI'AN ON THE PODIUM AFTER THE 2020 MACAU GT CUP (IMAGE SOURCE: MGPOC)

"This opportunity came as a surprise to me," explains Charles. "Harmony Racing is a brand new team and the first one to run a Ferrari in China to this high professional standard. David Chen approached me and was willing to give me the opportunity to race. It worked out in the first round of the China GT Championship and also when I joined the China Endurance Championship (CEC) from the second round. We won race two at the China GT Championship weekend and we won the CEC race in Zhuzhou as well, so everything seemed to be good on my GT debut."

However, always his own harshest critic, Charles was frustrated with himself when the acute differences between the two disciplines of motorsport became more apparent, despite continuing to achieve impressive results with the team.

"At the CEC in Ningbo, we finished P2, but I was very upset about my performance that weekend. I expect myself to always improve, and I also had a very strong team mate in [two-time Macau GT Cup podium finisher] Alexandre Imperatori, who has been a really

good coach to me. There are many new things to adapt to in a GT car from a formula car. I think I'm still driving the GT a bit like a single seater."

Quick to learn from his experience, as a GT rookie Charles knows he still has much to master: "We had understeer in Ningbo and I really didn't know how to cope with it," he explains. "In formula cars I never really had that level of understeer. The most challenging difference between GT cars and formula cars is how you brake in a GT as it can impact the car balance a lot. Braking too hard can cause understeer, while in a formula car, you brake super hard. Braking and the weight transfer, because it's so much heavier and has so much power, and learning to take care of the tyres are key, especially as the races are longer. It's something I need to be able to adapt to in the future. It will take a little bit of time."

In 2023, Charles will spend his final year at university on campus in the UK, but is hopeful of being able to fit in some racing, whether it be open-wheelers or GTs, around his studies. "To be honest, I'm just happy racing whatever the car," he admits, although there's no doubt he has enjoyed the challenge of his GT debut. "David has been great. He's really keen to offer opportunities to young drivers and those who deserve a chance, and I'm grateful for his support. Who knows what will happen in the future?" ❧



CHARLES LEONG HON CHIO (RIGHT) WITH TEAM MATES ALEXANDRE IMPERATORI (CENTRE) AND LIANG JIATONG (LEFT) (IMAGE SOURCE: QIAN JUN MOTORSPORT MEDIA)