

TIME TO FLY FLAG HIGH

EX-RACER TO JOIN OTHER SPH WAGC
WINNERS FOR FINALS IN SOUTH AFRICA

BY DAVID LEE

As the first Singaporean to compete and score points in the FIA World Touring Car Championships as well as the Super GT series, he has whizzed around race tracks at speeds exceeding 200kmh.

After retiring from racing in 2012, 46-year-old businessman Melvin Choo now finds himself with another opportunity to represent the Republic, in the more pedestrian sport of golf.

On Aug 2, Choo topped Division B (5.5-10.4 handicap index) at the SPH Golf World Amateur Golf Championships (WAGC) Finals presented by Centurion, who owns The Dalat at 1200 Country Club & Private Estate in Vietnam.

Along with the other winners – Erwyn Lam (Division A 0-5.4), Clara Ang (Division C 10.5-15.4), Colin Tan (Division D 15.5-20.4) and Lee Kian (Division E 20.5-25.4) – Choo will fly the Singapore flag at the WAGC in Durban, South Africa, from Oct 22-29.

“As a former racing pro of 10 years who retired in 2012, I have raced in Europe and Japan and the challenge of competing will always be something I look forward to,” said Choo.

“This gives me another chance to represent Singapore, and another challenge for me to compete. I will be there to represent my country so definitely I will try to win my division and help the team finish as high as possible.”

The WAGC in Durban offers different handicap divisions for golfers of varying abilities and is into its 22nd edition this year.

Team Singapore will play two practice rounds and four tournament rounds, where they will compete for the team title as well as individual honours in their respective handicap divisions. They finished second in the past two years.

The SPH Golf WAGC is the national qualifier for the WAGC tournament and it began with two qualifying rounds in July at the Tanah Merah Country Club's Tampines Course.

It attracted about 200 golfers over the two rounds, with the top 30 per cent playing in the Finals.

Choo showed he's got game by being the only golfer to shoot under par in the local Finals with a one-under 71.

He explained his fine showing: “I've been a TMCC member since the club's official opening in 1984, it's my home course and we were playing off the white tees when I usually play off the blue or black tees.

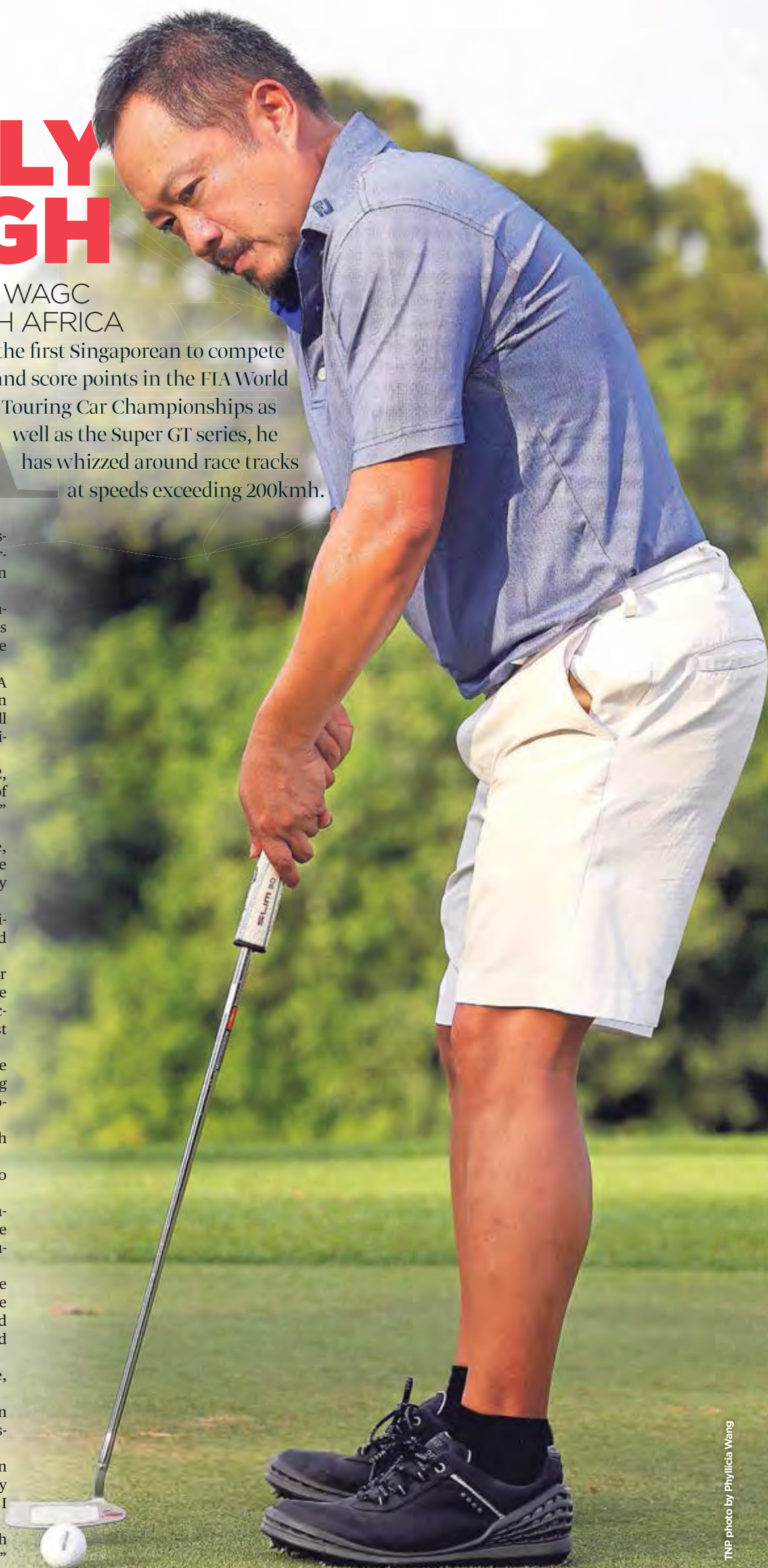
“My game plan was to be conservative and stay on the fairway. I knew that since it was the final round, pressure is inevitable. Having been a racer before, I understood pressure better so I just played my own game and waited for others to make mistakes.”

Racing and golf may be as different as chalk and cheese, but Choo can see some parallels.

The 9.3-handicap index golfer said: “We risk our lives in racing and obviously you can't replicate that type of pressure in golf.

“But they are technical sports in their own rights. In my first year back playing golf, I had to learn how to play again and it wasn't only until my second year back that I got back in the groove.

“If I were to think of a similarity, it would be that both physical and mental control are important in both sports.”



TNP photo by Phyllicia Wang