

Racing driver, businessman and father of four, Khaled Al Qubaisi certainly doesn't do things by halves. We caught up with him ahead of his final race of the season in the Porsche Mobil 1 Supercup at this year's Abu Dhabi Grand Prix to find out more



The air is filled with the noise of screaming engines and squealing rubber as we make our way to the support garages at Yas Marina Circuit. The ADTA-sponsored Team Abu Dhabi by tolimit are just completing their first day of testing as they prepare for the final race of the Porsche Mobil 1 Supercup, and we're here to meet Khaled Al Qubaisi to find out how he made the leap from businessman to racing driver at the relatively ripe old age of 33.

"I've always been interested in racing ever since I was a kid," says Khaled with a smile.

"Until recently we didn't really have any proper racing or motorsport infrastructure over here, so it's very difficult to get to do anything on a professional level. My first karting experience was when I was 18 or 19 and it was only really for fun. Together with the tolimit team, I am trying to

establish a more professional infrastructure with a racing school to try and raise local interest in racing with some national heroes.”

Khaled studied in America, where he completed his Bachelors and Masters degree, before returning to Abu Dhabi to work. He is currently head of Human Resources at Mubadala. But the self-confessed speed freak says racing was always at the back of his mind.

“What really kicked it off and convinced me to take my driving further was an event that was held by Mubadala where they had Luca Badoer [the Italian F1 driver] doing some kart laps at the Abu Dhabi Exhibition Centre and I was fortunate enough to race him and managed to beat him.”

In 2009, Khaled was introduced to some of the people behind the scenes at Yas Marina Circuit who gave him the opportunity to participate in one of the support races at the inaugural Abu Dhabi Grand Prix.

“I only had three months to get ready for the first race. The tolimit Motorsport team took me for some testing and then trained me intensively so I could get my national training license to allow me to race. It was hard as I had to compete in ten national races but I got my license just in time for the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix weekend, which was my first international race.”

Shortly afterwards, the Abu Dhabi Tourism Authority signed up for a two-year sponsorship of German-based tolimit motorsport team in the Porsche Supercup and Khaled hasn't looked back.

7am: While he's testing with the tolimit team, Khaled gets to have a bit of a lie-in but usually he's up bright and early.

“My full-time job is head of HR at Mubadala, but I am also chairman of Daman, managing director of Tabreed and I sit on the board of a number of other companies including Abu Dhabi Motorsports Management, so this certainly keeps me busy.”

8am: Although the Porsche Supercup races are relatively short sprint races, they are still physically demanding and Khaled needs to stay in good shape.

“I try to keep fit by running for half an hour, cycling or going to the gym when I can but it’s tough – there just doesn’t seem to be enough hours in the day. The main thing is trying to keep focused – if you get tired, you lose focus and if you lose focus, that’s when you start making mistakes.”

10am: Having not been in a race car for a number of weeks, the morning session of the test day at Yas is very important for Khaled.

“My last race was in Monza two months ago and I’ve been so busy at work that this is really my first day back at the racetrack – it’s almost like starting all over again and it takes a while to adjust.

“It’s all about getting the feeling back and getting used to the track. Focusing on where you need to improve, looking at the data and working out where we can go faster.”

12pm: The first session is out of the way and Khaled grabs a quick bite to eat before jumping back into his car.

“My diet is fairly good. I just try to keep it balanced and stay away from too many sweet things,” he laughs.

2pm: Time to get back out on the track for the second test session of the day and, although he has driven all over the world, Khaled still maintains that there is something special about pulling out of the pit lane and onto the circuit in Abu Dhabi.

“I just love this track. In my opinion it’s the best racing facility in the world by far. The hotel, the marina and the track itself – it’s like a piece of art.”

6pm: Testing over for the day, Khaled heads home to his family. But what does a racing driver use to cruise the streets of the capital?

“I have an SUV, a Porsche Cayenne, and it’s a really good car,” he chuckles. “I thought since I’m racing Porsches, I have to be loyal to them off the track as well.”

8pm: It’s not often that he gets an evening off but when he does he likes to make the most of it – by doing not very much at all.

“I rarely have much spare time now apart from occasionally at the weekends. I like to relax with the family. My work is so fast-paced and obviously racing is fast-paced too so it’s nice to just wind down and take things slowly.”

Final thoughts: Speaking about the final race of the season at Yas Marina Circuit: “It will be tough but I’m aiming to get into the points at least. The Supercup is like the Champions League of Porsche racing. I have my other teammates and if we all perform well then maybe we have a chance of winning the team championship, but it will be a big task.”

Jon Muller