

Ribi Adeshokan

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Group GT3, known technically as Cup Grand Touring Cars and commonly referred to simply as GT3, is a set of regulations maintained by the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) for grand tourer racing cars designed for use in various auto racing series throughout the world.

About eight years ago, Ribi Adeshokan dropped his wife off at Brands Hatch racing circuit in Kent for a retreat. He said, "I was blown away. I noticed that the people involved in racing at the circuit were predominantly white or European, and I asked myself why Africans did not tap into this. I see what I do as a personal calling."

Funding the project personally and with support from friends, Ribi describes himself as an entrepreneur. He said, "This is a private venture and I try to share my vision with other people. A lot of white people are excited about what I am trying to do and they offer their support."

"One of the things that motivates me is around racial inequality; not that we are being discriminated against. African people have to make an effort; it's a way to contribute to global development and innovation."

Ribi describes his team as his wife and eleven year old daughter. He said, "GT3 is a top-level sport and

there are lots of experts. We have the best mechanics and engineers and we enjoy a close working relationship with the organisers of British GT3. It's not just about us going to a race, it's really about educating black people so they can be part of it too. We work hard to create awareness and we have discovered that young people and children want to engage with what we are doing. Everyone wants to talk to us and be inspired."

With a half a million US dollar price tag, GT cars do not come cheap. Ribi said, "Motor sport is quite an expensive business. I have lost money along the way but I have learned a lot as well. It took a couple of years for me to recover and realise the huge potential we have. We represent 1.2 billion people worldwide and we see the way everyone wants to belong to this. We have a real sense of pride and we are building a brand."

It's not all about winning. When was the last time England won the World Cup?* Sport brings people together, irrespective of religion or colour."

Faith is very important to Ribi. He said, "From the very beginning up until now it's been a tough journey. I have broken through a lot of barriers. I have been accepted into the world of GT motor sport. This is about building people and this is our strength. To pass through this journey is all about faith. God wants me on this journey to

impact on other people. It is not about me. We have about eight drivers and they are variously of African American, Black British, South African and Indian origin."

The GT3 project is about giving people opportunity. Ribi said, "Our drivers are not paid at the moment – we will pay them, but not yet. This project goes beyond colour; it's all about unity. We do need to retain our African identity, but all of our technical team are white British and they will train our black teams as well. My wife looks after administration and events. We have our own DJ and after the race, we have an after race party. Motor sport is an elite sport and we want to be more relaxed and bring in the under 35s because they are the future. I want to bring people in – they can sit in the car and get closer to the sport. It's about education. When the car is racing, it's getting bashed all the time. We allow people to sit around the car. It's my joy, and I am giving them that same experience. Even with the pressure, I think we will get there

one day and that's where faith comes in. God gave me a great wife and God is wonderful. Most of the time when a door seems to be closing, out of the blue, something will come up. It may not be straightforward, but it will be there for us."

Youth development is very important to the project and to Ribi personally. He said, "It's about letting people realise that they can have a career in the industry. We want to offer young people something. We are developing educational products because this isn't just about the sport - it's about education as well."

There are lots of young, black, British kids and they need role models, not just the celebrity thing which isn't really working for them.

We need to use this as a platform to help young people to understand that they don't need to

be a super-star to be successful; they need a solid career." Philosophical about humanity Ribi said, "It's very important to have an impact on humanity and change the world. Of course, we want to have a good life and work hard - forget about racism - we have to work hard as well. We need to come together. The real question is what can we contribute as a community? That is our responsibility and it can be a problem in Britain. When you see a black, Chinese or Indian person, we should not judge on face value."

My personal dream is that we earn that respect instead of demanding it.

We can make a positive contribution. By all means, pray for Africa and pray for things like Ebola to be resolved, but the images we see often perpetuate the idea that black Africans need help. We need to try and change the way we are looked at."

*1966

