

Lankan rallyist to fulfill father's dream

AGE CORRESPONDENT

The 20th edition of the Raid de Himalaya, like every year, witnessed a fair number of competitors travelling from different parts of the world to battle with the best in India.

Sri Lanka's Shafraz Junaid, Britain's Suzanne Bull, Nepal's Deepak Sah and our own London-based Amitrajit Ghosh led the charge of the foreigners this year. The Raid started in Leh on Tuesday, traversing through some of the highest motorable roads in Ladakh, Zaskar and Kargil, before finishing on October 14.

Sri Lanka's Shafraz Junaid, along with Akhry Ameer, have already transported their Nissan pick-up truck and are eagerly looking forward to make their presence felt in the Raid.

Interestingly, Shafraz and Ameer are fulfilling the dream of Shafraz' father Faizal Junaid, who used to be the navigator for Sri Lanka's celebrated rallyist Cassim Wahab. For years, Junaid Senior and Cassim had dreamt of competing in the Himalayan Rally, which ran from 1981 to 1990. Junaid Junior is now out to achieve his dad's dream.

Shafraz and Ameer have been in Leh for more than a week now, getting used to high-altitude rallying. "I started rallying more



Sri Lanka's Shafraz Junaid (left) along with Akhry Ameer.

than two decades ago, and Ameer has been my navigator for long. My Dad's dream of rallying in the Himalayas always stayed with me. Last year too, we tried hard to come for Raid de Himalaya but could not make it. We are elated to be here this year," Shafraz said.

Last year, the duo were placed 2nd Runners Up in the Coffee

Day Rally of Chikmagalur, which was part of the Asia Pacific Rally Championship. "Coming for the Raid as been a challenge for individual entrants. We have stretched our budgets to just get here. Our target is simply one thing — finish the Raid," Ameer said.

In another first for the Raid, an Indian with international rally-

ing honours will be racing here. Amitrajit Ghosh, an established name in Indian rallying circles, moved to England five years ago to pursue motorsport internationally.

Ghosh is the only Indian with a podium in a British Rally Championship round and a win in a European Rally Championship Round (Greece).

He was also among the top five at the Latvian Rally Championship. Ghosh is driving for Team Mahindra at the Raid.

Raid de Himalaya is the flagship event of the country's premier motorsport club, Shimlabased Himalayan Motorsport. Its president Vijay Parmar pointed out that teams from Austria and Germany have participated in the Raid earlier.

"The whole idea is to have international participation. The German crew had shipped their Mercedes from Germany to compete in the Raid Adventure, which follows the Time-Speed-Distance format. It is great to have a Sri Lankan team in the Raid Xtreme, with a vehicle raced here in Sri Lanka and brought here," Parmar said.

Nepal's Deepak Sah and Britain's Suzanne Bull will be competing in the Xtreme Moto. Suzanne Bull, incidentally, is currently managing a bungee-jumping set-up in Rishikesh and divided her time between India and Switzerland.

Bull has been in India for six years now and she learnt how to ride a motorcycle only after coming here. "I have been motorcycling in the Himalayas for many years now. It's not about proving anything to anybody. I have to prove to myself that I can compete in this tough, highly challenging event," Suzanne said.

October 15. However, after a hike in examination fees, authorities will be taken up on...