

Singapore-UAE team wins autonomous car race in Italy on third attempt

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Team Kinetiz with their autonomous race car after placing first in the Abu Dhabi Autonomous Racing League's race at Italy's Imola Circuit on Sept 5. PHOTO: K2



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 **Summarise** 

SINGAPORE – Third time's the charm for a team that included staff and students from Nanyang Technological University (NTU), which won an autonomous car race in Italy on its third attempt despite a more challenging circuit than before.

Team Kinetiz – comprising members from NTU, United Arab Emirates tech firm K2 and autonomous systems specialist Alp Autonomy – beat

four other competitors for the Sept 5 victory at the Abu Dhabi Autonomous Racing League (A2RL).

During the inaugural A2RL race in 2024, [Team Kinetiz failed to make the final four after placing sixth in a pre-qualifying round.](#)

Its fortunes improved during the 2025 race, winning the Sim-Sprint virtual racing event and eventually placing fourth in the grand final.

There was no “magic algorithm” that led to Kinetiz’s win this time, said NTU team lead Holden Li, an associate professor from the university’s School of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering.

Instead, the team learnt from data gathered from its previous experiences, refining its algorithms and improving its performance along the way.

“I would say that these three consecutive years of accumulated experience made an enormous difference,” Li said.

He noted the team managed to triumph despite the challenges posed by the 2026 circuit, which has elevation changes and bumps, unlike the mostly flat nature of Abu Dhabi’s Yas Marina Circuit, where the race was previously held.

The 4.9km-long Imola Circuit in northern Italy hosted the A2RL for the first time.

Imola’s challenges included narrow racing lines and difficult overtaking zones, testing “how autonomous systems manage grip, traffic, positioning and overtaking under sustained pressure”, race organiser Aspire said in a statement.

“Imola raised the level of the challenge, asking autonomous systems to race wheel-to-wheel in a completely different environment and generating valuable data to accelerate the next stage of R&D,” said Stephane Timpano, chief executive of Aspire, the business development and programme management arm of Abu Dhabi’s Advanced Technology and Research Council.

“What we saw here gives us a new measure of how these systems perform and adapt under pressure.”

Among the league’s objectives is the promotion of greater safety and wider adoption of self-driving technology.

Teams race identical driverless cars equipped with cameras, lidar (light detection and ranging) sensors, radar and a navigation system. The vehicles can reach speeds of up to 300kmh.

Each team develops software that controls the car and makes real-time decisions on acceleration, braking, steering and reacting to other cars on the track, based on data from the sensors.

The A2RL race was held as part of the ACI racing weekend – a major event on the Italian motorsport calendar – together with traditional formula racing championships, the Formula Regional European Championship and the Italian F4 Championship.

The other teams that took part were the previous winner, TUM from Germany's Technical University of Munich; Constructor Racing, also from Germany; PoliMOVE from Italy's Politecnico di Milano; and Unimore Racing from the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, also from Italy.

Team Kinetiz came in 10.963 seconds ahead of second-placed Constructor Racing.

TUM, which won the first two A2RL races in 2024 and 2025, hit a technical issue, finishing fifth.

Unimore Racing, which had an early lead, also encountered a technical problem and slowed down, resulting in a collision with PoliMOVE's car, eliminating both teams.

Kinetiz team principal Omar AlQassim, who is director of partnerships and acquisitions at K2, said: "It's a very proud moment for all of us at Team Kinetiz to win A2RL's first international race and, most importantly, to represent the UAE on an international stage."

"The team has worked extremely hard for this achievement, and seeing that effort result in a win makes it even more special."

NTU's vice-president for innovation and entrepreneurship Louis Phee said the win was a "testament to NTU's standing as one of the world's leading universities in artificial-intelligence research".

"By combining NTU's research capabilities with strong industry partners, our researchers can compete and win against the best teams in the world and help advance technologies that could shape the future of autonomous mobility," he said.

NTU's Li said the team's experiences could have broader implications for Singapore, which has been pushing for greater adoption of autonomous technology.

“We want to translate what we have learnt into broader applications for autonomous systems and robotics for Singapore.”

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