4x4

RAINFOREST CHALLENGE 99 ITS' D-DAY!!

SOME will be nervous, others sweating in their too clean cargo pants and Camel shirts. But all will be looking forward to the start of the Rainforest Challenge today (RFC) at Dataran Bandaraya, Johor Bahru.

RFC will be setting two official records and one unofficial. The Malaysia Book of Records will be there to register the largest 4x4 parade as well as the biggest international 4x4 convoy ever assembled in Malaysia -- of course, they won't all be going into the jungle. The other unofficial record? Well, it is the only international event in the country which overlap with our general elections day.

For the foreign contingent representing 23 countries from Asia Pacific, Africa, Europe and North America, this will be the jungle event of the year; one which they have been planning and preparing for the past 11 months.

The favourites this year are the Thais, and the top two teams are Puripat/Choochart and Suthat/Pongchai.

The former was here last year and finished in the top 10 while the latter shone in the recent Perak National 4x4 Challenge held in July this year. Both teams are members of the Off Road Federation of Thailand.

The Australian team of Trent Leen/Wayne Smith will also be one of the teams to watch out for. No doubt Trent will be new here with his Nissan Patrol, but Wayne, with the experience with his father in the previous RFC will be an advantage to this "young guns" from Down Under. Their age factor should not be underestimated in the competition. Those who do will surely pay a heavy penalty for their misjudgement.

Still from Asia Pacific region, the Japanese winners of the RFC Overseas Selections Japan organised by Off Road Express will be another one team to watch. Tomonori Tsurumi and his "winch man" Kazushi Suzuki will be driving another Nissan Patrol, painted with Simex and Off Road Express colours. The younger Tomonori is no push over, even though they will not be driving their machine from Japan. The vehicle will be supplied by Simex. Suzuki, the diminutive but tough winch expert, will surely give solid support with his experience.

The British champion of Simon Buck and Jeremy Clark and their Land Rover Defender 90 will see their reputation severely tested in a jungle event. How they do will have a great impact on the image of Land Rovers in Malaysia where the Toyota Land Cruiser has long since become the No. 1 workhorse of the nation.

Next comes the Malaysian-based Danish team of Max Skjold and son, Jacob. This father/son combination in their Jeep Cherokee 4 litre has shown tremendous improvement in their skills for the past two years. They finished in the top five in the Perak National 4x4 Challenge this year. It will be interesting to watch how they will fare this time.

Closer to home, our fellow Malaysians from the Land Below the Wind, Hui Vui Leong and Chu Khen Chu in their Toyota LC FJ 43 R-KC will be showing their forte. Not known for softness, they will showing what Sabahans are made of. A team to be reckoned with.

Simex, the title sponsor, will be fielding a team of four, which will give our foreign guests and fellow Malaysian teams a real challenge that they will never forget. Wong Sing Cheong/Nelson Wong, Harry Yap/Thomas, Danny Liew/Chan King Cheong and Martin Wong/Simon Sim will make sure that the others sweat profusely on the way to the top five position.

The other Malaysian teams from Johor, Kuala Lumpur, Selangor and Penang will also be giving their best in this event. Among them, Tan Chin Long/Wong Van Naan will be at their best and might even spring a surprise or two.

However, the other teams competing in this third edition of RFC should not be discounted at face value yet. In a event like this, the team that can outpace, outlast and outperform the rest without causing damage to their vehicle will surely win the day.

The other attractions that Luis Wee, RFC event director, will be showing during this event will be the five brand new Husaberg Enduro bikes and two Yamaha Grizzly 4x4 Quads all from Sweden. Among the bikers will be a lady this time, Ms Erica Roth, who will be riding the Husaberg FE 400 cc. This 24 year old lass has full of experience to match her style. Who says a woman's place is in the kitchen?

For true grit and endurance, the honour must surely go to two gentlemen from Sweden, Mats Andersson and Fredick Lindstrom. Both are paralysed from the legs downwards, but that did not stop them from riding their Quads all over the world, in the snow, rocks and sand. But the jungle will be a new territory for these true blue adventurers. However, nothing will stop their pursuit of knowing new places and experiencing new adventures. They will ride their 600cc Yamaha ATV with the convoy.

The event ends at Awana Kijal on December 8 at the Awana Kijal.