

Rwanda's motorsport scene is revving its engine, attracting new enthusiasts and promising economic growth. The excitement, the competition, the economic potential – it's all there. But before we shift into high gear, let's address a critical issue – safety.

The recent participation of an untrained (enough) individual in a weekend event underscores a crucial need: robust safety measures and structured training programs. Look, I'm all for fresh talent.

New blood is what keeps any sport vibrant. Rally, as most of you call it, is inherently thrilling, but that passion shouldn't cloud judgement.

The FIA, the international sport's governing body, makes it clear: proper training is paramount for the entire crew, including drivers, pace readers, and marshals. Their tiered licensing system emphasizes experience and training – for good reason! Tragic accidents throughout history serve as grim reminders of this point. From multi-car pile ups to fatal crashes, these incidents underscore the importance of preparation.

Rwanda itself isn't immune. We all remember the 2014 Rallye Des Mille Collines tragedy that left a pace reader dead, (RIP). This wasn't just a driver issue – it involved an experienced navigator, highlighting the importance of a well-trained team. Motorsport rally isn't a one-man show.

The Rwanda Automobile Club (RAC) needs to take a page out of the FIA's playbook. One-off training sessions for amateurs are simply not enough. RAC should strictly enforce the FIA's tiered licensing system, demanding comprehensive training and experience. Acting as the gatekeeper, RAC needs to ensure only qualified and licensed individuals hit the track.

In a landmark partnership, the RAC partnered with FIA to propel Rwandan racing hopefuls onto the international stage. This initiative at that time, saw talented young drivers, like Fabrice Yoto, whisked away to South Africa for intensive training at top-notch facilities.

Yoto wasn't alone in reaping the rewards of this program. Participants honed their racing skills under the guidance of experienced instructors, gaining valuable knowledge and techniques. The program even fostered important connections within the motorsport world, opening doors for future professional opportunities.

Urgently, RAC needs to work with the private sector to establish local rally-specific driving schools that adhere to international benchmarks, not just regular driving schools.

One example is that of the Abdul Sidi Rally Academy which is a unique venture not only in Kenya but in Africa, the academy helps rally, upcoming drivers and fans relish a dream that looked impossible. We need such schools to avoid risking lives in the cockpit. Additionally, RAC needs to tighten its grip on enforcing licensing regulations.

The good news? The FIA's partnership with RAC to establish a national karting program, which was introduced in 2019, is a step in the right direction. Imagine a generation of skilled and responsible drivers nurtured from a young age! This isn't about slowing down progress; it's about ensuring a sustainable future for Rwandan motorsport. Here's what we can do:

RAC: Prioritize safety by developing training programs for upcoming drivers and navigators. Enforce licensing regulations with a stricter hand.

Motorsport Enthusiasts: Support the establishment of local rally-specific driving schools that meet international standards. Urge the RAC to strictly enforce licensing regulations.

By prioritizing training and enforcing regulations, RAC can ensure a thrilling and sustainable future for Rwandan motorsport, one where everyone crosses the finish line safely. It's time to shift gears and put safety in the driver's seat.