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LEWIS FIRES A WARNING SHOT



WHAT WE LEARNED FROM F1'S FIRST TEST **P20-23**

M-Sport man aims to bounce back on Rally Mexico

ELFYN

MY WRC CHALLENGE STARTS NOW



By David Evans

Elfyn Evans needs to kick-start his World Rally Championship challenge in Mexico this week after what the Welshman admits has been a 'rubbish' start to the season.

The M-Sport Ford Fiesta star is looking to ignite his WRC challenge after two difficult rounds so far.

Evans was hit by a puncture on the Monte Carlo Rally and again on Rally Sweden.

He is only 10th in the points table.

Evans said: "We have a really good chance on Rally Mexico, and we need to take it."

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FREE! NATIONAL RACING CALENDAR 2018



ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW FOR THE YEAR AHEAD



AUDI HITS THE FRONT IN FORMULA E

DANIEL ABT BREAKS VICTORY DUCK **P27**



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Welsh M-Sport star aims to get his 2018

EVANS: SUCCESS

By David Evans

Elfyn Evans is looking to reverse what has been a miserable start to the season so far by targeting victory at this week's Rally Mexico.

The M-Sport Ford World Rally Team driver has struggled to make any impact on his return to the World Rally Championship's frontline after a brace of punctures spoiled his chances of a result in Monte Carlo and Sweden. Evans arrives in Leon 10th in the table on eight points after recovering to sixth on round one in Monte Carlo and non-scoring in Sweden last month.

On both events, Evans' early problems left him at the front of the field running in adverse conditions. The same cannot be said at Mexico this week, where he and co-driver Dan Barritt will run eighth on the road.

"When it's hot and dry there's always going to be an element of road cleaning," the Ford Fiesta WRC driver told MN. "Running first on the road is certainly not going to be great [for points leader Thierry Neuville] - the second pass will be a challenge as well. We saw this in Mexico last year. It's important we get a result this week and we're going out there to look to change things around."

Reflecting on his start to the season, Evans offers a blunt assessment, adding: "It's been a rubbish start to be honest. We showed we had the speed in Monte, especially later in the event. We have to stay optimistic, the puncture in Monte was, I think, unlucky. The [puncture] in Sweden? OK, there was no rock there on the recce, but we took quite a big cut. Sweden was a so-so event. But now we're looking forward."

Last time Evans competed in the Americas, he lost a Rally



An early puncture meant Evans non-scored in Sweden

Argentina victory by 0.7s to Neuville. He knows a win is needed to lift him back into a title race where he already languishes 33 points behind the table-topping Belgian.

"Realistically, we have to go out there targeting the win," Evans said. "We've talked about this so many times and I'll say to you again that it's very easy to sit here and talk about winning a round of the World Rally Championship, it's something else going and doing it. We have an opportunity in Mexico and we have to take it, but a lot of things have to fall into place for that success to come. We're going with the view of doing the best job we can and I don't see any reason why we can't [win]. We need to get the season going, this is a good place to go and kick-start our year."

Evans scored his first WRC win on his penultimate event with the DMACK team last year on Wales Rally GB, and this week will be his first time competing on gravel in a Michelin-shod, current-spec World Rally Car. Having twice finished fourth on the roads around Guanajuato, Evans admitted he was looking forward to his first time on the loose as number two to Sebastien Ogier in M-Sport's main team.

"Mexico's an event I enjoy," he

said. "Last year was a tricky one, we had an engine penalty [five-minute penalty for changing his Fiesta WRC's engine ahead of the first stage] early on, but I've had some pretty good results in Mexico. The stages are quite technical, but they flow nicely and they're quite quick."

"This year managing the tyres could be quite tricky. We were able to use the soft [compound] tyres on the morning loop last year, but I don't think it's going to be anything like as cool as it was last time."

"The temperatures are looking set to be around 30 degrees, so maybe it'll be a case of using them as part of a crossed [with hard tyre] package. We've got less tyres than last time, so we'll have to be careful, but with 16 hard tyres, there's enough to take four hards on Friday and Saturday afternoon and possibly a full set on Sunday."

Evans tested both compounds for Mexico in Spain last week and was the only M-Sport driver to enjoy two full days of preparation before winter arrived in Almeria (see sidebar).

The route for Rally Mexico has evolved in recent years and Evans is sorry to see the decline of some of the longer-length stages. Two years ago, crews tackled the 50-mile Guanajuatito test and last season there was a 35-miler in El Chocolate, but this time the longest test - a shortened version of El Chocolate - doesn't even make 20 miles at 19.53.

"I like the variety of stages," said Evans. "I know it doesn't help everybody having a lot of long stages, and it's not necessarily the best for fans trying to spectate on the events. But it's nice to have them, there was always that endurance element about this event and that seems to be missing a bit this year. It's nice to have different challenges."



A penalty thwarted Elfyn Evans' run in Mexico last season

HEADLINE NEWS

Photos: Red Bull Content Pool, mcklein-imagedatabase.com, MFORN Studio

attack on the road in Leon

RALLY MEXICO WILL BE CRUCIAL



Evans has a big target for Mexico



Welshman needs to spark his 2018 campaign into life

Snow strikes test and ruins Ogier's preparations

The recent spell of inclement weather in Europe spoiled Sebastien Ogier's preparations for Rally Mexico with heavy snow forcing the Frenchman to call a halt to his first gravel test of the season last week.

Ogier completed his first full day of running in Almeria, southern Spain with no problem, but took the decision to stop driving when heavy snow started to fall early in his second day. M-Sport Ford World Rally Team's third driver Teemu Suninen lost his only day of pre-Mexico running to the weather.

Elfyn Evans was the only Ford Fiesta WRC factory driver

to emerge unscathed from the chaotic weather, he was first of the three M-Sport men to run and enjoyed his allocated two full days.

While the M-Sport squad might have missed test time, the Ford Fiesta WRC did have the advantage of time in Ford's climatic chamber at Dunton, where it was mapped and optimised for running on the high-altitude stages in Mexico this week.

Deputy team principal Rich Millener denied Ogier's loss of running time would impact on his performance in Leon.

"The important thing for the

guys was to get some running time on gravel after the different conditions in Monte Carlo and Sweden," Millener told MN. "OK, it's tough for Teemu that he didn't get his test, but Elfyn and Seb have had some time in the car.

"Let's be honest, the absolute relevance of this test is debatable – in Mexico we're going to be running in 30-plus degrees at very high altitude and in Spain last week, while we got some altitude, the temperatures were mid-teens at best."

Evans was happy with his running time in the car, saying: "The conditions were pretty

good for us. At either end of the day it was a bit cooler, but we managed to get some running on the hard [compound] tyre – it wasn't ideal for that, but at least we got a feel for it."

Millener's point about the relevance of testing, stands for Evans; the Welshman lost his pre-Finland test last season and finished second overall, then tested for Wales at M-Sport's test venue in Greystoke forest, Cumbria and won Rally GB.

"We tend to go quite well when the test's been a little bit compromised," said Millener. "Let's see what next week brings."



Ogier's running was cut short on the second day

RACING NEWS

F1 ROUND-UP

Still ugly, annoying

Kevin Magnussen reckons the halo may cause problems for drivers when the Belgian Grand Prix comes around, insisting he's still not a fan of the divisive device. "It's very annoying. Ugly. Difficult to get into the car, difficult to get out of it, difficult to get the steering wheel on and off, it's just generally awkward and annoying," said Magnussen. "Once you get into a corner it [vision] is fine because you look to the sides not through the pillar in the middle, but it distracts your eye when you change direction through things like chicanes. If you're chasing someone at Eau Rouge [at Spa] you won't be able to see if he makes a mistake at the top and spins if you're down in the middle part. It could be like that with any turn with elevation."

No character

Lewis Hamilton reckons the resurfacing of the Circuit de Catalunya in Spain has robbed the track of its character. Resurfacing works took place in January, with the first F1 group test taking place on the new asphalt. "I'm not quite sure why they resurfaced it," said Hamilton. "I think it's a waste of money. The older surface had more character. If you smooth the thing out you lose a lot of the character Barcelona has. I always say a brand new house has no character, but if you buy an old house, it'll always have more history and character."

Cash drop

The 10 F1 teams collectively received \$47million (£33.84m) less than the previous year during the first year of Liberty Media's ownership. Team payments fell five per cent, the first time they have gone down. F1 Group's overall revenues also fell by \$12m (£8.64m), mostly due to running 20 races last year, not 21 as in 2016. Liberty has also opened a new London office, expanded its staff and spent extra on promotional events, such as F1 London Live.

Furious music

The composer of the *Fast and Furious* soundtrack has been commissioned to create a new theme for F1. Brian Tyler, who attended last year's US GP in Austin, said on social media: "What an honour to be chosen to compose the F1 theme! This is a life-long dream come true as I'm a massive F1 fan." Tyler has written scores for many Hollywood blockbusters, including *The Expendables*, *The Mummy*, *Rambo*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and a host of Marvel films.

HAMILTON HOTTEST IN



Hamilton says he was being conservative

By Robert Ladbrook

Lewis Hamilton fired a warning shot to his rivals by finishing on top over the four days of Formula 1 testing in Spain last week, insisting this year's car is faster than last year's title-winning machine.

The four-time champion set an ominous early pace by posting the fastest time across the four days on the final afternoon run on Pirelli's medium-compound tyre.

Red Bull's Daniel Ricciardo topped day one, also on the mediums, while Sebastian Vettel's day-two best was set on softs, and in considerably warmer temperatures compared to Hamilton's benchmark.

Many teams lost mileage across the test with severe weather halting almost all activity for the entirety of day three, when snow coated the circuit and led to the day starting three hours late. When the track did go green, Fernando Alonso's McLaren was the only car to set a time in wet and freezing conditions.

While hesitant to read too much into

early testing times, Hamilton said he could feel that Mercedes' new F1 W09 is a step forward in pace from the chassis that carried him to nine race wins and a fourth title last term.

"It's an evolution of last year's car, and we've got better tyres and particularly here we've got a new track surface, so that might make things seem better than they really are," said Hamilton.

"It's difficult to say whether the car is that much better, or how much of it is the track and the grip and the tyres. Next week [in Barcelona again] we'll get a better understanding. But it definitely feels like a faster car compared to last year's car, so that's a big positive."

Hamilton said he wasn't putting too much pressure on himself during testing this term.

"Collectively, I've done less than a day in the car [over the test duration]," he said. "My mindset is not really like 'this is the start to getting the next championship' – although it is – it's really just about learning as much as we can and being



Lewis Hamilton and the halo

consistent and as diligent as you can in the driving laps you get.

"Of course this is all building blocks for a title fight, but we have no idea where people are. It looks like Red Bull is quite quick, it looks like Ferrari is quite quick, but no-one really knows yet."

Ferrari ended the test as second-best to Mercedes, and McLaren's Stoffel Vandoorne was third overall after finishing second fastest to Hamilton on the final day in the Renault-powered MCL33. However, McLaren lost mileage when a wheel departed Alonso's car on

the opening morning last Monday, and loose exhaust bodywork caused heat damage on day two. McLaren's best times were also set on Pirelli's new hypersoft compound.

Red Bull suffered from two fuel leaks, which limited Max Verstappen's running before the Dutchman had an off on the final day.

After three dismal years of pre-season testing, Honda appeared to have made progress with new partner Toro Rosso topping the lap counter across the four days.

F1 calendar shuffle on hold for now

Formula 1's proposed calendar shuffle will be put on the back burner for now.

Liberty Media had begun investigating changing the format of the calendar to group grands prix into regional clusters, both to boost popularity within that area and also trim costs.

There had been suggestion the shake-up could happen in time for 2019, but the plan

has hit some issues – such as Australia's desire to remain as the opener and Abu Dhabi wanting the finale.

F1's commercial director Sean Brathes said: "We are trying to point this ship in a direction that will be more efficient for fans, because we can navigate them in the same timezone. But some contracts we have mean it will be a while."

Wolff says Mercedes was not the impetus for supply parity issue

Mercedes head Toto Wolff has denied that his firm was in any way the target of the recent FIA push to ensure manufacturers supply identical spec power units to its customers.

The FIA recently sent out a technical directive to all teams, reinforcing the requirement for all engine suppliers to give identical hardware and software to customer teams as well as their own works operations.

From now on all customer teams will also have identical fuel and oil

specifications to the works cars, unless they have opted for a different supplier deal.

Some paddock members have suggested that the FIA directive was aimed more at Mercedes than Renault or Ferrari, with Red Bull head Christian Horner even suggesting reporters "go ask Claire Williams" where the impetus for the clampdown came from.

Wolff, however, is adamant that neither Williams or Force India have lobbied on the subject.

"I don't think any of our

customers was pushing for it," said Wolff. "It's not relevant to us because the rules have been in place for a while that you must supply customers with the same hardware and software, and we've always done that. Identical modes for the customers and us. There has never been any difference. That's why we don't have a problem with it [the directive]. If there was any suspicion out there, it certainly wasn't anything that would have any consequence for us."

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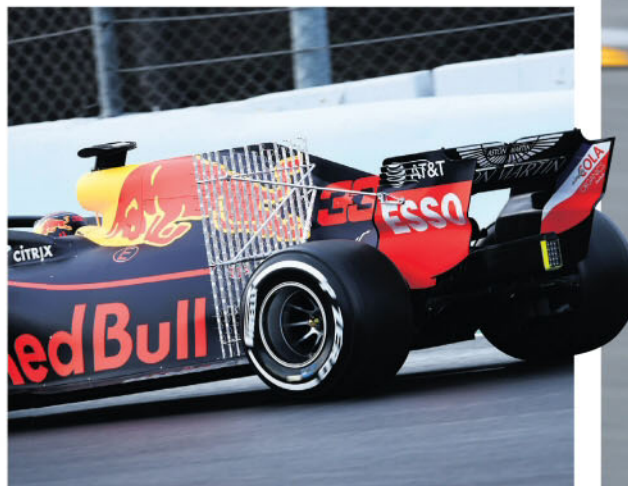


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FIRST F1 TEST

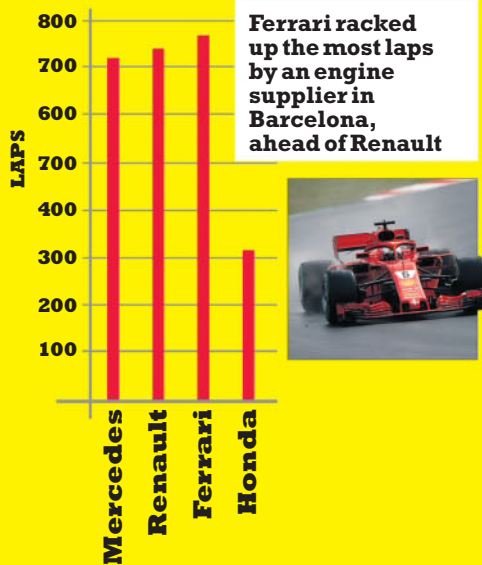


Toro Rosso-Honda relationship gelled well

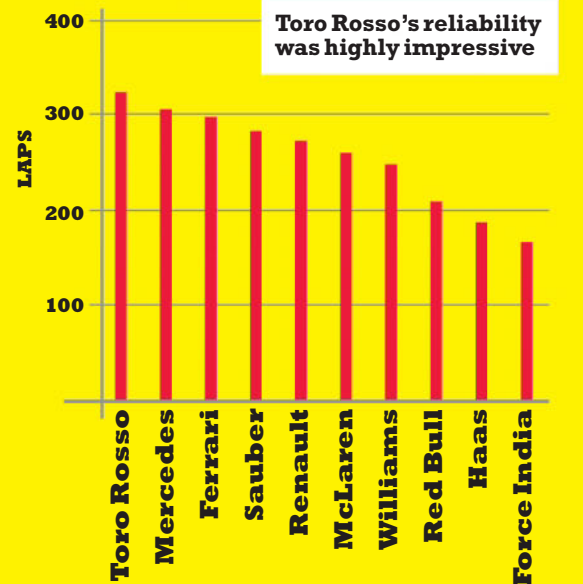


Red Bull was rapid early on, then hit some trouble

TOTAL LAPS BY ENGINE



TOTAL LAPS BY TEAMS



TESTING TIMES

Date: Feb 26

Weather: Cloud, some rain Mood: Optimistic

POS	DRIVER	CAR-ENGINE	TIME	GAP	LAPS
1	Daniel Ricciardo	Red Bull-Renault	1m20.179s	-	105
2	Valteri Bottas	Mercedes	1m20.349s	+0.170s	58
3	Kimi Raikkonen	Ferrari	1m20.506s	+0.327s	80
4	Nico Hulkenberg	Renault	1m20.547s	+0.368s	73
5	Carlos Sainz	Renault	1m22.168s	+1.989s	26
6	Lewis Hamilton	Mercedes	1m22.327s	+2.148s	25
7	Fernando Alonso	McLaren-Renault	1m22.354s	+2.175s	51
8	Brendon Hartley	Toro Rosso-Honda	1m22.371s	+2.192s	93
9	Lance Stroll	Williams-Mercedes	1m22.452s	+2.273s	46
10	Romain Grosjean	Haas-Ferrari	1m22.578s	+2.399s	55
11	Marcus Ericsson	Sauber-Ferrari	1m23.408s	+3.229s	63
12	Nikita Mazepin	Force India-Mercedes	1m25.628s	+5.449s	22

Date: Feb 27

Weather: Cloud, some rain, light snow Mood: Progress

POS	DRIVER	CAR-ENGINE	TIME	GAP	LAPS
1	Sebastian Vettel	Ferrari	1m19.673s	-	98
2	Valteri Bottas	Mercedes	1m19.976s	+0.303s	94
3	Stoffel Vandoorne	McLaren-Renault	1m20.325s	+0.652s	37
4	Max Verstappen	Red Bull-Renault	1m20.326s	+0.653s	67
5	Carlos Sainz	Renault	1m21.212s	+1.539s	65
6	Pierre Gasly	Toro Rosso-Honda	1m21.318s	+1.645s	82
7	Robert Kubica	Williams-Mercedes	1m21.495s	+1.822s	48
8	Sergey Sirotkin	Williams-Mercedes	1m21.822s	+2.149s	52
9	Esteban Ocon	Force India-Mercedes	1m21.841s	+2.168s	79
10	Charles Leclerc	Sauber-Ferrari	1m22.721s	+3.048s	81
11	Kevin Magnussen	Haas-Ferrari	1m22.727s	+3.054s	36

Date: Feb 28

Weather: Snow, melted, wet Mood: Frustration, crippling boredom

POS	DRIVER	CAR-ENGINE	TIME	GAP	LAPS
1	Fernando Alonso	McLaren-Renault	2m18.545s	-	11
2	Daniel Ricciardo	Red Bull-Renault	-	-	2
3	Brendon Hartley	Toro Rosso-Renault	-	-	2
4	Marcus Ericsson	Sauber-Ferrari	-	-	1
5	Robert Kubica	Williams-Mercedes	-	-	1
-	Everyone else	Warm, snug and boring	-	-	-

Date: Mar 1

Weather: Mercifully not snowing Mood: Yay! Race cars, finally!

POS	DRIVER	CAR-ENGINE	TIME	GAP	LAPS
1	Lewis Hamilton	Mercedes	1m19.333s	-	69
2	Stoffel Vandoorne	McLaren-Renault	1m19.854s	+0.521s	110
3	Sebastian Vettel	Ferrari	1m20.241s	+0.908s	120
4	Kevin Magnussen	Haas-Ferrari	1m20.317s	+0.984s	96
5	Fernando Alonso	McLaren-Renault	1m20.929s	+1.596s	51
6	Carlos Sainz	Renault	1m20.940s	+1.607s	60
7	Lance Stroll	Williams-Mercedes	1m21.142s	+1.809s	54
8	Sergio Perez	Force India-Mercedes	1m21.973s	+2.640s	65
9	Max Verstappen	Red Bull-Renault	1m22.058s	+2.725s	35
10	Pierre Gasly	Toro Rosso-Honda	1m22.134s	+2.801s	147
11	Nico Hulkenberg	Renault	1m22.507s	+3.174s	49
12	Valteri Bottas	Mercedes	1m22.789s	+3.456s	60
13	Charles Leclerc	Sauber-Ferrari	1m22.808s	+3.475s	59
14	Marcus Ericsson	Sauber-Ferrari	1m23.825s	+4.492s	79
15	Sergey Sirotkin	Williams-Mercedes	1m31.979s	+12.646s	47

Kubica ponders busy diary with Ginetta WEC outings

Williams reserve driver Robert Kubica plans to test Manor's Ginetta LMP1 car again next week after managing just two laps before the car broke down during his initial test.



Kubica: Ginetta woe at Aragon

Kubica had been sharing driving duties with fellow Williams test driver Oliver Rowland at Aragon but had his time in the car cut short after an engine problem with the Ginetta G60-LT-P1.

Kubica is now set for another run in the car, but the Pole would not be drawn on whether he plans to compete in the World Endurance Championship when asked at the first F1 test.

"Honestly I didn't have time to think about it," he said. "I'm quite busy here and it's quite a lot of work I'm doing."

"So I will have to review, the schedule is very busy so if I have to add some racing into it will mean from the middle of February until after Le Mans [in June] I will have less than 10 days at home."

"I have to make sure I can do things properly in here [with Williams] and in racing. I don't want to do many things and it will become a bit messy."

QUICK LAPS THE FASTEST NEWS ROUND-UP

Shane van Gisbergen gave the new Holden Commodore a perfect Australian Supercars debut after winning both legs of the Adelaide 500 last weekend. But it was a less successful season opener for likely title contenders Jamie Whincup and Scott McLaughlin. Whincup suffered his first DNF since 2013 in the second race with gearbox troubles,

while McLaughlin had a puncture that dropped him out of the lead pack. Van Gisbergen now already has a 42-point lead at the top of the standings... Stewart-Haas driver Kevin Harvick secured a second comfortable NASCAR Cup victory in succession after winning at Las Vegas last weekend. Harvick was dominant throughout, although Kyle Busch

closed when on fresher tyres towards the end... **Oliver Rowland is set to test a Super Formula car for the first time this weekend as the Williams young driver evaluates a campaign in the series. Elsewhere, ex-Sauber Formula 1 driver Pascal Wehrlein has decided to drop plans to also race in Super Formula and will instead focus on DTM and his Mercedes**

F1 reserve role... British drivers Daniel Ticktum and Oliver Rowland will share Formula 2 testing duties for the DAMS team in place of Nicholas Latifi at Paul Ricard this week. Latifi is missing the first test of the F2 pre-season as he recovers from the infection that kept him from driving for Force India in last week's opening F1 test at Barcelona. Ticktum, the 2017 Macau Grand Prix and

McLaren Autosport BRDC Award winner, drove for DAMS in the final three rounds of last year's GP3 season, scoring a best finish of third in the second race at the Abu Dhabi finale. *MN* understands that the 18-year-old will drive on the final day of the three-day test in what will be his first taste of F2-level machinery. The series has a new car for 2018, switching to a V6 turbo-powered Dallara chassis...



Newgarden: Reigning champ

Newgarden faces strong opposition to defend IndyCar title as 2018 season begins

Josef Newgarden will face strong opposition to defend his IndyCar drivers' title, and claim a third straight crown for his Penske team, as the 2018 season kicks off at St Petersburg this week.

As well as his trio of strong team-mates in Helio Castroneves, Will Power and Simon Pagenaud, Ganassi has downsized

to two cars and will likely challenge, partnering Ed Jones with four-time champion Scott Dixon.

The new era has attracted fresh teams, headlined by Carlin who field ex-F1 Brit Max Chilton and Charlie Kimball for the full season.

Elsewhere, Schmidt Peterson Motorsports has brought in former DTM

driver Robert Wickens to team up with James Hinchcliffe. Invaluable data will be provided by a third car, run by Michael Shank Racing, for Brit Jack Harvey at selected races.

Ex-GP2 driver Jordan King will drive the non-oval races for Ed Carpenter Racing, adding to the British interest.

The biggest switch in the series for 2018 is that all teams will run the same aero package, in comparison to last year where manufacturers developed their own version. The kit's deliberate lack of downforce means drivers will make all the difference on-track rather than clever set-ups.

RACING NEWS

Photos: Jakob Ebrey



Barnicoat to join Balon at Track Club

BARNICOAT TO RACE A McLAREN IN BRITISH GT

Single-seater convert will race Track Club 570S GT4 during 2018



Barnicoat was F3 winner

By Robert Ladbrook

Ben Barnicoat will take part in his first full British racing campaign when he tackles the British GT4 Championship this season with the Track Club McLaren squad.

The 21-year-old will share a McLaren 570S GT4 with series returnee Adam Balon this year.

Chesterfield-based Barnicoat was one of the UK's brightest single-seater prospects, having been part of the Racing Steps Foundation until the programme ceased in 2017. He was a two-time winner in the FIA Formula 3 European Championship prior to his switch to GTs with the Strakka Racing McLaren team

in last year's Blancpain GT Series Endurance Cup. He is now a member of the McLaren GT Driver Academy. His plans outside of British GT are yet to be confirmed.

Barnicoat said: "It's going to be great doing British GT as it's a brand new championship for me and it'll be my first season of racing in Britain since karting in 2012, so there's a lot to learn."

"I've done some development work on the 570S GT4, so I know what the car's about and it's a great piece of kit."

"It has less power and aero than the GT3 version I race in Europe, but it's probably one of the most advanced GT4 cars available right now."

"I don't know a huge amount about

British GT. I've been friends with [reigning GT3 champion] Seb Morris since we were team-mates in 2014 [in Formula Renault], so I've checked in on what he's been doing, but aside from that doing a Pro-Am championship is all new to me, but I like a challenge."

Balon scored two race wins in his maiden British GT season last term sharing with Adam Mackay. The two finished fourth in the GT4 points.

"I'm looking forward to working with Adam, he's clearly got a lot of talent," added Barnicoat.

"The team did a great job last season so when the chance to join them came up for this year I jumped at it. I'm a racer, I want to be out competing as much as possible."

Team Hard reveals its line-up for British GT4

Team Hard has confirmed the four drivers that will crew its brace of Ginetta G55 GT4s in this year's British GT Championship.

Tony Gilham's squad has signed series regular Anna Walewska to handle its first car alongside Britcar graduate Callum Hawkins-Row.

Team regular Ben Wallace will share the second entry with former BRDC British Formula 3 racer Nick Worm.

This year will be Walewska's fourth in British GT, having moved across for the Century Motorsport team. Hawkins-Row raced a Team Hard Ginetta to third in Britcar's GT4 division last term.

Wallace finished third in last year's VAG Trophy, before entering two BGT rounds, while German racer Worm finished 15th in BF3.

"We had a great debut British GT season in 2016, culminating in winning the team's title, and we're looking to come back this year with a very strong line up after a tough 2017," said Gilham.



GT3 has secured 12 entries, so far

British GT gets largest full-season entry since 2014

The British GT Championship will feature its largest full-season entry for four years, helped by its biggest ever numbers for the GT4 division.

British GT organiser SRO is set to unveil a capacity entry list at the series' media day at Donington Park tomorrow.

The GT4 field has again been the largest area of growth, with 23 cars shared across eight different manufacturers. That marks the highest ever entry for the junior GT category, surpassing last year's benchmark of 16.

It is the first time that British GT has hit its capacity of 36 full-season entries since 2014. Should all of those cars make it to Oulton Park, it will be the series' largest ever opening round grid, beating the 34 cars that started the 2014 event.

British GT Championship manager Benjamin Franassovici said: "This year could well be the most exciting and competitive British GT entry ever assembled. We're not taking anything for granted – far from it – but our Pro-Am format and Balance of Performance [equalisation system] has undoubtedly helped boost GT3 numbers. I think we've proven that, under the right conditions, the class can still thrive domestically."

"The factory GT3 drivers have grabbed most of the pre-season headlines, but GT4 represents the biggest success story. The influx of manufacturers has forced people to take notice, the cars look great and our grid is bigger than ever. This could be the year that GT4 emerges from GT3's shadow."

Nissan GTR GT3 expected to race in Britain this year

The Nissan brand is set for a return to the British GT3 grid this year, *Motorsport News* understands.

Ahead of the series' official season launch at its media day at Donington Park tomorrow (Thursday, Mar 8), *MN* understands that a deal to return the Japanese brand to the grid with an all-silver driver pairing was close to fruition.

A Nissan GTR GT3 came close to winning the outright British GT3 title back in 2012 when Jann Mardenborough and Alex Buncombe shared the machine but lost out in the season finale. The last time a GTR appeared was the 2017 season finale, when Charlie Fagg and Ben Green shared an entry by the factory JRM team.



Nissan made a return in 2017



Cole has tested the car, in the snow, in Spain recently as he moves from Subaru

Cole makes return to Motorbase Ford Focus in BTCC as he replaces Mat Jackson

James Cole will drive a Motorbase Performance Ford Focus RS in the British Touring Car Championship this season.

The 29-year-old, who won a race at Rockingham last season at the wheel of a Team BMR Subaru Levorg, has replaced Mat Jackson in the Kent team's line-up. Despite agreeing a deal, Motorbase and Jackson "parted ways" two weeks ago.

Cole, a former British Formula Ford champion, has previously driven for Motorbase when he handled one of its Focus ST cars, although the team only took part in the latter part of the 2015

campaign while it developed its new car.

The Liverpool-based racer, who will line up alongside Tom Chilton in one of the two Shredded Wheat cars, joined Motorbase for a test session at the Parc Castelloli circuit in Spain last week. Sam Tordoff will drive a Team GardX Racing version of the Motorbase Ford.

Cole said: "It was like putting back on an old pair of gloves at the test. I thought it might take a while to get to grips with front-wheel drive again but I managed to get up to speed very quickly."

"I am probably more excited about this

season than any before. The Focus RS really feels like a racing car, much more so than any other front-wheel-drive BTCC car I have driven.

"It's also great to be back working with James Mundy, my engineer from [the Jamun team in] Formula Ford, it's been 10 years since we last worked together so it feels like a homecoming."

Team boss David Bartrum said: "James has done a very good job in the Subaru in the time he's been away. He's won a race and has clearly raised his game and coming back to FWD may well suit him."



JTR line-up: Plato, Orton and Harper

Plato stays with JTR as Orton joins Porsche team

Porsche Carrera Cup GB racers Lewis Plato and Jamie Orton will both remain in the series this year, driving for the JTR squad.

Plato finished fifth in the standings last term, taking four podiums, while former Ginetta GT4 Supercup frontrunner Orton had a disrupted first year in the category as he competed with both Redline and In2Racing. The duo join Porsche Junior driver Dan Harper in the JTR line-up.

“Lewis started out 2017 really well and was fighting for wins and was in strong championship contention but our results together faded towards the end of the year,” said team boss Nick Tandy. “The plan for 2018 is to keep that speed but be much more consistent.”

“Jamie comes to us with a year’s Porsche experience in his pocket. His results in previous years in other championships proves when he is on top of the car he will be a threat to anyone. He will be an asset to our team and his team-mates.”

Porsche factory driver Tandy added that he is in talks with a fourth driver too.

LYDDEN HILL TO STAGE FOUR RACE MEETINGS



More races at Lydden Hill

Lydden Hill is going to promote its own club racing events as track bosses plan to increase the amount of circuit racing held at the venue.

A successful Classic Touring Car Racing Club meeting last August was the track’s first circuit racing event for two years as rallycross and trackdays filled the Lydden schedule.

Now, apart from the British and Global Rallycross championships and other off-road events, there are four race meetings scheduled for 2018.

The CTCRC will be back with a full programme of races to supplement the

Classic Festival on July 7/8 and the British Automobile Racing Club Truck Festival on August 18/19 will feature Pickup and Intermarque saloon races as well as the truck events.

But in addition to these, the circuit has decided to promote events. The Lydden Hill Motor Club’s Spring Race Day on April 7 will start with a Borough 19 sprint followed by races for South East Saloons & Sports Cars and a Festival of Fords event, as well as other races still to be confirmed.

Then on October 6 the LHMC’s Autumn Race Day will feature the

same two categories plus the three regular BARC SE championship rounds for Modified Saloons, Tin Tops and Intermarque silhouettes.

The two LHMC meetings are likely to attract many competitors who used to race with the South Eastern Motor Sports Enthusiasts’ Club (SEMSEC), which stopped organising race meetings in 2014.

Hannah Rynston, Lydden’s marketing and events manager, said: “The existing LHMC will still remain involved in the MSA British Rallycross Championship, although with the

current focus to increase the amount of circuit racing at Lydden, it seemed natural to begin our own LHMC race series.

“Looking ahead to 2019 I am in discussion with a number of race clubs to increase circuit racing here at Lydden Hill to run alongside our existing programme of events.

“With the current investments and improvements taking place ahead of the 2018 season we are looking forward to an exciting and prosperous future for the circuit.”

Pickup Truck campaign a “test” for Thunder Saloon race winner Gent as entries pass 30

Thunder Saloons race winner Dale Gent will compete in the Pickup Truck Racing Championship in 2018.

The 33-year-old will dovetail outings in his modified Subaru Impreza with the Pickups, racing both on the same weekend at Croft and Rockingham.

“I’ve been looking for a new challenge,” said Gent, who will race both cars, run by

Relentless Performance.

“Thunder Saloons has gone well, but I wanted to test myself.

“Pickups is close racing and I’ve always liked that. Bumper to bumper, side by side and having to battle for it. I’d like to be in the top 10, but there’s a lot to learn and some of the boys in it have been doing it a long time.”

The Pickup Truck

Championship has had an influx of entries for 2018, with numbers rising from below 20 to above 30.

Scott Bourne, the reigning champion, will return with the number one on his door, while leading National Hot Rod racer Steve Dudman returns after a 17-year gap.

Twilight oval races at Rockingham and a ‘dash for cash’ oval race with a pitstop,

at the same Rockingham venue, has helped to increase interest in the series.

After racing at Brands Hatch last year, British Touring Car Championship frontrunner Andrew Jordan confirmed he would like to return with his father Mike, who competed in the championship’s first season in 1997. They are yet to register.



Gent will race his Pickup alongside his Subaru in multiple races



Gearbox prize for DSG cars

Postponed media day and reduced testing as TCR UK announces its 2018 prizes

The TCR UK Championship has postponed this week’s media day until March 30, but has unveiled prizes for the 2018 season.

TCR creator Marcello Lotti visited the UK last week to finalise details of the championship, where he urged for the media day to be delayed

due to a clash with the Geneva Motor Show. Reportedly, a number of teams backed the decision, to allow for more time to prepare for the season.

The winning team and driver in TCR UK in 2018 will receive free entries for the following year, while the highest

finishing car in the championship using a DSG gearbox (Audi, SEAT, VW) would receive a free upgrade to a sequential ‘box.

To reduce costs at the request of teams, the championship will no longer have a pre-event test at each round, and will return money back

on those that have paid entry fees already through “start money” awarded on the number of starts made in the season.

MN understands a total of five drivers have confirmed interest in starting the season. The series confirmed it will run regardless of number of entries.

Blancpain GT Endurance switch for British GT3 champion Morris with Team Parker

Reigning British GT champion Seb Morris will graduate to the Blancpain GT Series Endurance Cup this year with Team Parker Racing.

Morris, who recently featured on the *Celebs Go Dating* TV show, will stick with both the team and brand that carried him to the British GT3 crown last year with

Rick Parfitt Jr.

He will share a first-generation Bentley Continental GT3 with Derek Pierce and Ade Barwick. The deal marks Team Parker’s return to Blancpain Endurance for the first time since 2016.

Morris said: “I am delighted to have signed with Team Parker Racing for my first

proper assault on the Blancpain GT Series Endurance Cup, which I consider to be the biggest sportscar championship in the world right now.

“Winning last year’s title means I now feel ready to leave British GT and use all the experience learned there over the past two years to mount a championship challenge with

Ade and Derek. I know all about Team Parker and the Bentley Continental GT3, which is a proven championship-winner against top Pro-Am competition. So I feel extremely confident that we can get out there and win in Blancpain.”

Parfitt will share his British title-winning Bentley with Ryan Ratcliffe this year.



Morris won the 2017 British GT3 title in a Bentley with Rick Parfitt Jr

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RACING NEWS

Photos: Jakob Ebrey, Mick Walker

EQUIPE SERIES GET OVER 100 SILVERSTONE ENTRIES

Organisers secure extra grid for the opening round of the series



Equipe GTS is ever-popular

By Stephen Lickorish

Equipe GTS organisers have secured a second grid for the opening meeting of the season after the initial 40 spaces were filled within two-and-a-half hours last month.

The popular series, which caters for FIA Appendix K machinery, will now have two grids at the MG Car Club's season opener on the Silverstone National Circuit on

April 7. The two races will be 35 minutes, instead of the originally planned 40, to ensure they fit into the timetable.

"I'm really pleased that we have been able to accommodate all the drivers," said co-organiser John Pearson. "The interesting thing about doing it on a first-come first-served basis is if you look at the original entry list we'd got some new drivers and a lot of our regular drivers hadn't managed to get their place.

"It will be a great start to the year but one round doesn't make a season."

Equipe GTS's new sister series, Equipe Pre '63, will also launch that weekend and is full too.

"As a new series, you just don't know [what entries will be like]," added Pearson. "There is a number of crossover cars between the two series, with models like the Elites, Healey 1000s and Morgans, which can do both.

"But the new series has brought in a lot of new drivers that haven't raced for us before. We've got a lot of three-litre Healeys and MGAs. It's a nice cross section of cars that represent what we're trying to achieve. So we could be running 120 cars, we're currently on 108."

Equipe Classic Racing has also already secured extra track time at its next meeting at Brands Hatch on April 28/29 because of the level of interest received.

IN BRIEF

Neary to Britcar

British GT regular Richard Neary plans to contest a full season in the Britcar Endurance Championship this year in a Mercedes AMG GT3. Neary won the Britcar Sprint race at the Walter Hayes Trophy at the end of last year and will dovetail racing in Britcar with other GT series.

JSCC scholar

Karter Scott McIntyre has been chosen as the winner of the Junior Saloon Car Championship's scholarship shootout. McIntyre impressed in a variety of assessments, which included fitness, media and driving tests, that took place at Silverstone at the end of last month and has secured a fully-funded drive in the series for 2018.

F3 signings

Mexican Alexandra Mohnhaupt and Frenchman Tristan Charpentier have joined the BRDC British F3 grid. Mohnhaupt will race with Douglas Motorsport and is the second female driver to sign up for the series this year after Jamie Chadwick, who will also race with Douglas, while Charpentier will compete for the Fortec Motorsport squad.

Manchester driver stays in the States

British driver and reigning USF1600 champion Matt Cowley will race in the Formula 4 US Championship this year with Century Auto Racing.

The 20-year-old from Manchester dominated in F1600 last year and believes F4 is an important learning curve for adapting to more powerful machinery.

"The whole reason we're going there [F4] is because it's a step up from 1600, so it's slicks and wings so I can get adjusted to that before stepping up to more powerful cars," said Cowley, who won the British Racing and Sports Car Club National FF1600 Pre-'90 title in 2016.

"With the scholarship [prize] you get the money to race in [US] F3 the following year, so that's still the plan.

"Doing F4 instead seems a more viable option with our budget. They have 25 cars signed up already so it should be a big competitive grid."

After his successful season in 2017, Cowley was awarded the President's Cup by the Sports Car Club of America. He is the first British driver to receive the trophy in its 63-year history. Previous winners include Roger Penske, Skip Barber, Bobby Rahal and Paul Newman.

Cowley won't be the only FF1600 convert to compete in US F4 as Jordan Dempsey of Ireland is also set to do the series, which uses Honda-powered Onroak chassis cars.

Keen swaps Barwell for Grasser in Silverstone 12 Hours

British GT driver Phil Keen will join the factory Grasser Lamborghini team for this weekend's 12 hour race at Silverstone.

Keen will share a Huracan GT3 with Frenchman Franck Perera and Swiss drivers Rolf and Mark Ineichen.

Keen has been runner-up in British GT for the last two seasons sharing a Barwell Motorsport Huracan with Jon Minshaw.

"It'll be good to run with Grasser as they're a top team in Europe, so there's not a better team to make my Creventic debut with," said Keen. "Grasser wanted me to do a test with them but I kept having clashing dates, so the race has come about through that. It'll be a cool experience and I get to learn the new Hankook tyre too."

The event is split this year into a 12-hour and a 24-hour

race. The latter is mostly made up of TCR cars and features British Touring Car frontrunner Matt Neal among 19 entries.

The 12-hour race features 23 entries dominated by GT3 cars. 750 Motor Club Bikesports champion Stefano Leaney kicks off his second season of racing, this time with Travis drummer Neil Primrose, in a Norma M20.



Keen drives Lambo in BGT

Fulk returns for full season of Clio Cup with top squad Pyro

Renault UK Clio Cup driver Zak Fulk will contest a full season of the series with the Team Pyro squad this year.

The 16-year-old contested the final three rounds of the series last year after originally planning to compete in Clio Cup Junior.

Fulk impressed in those appearances, alongside Bradley Burns who also joined the field at the same time, with the pair

instantly on the pace. Fulk took a best result of ninth but did claim one fastest lap.

"Zak's a very good driver to work with," said Pyro team boss Mark Hunt. "He's only 16 and most drivers don't arrive with us until they've competed in at least one season in cars. Despite his very limited experience, he is mature for his age and there's clearly a lot of raw talent there.

"I believe he has the potential

to do very well this season in Clio Cup."

Fulk added: "I want to get off to a strong start - I'm working hard on my fitness and have some days booked in a simulator. Hopefully podium results are achievable and the Graduates Cup title is something I'll be focusing on, but let's see how things unfold."

Fulk joins Burns and Daniel Rowbottom in Pyro's line-up.



Fulk took fastest lap at Brands Hatch last year after joining Clio field

Caroline performs U-turn on sabbatical to race in American-based USF2000 series

British Formula 4 champion Jamie Caroline will move to the USF2000 Championship this year after failing to find the budget to continue racing in Europe.

The 19-year-old has signed a late deal to compete with BN Racing as the series begins at St Petersburg this weekend.

"I've always had my eye on racing in

America," he said. "There seem to be more opportunities for young drivers, the competition is good, plus the whole Mazda Road to Indy scholarship is pretty exciting. This is the best career move for me and I hope to find some new sponsors to work with in the US.

"When I heard from BN Racing I was

immediately interested. The team looked strong in pre-season testing and with a British team owner I'm sure I will feel right at home."

● *Another driver competing in USF2000 this year is Keith Donegan. See page 25 for more on how the Irishman has been able to restart his racing career.*



Caroline had 'retired' from racing

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31 March/2 April	British GT and BRDC British F3 Championships	Oulton Park
1/2 April	British Truck Racing Championship	Brands Hatch
7/8 April	British Touring Car Championship	Brands Hatch
13-15 April	Bennetts British Superbike Championship	Brands Hatch
28/29 April	British Touring Car Championship	Donington Park
4-6 May	Donington Historic Festival	Donington Park
5-7 May	Bennetts British Superbike Championship	Oulton Park
5/6 May	Blancpain GT Series Sprint Cup	Brands Hatch (GP)
19 May	Vintage Motorsport Festival	Oulton Park
19/20 May	Historic Wolds Trophy	Cadwell Park
25-27 May	Motul FIM Superbike World Championship	Donington Park
26/27 May	Masters Historic Festival with Historic F1	Brands Hatch (GP)
26/27 May	British GT and BRDC British F3 Championships	Snetterton
27 May	Family Funday	Oulton Park
9/10 June	American SpeedFest VI	Brands Hatch
9/10 June	British Touring Car Championship	Oulton Park
15-17 June	Bennetts British Superbike Championship	Snetterton
24 June	Vintage Motorsport Festival	Donington Park
30 June - 1 July	Legends of Brands Hatch Superprix	Brands Hatch (GP)
20-22 July	Bennetts British Superbike Championship	Brands Hatch (GP)

21/22 July	Convoy In The Park	Donington Park
22 July	Vintage Motorsport Festival	Cadwell Park
28/29 July	British Touring Car Championship	Snetterton
4/5 August	British GT and BRDC British F3 Championships	Brands Hatch (GP)
4/5 August	Donington Classic Motorcycle Festival	Donington Park
11/12 August	DTM (German Touring Cars)	Brands Hatch (GP)
17-19 August	Bennetts British Superbike Championship	Cadwell Park
19 August	Festival Italia	Brands Hatch
25-27 August	The Oulton Park Gold Cup	Oulton Park
2 September	Festival of Porsche	Brands Hatch
8/9 September	British Truck Racing Championship	Snetterton
14-16 September	Bennetts British Superbike Championship	Oulton Park
22/23 September	British GT and BRDC British F3 Championships	Donington Park
23 September	Vintage Motorsport Festival	Snetterton
29/30 September	British Touring Car Championship	Brands Hatch (GP)
12-14 October	Bennetts British Superbike Championship	Brands Hatch (GP)
3 November	Neil Howard Stage Rally and Fireworks	Oulton Park
3/4 November	British Truck Racing and Fireworks	Brands Hatch
18 November	North Humberside Stage Rally and Fireworks	Cadwell Park

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HISTORICS

DOWN THE PUB WITH

CHRIS ATKINSON

Age: 50 Lives: Isle of Wight
F5000 racer

He commutes to race

"I live on the Isle of Wight and we only come to the North Island, the UK, for motorsport. I was born and bred on the island and we commute to race. I started competing in motor bike trials when I was 10 and then I went banger racing when I was 18 or 19. I met my partner Jan through banger racing. Racing a Formula 5000 is tame compared to banger racing!"

He was tempted by Historic FF

"I gave up motorsport to concentrate on business but then I got to the stage where all I did was work. I was at a party and someone told me this guy raced Historic Formula Ford. That was Anthony Goddard and so I went and knocked on his door. He showed me his car and I went to a race meeting. The first racing car I drove was my own Merlyn at Brands Hatch in the rain. I couldn't see: it was mad and I felt like going home."

He now has a Formula 5000 car

"That was about 15 years ago. I did Formula Ford for about eight years and I've done Guards Trophy in a Piper and I'm now in my fifth year with the Surtees Formula 5000. It's a great car: we're boys and we always want the next toy. It's Mike Hailwood's 1971 car and I just give it lots of respect."

Goodwood is next

"We went to New Zealand with it last year and did nine races, which was fantastic. I'm very privileged to own it. You sit in the car and it's just a special place to be. I spent many years sat in the grandstands and for a poor boy from the Isle of Wight it is amazing to be racing these cars. Next week we're at Goodwood with the F5000 and it is a privilege to be asked. I've always wanted to go to Goodwood and it is my local track."

He competes in trials

"I do some Historic Sporting Trials. That was down to Frank Lyons who told me I needed a car and I said I didn't! So we went to a trial to have a look and next minute I'm buying a car. I thoroughly enjoy it and I do it with my dad and he loves it. He's 78 now and it's great to do it with him."



Atkinson: F5000 battler

ROHRL REUNITED WITH QUATTRO S1

German to drive Pikes Peak car at Eifel Rallye Festival in 2018



A quattro will also be driven by winner, John Buffum



Rohrl won the climb back in 1987

By Paul Lawrence

Walter Rohrl will return to the wheel of his 1987 Pikes Peak-winning Audi Sport quattro S1 E2 as the famous American hillclimb is celebrated during the Eifel Rallye Festival in Germany on July 19-21.

Pikes Peak is the theme for this year's Eifel event and Audi Tradition will take two

original works cars to the host town of Daun. As well as the 600bhp Sport quattro for Rohrl, Harald Demuth will drive the 1985-winning car. A third privately-entered quattro will be entered for double Pikes Peak winner John Buffum.

The 'Race to the Clouds', held in the Rocky Mountains, covers 12 miles and 156 corners en route to the

summit of Pikes Peak at an altitude of more than 14,000 feet. On the Eifel Rally, the Pikes Peak cars will complete two demonstration stages.

Rohrl was the first driver to break 11 minutes for the climb. "I drove up the mountain eight times and made my own pacenotes. Then I gave each of the 156 corners a specific name and learnt all of them by heart. In contrast to some of

my rivals, I knew where I was all the time. It is great to see Audi take this unique car out of its museum and show it in action to the audience."

Another Group B rally car from the Pikes Peak story will head to Germany in July. British driver Mark Rennison, who tackled the US hillclimb in a modified Ford RS200 as recently as 2014, will enter the event.



HERO events are full up

HERO events to be expanded as demand for entries flies high

The Historic Endurance Rally Organisation is considering extending its calendar after most of its 2018 classic rallies filled up in the opening weeks of the year.

Events like the Scottish Malts in April and the Classic Marathon

in June already have capacity entries, while November's Rally of the Tests has taken over 100 entries and the challenging Le-Jog in December now has a full entry of 60 cars. The HERO team is now trying to extend the entry to cope

with demand. Demand for rallies that blend regularity sections with special tests shows no sign of abating and HERO is now planning to add events to its schedule over the next two or three years.

Coulthard signs up for Goodwood Members Meet

Former grand prix racer David Coulthard will return to Goodwood for the 76th Members' Meeting and will race a Mercedes 300SL in the Salvadori Cup.

Coulthard, 46, will race the Mercedes for the new IWC Schaffhausen Historic Racing Team and will go up against Jaguar D-types, Lister-Jaguars

and Birdcage Maseratis in the sprint race for sports and sports-racing cars produced between 1955 and 1960.

The former Williams, McLaren and Red Bull Racing driver has experience of Goodwood and competed in an Austin A35 in the St Mary's Trophy at the Revival Meeting in 2016.

However on the Sunday of the Members' Meeting he will make his race debut at the event in the six-cylinder Mercedes.

Coulthard will be the first driver to race for the team and both car and team will be unveiled on Saturday morning at Goodwood, ahead of qualifying for the Salvadori Cup.

Rescued Royale project is started

A Royale RP11 Formula 3 car from 1972 has recently been rescued from a garden where it had been stored under a tarpaulin for 30 years.

David Cranage discovered the car by chance and persuaded the owner to sell the sorry remains of chassis RP11/6, a 1600cc F3 car used by

the works team in period. The chassis, one of only eight that were built, could have been a replacement for Tom Pryce in 1972 when his first chassis was hit by another car at Monaco and wrecked. "I'm sure it is worth restoring," said Cranage. "I'd like to research it and see it properly restored."

Mitchell back on track with an Alfa Romeo and a BMW for the new year

Former Historic FF1600 champion Richard Mitchell, now 25 years old, will return to a full race programme this season by sharing two cars with Tim Parsons.

The duo will campaign an Alfa Romeo GTA in the Classic Sports Car Club's Swinging 60s Series as well as a BMW E21 Alpina in Future Classics. Mitchell, right,

who has been coaching Parsons, has not contested a full season since winning the HFF crown with the Speedsport team in 2015 and only raced once last

year due to lack of funds. The Exeter-based racer now hopes to further his reputation in the historic arena. "I'd love to move up the historic racing ladder," he said.



Sports 2000 will have a class

IN BRIEF

Retro success

Following the success of the 2018 Race Retro, the date for 2019 has been confirmed as February 22-24. Over 23,000 visitors attended last month's show, which marked a 10 per cent increase over the previous year. Star guests Miki Biasion and Brian Redman were greatly in demand for interviews and autographs.

Bromyard swap

After two demo events around the roads of Bromyard in Herefordshire, the Bromyard Speed Festival is moving to nearby Shelsley Walsh for the 2018 edition. A mix of road and competition cars will tackle the famous hill on Sunday, April 8 under the 'BSF on Tour' heading. Rally cars, single-seaters and historics will all be in action.

Jersey specials

Two popular events on Jersey will cater for pre-'93 cars this summer. The Jersey International Motoring Festival (June 1-3) features an evening sprint followed by two hillclimbs, while the Jersey Speed Festival (August 25/26) will feature two days of competition on the 1074m Greve de Lecq hillclimb course.

Classics tweaked

The HSCC has reaffirmed its commitment to the Classic Racing Car Series, with a rework of car eligibility and an attractive calendar of races for 2018. The focus will return to the category's origins as a series for racing cars from the era before wings and slicks and the schedule starts at Donington Park on April 8.

Auction is a hit

Nearly £900,000 was taken in the Silverstone Auctions competition car sale at Race Retro 10 days ago, including £182,250 for the Ford Sierra RS500 Cosworth that won the 1990 BTCC with Robb Gravett.

Asphalt axed

The opening round of the Historic Asphalt Rally Championship was a casualty of the snow over the weekend. The Bovington Stages in Dorset was postponed due to the conditions, so the opening championship round will now be the Salamandre Rally in Belgium on April 22. The Bovington event is now planned for August 11/12.

La Vie en Bleu

French and Italian cars will be celebrated at Prescott in May at the 2018 edition of La Vie en Bleu incorporating La Vita Rossa. The weekend of May 26/27 will include a round of the Ferrari Hillclimb Championship, a class for ERAs and demonstration runs by Duncan Pittaway in the 'Beast of Turin', the 1911 Fiat S76.

\$2000's own class

Historic Sports 2000s will have a class within the HSCC Classic Clubmans Championship. A growing number of pre-'85 Pinto-powered Sports 2000 have raced with the front-engined Clubmans and the arrangement has now been put on a permanent footing.

RALLY NEWS

Photos: mcklein-imagedatabase.com

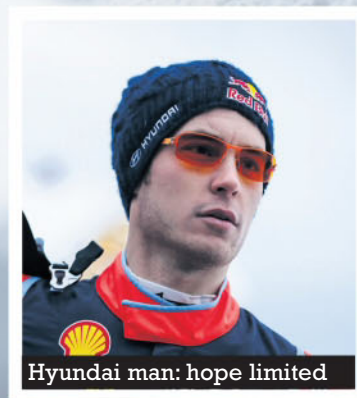
RALLY MEXICO PREVIEW



Sweden triumph means
Neuville opens the road

NEUVILLE READY TO RIDE HIS LUCK IN MEXICO

Road order is likely to hinder championship leader's pace



Hyundai man: hope limited

By David Evans

Thierry Neuville will face one of the biggest challenges of his career when he's forced to open the road at this week's Rally Mexico.

Arriving in Leon as championship leader, the Belgian will face the worst of the conditions on the opening day of the season's first gravel rally. Neuville topped the WRC standings after Rally Finland last year, but that actually offered an advantage for the all-asphalt Rally Germany.

Despite understanding he will lose time to his rivals, Neuville remains upbeat about his situation.

"I know what's coming," he told *MN* after opening a 10-point advantage over his nearest rival Sebastien Ogier in Sweden. "But I am really happy with the performance we did in Sweden. We are ready for Mexico and we will do what we can. It's part of the game."

"Morale and motivation couldn't be higher. Mexico is a nice event with good memories from my first podium in 2013 and then when we scored Hyundai's first podium a year later."

Road sweeping will be a part of Neuville's game of particular

interest to Ogier. The defending world champion, who will be second on the road, has spent much of the last five years running at the front of the field. When he crashed out of the opening day of Rally Finland last year, Ogier was able to watch his rival's progress opening the road. At the time, and still sore from his own retirement, he told *MN*: "Now he [Neuville] realise what is first on the road. There are not so many people who have seen that. Since years I have done this job and people like him, who have never done [it] often say: 'Ah, it's not so much, Ogier's complaining too much.' But now I see what he do when it's tough and it's nothing really impressive."

Now Ogier will have the chance to inspect the Hyundai driver's lines more closely as he follows him through this week's roads around Guanajuato.

The M-Sport Ford driver is, however, focusing on his own event rather than that of the man ahead of him – and

Mexico is always an important event for Ogier and co-driver Julien Ingrassia.

Ogier said: "There's always a special feeling when we return to Rally Mexico, because it's where everything started for me 10 years

ago. It was our first event in the world championship and the story started with victory in the Junior WRC.

"Since then we added a couple of podiums and victories at the highest level, which means that I obviously have Rally Mexico in my heart.

We'll do our best to continue this love story with another strong result and are looking forward to the great Mexican atmosphere.

"The loose gravel can also pose something of a challenge for the early runners and, even though we won't be the first car on the road next week, there will still be a lot of fast drivers behind us. We need to try and stay as close as we can on Friday morning. Then we can see where we are and push for the best possible result."

Neuville and Ogier will struggle for grip in the loose on the opening day, but it would be unwise to rule them out of a scrap for the podium once the order is reversed for the weekend.

Round three does offer a gilt-edged chance for the drivers in the middle of pack, like Andreas Mikkelsen, Kris Meeke and Elfyn Evans running sixth, seventh and eighth on the road. They should enjoy the optimum running position with a swept line, but without the same potential for ruts or rocks being pulled out by the crews following.

Loeb swots up ahead of his WRC comeback

In case you've been residing on another planet, you can't have failed to notice Sebastien Loeb returns to the World Rally Championship in Mexico this week.

The Frenchman starts the first of his three-round programme in Leon (Corsica and Catalunya will follow), but he has been careful not to make any predictions of a potential seventh successive victory at Rally Mexico. The focus for the nine-time champion will be on enjoying his time in the sister C3 WRC to that of last year's winner Kris Meeke.

"I hope to be more or less on the pace," said Loeb. "I have no idea where I stand in relation to the other drivers, so I can't wait to get started. You have to bear in mind that this is still the world championship – the other drivers haven't stood still over the last few years."

Last week's *MN* revealed a positive pre-event test for Loeb, where he completed just over 300 miles of running in Spain, and he has since spent time watching onboard videos from last year's event in an effort to further remind himself of the route.

Loeb pointed out that, while there is a perception that he knows Rally



Loeb: Mexican outing in 2012

Mexico, the route has been changed since he last drove in 2012.

He said: "Twenty-eight per cent of the course is going to be new to me, compared with just four per cent for the others, but that's pretty positive, because it is one of the events I still know best. However, my memories of the 72 per cent that I have driven before go back six years, so I've done a little bit of work so that I don't feel completely disorientated. I hope my [11th] position in Friday's running order will help me to get my bearings because, with the current regulations, you really need to have a good first day otherwise your rally suffers."



Ogier likes Mexico

TAKAMOTO KATSUTA: JAPAN'S NEWEST WRC STAR

PAGE 18



The Strength of Experience



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'Border Counties axe causes headache'
Snowfall wreaks havoc, p17



HOW CLOSE IS THE SAFARI RALLY TO MAKING A RETURN?



NEWS ANALYSIS

McRae won the last Safari in '02

Antiquated anachronism or vital component of the World Rally Championship's future? What is the future of the Safari Rally?

Talk to the man who took one podium finish from eight Kenyan starts and you'll get one answer. Talk to the man who started seven and won two and you'll get a very different response. FIA president Jean Todt – the podium finisher – can see a future for the Safari. Head of Toyota's rally operation – and two-time winner as a driver – Tommi Makinen, can't.

The future of this once-great event was brought into focus last week, when Todt opened the WRC Safari Project's new HQ building in Nairobi. The next step of a possible return to the WRC calendar comes next week when the Safari Rally will be attended by WRC officials. This is as close as the rally has come to returning to the top flight, but such a move has already polarised opinion across the service park.

What went wrong?

October 1, 2002 was the date when the game was up for the Safari Rally and the World Rally Championship. The FIA issued the calendar for the following year's series and Africa was absent. The explanation was that the event organisers had failed to meet its obligations to the governing body and the necessary guarantees that these obligations could be met was not forthcoming.

The Automobile Association of Kenya was reckoned to owe the FIA more than US\$40,000 (£28,000) – debts which had been outstanding for more than a year and when that money was still not forthcoming the FIA decided it wouldn't be included in 2003.

Even before that, the Safari was struggling to adapt to the increasing demands on it to fall into line with European WRC rounds.

First organised in 1953, it was originally labelled the Coronation Safari because it ran during a holiday taken to celebrate the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. The event became known as the ultimate motorsporting adventure, an open road race across the Serengeti with Mount Kilimanjaro for a backdrop. Victory on the Safari was, for a time, as worthwhile to a manufacturer as winning the world championship itself.

But as technology moved into the 1990s, the cars got quicker and quicker and, more pertinently, better equipped to deal with what Africa would throw at them at speed. No longer was there the same need to lift for washed away roads or football-sized rocks. Safari-specific cars were strong as they come and almost geared for the same sort of speed as they were taking on the jumps of Finland. This combined with rising population and increased traffic on the Kenyan roads meant there were more accidents involving the general public.



FIA boss Todt visited Kenya last week

Hence, in 2002, the organisers tried to run a Safari on supposedly closed roads (it's pretty much impossible to close roads running through settlements outside of Nairobi). This dilution left the Safari caught between two stools – an unsustainable past and an unaffordable future.

What happened then?

The Safari Rally continued to run and twice featured on the Eurosport-funded Intercontinental Rally Challenge calendar. Since then it has become a round of the African Rally Championship only, with a dramatically different route, unrecognisable from the height of its popularity as an East African Safari.

While enthusiasm for the modern event waned, a classic rally was started by Kenyan Mike Kirkland. The first event ran 50 years on from the first, 1953 Safari in 2003. This biannual event has prospered with the likes of Bjorn Waldegaard and Stig Blomqvist listed amongst its winners.

What happens next week?

The Safari Rally runs from March 16-18 and includes a 361-mile route, of which 137 miles will be competitive. The rally starts from the centre of Nairobi and heads south for Naivasha, where the service park and rally HQ is located. Saturday provides the mainstay of the competitive route with close to 100 miles of sport before a Sunday lunchtime finish. Typically for Kenya, all the action is high altitude, with the stages all set between 2000 and 2500 metres.

Will this rally help?

Clerk of the course Gurvir Bhabra is determined to run next week's rally as much to WRC standard as possible. One of the primary concerns the WRC stakeholders have is centred on safety – FIA president Todt has made it abundantly clear that the safety and security of the stages is paramount – and to that end this will be the first Safari ever to run completely on private farm roads.

The stages running through the Rift Valley have been graded to what's been reported to *MN* as 'European-specification' gravel roads. The organisers have included chicanes to slow some of the higher-speed



...and signed a photo of himself...

straights. The aim of next week is to demonstrate both the sporting infrastructure and the financial wherewithal to run. A 2019 candidate event is already on the cards, with 2020 the targeted year for the world championship.

Having met with Todt last week, Bhabra admitted the event's future was in its own hands. He said: "Jean Todt told us, simply and clearly, getting or not getting the Safari back to the WRC is our own decision."

What do people think?

Todt said: "The modern World Rally Championship needs to extend its horizons and become more global and I would like to see us return to Kenya for a tough and demanding event. As the world's second largest continent, Africa is very important to the FIA and the Safari Rally represents everything that is in the DNA of our sport."

Makinen has made clear his feelings that the current generation of World Rally Cars are not designed for endurance events or rough roads. While the Safari organisers are keen to underline this will be an event more in line with the rest of the WRC, the Finn's not convinced.

"I don't think this is what the sport is about so much now," he told *MN*. "I think [this] event would be too expensive. I don't like these kind of endurance races and still there would be areas where we would have to change the car."

Makinen's opposite number at M-Sport, Malcolm Wilson, was keen to see what next week brings.

"The number one priority has to be safety," said Wilson. "We simply couldn't run a Safari in the style of what we used to do, not from a safety or a cost perspective. I've been told the roads would be smoother, so the cars could cope. Let's see, from a historical perspective it would be interesting to have a Safari Rally back, but it has to be cost-effective."

Of the current drivers, Elfyn Evans told *MN* he'd be interested in competing in Africa.

"I was in secondary school last time the Safari Rally was running," he said. "But I've heard the stories and it's an iconic event – it would be interesting, but it has to work for everybody."

GROUP RALLYING EDITOR

DAVID EVANS

"Loeb has done plenty of homework"



He's coming home. Sebastien Loeb is back where he belongs... at the wheel of a factory World Rally Car.

The time has come to set aside the feelings that Citroen has let Craig Breen down and focus on the positive side of the story: a nine-time world champion's back to chase a seventh consecutive Rally Mexico win.

What's going to happen?

Nobody knows. Not you, not me and not even super-Seb himself. He might win. He might be a second per mile off the pace. Only time – and the times – will tell.

Much has been said about how much Loeb knows about the route for Rally Mexico and how familiar he is or isn't with the Guanajuato roads. But what we haven't talked about so much is the need for experience of other aspects of Mexico. Knowing the roads is one thing, but knowing how to drive them is quite another.

From the outside, the gravel tracks which reach out from the Leon service park look much the same as any others you might find around the world. But there's one key difference for this event: the altitude. For much of the time the cars will be in stage mode well north of 2000 metres; for us Brits, imagine Snowdon sitting on Ben Nevis and the rally cars competing on top of them both. That's how high we're talking.

Year-in, year-out we hear about the effect this has on the engine, with the thinner air slashing power outputs by as much as 20 per cent. So, the drivers have to get used to a slower car: that can't be that complicated.

Actually, there's a real art to getting the best out of Mexico. Naturally, the cars are tweaked and tuned to deliver under the stress of high-altitude, but ultimately it comes down to the driver being able to make the difference.

The key here is momentum and keeping the car right on the very limit of grip as long as possible. Any speed scrubbed takes longer here than anywhere else to build back up. Equally, less power means the softer tyre will come into play far more than you would ever have thought with ambient temperatures around 30 degrees and the hard-baked running even higher.

With less power comes less wheelspin and less slip means less wear on the tyres. Additionally, depending on how much rain there's been to wash the loose gravel away, a thick layer of gravel allows the wheels to spin without reaching down to the tyre-burning bedrock.

Loeb knows this. Like he knows how to tune the brake balance and bias to cope with excess heat generated from what can be fairly fierce Mexican sunshine.

Only two drivers (Jari-Matti Latvala, 11 and Sebastien Ogier, 9) have started Mexico more times than Loeb's eight. Yes, it's been a while since he was last here, but revisiting the data, talking to the likes of the team's co-ordinator Daniel Grataloup and long-time Citroen engineer Didier Clement will bring so much back to him – and that's before he starts the race.

Loeb remains the sharpest of operators and an absolutely world-class driver. Countering that, time waits for no man and six summers have been and gone since he last opened the taps in Otates.

One thing's for sure: we'll all be waiting on the first split for Citroen #11.



AGREE/DISAGREE?
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RALLY NEWS

Bolivian teen for WRC2 in Mexico

Seventeen-year-old Marco Bulacia will make his WRC2 debut at the wheel of a Ford Fiesta R5 at this week's Rally Mexico.

The Bolivian youngster is the second 17-year-old to join the WRC2 ranks in five months, following Kalle Rovanpera.

Rovanpera also returns to WRC2 duty, after missing Sweden, with a factory Skoda Fabia R5 in Leon this week.

Bulacia has mainly rallied in his native Bolivia until now, but did finish fourth in a Ford Fiesta RS WRC at last year's Bettiga Memorial event in Italy.

Bulacia said: "It's incredible to be contesting my first WRC event – a dream come true. In my country there were no R5 cars in competition last year, so I had to look outside for experience. We competed in Italy with the Fiesta and secured two podiums, but out of all the drivers in Mexico I will have the least amount of experience and will need the necessary kilometres to know what level we can be on."

Bulacia will face Briton's Gus Greensmith as well as Rovanpera and his team-mate, defending WRC2 champion, Swede Pontus Tidemand.

Mexico newcomer Greensmith, who completed a 120-mile pre-event test in Greystoke last week, said: "It feels like an incredibly long time since I have been behind the wheel and I am looking forward to kick-starting my 2018 WRC2 campaign with a good result next week."

AHLIN SIGNS UP FOR ERC BID

Swede aims for 2019 European title



Ahlin was second in BRC in 2017



Ahlin graduates from Britain

By Jack Benyon

Swede Fredrik Ahlin is hoping to gain experience of the events in the European Rally Championship this year before gunning for the overall title in 2019.

The 2017 British Rally Championship runner-up confirmed last week that he would compete in at least five events in the ERC in 2018; the Azores, Rally of Rome, Barum, Rally Poland and Rally Latvia.

He is also looking at competing on the second round, the Canary Island Rally, but will make a decision on that after the Azores.

The Swede will remain with the Cumbrian firm CA1 Sport. The team is headed up by Martin Wilkinson, a former engineer to Colin McRae and Carlos Sainz. Ahlin will use a Skoda Fabia R5 for a second season.

Ahlin chose the ERC over competing in rounds of the WRC2 category.

"It's good to have a more even

playing field [in ERC] because in WRC2 it's really hard to fight with the works teams as they have so many more opportunities to test and all of these things," said Ahlin. "It's a more level playing field in ERC where the preparation level is similar for everyone. It's a more fair fight than WRC2."

Ahlin is also considering outings outside of the ERC as he looks to get more experience of events further afield than Sweden or Britain.

"We're looking at doing Ypres, it's a good Tarmac rally and it will be good preparation ahead of Rome for us. There's unfinished business after last year," said Ahlin.

"We'll do the South Swedish Rally, due to other commitments as there's a documentary being filmed about me on that rally. Wales Rally GB is a possibility for me as well."

Ahlin was leading the BRC element of Ypres last year before a low-speed roll ruled him out.

Yates joins fellow BRC man Ahlin in Azores

British Rally Championship podium finisher Rhys Yates will travel to the Azores for the first round of the European Rally Championship round (March 21-23).

Yates has switched from a Ford Fiesta run by his family squad, the Brettex Rally Team, to a Skoda Fabia R5, which will be run by CA1 Sport, which also runs Ahlin.

Yates said: "The prize of an event in a WRC car [for winning ERC Under 28] is unlikely for me at this point, but it's nice to have something to aim at. That's how you improve."

"I believe we can be on the podium in BRC this year and I'm going to the Azores to gain experience of the event and to test myself against some of the best in the ERC."

Citroens upgraded for a Corsica push

Citroen tech chiefs will introduce improved suspension geometry to the C3 WRC at next month's Tour de Corse – in the hope of securing a home win that looked on the cards for the first half of last year's rally.

The drivers have talked consistently about a lack of grip at the rear of the C3, something which was more pronounced at last month's Rally Sweden. While the French firm declined to comment on potential specification changes for Corsica, MN has learned new rear geometry will be on the car for round four.

For asphalt rallies, Citroen has continued to develop its

own suspension, but Ohlins is understood to be further refining the gravel specification for the remainder of the season.

Citroen technical director Christophe Besse said he was pleased with what he saw from the team at last month's Rally Sweden, where Craig Breen finished second.

"We are going in a good direction," he said. "For Sweden, all we had were the developments we had made for the car on the loose surface rallies last year and it looked to work well."

Besse admitted Kris Meeke's turbo failure still had the team members scratching their heads.

Meeke and Nagle to retrace steps

Kris Meeke and Paul Nagle will revisit the corner which almost cost them Rally Mexico victory last season when they retrace the route this week.

Leading Sebastien Ogier by 37 seconds going into the final stage, the Citroen pair went off the road, through a hedge and into a car park, rejoining the road to complete the stage and win the rally with 13s still in hand.

The footage was voted the moment of the year at last season's WRC Awards in Australia.

Nagle admitted he didn't think their pacenote for the corner would need changing – just their line through the bend.

"We had it noted as a fifth-gear right-hander that tightened – the nature of that corner is unlikely to have changed," said Nagle. "We'll have a look at the corner and maybe while we're there we'll take a quick look at the car park – just to see exactly what sort of car park it was that we went in to!"

Lengthened by three miles, the Derramadero stage will be used twice on Friday rather than the single powerstage use from 12 months ago.

"It'll be nice to get in there and get it over and done with," said Nagle. "There's a bit of history, but in the end it's just another corner."



Footage of Meeke in the Mexican car park went viral on social media



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'Racers swap circuits for rally outing'

R.A.C. Rally feature, p19



Photos: Jakob Ebrey



BRC won't look at a move away from R5

BRC STICKING WITH R5 FORMULA DESPITE STRUGGLING FOR ENTRIES

The British Rally Championship has no plans to move away from the current R5 formula as its top class, despite a lower-than-expected entry for the Border Counties Rally.

The series attracted seven R5 machines for the opening round, six down on the number that started last year's event.

"My own viewpoint is that the current format we have for the British Rally Championship is the correct format," BRC championship manager Iain Campbell told *Motorsport News*.

"The guys that have the R5 cars are always going to want to do longer events than 45 miles, so there is a reason for us

to have them and I think it would be foolish not to have them. That [changing from R5s] is not even on my radar.

"We should have the top range of cars in the championship."

A number of drivers have cited budget and a struggle to attract bigger sponsors as a reason for missing the series.

Including the cost of an R5, a year-long budget is in excess of £300,000.

For the first time since its return in 2016, the BRC has no clashing rounds with the Irish Tarmac Rally Championship, but that has failed to attract a number of its competitors who have dovetailed with the two championships previously.



Irishman drove Fiesta in '17

Barrable back to Fiesta for Irish Tar

Irish Tarmac Rally Championship frontrunner Robert Barrable will rejoin the championship with a Ford Fiesta R5.

Barrable will kick off West Cork – an event he won in 2011 – having switched from the Hyundai i20 he used last year. The car will be provided by Dom Buckley RSC.

"I've committed to the first three rounds and we'll see how we go from there," said Barrable, who finished second on the Rally of the Lakes, but his season ended after a crash in Donegal.

"The plan at the start of the year is always to go out and do the full championship. That is the plan. But we'll put a focus on the first few rounds and make a decision after that."

Barrable did one event in a Fiesta last year, the Galway International Rally, but it was in an older-spec M-Sport-built car.

"I haven't driven the Evo2 Fiesta," he added. "The last time I drove a Fiesta was last year but it was only the Evo1. We'll have a day's testing before we go to West Cork, and we'll go from there."

West Cork is the opening round of the ITRC, which is held on March 17/18. Reigning champion Sam Moffett is returning.

BTRDA Rally First champ joins BRC Cadets

Reigning BTRDA Rally First 1.4 champions Bart Lang and Sinclair Young will compete in the Cadet Class of the British Rally Championship this year.

Lang, 23, will drive a Ford Fiesta R2 prepared by fellow Myerscough College classmates, as he himself is a third-year student, on all six events in the championship this year.

"I think it's a necessary step for me," said Lang of the jump

to BRC competition. "I'm a third-year motorsport student at Myerscough, they've helped out on the Micra where they could. I've worked on Fiesta R2s as part of my studies with Myerscough and we've been out to JWRC as a mechanic, which was fantastic.

"When they got this car I helped to rebuild it when it had an accident in the hands of one of Mauer Motorsport's customers."



Lang (second from right) will drive Myerscough's Fiesta

SEEDDED ENTRY

MSA Asphalt Rally Championship, Tour of Epynt Rally, Bulth Wells, March 11

NO	DRIVER/CO-DRIVER	CAR
1	Bob Fowden/Aled Davies	Subaru Impreza WRC
2	Damian Cole/Jamie Edwards	Ford Fiesta WRC
3	Melyvn Evans/Mark Glennerster	Subaru Impreza WRC
4	Steve Simpson/Patrick Walsh	TBA
5	Jason Pritchard/Phil Clarke	TBA
6	Mark Jones/John Hawkins	BMW M3
7	Phil Turner/Simon Anthony	Mitsubishi Lancer E9
8	Daniel Harper/Chris Campbell	MINI JCW WRC
9	Ashley Field/TBA	Darrian T90 GTR+
10	Huw Reed/Anthony Hackett	Darrian T90 GTR

MSA Asphalt returns with Tour of Epynt Rally

Celebrating 40 years of rallying this year, Bob Fowden will kick off Sunday's Tour of Epynt as car number one in a strong field allied to the return of the MSA Asphalt Rally Championship after a one-year hiatus on 2017.

Multiple Welsh Tarmac Rally champion Fowden has plenty of competition with 2016 champion Damian Cole second on the road in the car he used to win that title, a Ford Fiesta RS WRC.

Melvyn Evans (Subaru), Steve Simpson (TBA), Dan Harper (Mini John Cooper Works WRC) and the Darrian (one of six) of Ashley Field are all likely to challenge.

There has been heavy snowfall in the area, but as *MN* went to press it was understood the event was set to go ahead, although travelling crews and spectators should check the Port Talbot Motor Club's and MSA Asphalt's websites and social media channels before travelling.

Over 50 of the entry have registered for the returning Asphalt Championship, for the 75-mile shootout in Bulth Wells.

The series goes to Belgium, Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man as well as two events on the mainland over Otterburn and this weekend's Powys event.

Four champions to national opener

Four Irish National Rally champions are among a strong entry for Sunday's Mayo Stages Rally on the island of Achill.

The Fords of Declan Boyle (Fiesta RS WRC), Donagh Kelly (Focus WRC) and Roy White (Fiesta RS WRC) and Subaru Impreza driver Niall Maguire (Subaru WRC) have seven titles between them.

Former Irish Tarmac Rally champion Garry Jennings (Subaru WRC) is also in the mix along with Josh Moffett (Fiesta R5) and Desi Henry, who makes



McGonigle leads the field

his debut in his Fiesta R5.

Last year's rally winner Joe McGonigle steps up to a Mini John Cooper Works WRC in 2018 and leads the field away as car number one.

The 68-mile event runs three stages, three times.

SEEDDED ENTRY

Irish National Rally Championship, Mayo Stages Rally, Achill Island, March 11

NO	DRIVER/CO-DRIVER	CAR
1	Joe McGonigle/Ciaran Geaney	Mini WRC
2	Roy White/James O'Brien	Ford Fiesta RS WRC
3	Donagh Kelly/Conor Foley	Ford Focus WRC
4	Declan Boyle/James O'Reilly	Ford Fiesta RS WRC
5	Garry Jennings/Rory Kennedy	Subaru Impreza WRC
6	Josh Moffett/Keith Moriarty	Ford Fiesta R5
7	Desi Henry/Liam Moynihan	Ford Fiesta R5
8	Niall Maguire/Enda Sherry	Subaru Impreza WRC
9	Kevin Barrett/Sean Mullally	Subaru Impreza WRC
10	Adrian Hetherington/Ronan O'Neill	Ford Escort Mk2



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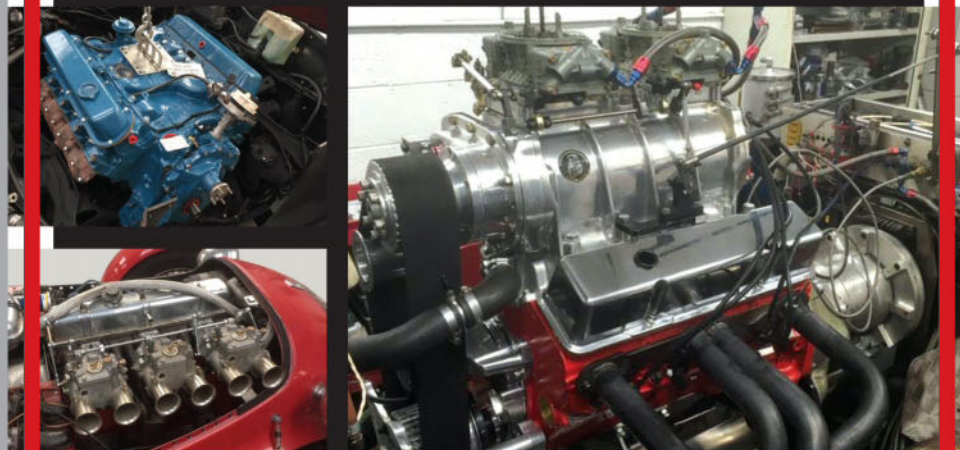


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RALLY NEWS

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POSTPONED BORDER COUNTIES RALLY FACES CALENDAR HEADACHE

Jedburgh event will struggle to keep British and Scottish series

By Jack Benyon

The Border Counties Rally faces a struggle to return to the rally calendar with its championships intact with no obvious date to reschedule the postponed event.

The Jedburgh counter was due to kick off the British Rally Championship, and was the second round of the Scottish Rally Championship.

However, with a congested calendar, it looks unlikely that the Borders will be able to run on a weekend where it is suitable for both the SRC and BRC (see calendar boxes, right).

"We need to sit down as a committee and work out where we are," said Clayton Lackenby, Border Counties Rally clerk of the course. "It's a congested calendar to try and work out where we can slot in and work in the championships, it's going to be difficult and we know that. The other events that were cancelled are looking for dates as well."

"There's nothing [a date] that's obviously ideal considering the British

and Scottish Championships. We have to speak to the championships and see where they would want to be.

"We wouldn't want to leave out a championship, as we've committed to both of them."

British Rally Championship manager Iain Campbell added: "I admire the organiser's stance, cancelling at a time when competitors could still get accommodation deposits and such like back. Even if the stages could have been cleared, the issue of getting marshals and rescue units into place properly was always going to be a concern."

The event was cancelled early [Friday March 2] due to concerns over getting marshals and safety crews into the stages. The event organisers were robbed of valuable set-up time over last weekend due to heavy and drifting snow. Thought was also given to the number of crews travelling long distances and from abroad, in order to give them time to recoup cash.

Visit motorsport-news.co.uk to read a column by Jack Benyon on why too many events in the UK is causing problems.



Border Counties has been postponed due to snow

CALENDAR

BRC	
DATE	EVENT
Apr 28	Pirelli International
Jun 23/24	Ypres Rally
Aug 17/18	Ulster Rally
Sep 13-15	Rally Isle of Man
Oct 4-7	Wales Rally GB

CALENDAR

SRC	
DATE	EVENT
Apr 21	Speyside Stages
May 19	RSAC Scottish Rally
Jun 23	Argyll Rally
Aug 11	Grampian Rally
Sep 8	Galloway Hills Rally

Mid Wales: no date for 2018 yet

The Mid Wales Stages organiser was expected to meet earlier this week to discuss a new date for the event.

The Newtown-based rally was returning in 2018, having elected not to run the previous year due to concerns over the financial aspect of running the event.

The rally had attracted a quality entry, including British Rally Championship frontrunner Tom Cave and UK Top 40 recording artist John Newman – due to make his rally debut.

"We'll have a meeting early [this] week," said clerk of the course Wayne Jones. "The plan is to gather the organising committee and have a look at dates and try to work out if we can squeeze back into the calendar."

"The Malcolm Wilson is going to reschedule. We need to see whenever everyone else is going to reschedule but we don't have a date in mind yet. Hopefully we'll have something by the end of next week. It's up in the air at the moment."

● The Bovington Stages Rally, a non-spectator event in Dorset, has confirmed the date it will reschedule to after being postponed last Sunday. The new date for the event is August 10/11.

Malcolm Wilson Rally has BTRDA backing

The Malcolm Wilson Rally has the support of the BTRDA Rally Series in trying to rearrange an October date for the event after it was snowed-off last weekend.

The Cockermouth-based rally was due to run last Saturday, but the snow in the area made it difficult for marshals and volunteers to get to their posts.

"The plan is to run it in October if we can find a date that suits everything," said Malcolm Wilson Rally clerk of the course Kevin Savage. "You can't run events in the Lake District after Easter and before the end of September."

"We need the BTRDA for the entry. Without the BTRDA you wouldn't make the event pay. We're hoping to have it all sorted in the next few weeks."

The October date would make the

Malcolm Wilson Rally the last round on the calendar, as the current curtain-closer is the Trackrod Rally Yorkshire in September.

BTRDA Rallies Committee chairman Neil Cross added: "We will support the Malcolm Wilson Rally as much as we can. We'd like them to be a round of the championship, they're a long-standing member. We're working with them to find an acceptable date."

"There needs to be a lot of communication between events and championships [because of the number of rallies looking to run later in the year]."

Savage confirmed that those who hadn't withdrawn before the event was cancelled would receive a refund, less the £50 non-refundable deposit. That deposit will be taken off if crews elect to re-enter.

New title decider for MN series

The SMC Stages will become the final round of the Motorsport News Circuit Rally Championship for 2017/18, replacing the Donington Rally, which was postponed due to snow last Sunday.

The Anglesey-based SMC Stages (April 15) is situated at the island's Ty Croes Circuit. The championship already visits the same venue, for the Lee Holland Memorial Stages in March, and it has been in the MN series since it started in 2015/16.

Now, the championship will visit North Wales twice with the event slotting into the calendar.

"It was the reserve event



MN Championship already visits Anglesey in March

for the championship because the dates are close to the end of the championship, it meant it could be used as a reserve round and if anything happened at the last minute, we could still invoke it," said MN Circuit Rally Championship co-ordinator Darren Spann.

"It's a circuit we know and are used to, which is also a massive advantage when bringing an event into the

schedule at the last minute.

"They are a set of organisers I've worked very closely with in the past, the main person behind that event is the radio controller on the Oulton Park event [Neil Howard Stages]."

The Lee Holland Memorial Stages on March 18/19 is the next round of the Championship, followed by Alan Healy Memorial Cadwell Stages on April 8.

JASPER AND WHYATT KEEP BURNS AT BAY



Jasper/Whyatt topped only rally to run last weekend

Roskirk Stages Rally

By Phil James

Organiser: Blackpool South Shore Motor Club When: March 4 Where: Three Sisters Race Circuit, Wigan. Championships: ANWCC; SD34; F1000; Three Sisters Rally Challenge Stages: 12 Starters: 31

Mark Jasper and Don Whyatt headed the standings throughout to bring their Ford Escort Mk2 to victory, seven seconds ahead of the Vauxhall Corsa of Ryan Burns and Shaun Hughes on the Roskirk Stages at Three Sisters.

Having suffered a broken steering arm on SS2, Jasper's Escort thereafter ran faultlessly as he fended off the challenge of Burns and the Escort Mk2

crewed by Andrew Morris and Chloe Thomas.

When Morris's tyre gamble of running slicks on SS7 backfired, Burns took advantage and secured the runners-up spot.

Brandon Smith and Dylan Thomas paid a heavy price for their stage three spin and could only manage fourth in their Darrian T90 GTR while Martin Evans and Lee Edwards completed the top five in their Escort Mk2.

Class 2 winners Stephen and David Terry claimed seventh in their Nissan Micra ahead of the Corsa of top Class 3 finishers Richard and Adam Kay.

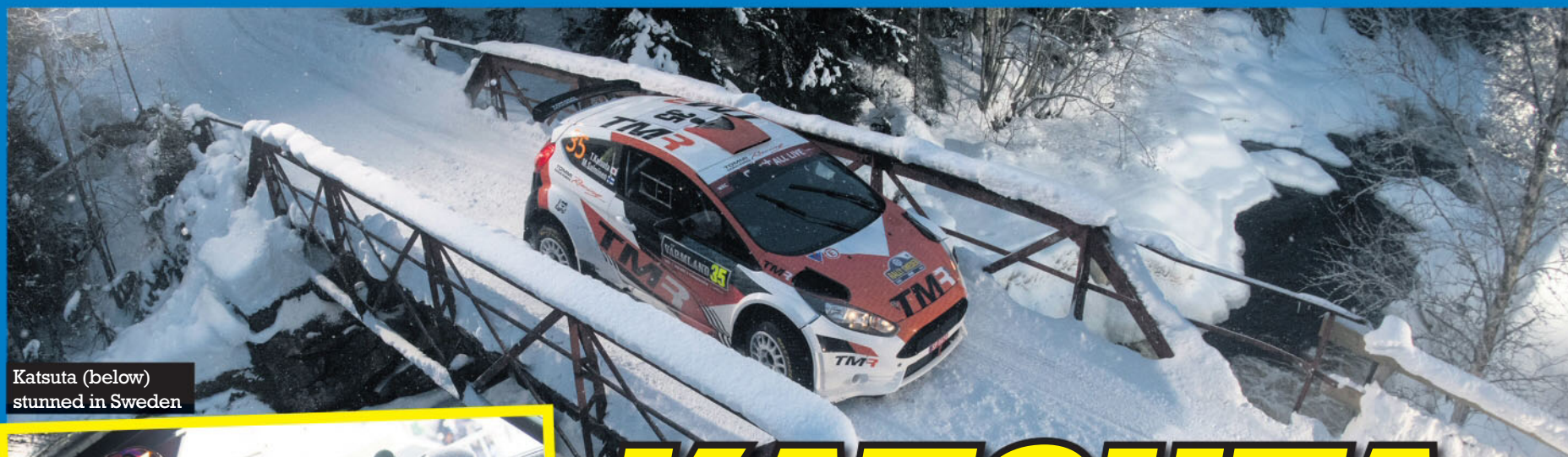
Reigning Three Sisters Rally Challenge champions John and Alex Stone were without their Ford Fiesta S2500 which suffered a recent engine failure, so used a Renault Twingo R1 prepared by RallyMe. After getting stuck in gear on the last two stages, the duo still finished 12th overall.

Results

1 Mark Jasper/Don Whyatt (Ford Escort Mk2) 32m41s; 2 Ryan Burns/Shawn Hughes (Vauxhall Corsa) +7s; 3 Andrew Morris/Chloe Thomas (Escort Mk2); 4 Brandon Smith/Dylan Thomas (Darrian T90 GTR); 5 Martin Evans/Lee Edwards (Escort Mk2); 6 Nick Stamper/Darren Riley (Subaru Impreza); 7 Stephen Terry/David Terry (Nissan Micra); 8 Richard Kay/Adam Kay (Corsa); 9 Calvin Woods/Connor Aspey (VW Lupo); 10 James Swallow/Victoria Swallow (BMW Compact). Class winners: Tom Urquhart/Matt Hewlett (Nissan Micra); Terry/Terry; Kay/Kay; Evans/Edwards; Smith/Thomas; Edward Lewis/Sam Bilham (Citroen C1).

INTERVIEW

Photos: mcklein-imagedatabase.com



Katsuta (below) stunned in Sweden



KATSUTA: JAPAN'S BEST WRC PROSPECT

David Evans discovers the background of the rising talent from the land of the rising sun

Generally speaking, racing drivers don't like being told where to go. Or how fast they should go when they get there. They choose their own lines, make their own decisions. Mavericks, with no need for a wingman.

That was Takamoto Katsuta a few years ago. Second in his first season driving a TOM'S Dallara in the frontline All-Japan Formula 3 Championship, a Toyota Formula Challenge title under his belt and the 20-year-old had his ducks neatly lined up.

That was 2013. A year on and Katsuta's being told where to go. Racing's not for him. He's a rally driver now.

The land of the rising sun is a place with an outstanding rally history. In terms of nations, only France and Italy have produced more successful rally cars. Mitsubishi and Subaru dominated their days and Toyota has returned to chase – and possibly surpass – former glories in the sport.

For a country producing such great metal, the men haven't quite followed. It's just as baffling in Formula 1: historically brilliant engineers and engines and a podium each for Aguri Suzuki, Takuma Sato and Kamui Kobayashi.

At the second round of this year's World Rally Championship in Sweden, Katsuta showed the first significant signs of being able to turn at least the muddy side of that fortune around. The 24-year-old rocked the establishment with an extraordinary WRC2 win in his Ford Fiesta R5.

Out of nowhere the quiet Japanese found himself in the full glare of the spotlight. It's not often that a WRC2 driver comes close to overshadowing the main field, but Taka very nearly did just that in Torsby.

It wasn't just that he won, it was the manner in which he did it. He simply never stopped pushing. Even when

just the six-mile Torsby stage remained and he held a 10.1s advantage over Pontus Tidemand, he refused to relax.

"The feeling," he told me ahead of the final stage – the biggest of his life, "is that this 10 seconds is not enough. He is very fast and I have big respect for him and his driving skill. I cannot slow down, I need a big push in here."

There was undoubtedly an element of him trying to out-psyche his opponent, but at the same time you got the feeling that even he couldn't believe what he'd done. And that he was still doing it. The former F3 racer was fully deserving of the praise and applause which came his way soon after the stage.

He's come a long way from Aichi, the region of Japan just east of Toyota city, where he was born and brought up. He now lives in Jyväskylä, home town of Rally Finland. It's fair to say, Formula 3's an increasingly distant memory.

"In F3," he says, "lots of drivers were pushing and pushing for Formula 1 and this was going to be difficult. Racing was good. I started karting at 12 and became a development driver for Toyota and Yamaha in my last two years [in karting]. Then Formula Challenge and F3, but then it was difficult. My father is a rally driver, so I looked to rallying."

And his father's not just any old rally driver. His father is Norihiko Katsuta, a man who sealed his eighth Japanese rally title last season.

By this time Toyota's intentions had become clear in rallying and the search – instigated by Toyota Motor Corporation president Akio Toyoda – had begun to find a Japanese driver for his Japanese car. The third and final piece of this Japanese jigsaw will be the return of Rally Japan to the WRC calendar, something that could come as soon as next year.

"From when I was young, I wanted to go to world level in motorsport, not just in Japan," says Katsuta. "My dad had the same idea, he wanted to go to



Pace has improved over 2017

the top level, but the timing wasn't right for him. But now I am coming and I have some big dreams from my dad. This is when I saw the news of Toyota's Rally Challenge Program. This is when I said: 'OK, now I must go rallying.'

Katsuta was signed up alongside the son of another famous rally driver, Toshi Arai's boy Hiroki. That was 2015 and, towards the end of that season, Katsuta made his rally debut outside of Asia. There was a promising seventh overall on the Turku Rally in Finland, but the Tommi Makinen-run Group N Subaru Impreza ended up off the road on the next two events. In that first season, Takamoto was co-driven by three people, all Japanese. Given rallying's Euro-centric nature, he was encouraged to take a European navigator.

Enter Dan Barritt. Burnley's finest had just parted company with Elfyn Evans and was looking for another seat. Turning Japanese was nothing new for Barritt, who had already worked with Fumio Nutahara and Toshi Arai. The difference was, however, those two were well established in their rally careers.

Katsuta was anything but. "The biggest problem we had when I started with him was the pacenotes," says Barritt. "Nutahara didn't speak a huge amount of English, but the difference with him



Takamoto Katsuta was runner up in All-Japan F3 in the 2013 season

was that he could make the notes. Takamoto was struggling with the notes. He'd had some training, but it was very, very basic stuff. We started out with a number system of one to five for the speed, the distance to the next corner and some basic descriptions of the corners ahead.

"It was such a difficult time for him, he was so green. There was so much for him to learn and if he didn't understand what was going on, we were just going to crash. It's fair to say there were some pretty dark times early in that year. He didn't have enough information in the notes about the speed, we were always looking to create extra words. He had to learn to drive slow before he could learn to drive fast. It was tough."

But there was progress. And less crashes. Barritt, of course, returned to Evans' side for the 2017 season, but admits he'd seen enough of Katsuta to understand the natural talent was there.

"He came on in leaps and bounds through 2016," he says, "and when everything was working, you could see he was a good driver. He had a great memory, something which comes with starting out on a circuit, but we were trying to take a driver from a single-venue [rally] to becoming the next Sebastien Ogier."

Katsuta understood the 2016/17 off-season was make or break. He went back to Japan and thought

about his options, before returning to his base in Jyväskylä to redouble his efforts. "He got a new co-driver (Marko Salminen) and they worked so hard on their notes over that winter," says Barritt.

Salminen's Finnish influence is increasingly obvious in Katsuta's notes these days.

"We have some Finnish words now," says Katsuta. "We have *ajaa*, this means push. But we also have some Japanese words like *mizu*, which describes wet, slippery conditions. These words are good, they're short and easy to understand."

Taka and his co-driver are clearly on the same page now. Their pace in Sweden – and their consistency of speed – was as exceptional as it was surprising.

"I don't think anybody saw that coming," says Barritt. "But I'm so pleased for him. He's worked hard and to come from where he was, he deserves this."

Katsuta is, however, more interested in where he's going.

"I have to focus on the world," he says. "That's where I want to be champion."

Makinen and Toyoda have shied away from talking debut events in a Yaris WRC, but that moment can't be far away if Taka can back up his Swedish pace on the remainder of this year's WRC2 rounds. ■

INTERVIEW

Photos: Paul Lawrence



Pair's Escort looked rather second hand

HAVING A BLAST ON THE LOOSE

How two racing experts took to the stages on the R.A.C. Rally. By Paul Lawrence

Last November, historic racers David Gathercole and Martyn Donn left their comfort zone far behind them to tackle the Roger Albert Clark Rally.

Gathercole and Donn teamed up for a series of one-day events through the year as a lead-in to tackling the Roger Albert Clark in Gathercole's Ford Escort Mk1.

He's one of the leading engine builders in historic racing, so the supply of a two-litre BDA unit was never going to be a problem.

"I started racing in karts when I was 16 so I've been racing for the better part of 40 years, although I had a fairly big gap in the middle of it," says Gathercole. "When I was a kid I was totally fascinated by watching the RAC Rally highlights on the TV. I followed the rally when I was an apprentice. It was always my dream to go rallying but it was just too expensive and racing was more accessible."

When he was 21 years old, David and a friend bought a Triumph Dolomite Sprint, which they were going to prepare for rallying but it was a stillborn project because by the time they'd got all the rot and rust out of the car, they'd run out of money.

"We looked at twin-cam Escorts and it was just more than we could afford. So I started racing an MG Midget and somehow we managed it."

In more recent times, Gathercole has successfully raced a range of historic single-seaters and sports-racing cars. Donn, meanwhile, raced in Formula Vee before switching to historics where he won the 2016 Derek Bell Trophy in a Formula Atlantic Lola T760. However, he did some rallying in his younger days and jumped at the chance to co-drive for Gathercole.

"I'd done a few rallies before it, fairly unsuccessfully," says Gathercole of preparations for the four-day event. "But we had no concept of how punishing the stages would be and how challenging the whole rally would be. It was total madness!"

Gathercole drove the Escort for a week before the rally in the freezing cold to try and iron out all the final little issues and quickly realised they needed a heater in it as they faced four long days covering gravel stages in Wales, the Scottish borders and Kielder forest.

"We'd done the Woodpecker a few weeks earlier and decided we needed to buy a better intercom so we could hear each other," says Gathercole.

"To this day, I don't know if that was

actually beneficial or not!"

They had a shock when they arrived at the start of the rally. "When we got to Shelsley Walsh we realised it was bigger than we had anticipated. The last time I'd been to Shelsley I was 13. I think Martyn got a bit frustrated at my inability to drive and my fearless approach to the forest stages, but we dug it out of the dyke every time," recalls Gathercole.

"We thoroughly enjoyed ourselves and the night stages were just incredible. I've done the Le Mans Classic at night but going through the forest, and passing cars that are upside down, was something else."

The first leg in Wales went well enough but the drama kicked in early on the second day on the southern end of Kielder. They found a sizeable ditch and had another Escort and a Saab for company. Fortunately, with some help from the sweeper car they got out and got going again and the rest of the day went quite well with some good stage times.

"On one stage we'd been off and we came round a corner and there was a BMW with its front wheels in a ditch. We got our rope out and gave them a tug," explains the driver. "That was the attitude that everyone seemed to have towards each other. Just keep going and finish at all costs.

"Amazingly Sunday in Scotland



Gathercole is more used to handling this Lola T212 sports racer

was pretty much a trouble-free day and we survived the ice later on, which wasn't skill, it was just luck. On Monday in the final leg in Kielder the first stage went swimmingly well, so we probably gained just a tad too much confidence. We went into the 20-mile second stage and we were about halfway through when we rolled and went over twice."

The car looked pretty sorry and they were rather dejected as they thought that was it and they were out of the rally. The car was sat on a tree stump so the rear wheels weren't on the ground.

Gathercole explains: "We found some long logs and used them as a lever. We just squeezed between two tree stumps to get the car back onto the road. So we were back in.

"We tank-taped all the windows back in so it looked something like, but not very like, an Escort and we were looking through a damaged windscreen. On the second run through the long 20-mile stage we got to the same corner and Martyn warned me but I had it up on two wheels again. There were some expletives over the intercom.

"We were just about to go into the last stage and there was a poor guy in a Escort Mk2 and his differential had

broken. We were now just driving for a finish and two miles into the stage we started to pick up a misfire. The high-pressure fuel pump had packed up and we stopped on stage and had to wait for the pump to cool down so we could restart the engine and we limped on at about 2500rpm. But we got it to the finish."

Despite all the dramas and the mental and physical challenges, they are already planning a return for the next edition in November 2019.

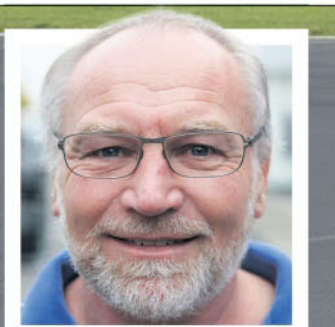
"We can't wait to go back and do it again. You can't really put it into words," smiles Gathercole. "I just love the atmosphere around the rally world. The camaraderie, the laughing and joking. There were never any harsh words said, which was totally refreshing. If I had the opportunity to go and do it again in the next 10 minutes, I'd go and do it."

It is clear that, for someone who has done an awful lot of racing, crossing the tracks to rallying has been an amazing experience.

"It's probably a bit late for a mid-life crisis and it is something that will live with you forever," he says. "A lifetime experience: the most amazing, rewarding and gruelling thing I've ever done on four wheels." ■



Donn (right) in his usual Formula Atlantic Lola



F1 TESTING

THE 10 THINGS WE LEARNED

Do times actually mean anything? Our reporting team discovered...

Pre-season Formula 1 testing can be difficult enough to get a clear understanding from, even when things go smoothly, but in 2018 the first test gave us even fewer indications than usual thanks to the weather.

Freezing temperatures, rain – and even heavy snow on one morning – made the first three and a half days effectively a write-off for the teams, and it led to a very busy final afternoon as everybody played catch-up on mileage.

There's certainly not much data to go on – for the teams or for those of us analysing what we saw in Spain – but by being on the ground at Barcelona's Circuit de Catalunya the reporting team from our sister title *Autosport* was still able to pick out several interesting details that emerged during the opening test.

With better weather predicted for next week's running, test two will certainly put more meat on the bones, but for now the bones we have to work with are worth a look.



Hamilton started off strong, again

1 THE PICTURE

This statement as it first sou disrupted ru appeared m remove obv combined ti Vandoorne's runs (third o Magnussen (sixth) from the picture v expecting h

With those up with Lew three tenths than Sebast (worryingl harder tyre) next up ahead gap back to 1 seconds) an a little bigger more troubl main rivals,

3 RED BULL IS BEING HELD BACK...



The RB14 looked great, but struggled

The new Red Bull looks very good, with none of the problems that held back last year's early car. But with Renault taking a conservative approach with its power unit, and question marks over when the major ERS upgrade featuring the long-delayed

new in-house MGU-K will land, it's uncertain when that will change. The Renault package hasn't stood still. The three-tenths of lap time that weren't available for use at last year's Abu Dhabi finale is now available, as there is

maybe a tenth of further gains. But that still puts the Renault behind, and maybe by 40-50bhp.

Red Bull is certainly quick, and there's every chance it will at least be as close to the front as it was at the back end of last season when Max

Verstappen won in Malaysia and Mexico.

But unless the chassis is a clear step ahead of that of Mercedes and Ferrari, the danger is it's going to be another season of fighting for wins rather than the title.

Edd Straw



Renault looks but still impres

4 ...BUT RENAULT'S TEAM HAS TAKEN A STEP FORWARD

There's lots of good news for the Enstone-based works Renault team. Having finished last season as the fourth-fastest car and nicking sixth in the constructors' championship, even the sketchy data from the first test suggests it has taken another stride forward.

While the car superficially looks pretty similar, there are major changes under the

bodywork in the packaging. And for the second test, a new front wing with a different concept is set to be introduced that could help unlock further aerodynamic performance. That's an area where Enstone has beefed up significantly recently, and there's realistic expectation that the development rate will be good.

It's too early for Renault title contender, and it is rebuilding phase. But for place in the constructor championship is a realistic target. And the first test it has got a realistic chance of taking on fellow Renault-powered team McLaren

car that looks nimble and

EARNED FROM TESTING

Plugs into the facts

THE COMPETITIVE FUTURE IS EMERGING

ent isn't as ludicrous as it seems after a week of testing that often seems meaningless. But if you look at the various outliers from the test – notably Stoffel Vandoorne's series of hypersofts (overall) and Kevin Magnussen's charge on supersofts on Thursday, you get a sense of what we were largely expecting heading into 2018. The adjustments we end up seeing in Hamilton's Mercedes and Vettel's Ferrari are likely to be similar, with Hamilton using a softer tyre, and Valtteri Bottas and Max Verstappen is a bit more aggressive, but Red Bull had a more comprehensive test than its competitors, completing almost

100 fewer laps, and Ricciardo's best lap was near the end of a 30-plus lap run on the opening day – so there is still time in the RB14.

Behind Kimi Raikkonen's Ferrari it's a battle between the Renault of Nico Hulkenberg and the Renault-powered McLaren of Fernando Alonso. McLaren will hope to be troubling Red Bull more than worrying about fending off the works Renault team, but the R.S.18 looks like a solid step forward from the car that ended 2017 as the fourth-fastest, and Enstone didn't get as greedy as Woking when it came to use of the softest tyres last week.

Behind the suspected big five it's all to play for, although Sauber consistently sat near the bottom of the times, suggesting its recovery from the doldrums will not be an instant one.

Glenn Freeman

2 FINGER TROUBLE AT McLAREN



A wheel problem led to a bad start



Vandoorne (l) and Alonso

Pre-season testing has not been kind to McLaren in recent years, but the team was optimistic as it headed to Barcelona with a Renault, rather than Honda, engine in the back of the car.

McLaren ended the test with 260 laps, 52 more than it managed last year and only 64 short of table-topper Toro Rosso. But it could have been so much better, had it not been for a few minor errors or issues.

On Monday, McLaren sat out most of the morning after Fernando Alonso was left stranded in the gravel when the right-rear wheel came loose. Racing director Eric Boullier said it had simply not been fastened "tight enough".

The next day, the team suffered some fire damage when what it termed as "a £2 bolt" failed, letting the exhaust come loose.

Despite high temperatures at the rear that damaged the bodywork on the final day, it recovered well with Stoffel Vandoorne clocking 110 laps before Alonso added 51.

Alonso declared himself "really happy" at the conclusion of the test, but McLaren needs a cleaner run in test two if it is to start the season on a stronger foot.

Lawrence Barretto

similar, tested



Snow stunted day three. But to pass the time, and incite some social media hilarity, Mercedes crafted its own 'iceman'. 'Karl the F1 Snowman' already has over 1,400 Twitter followers...



Force India had a quiet test. A sensor problem meant it suffered on day one, and reserve driver Nicholas Latifi was too ill to drive. Sergio Perez and Esteban Ocon gained some miles.

AS

ult to be a still in a fourth of the world's most effective. Edd Straw

5 TORO ROSSO AND HONDA ARE GELLING WELL

There was good reason to be concerned for Toro Rosso coming into this test given all the troubles McLaren had with Honda. But it was impressive to see the Toro Rosso-Honda running relatively trouble free and completing more laps than any other team.

Adapting to a different engine is a huge challenge for a small team, and Toro Rosso has done well. But it will have come at a cost, because any effort going into that is resource you can't use doing other things. What we did see is that Toro Rosso and Honda have a good basis to work from with lap times that, while not stunning, look to be in the midfield mix.

Most importantly, the two sides seem to be communicating well. Toro Rosso is willing to make compromises on the chassis to accommodate Honda, and vice versa. That's how it should be with a genuine team/engine manufacturer partnership.

Gary Anderson



The sweet irony of a Honda leading a McLaren

F1 TESTING

6 KUBICA WANTS TO MOVE THE STORY ON NOW



Kubica is bored of 'limitations' talk

Robert Kubica has been very open when asked about his limitations as he bids to return to F1, having suffered life-threatening injuries in a rally crash in 2011.

But in Barcelona, he admitted to growing tired of consistently having to answer questions on the subject and called for the focus to be on the speed and feedback he delivers in his Williams reserve role.

"We should stop talking about this," he said. "If I can jump in the car and do the job, I think that's fair enough. Of course I have my limitations but I never hide them."

"The problem is I was too honest with everybody and they kept asking questions, I think we should stop it."

He also insisted his focus is on helping the team and the race drivers Sergey Sirotkin and Lance Stroll.

But avoiding the comparisons of his pace versus Sirotkin this season will be difficult and it is undoubted he retains hope of completing what would be a remarkable F1 racing comeback.

Lawrence Barretto



Testing in Spain guarantees good weather, right? Wrong! F1 teams – and the shivering fans! – were left frustrated by a lack of activity on day three, as heavy snow swept in. Fernando Alonso was the only driver to set a time, and only five drivers dared to go out at all. Ferrari described the conditions as "pointless to run an F1 car in", and it's clear that most of the grid agreed.

7 THE HALO IS A DRIVER ID NIGHTMARE

During this test, halo-era F1 arrived in force with all 10 cars running pukka versions of the cockpit head protection structures fully integrated into the cars.

The biggest problem it poses is not the offensiveness of the halo itself. Instead, it's the fact that it makes it even more difficult to pick out the

driver given their helmets are hidden.

It didn't take long to adapt to the fact the halo is there, although surprisingly it was the bland black halos used by Red Bull, Mercedes, McLaren, Haas and Renault that were the least obtrusive and effectively just blended into the background without ruining the shape of the car.

Less effective were the teams that painted the halo to integrate into the livery, with the new Ferrari in particular grating.

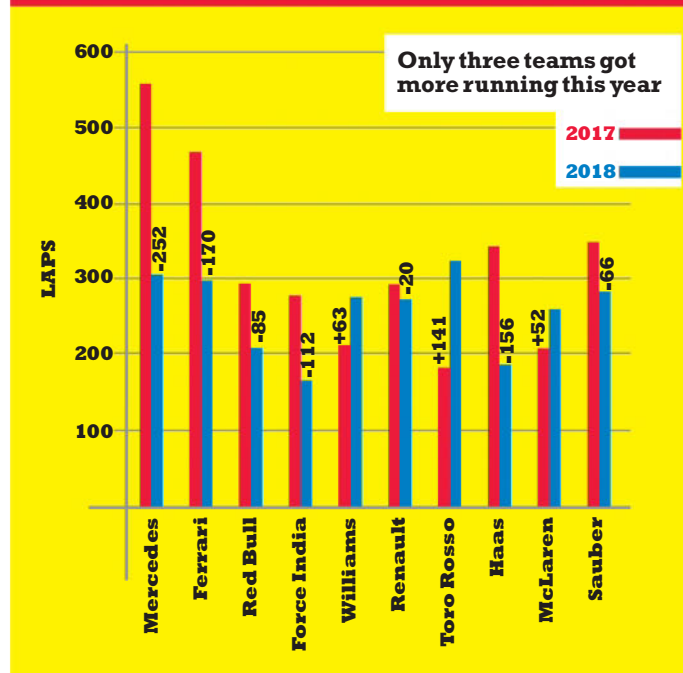
The halo remains a frustrating and unsightly halfway house, but it's here to stay and it won't take long to get used to it. Especially the black ones.

Edd Straw



Halo, better in black? Ferrari doesn't think so

LAPS COMPLETED: 2017 v 2018



Red Bull didn't have its most productive of tests in Barcelona. After Daniel Ricciardo gave the team a solid start by going fastest on medium tyres on day one, the squad suffered a number of teething issues. Max Verstappen endured two fuel leaks and then binned the car into the gravel to essentially halt his final day of running. The team took great care to hide the new car's floor as it came back to the garage, suggesting there's something rather cunning underneath the RB14.

8 F1 SHOULD DITCH SPAIN FOR BAHRAIN

Weather chat is dull at the best of times, but the subject dominated the headlines at testing last week as much of Europe was hit by severe weather from storms.

The opening two days of the test were blighted by low temperatures. Combined with a new track surface, grip was at a premium and very little meaningful running was completed.

With snow predicted for Wednesday, the teams discussed postponing running until later in the week or bolting an extra day

on to the second test – but they couldn't all agree.

The snow hit as predicted and day three was a write-off. Admittedly, the weather has been unusually severe but Barcelona is always cold at this time of year.

So F1 should go to Bahrain for the first time since 2014. It may be slightly more expensive logistically, but that will be money well spent given the smooth work that can be done.

It will be more challenging for teams

to get parts across, but as Toro Rosso technical director James Key said overcoming those challenges is “perfectly doable”. Let's make it happen.

Lawrence Barretto



Snow stopped play for the majority of day three



Testing was a mixed bag for McLaren. It's new era with Renault engines suffered a few hiccups – none engine-related for once. But Stoffel Vandoorne looked quick by going third fastest overall, albeit on the new hypersoft tyres, proving the McLaren has pace when it's on four wheels...



Formula 1 fans are a hardy bunch, and Barcelona this year featured a nice variety. This one definitely felt the force (nine gale...), but was curiously camouflaged on Wednesday morning...



Apparently nobody likes the wet weather

9 TEAMS NEED TO STOP FEARING THE WET

Last year in Barcelona testing, the track was artificially wet to allow tyre testing, and all it did was just waste everybody's time. This year when the track was actually wet on Wednesday afternoon nobody was willing to go out. That's just wrong.

You can always learn something in those conditions, and we know

that most teams will end up complaining about lack of wet or intermediate tyre knowledge when it rains on a grand prix weekend. I know parts are scarce, but drivers can be careful where they push and some real work can still be done.

I always saw conditions like these as an opportunity to pull off a shock, so for small teams any wet

knowledge is going to be beneficial. This was a missed opportunity, especially as teams need to understand what they can do to make these cars less difficult in the wet.

One thing I can be sure of was that if Jordan was here and I was there on the pitwall, we'd have been out there taking advantage.

Gary Anderson

10 EVEN THE BIG TEAMS ARE BEHIND

The weather was so poor – most of the time it was wet, cold, or snowing – that the afternoon of the warmer final day represented the only meaningful running.

With the exception of Red Bull, every team took advantage of that, but it's significant that the two teams furthest behind their mileage total from test one in 2017

are Mercedes and Ferrari (see graph, left).

The two biggest teams have been able to get down to serious race simulation work surprisingly early in recent years, but this week nobody got a traditional full race sim in. Mercedes was philosophical about the lost mileage, saying it's simply a case of coming up with a new plan to complete as

much work as it can in even less time than usual, but it offers a glimmer of hope that the best cars won't be as sorted by the time they are unpacked in Australia.

The only teams better off at this stage than in 2017 are ones that had forgettable first tests 12 months ago: McLaren, Toro Rosso and Williams.

Glenn Freeman



Merc was quickest, but way down on mileage

WHY IS GINETTA GT5 PROVING TO BE SUCH A HIT?

CALENDAR

Ginetta GT5 Challenge 2018

ROUND	DATE	VENUE	PACKAGE
1	Mar 31/Apr 2	Oulton Park	British GT
2	Apr 28/29	Rockingham	British GT
3	May 19/20	Thruxton	TOCA
4	June 9/10	Silverstone	British GT
5	July 21/22	Spa	British GT
6	Aug 25/26	Knockhill	TOCA
7	Sep 22/23	Donington Park	British GT



Joining the BTCC bill at Thruxton is a big draw

Popular series is boasting a stunning entry of top drivers and teams. By **Stephen Lickorish**

It really is quite some list of drivers. Often championships are incorrectly described as having a 'strong' entry, but that is genuinely the case for the Ginetta GT5 Challenge this year. And it's all the more impressive when you consider it's for a series that doesn't always command a huge amount of attention.

Two Junior Saloon Car champions (Katie Milner and Will Dyrdal), a JSCC title contender (Gordie Mutch), a Fiesta Junior frontrunner (Josh Hislop), three Ginetta Junior graduates (Scott McKenna, Connor Grady and Charlie Digby), a world and European karting champion (Brett Ward) and last year's GT5 runner-up (Shane Stoney). That is surely the definition of a strong entry.

The list goes on far beyond those names too, with the grid close to being full. That may not be a surprise

for a category that regularly boasts packed fields, but it is the quality of this year's entry in particular that makes it stand out.

And it's not just on the drivers front that it's proving a hit. Some big and successful teams also compete too. You've got the likes of GT regulars Century Motorsport, Optimum Motorsport and Fox Motorsport, along with the racing arm of Ginetta's trackday operators W2R Motorsport, and previous GT5 title-winner Xentek Motorsport. And for this year, successful squad HHC Motorsport has decided to return for the first time since 2012.

So what's the secret behind the series' success?

Budget is certainly a key point, with entry fees a fraction of some of Ginetta's other main championships. In fact, you don't need to be part of a big team with many drivers racing as privateers. "The cars are really cost-effective to run and it's great fun to drive," reckons Ginetta's motorsport

manager Ash Gallagher. "It's possibly the most cost-effective way to get out in a rear-wheel-drive car in the UK. We've worked hard over the winter to make sure we're talking to the right people and when you've got a good package it sells itself."

Clearly it has done just that, with the rear-wheel-drive point being a significant one when it comes to attracting aspiring GT racers. Another factor that is often discussed is the calendar. The series is a regular on British GT's support bill and joins it in making the trip to Spa. It also visits the Thruxton and Knockhill rounds of the British Touring Car Championship, benefiting from the huge trackside crowds and live television coverage that entails.

"I think that [BTCC rounds] has certainly helped – it's a big draw," says Gallagher.

HHC team boss Charlie Kemp agrees the calendar is a major factor in the series' success.

"It goes hand in hand with British

GT," he says. "We're effectively starting a little ladder and while you can be 16 to race in GT5, you can also be any age – so it gives a straight jump into GT cars which aren't just for young professionals but also for gentlemen drivers. The car is a proven car and it's a good bit of kit, on slick tyres, and on a really good package – the British GT package is going from strength to strength. It's also significantly less rounds [seven] than a TOCA package."

"For a lot of people, 10 rounds is an awful lot, not just financially but in terms of being away from work and family. It's got rounds on the TOCA package and it visits Spa too, so it's the best of all worlds."

That combination is proving particularly popular with junior racers. The series is not only attracting graduates from those series, but also drivers who could've remained in the far more expensive Ginetta Junior category for another year. But, as Kemp points out, it's not

just for the very young with the Am class catering for older racers too.

GT5 is also renowned for its close competition and can be a good starting point for those making the transition from karts. Ward has won numerous titles in karting, but despite being 20 years old now, has never raced a car.

"It's a great step up from karts," he says. "There's a great window of opportunity to advance in the future and maybe go to GT4 or other forms of Ginetta."

"I was committed to staying in karts and wasn't looking to leave. It was an old kart manager that pointed me in the direction of making a step and giving it a go."

And considering the pace he has demonstrated in pre-season testing, he's one of the many drivers to watch this year. But calling a winner is nigh-on impossible. If the racing and title fight proves to be as good in reality as it is on paper then this should be one of the battles to watch in 2018. ■

But Ginetta Junior isn't looking quite as healthy as top teams depart

While the GT5 Challenge is thriving at the moment, things are not looking quite so rosy in another of the manufacturer's championships: Ginetta Junior.

The series is reeling from the loss of at least two of its top teams from last season. That JHR Developments is not competing is no surprise considering the engine tampering scandal it was embroiled in last year that culminated with the team being suspended by Ginetta. But the bigger blow comes in the form of HHC Motorsport withdrawing – the team that has powered the champion to the title four times in the last six years. Add in Douglas Motorsport considering quitting

too, and there is a clear gap at the top of the series.

But Ginetta motorsport manager Ash Gallagher is unconcerned.

"It's always been the way with the top teams," he says. "When I started running it, Hillspeed were at the front of the championship along with TJ Motorsport and Tollbar and there was no HHC or JHR. Then those guys retired or moved on and then now they [HHC] are moving on to other things too. It's just a cycle really."

Elite Motorsport is now the only team that won a race in 2017 that is definitely staying on the grid – and it is fielding a full six-car team. With 13 drivers currently confirmed, that means half

of them are with just one outfit.

New squads are looking at entering the series and Total Control Racing is returning after a year's absence, but these are unlikely to completely fill the void at the top.

"I think it's in a very similar place to Renault Clio – I don't think we've got a good enough batch of teams in the paddock," says Wayne Eason, boss of Renault UK Clio Cup team WDE Motorsport – which is entering the series this year. "That is why I see it [Ginetta Junior] as a good opportunity for us."

It's certainly a year of change for the series and we'll soon know what those team changes really mean for the future of the category.



Elite will have a strong presence on 2018 Ginetta Junior grid with six cars

INTERVIEW

Photos: Gary Hawkins, Jakob Ebrey

DONEGAN'S AMERICAN DREAM TAKES SHAPE



Donegan has a shot of getting to IndyCar



Festival podium got Donegan noticed

Almost four years out of racing hasn't stopped the 20-year-old Irishman. By **Stefan Mackley**

Three-and-a-half years is a long time in racing, even more so if during that period you are sidelined, not competing or forging a career up the motorsport ladder. For Ireland's Keith Donegan, it seemed like the chance of a career in motorsport had passed him by.

In 2013 things were positive for the then 16-year-old. He had just finished second in the Ginetta Junior Championship and taken two wins from the last four races.

Momentum was with him, but then came a bombshell. His parents were keen for him to go to college and his racing career was put on hold...for almost four years.

Fast forward to the present day and Donegan is preparing to take part in this weekend's opening round of the USF2000 Championship at St Petersburg in America. The 20-year-old will compete with ArmsUp Motorsports having won the Mazda Road to Indy Shootout in December last year, beating 17 other drivers to the \$200,000 (£145,000) scholarship.

It's a long way from where he was even just 12 months ago.

"It was coming good [in 2013] but I had to stop and I was a bit

disheartened, but I never lost the buzz and the passion," says Donegan. "I said to my parents 'if I have a good grade [studying business at Trinity College in Dublin] could I buy a Formula Ford car?'"

"If someone told me 12 months ago where I would be now I would probably have laughed at them and told them you're crazy. This time last year it was still another month until I sat in the car."

Donegan decided to follow in the footsteps of his dad and two uncles who had raced in Formula Fords and bought himself a Van Diemen JL13K. Often driving the truck carrying the vehicle to the circuits himself, Donegan would also work on the car with his dad, Brendan, and friend Pat Duffy.

"All week we were preparing the car, changing the engines and just going out there to win every race," says Donegan.

"I'm very old school with how I do things, I think a lot of drivers now wouldn't know a spanner from a hammer.

"If you don't know your car inside out you can't understand how to set up the car.

"We had such long hours, eight in the morning until 2200hrs or 2300hrs and whenever you're working that hard it makes you a bit more hungry. You want it more than anyone else."



Just pipped at Brands Hatch

Results were sporadic during the season, with three podiums and a final position of 11th in the British Racing and Sports Car Club's National series standings, having missed three meetings.

It would be the Brands Hatch Formula Ford Festival in October, though, where Donegan would make his mark. Having reached the final, from his starting position of sixth, the Irishman was the only driver making progress towards the front of the field in the latter stages. Hours spent in the workshop tinkering with his car had allowed him to put a set up on the Van Diemen which meant it would come to him later in the race.

He finished within a whisker of

victory, just 0.107s behind winner Joey Foster and with the fastest lap of the race.

With Foster ineligible for the MRTI ticket – only available to drivers under the age of 25 years old – the coveted prize was passed to Donegan and his life was about to change forever.

"I basically went into the [Shootout] weekend with the approach that I was going to win, I knew that I could win but I had to prove I deserved it more than the other 17 drivers," remembers Donegan.

"I focused on doing the little things right. You have to be quick, to stand out with your technique on the track, you can't really go off.

"They said something to us before we started which I thought was quite funny. The odds are against you, you have a one in 17 chance of winning which is just over five per cent.

"That eliminated half the drivers because they were thinking 'what are the chances of me winning?'"

Only five drivers made it through to the final assessment at the Bob Bondurant Racing School, which consisted of a qualifying session followed by a short race. From there the winner would be picked by a panel of judges, including former IndyCar and Champ Car driver Scott Goodyear, as well as Oliver Askew – winner of the 2016 MRTI

Shootout and 2017 USF2000 champ.

"When I asked the judges what won it for me they said basically in qualifying everyone came in after a few laps to save the tyres for the race," says Donegan.

"My car was understeering so I stayed out and the rear started coming to me and I set the fastest lap of the weekend."

Donegan has now put himself on one of the most coveted ladders in world motorsport, where there is a defined path all the way to the very top of American open-wheel racing; IndyCar.

Last year's USF2000 champion and fellow MRTI winner Askew will graduate to the Pro Mazda Championship this season, the next step on the career ladder and proving that success will be rewarded.

But what pressure is there now on Donegan to succeed?

"There are only certain things you can do and things that are out of your control," adds Donegan. "You need to focus on what you're doing and do the best you can.

"If it doesn't work out you can say I tried everything I could, that's the approach we went into the MRTI Shootout – give it everything and focus on the fine details.

"I didn't think I could make a career out of racing after I stopped but I'm glad I came back when I did." ■



Donegan (left) took the big prize



Donegan: Ginetta Junior in 2013



Irishman had three years away

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FORMULA E: MEXICO

Photos: LAT

The German broke his Formula E duck in Mexico City. By Alex Kalinauckas

HOW ABT: MEXICAN WIN FOR AUDI MAN



Abt broke his duck to be the first German to win in FE

RESULTS

ROUND 5/10 Where: Mexico City (MEX) When: March 3

POS	DRIVER	CAR	TIME
1	Daniel Abt (GER)	Audi Sport Abt	50m45.164s
2	Oliver Turvey (GBR)	NIO	+6.398s
3	Sebastien Buemi (SWI)	Renault e.dams	+6.615s
4	Nelson Piquet Jr (BRA)	Jaguar	+7.015s
5	Jean-Eric Vergne (FRA)	Techeetah	+7.546s
6	Mitch Evans (NZL)	Jaguar	+9.050s
7	Antonio Felix da Costa (POR)	Andretti	+17.157s
8	Edoardo Mortara (ITA)	Venturi	+26.511s
9	Lucas di Grassi (BRA)	Audi Sport Abt	+29.208s
10	Alex Lynn (GBR)	DS Virgin Racing	+29.515s
11	Jerome d'Ambrosio (BEL)	Dragon Racing	+30.418s
12	Jose Maria Lopez (ARG)	Dragon Racing	+31.859s
13	Andre Lotterer (GER)	Techeetah	+36.206s
14	Luca Filippi (ITA)	NIO	+38.336s
15	Tom Blomqvist (GBR)	Andretti	+38.592s
16	Maro Engel (GER)	Venturi	+44.689s
17	Sam Bird (GBR)	DS Virgin Racing	+44.982s
R	Nicolas Prost (FRA)	Renault e.dams	36 laps/damage
R	Felix Rosenqvist (SWE)	Mahindra Racing	34 laps/battery
R	Nick Heidfeld (GER)	Mahindra Racing	27 laps/water pump

Pole: Rosenqvist 1m01.645s. Winner's average speed: 72.262mph. Fastest lap: di Grassi 1m02.202s (75.269mph).

Points (after 5/12 rounds): 1 Vergne 81; 2 Rosenqvist 69; 3 Bird 61; 4 Buemi 52; 5 Piquet 45; 6 Abt 37; 7 Evans 29; 8 Mortara 28; 9 Turvey 26; 10 Heidfeld 21.

Slick pit work helped Abt win

One hop, one step – one car to another. Belts done up, Daniel Abt was out in a flash. Out of the pits, out in the lead of the Mexico City ePrix, and on his way to the glory of a first Formula E victory.

After being heartbreakingly denied a maiden win in Hong Kong on his 25th birthday last December due to a technical passport infringement, Abt kept the trophy for good and rescued a dismal start to Audi's first season as a works FE manufacturer.

Starting fifth, Abt immediately seized fourth around the outside of Antonio Felix da Costa at Turn 1, and set off in pursuit of polesitter Felix Rosenqvist, NIO's Oliver Turvey and 2015/16 FE champion Sebastien Buemi. His rise to victory was aided by two slices of fortune – first Rosenqvist dropped out of a secure lead at one-third distance with battery failure, and then Buemi made

a mistake at the first corner on lap 21 of 47. The Renault e.dams driver slid wide and Abt steamed through.

Abt closed on Turvey, who had been looking good after gapping Buemi early on at the scene of his first FE pole one year ago – a race that was ended by a technical failure while he led – before he struggled with energy management in the final laps of the stint.

The “key for the victory” Abt jubilantly explained afterwards, was the pitstops. The German driver leapt between his two cars and emerged easily ahead of Turvey, who had had a slight gearbox problem pulling away in his second machine, but didn't think that cost him the place.

“We'd worked on [the swaps] very hard and the mechanics are incredibly fast,” Abt added. “I don't know how they did that today.”

Although the Audi mechanics were able to service Abt quickly, at the Techeetah team things were not so smooth. Andre Lotterer clipped a mechanic as he pulled away – the

first victim of the controversial minimum pitstop time removal from earlier in the season – copping a drive-through penalty that dropped him from seventh to 13th, and injuring ligaments in his servicer's right leg.

Barring a slide in the Autodromo Hermanos Rodriguez's stadium section with five laps to – “it got my heart rate a bit up” – Abt eased clear to win by 6.398 seconds. Turvey kept a resurgent Buemi at bay to claim his first FE podium, with Nelson Piquet Jr fourth for Jaguar after charging up the order in his second car after running longer in the first stint.

Although Piquet made bold moves on Jean-Eric Vergne, who finished fifth, and team-mate Mitch Evans (sixth), his charge was stunted when he reached Buemi's tail and, disappointingly, there was no grandstand finish.

Turvey was “relieved to cross the line and get the first podium for the team”, which has not seen a trophy since Piquet won in Moscow in FE's inaugural season – then known as

China Racing. Buemi, who had been up and down all day with so-so practice times, topping the qualifying group phase and then blowing his superpole lap, was pleased to recover from a difficult first half of the race. He said: “In the end, I'm still quite happy because that's my 20th podium in Formula E and it's better than nothing.”

Although he is now 29 points off standings leader Vergne, the Toyota LMP1 driver insists he is not in the title hunt: “I don't consider myself in contention for the championship because I'm not quick enough.”

Rosenqvist, the star of the day until his issue stopped him at the butchered Peraltada corner, plans to “forget and just pretend that when we come to Punta del Esta [the points are] the same as we came here”, as he is still second in the standings, 12 points adrift.

Vergne refused to be frustrated with fifth as he had “basically had no idea what was going on” in his second car as his dash, radio, and energy-level beep systems were all off-line.

He was more agitated to be passed by a Fanboost-armed Buemi, who he had jumped in the car swaps, with the pair having a frank discussion about the voting system after the race.

Lucas di Grassi produced what he called “one of my best races in Formula E” to rise from last on the grid, where he was condemned to start by a penalty for an inverter issue that forced him out in Chile, and having to set a lap in the first qualifying group on the dusty track.

The reigning champion fought to ninth and clinched one extra point for the fastest lap, but did make contact with Jose Maria Lopez and an unimpressed Maro Engel during his charge back through.

After becoming the first German driver to score a FE win, Abt rued the 25 points he had lost in Hong Kong. “It would be nice to have [them] because then we would be really in the hunt for the championship,” he said.

“But it's still not over, we're strong, we can still do it.” With seven races to go that is not out of the question.



Vergne struggled with second car's systems



Rosenqvist could have won, but had battery failure



Briton Oliver Turvey led the way, and took his first FE podium

SPORTING SCENE

Photos: Duncan Stephens

ROUND-UP

Reigning BTRDA Gold Star Sporting Trials champion Ian Wright continued his form from January to win the opening round of the BTRDA and British championship, the **Walsingham Trial** on Sunday.

Despite two inches of snow on Friday, the club decided to run the event even though the field was decimated with half of the entries not making the start.

Wright led all day and was the only competitor to climb the opening hill on the first round. That meant he took a decisive seven points from runner-up Richard Sharp and he went on to win by just four points.

George Watson completed the podium after winning a tie-break from the intermediate independent class winner Nick Speed. With Simon Kingsley in fifth, Ross Bruce surprised many to win the intermediate live-axle class in sixth. He beat Stuart Beare, who just managed to oust his son Sam, who was top rookie in eighth overall. 750MC champion Phil Haines finished in ninth ahead of Bob Bruce.

Duncan Stephens

Results

Walsingham Sporting Trial
Organiser: 750 MC **When:** Sunday, March 4 **Where:** Queen Elizabeth Park, Portsmouth **Starters:** 17
 1 Ian Wright (Sherpa Indy) 23 marks;
 2 Richard Sharp (Cartwright) 27 marks;
 3 George Watson (Hamilton); 4 Nick Speed (Crosbie); 5 Simon Kingsley (Crosbie); 6 Ross Bruce (Concord);
 7 Stuart Beare (Sherpa); 8 Sam Beare (Sherpa); 9 Phil Haines (Facksimile); 10 Bob Bruce (Concord).

THE DARK ART OF GOING UPHILL SLOWLY

How tackling a Sporting Trial requires a certain mindset. By **Duncan Stephens**

There aren't many areas of motorsport where an average of just a few miles per

hour can make you a hero.

But in the Sporting Trials world, it is how a competitor drives which is more important than the speed. The skills of maintaining momentum and maximising the traction available is the crucial factor.

The cars are purpose-built small specials, created specifically to MSA regulations. They are fitted with motorbike front wheels and engines, mounted in the front, of up to 1650cc in size.

Over the last decade and a half, the sport has moved on with independent rear suspension, rear-mounted gearboxes and free differentials. There have been suspension tweaks too, even though the cars all run on controlled road tyres. Despite that, the previous generations of cars with live axles are still competitive with Josh Veale winning the BTRDA Gold Star in 2014.

Events usually consist of 10 sections, and each section is split up into 12 scoring zones with the highest value, 12, at the bottom. The point on the hill where the cars fail or stop forward motion is

the number of points dropped on that section.

There are two specific driving techniques called blasting and trickling, and they are polar opposites.

Trickling is maintaining grip with the rear driving wheels travelling at the same speed as the car is progressing up the hill. Blasting has the wheels spinning as fast as possible. Blasting is obvious to onlookers with engines screaming in probably top gear (although the rear wheels still only do 40mph), whereas to the outside a trickle looks easy but is hard to master.

A perfect trickle doesn't just involve the right speed. It also necessitates team work with the passenger, correct use of the fiddle brakes, choosing the correct line steering around obstacles. A lot of variables at perhaps just a few miles per hour at 500rpm in first gear.

Fiddle brakes are critical to every element in driving a sporting trials car all the time. As well as the steering wheel, the brakes are used to steer the car, and are to be used proactively to prevent wheelspin over bumps.

Five-time British champion John Fack considers correct pace the most critical element to driving a car. He says: "Understanding the exact pace required for any particular part of any section and how it can



Richard Sharp emphasises throttle control



Champion John Fack and passenger Julian Fack

change over the day is paramount. I remember one event at our premier venue, Long Compton: I slowed down to virtually nothing and walked away with the trial. Accelerating when you can and gently easing off and losing this momentum when you cannot. This is most definitely the hardest and least intuitive part of the art of driving a trials car."

Former motorbike trials rider

Richard Sharp began sporting trials just five years ago after a BTRDA training day at Shelsley Walsh. He won four events last year and finished a close second in the British championship. He says: "My background enabled good throttle control, but the fiddles brakes were a challenge. The basic principles were easy but hours of competitive seat time has enabled me to instinctively know when and

how hard to pull them. Ground conditions continually change so what worked one round may not work the next an hour later."

More information is available at btrda.com with the BTRDA running driver training experience days twice a year.

This weekend's event, the Peter Blankstone Trial, is hosted at the country's most historic permanent motorsport venue, Shelsley Walsh. ■

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SPORTING SCENE

Coley to take on Swift Sport challenge

World Rallycross television commentator Andrew Coley will return to the British Rallycross Championship for the Silverstone season-opener next week to compete in the single-make Swift Sport category.

Coley has previously raced in the RX150 buggy class on a pair of occasions and also raced a Citroen C2 Super1600 car in the Rallycross Grand Prix at Croft for the past two years.

"I'm really excited to be taking part in round one of the British RX in the Suzuki Swift category," said Coley.

His car will be run by series promoter, Peter Gwynne Motorsport in the 13-car line-up.

"I've known Pete for years and used to work at his rally school, where I regularly got told off for my driving, so I've no idea why he's letting me back behind the wheel," said Coley. "In all seriousness, the Swift category is extremely closely fought at every round, so I'm under no illusions as to how tough the opposition will be. My main aim for the weekend is what it always is; to try and have fun and enjoy it rather than put myself under any pressure."

WRAPS COME OFF GRONHOLM WORLD RALLYCROSS SQUAD

Two Hyundai i20s for World rally legend's fresh attack on top-fight competition

By Hal Ridge

Marcus Gronholm's GRX team will field a pair of Hyundai i20 Supercars for former European Rallycross champion Timur Timerzyanov and Gronholm's son Niclas in the World Rallycross Championship this season.

Motorsport News revealed the double World Rally champion's plans to adapt a pair of ex-WRC i20s for World RX this year last November.

The GRX Taneco squad revealed its new car and driver line-up at Gronholm's base in Inko, Finland, on Tuesday. It plans to begin testing within the next two weeks.

"We have chosen to use the i20 for this programme because of my previous connections with Michel Nandan [Hyundai WRC Team principal]," said Gronholm.

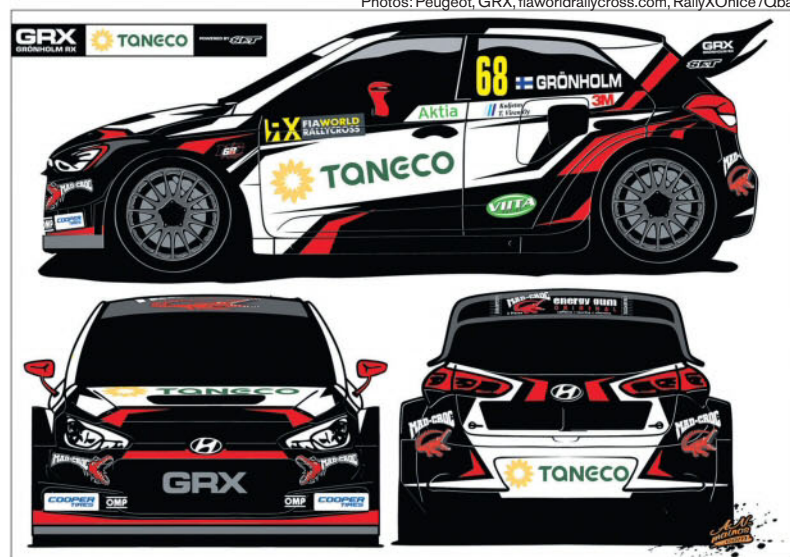
While the cars, based on 2016 WRC machines, have been purchased from Hyundai, GRX will be a private effort in 2018. "We have a good relationship [with Hyundai], but we don't have any manufacturer backing like some of

the other teams in World Rallycross," added Gronholm.

"We have a lot of information from when we bought the cars from Hyundai and so far the car looks very good. We know Timur can get the results and Niclas has been working hard this winter. I will be surprised if we can't be fighting with the big boys at least sometimes. The first target is semi-finals, then the final and podium."

Russian driver Timerzyanov will drive for the fifth different team in as many years this season, but says he has been desperate for such a move since parting ways with the Peugeot-Hansen squad in 2014.

"I've been waiting for this opportunity for a long time, maybe since the end of 2014 actually and I'm really excited," he said. "This is a big step for the future, on the technical side with the car and the whole team. It's a good feeling to work with Marcus too: he understands me as a driver. He has the same targets as me for this season, to get good results and he knows the best way to achieve that. We need to be consistent all the time and I see no problems with racing among the



Photos: Peugeot, GRX, fiaworldrallycross.com, RallyXOnIce/Oba

The GRX team has released images of the colour scheme for its Hyundais

top drivers."

The cars are being adapted for rallycross use by Gronholm's GRX squad and the SET Promotion team.

Team manager Jussi Pinomaki will be reunited with Timerzyanov. He ran the Russian driver to the European Super1600 title in 2010.

Loeb (inset) and his new 208 car



Loeb joins the big names to blood Silverstone's rallycross track next week

Rally legend and Peugeot World Rallycross driver Sebastien Loeb will compete in the opening round of the British Rallycross Championship at Silverstone next week in a works-run Peugeot 208.

The Frenchman, a nine-time WRC champion, will be joined on the grid by team-mate Timmy Hansen, who was announced as joining Loeb in the French team at the Geneva

Motor Show this week. The British RX opener will be the first rallycross event to be held at Silverstone. It is the precursor to the British round of the World Rallycross Championship, which takes place at the same venue at the end of May.

Another Frenchman, Guerlain Chicherit, will race a new G-Fors-built and run Renault Clio RS RX in the event to gain circuit knowledge.

Three-time British Rally champion Mark Higgins will make his debut for the Albatec Racing team at the event, and he will be joined in a pair of Peugeot 208s by owner Andy Scott. Five-time British champion Julian Godfrey will get his bid for a record sixth British RX crown underway at Silverstone, while former European Championship event winner Kevin Procter will return after a difficult season in 2017.

Grosset-Janin joins up with GCK WRX team

Frenchman Jerome Grosset-Janin will join compatriot Guerlain Chicherit in the GCK World Rallycross team for its maiden campaign racing a pair of Prodrive-built Renault Megane RS RX Supercars in the series this season.

The squad has also secured the services of double DTM champion and World RX convert Timo Scheider as test driver for the development phase of the new Banbury-built car.

Former French champion Grosset-Janin finished second in the European Championship in 2015 and 2016, driving for the Albatec Racing team.

Grosset-Janin said: "GCK has developed an awesome project and for the team to have partnered with Prodrive's technical expertise gives me great confidence. Thanks to an innovative and bold technical design, the Megane RS RX looks super aggressive. When I first had a look at the car, I got excited. It transcends the usual way of how things have been done so far and represents



Grosset-Janin will drive a Renault

what really gets me inspired and motivated, to think outside the box and dare to go big."

The new Megane Supercar has begun testing at a private facility but is yet to be revealed. Team owner Chicherit said: "Jerome is a very experienced driver, he knows the sport and the tracks very well and brings quite a lot of experience to GCK. Being a two-time runner up in Euro RX, he's already demonstrated he's ready to challenge for a championship, so now it's up to GCK to deliver him a good car too."

Newgarden and Castroneves look for RallyX on Ice return in 2019

Team Penske IndyCar stars Josef Newgarden and Helio Castroneves are eyeing further RallyX On Ice outings following their maiden appearances in the winter series.

Newgarden made his rallycross debut in the single-make Supercar Lites category on Al's frozen lake circuit two weeks ago, before Castroneves stepped aboard the same car for the season finale at Goll last weekend. Newgarden qualified for the semi-finals and finished fifth in his knock-out race to be 18th overall, while

Castroneves came home in 22nd.

"It was amazing to have the opportunity to come over and try this," said reigning IndyCar champion Newgarden. "It was very difficult; I take my hat off to all the regular rallycross guys. They're phenomenal at what they do. The track was technical and it became very rutted the more cars ran, so the deeper we got into the weekend, the more precise you had to be and people don't realise just how easy it is to put it into a snow bank if you go off-line. I just need

to take a couple more steps and then maybe we can return next year and do a little bit better. I really want to master this."

Oliver Eriksson won the season finale to secure the 2018 title ahead of older brother Kevin, while Jesse Kallio won the RX Academy on Ice title and World RX driver Kevin Hansen netted the Speedcar Xtreme buggy series with a podium finish in the last round. British RX Junior driver Ole Henry Steinholt won the buggy final.



Newgarden enjoyed his run

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MN does not always agree with opinions expressed in letters

MN SAYS...

Now is time for Elfyn to shine

Welshman is desperate to put a tough start to 2018 behind him

Elfyn Evans has been quite forthright in his own assessment of the 2018 campaign so far, admitting it has been a 'rubbish' start to the year.

In truth, it has, but that has been through no fault of his own. Two punctures have thwarted his challenge in both Monte Carlo and in Sweden, but he set fastest stage times on the opening round to underline the pace that took him to his maiden victory on Wales Rally GB at the end of 2017. Patience is a virtue in rallying, and letting the results come to you.

Given an advantageous road position on day one in Mexico, the tide could be about to turn for the M-Sport driver.

● In this week's *Motorsport News*, we are proud to offer our completely free National Racing Calendar, a document that is vital for fans plotting the weekends ahead. It is one of the most exciting times of the year as a chart can be mapped through the events to come. It is an age-old argument to suggest that there are too many championships and too many meetings. Those thoughts can be put aside for a week or so though. Get planning.

Matt James, Editor (Twitter: @MattJMNews)



LETTERS



Motorsport News, February 28

Cambrian thanks

On behalf of the organising team of the 2018 Cambrian Rally I would like to say a big thank you to all the marshals, rescue crews, recovery crews and medical teams who supported this year's event.

This year we were blessed with better weather than in 2017, but nevertheless we as a team still had several challenges to overcome before the event and on the day.

Sadly we had a serious incident which caused a delay, but due to the excellent work of all those involved in the incident, the crew were quickly attended to and taken to hospital and the crew were later discharged from hospital and are now making a steady recovery.

The day was a busy one for the recovery crews as we had many retirements and they were working until very late getting everyone out to be collected by their service crews, so once again many thanks to them for all their hard work.

Last but not least, a thank you to all the radio crews who did a great job in tracking all the competitors through the stages and ensuring everyone's position was recorded.

Without all the above we have no event, so once again many thanks.

Finally some people have complained about the condition of certain stages, please remember that we had severe weather leading up to the event which made the roads extremely wet, which would result in them getting cut up very quickly.

As for the Elsi stage, Natural Resources Wales had not regraded the roads since the Cambrian Rally last used them in 2016 and were not prepared to do any pre-event repairs to the road unless the event paid. We were reminded by NRW that the forestry roads are part of a working forest.

Motorsport events must accept the roads on an 'as found' basis.

There may be some urgent late fixes that have to take place, and NRW will deal with these as appropriate, but the standards remain the same: forestry purposes.

Alyn Edwards
Clerk of the course
Cambrian Rally

Halo can you go?

Even Mercedes boss Toto Wolff says that he wants to take a chainsaw to the halo as the wraps came off the new F1 cars.

I have one question: were the drivers who are actually going to be on the grid this season actually asked about the device?

Although there are some exceptions, most of the drivers who have gone on the record about this topic are against the halo. Surely it is the men at the wheel who should have been central to the entire debate. They are the ones who weigh up the risks and the rewards.

It does ruin the aesthetics of the cars and it looks like a halfway house solution. It is hardly the high-tech solution that the sport should portray.

Jason Lowe
Via email

YOUR PICS



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Photographs must be of a good quality and please send no more than three images

ART EDITOR MIKE STOKOE'S
FAVOURITE OF THE WEEK!



Duncan Stephens captured this photograph of Aaron Haizelden's Reliant Scimitar SS1



Chris Noble enjoyed a visit to Race Retro



Paul Trueman's photo of a Nissan rally car



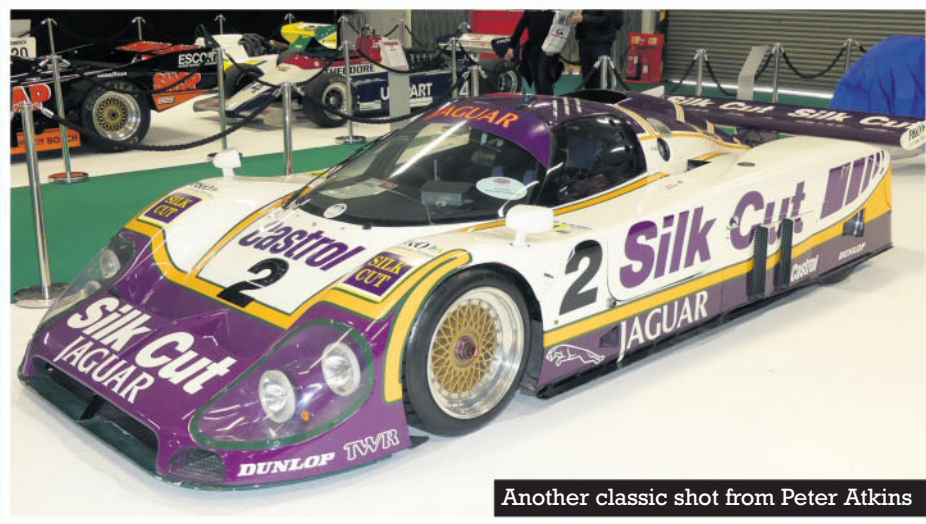
The Ford Escort 1700T from Peter Atkins



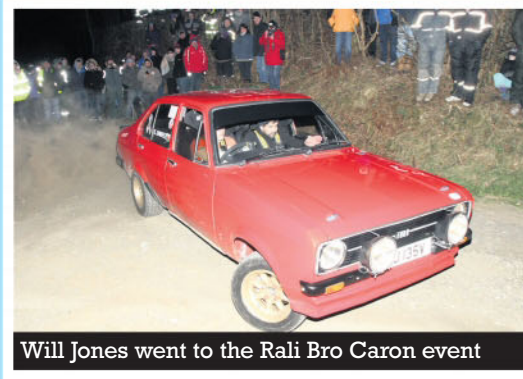
A sideways Renault by Peter Taylor



A Firenza from Race Retro, by Peter Atkins



Another classic shot from Peter Atkins



Will Jones went to the Rali Bro Caron event

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TV GUIDE



Mansell charts the ups and downs of his career

Catch the start of the Australian Supercars Championship from Down Under with highlights of the first round at Adelaide (Thursday, 1130-1400hrs), as Jamie Whincup aims for a record eighth title.

Later that evening there is another instalment

from **The Great History of the 24 Hours of Le Mans** series, this time from 1959 (2045-2100hrs). Aston Martin brought a more refined DBR1 to the great event, hoping that they would be able to take the fight to the mighty Ferrari 250s. If you're looking for more modern endurance racing, there is

Le Mans action from 1990 on Monday as Jaguar, Nissan and Porsche all vied for the top spot (1215-1230hrs).

And make sure to watch Peter Windsor's interview with 1992 Formula 1 world champion Nigel Mansell as part of **The Windsor Interviews** series (Sunday, 1630-1700hrs).

LIVE TV

IndyCar: St Petersburg

■ **Race:** Sunday, 1600-1915hrs, BT Sport ESPN

NASCAR: Phoenix

■ **Race:** Sunday, 1930-2330hrs, Premier Sports



Tune in for IndyCar action

LIVE WRC

Rally Mexico, BT Sport

■ **Saturday**
■ **End of day one review:** 1100-1130hrs, BT Sport 1
■ **SS16:** 1700-1800hrs, BT Sport 3

■ **Sunday**
■ **End of day two review:** 1530-

1600hrs, BT Sport 1
■ **SS21:** 1600-1700hrs, BT Sport 1

■ **Monday**
■ **End of day three review:** 1100-1130hrs, BT Sport 1

■ **Red Bull TV**
■ **End of day one review:** Saturday, 0300hrs

■ **SS16:** Saturday, 1645hrs
■ **End of day two review:** Sunday 0300hrs
■ **End of day three review:** Monday 0300hrs

■ **Channel 5**
■ **Highlights:** Tuesday, 1900-2000hrs



Daily review

■ **Day 1:** Saturday, 0930-1000hrs
■ **Day 2:** Sunday, 0930-1000hrs
■ **Day 3:** Monday, 0930-1000hrs



BOOK REVIEW FORMULA 1 CAR BY CAR 1970-79

The 1970s was a beautiful decade for Formula 1, during which, seemingly paradoxically, homogeneity spawned diversity. The ubiquity of the Ford/Cosworth DFV engine and Hewland gearbox – off-the-shelf hardware that was relatively cheap and second to none in performance – led to a proliferation of teams.

Those were the days when a preview to a grand prix provided previously undiscovered nuggets. Readers would genuinely not know until newsagents opened on Wednesdays whether McLaren will run a third car for Giacomelli, or if Nelson Piquet

was slated to do an F1 race on Sunday before dashing back to Mallory Park or somewhere on a Bank Holiday Monday to race in Formula 3.

That's why *Formula 1 Car by Car 1970-79*, produced by Evo Publishing and written by former *Autosport* publisher Peter Higham, is so appealing. It's the second instalment in Higham's decade-by-decade trawl through the highways and byways of F1.

Unlike the single-year 'biographies' of F1 by Mark Hughes, in which the trends of the time are re-examined with the benefit of the knowledge we have today, Higham's

method is to delve into the nooks and crannies mostly of period reportage – in *Autosport*, *Motorsport (Motoring) News*, *Autocourse* and *Motor Sport*, while using the phenomenal LAT archive. The result is a series of gems



Hingham's F1 book

hitherto lost in the mists of time. Take Jacky Ickx's reasons for switching his personal sponsorship for 1972 from Kent to Marlboro "not for the money, but because I think it is a better cigarette".

The treat here is seeing colour photos of all the driver/car combinations. Each team is given a technical and driver line-up summary, plus sponsorship where relevant, but to this writer it's not the Lotus, Ferraris, Tyrrells etc that are this book's main appeal. Instead, it's the obscure, such as the Connew, the concurrent Tecno projects, the Trojan and the Kauhsen –

not to mention the beautiful Kojima – or the stories of everyone to have tried to qualify for a GP in the ill-starred RAM Brabham privateer team of 1976. Every driver/car model that started a world championship race is pictured. Even if you're too young to have been around during that era, remember the cliché frequently propounded by old fogies that "you could've painted all the cars white and still distinguish which was which". Then look at this weird, wonderful and sometimes outlandish collection of weaponry and realise that's true.

Marcus Simmons

LISTINGS



The Hankook 24 Hours

RACING FRIDAY-SUNDAY

■ Silverstone, Northants

Hankook 24-Hours: 7 Race Series **Starts** Friday, racing from 1115hrs (qualifying from 0900hrs) **Saturday**, racing from 0900hrs **Admission** £20 **Web** silverstone.co.uk **Contact** 08704 588260

RALLY SATURDAY

■ Bishops Court Circuit, McGrady Insurance Stages

Starts 0930hrs **Admission** TBC **Web** svsproductions.com

■ Jedburgh, Scottish Borders

NCS Border Counties Rally **Starts** 0930hrs **Admission** free **Web** bordercountiesrally.co.uk

SUNDAY

■ Achill Island, County Mayo

Ostan Oilcan Acla, Connacht Print and Signs Mayo Stages Rally **Starts** 0930hrs **Admission** free **Web** maymotorsportclub.com

■ Epynt Ranges, Powys

Melvyn Evans Motorsport Tour of Epynt **Starts** 0840hrs **Admission** free **Web** ptmtonline.com

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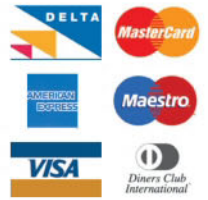
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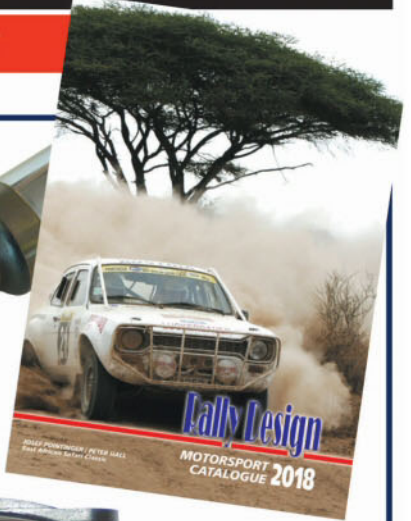
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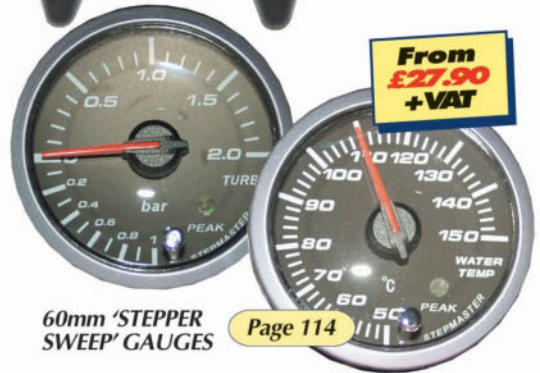
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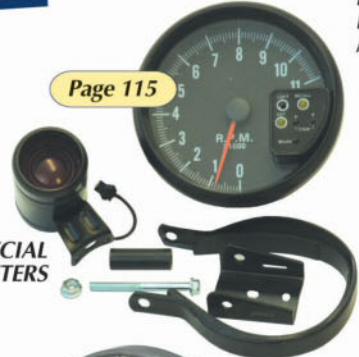
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