

CROSS COUNTRY CARS

Generally, when starting anything new, some good background research is always advisable. Only fools rush in - it's best to fully understand what you are about to undertake and work out which is the best approach for you.

There are two ways that you can learn in life: by trial and error and your own mistakes, or by lessons learned from other people's mistakes. The latter is certainly the quickest and cheapest route when it comes to motor racing.

Watch some Cross Country Cars in action at the local events. Take a stroll through the service parks and speak to some of the competitors, most will be more than happy to chat about how they got started and the pros and cons of various cars or championships.

Basically, there are two ways of getting started in motor racing. The first option is to buy a cross country race prepared car from a competitor who is changing classes or packing up.

The alternative way is to use a "donor" car and do all the conversion yourself. With this option much depends on the condition of the car in the first place. It must be stressed that it needs to be in sound condition with regard to body, suspension and running gear. You are going to be driving the car to its limit so it needs to be safe and strong.

It has to be said that the cheapest way of starting is by buying a ready prepared car. Preferably one which you have seen performs and which you can take back home straight from there. No race car ever seems to fetch as much money as has been spent on it, so doing it this way you are not paying full price for all the extra fittings. If you want to look at a prospective purchase it's not a bad idea to take along someone with some experience of the cars so that they can advise. You will need to fit a full roll cage to protect you in the event of an accident. A racing seat and a full harness seat belt will also be needed.

In addition to the car you will need personal safety gear; i.e. single layer FIA approved fire resistant racing suit, boots, gloves, balaclava, underwear and a FIA or SANS approved helmet. With all safety equipment always buy the best you can afford. If you are a spectacle wearer it's a good idea to use plastic lenses instead of the normal glass.

Find a co-driver. Having a good co-driver is very important. A driver can only do so much without knowing what's ahead of him/her.

The Regional events have Club supporter classes which are one of the best ways to make an entry into motor sport and have lots of fun. You can log onto MSA website to obtain the yearly calendar.

LICENSING

Before anyone enters into any motorsport event in South Africa, a competitor needs to obtain a competition licence. All motorsport in South Africa is governed by a body called Motorsport South Africa – referred to as MSA which has many functions. MSA is the licensing authority for competition licences and application has to be made via them.

In turn, all motorsport in South Africa runs under the international guidelines laid down by one of two international bodies and MSA is the sole affiliate to these bodies as well as the SA Sports Council. These are:

The FIA. (Federation de Internationale de l'Automobile) This is the body that controls all car racing.

The FIM. (Federation de Internationale de Motocyclisme) This is the body that controls all two-wheeled racing.

The forms that are needed to apply for a licence can be downloaded from the MSA website www.motorsport.co.za or you can apply online at www.msaonline.co.za.

When applying for your licence you will need proof of club membership. You can download the club list from the MSA website and contact any one of the Cross Country Car clubs. Once you have joined a club, ask them to send you a letter as proof of membership which

you will need when you apply online. Secondly you would need to take out one of the Medical Insurance options with MSA.

There are three types of licences that can be applied for and these are:

Club licence – This licence is a restricted licence that allows competition in club events and provincial events although no points can be scored in any regional championship with a club licence.

Regional Licence – This licence is also a restricted licence and allows competition in all club and provincial championship events although points can only be scored in the provincial championship in the province in which the competitor resides. No competition is allowed in any national championship events with a regional licence, other than if a regional championship event is combined with a national championship.

National licence – This licence allows competition in any event in South Africa as well as Lesotho and Swaziland which fall under MSA.

Once you have obtained your licence you need to download the General Competition Rules as well as the category specific rules (in this case Cross Country Car) from the MSA website. Make sure that you read through these books and familiarize yourself with all the rules and regulations of the competition. The SSR handbook will contain most of the information you need for your vehicle and general rules.

The concept is for the competitor to find their feet first in club events and use them to gain confidence and skills. Once you have mastered the club events, you can then move onto regional events. Similarly, keep on at your regional events until you think you're experienced enough and fit enough to enter into a national.

Our advice to all new competitors is to not rush into higher levels regional or national too soon. By gradually getting into club events one can gain confidence and skill and will be able to cope with the very physical demands of the sport. If a new competitor moves into regionals too quickly they'll find the going tough and may get a little disillusioned.

Stick with it and practice. Cross Country Car Racing takes commitment and every year you will get better. Good Luck!!