The basic unit of the Chinese language is the zi (字), i.e. a Chinese word. Each zi has a written form (called a character, made up of strokes), a sound (made up of consonant and vowel) and a meaning (or multiple meanings). When we speak or write Chinese, we string zi together to form terms, phrases and sentences.

This week: Words about auto-racing

賽

Pronunciation: sai (Putonghua, 4th tone), choi (Cantonese, 3rd tone)
Basic meaning: race, competition

Auto-manufacturers e.g. 寶馬 (bao ma = treasure-horse, BMW's Chinese name), 法拉利 (fa la li = “Ferrari”-transliterated), 本田 (ben tian, kanji for “Honda”) make 跑車 (pao che = run-car = sports cars).

To optimize performance for 賽車 (sai che = compete/race-car = auto-racing), cars' 懸吊系統 (xuan diao xi tong = suspend-hang-system = suspension), 煞車掣 (sha che zhi = stop-car-handle = brake), 變速箱 (bian su xiang = change-speed-box = transmission), 引擎 (yin qing = lead-hold = “engine”-transliterated), 輪胎 (lun tai = wheel-“tire”-transliterated) are adjusted.

Amateurs try 小型賽車 (xiao xing sai che = small-model-race-car = kart-racing). Professionals join 一級方程式 (yi ji fang cheng shi = one/first-grade-formula = Formula 1) races.

by Diana Yue