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CORONAVIRUS IMPACT **WHAT COULD HAPPEN NEXT**

AUTOSPORT

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15 MARCH 2020

DID F1 DO THE RIGHT THING?



How the Australian GP was cancelled

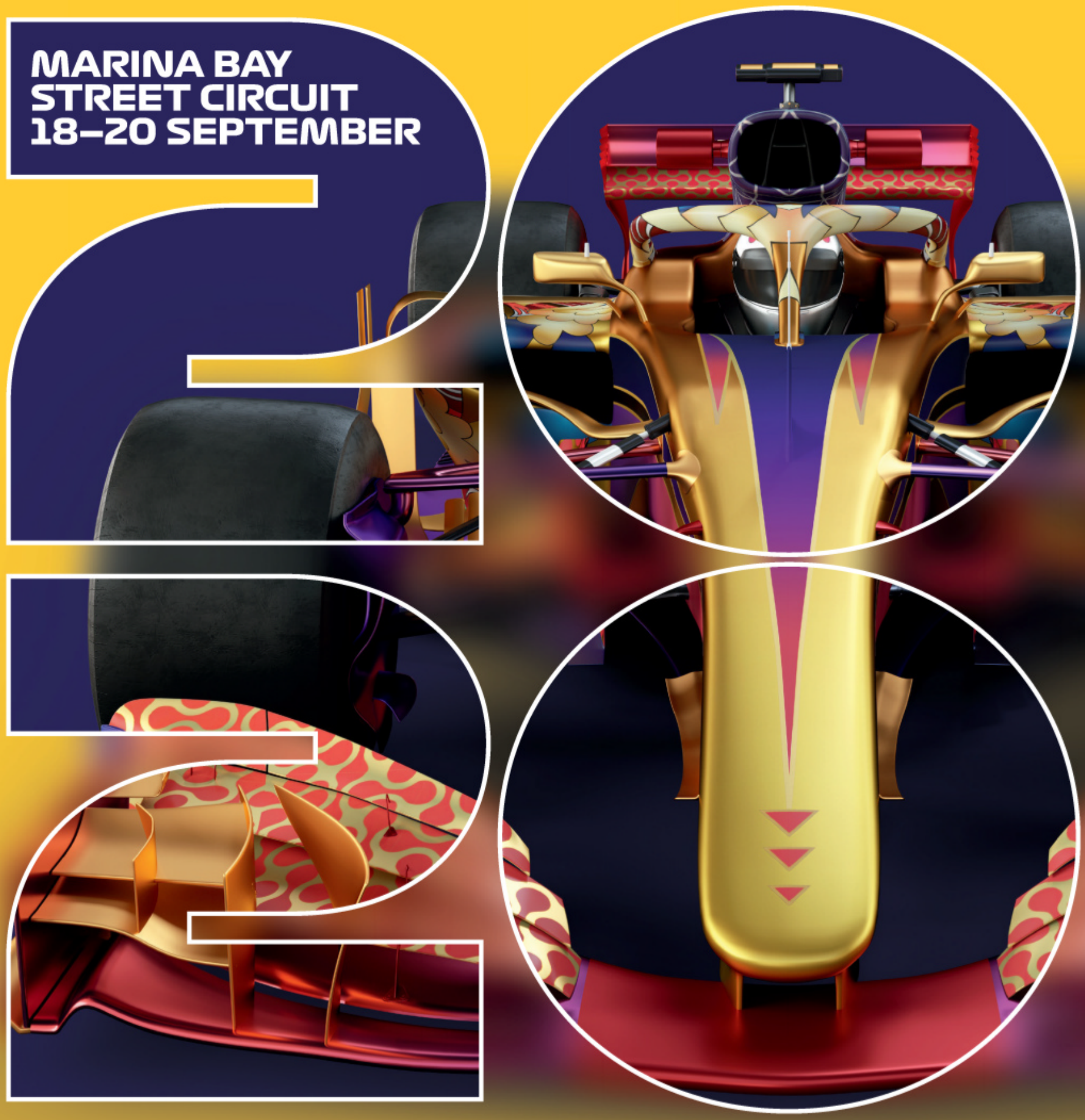
Hamilton 'shocked' race was going ahead

The Mercedes phone call that made the difference

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Making the right call a little too late in Australia?

Few would claim that cancelling last weekend's Australian Grand Prix was the wrong decision. With the coronavirus situation changing by the day and a case being confirmed in the Formula 1 paddock, resulting in McLaren's withdrawal, the decision seemed inevitable.

But what about the timing? As Alex Kalinauckas shows in our extensive analysis of what went on in Melbourne (page 16), some teams initially wanted to carry on with the race weekend and, even when enough of them decided to pull out, there was still a delay in communicating the fact that the GP wasn't happening. That's why some fans still travelled to the circuit and were, understandably, not impressed when they couldn't get in.

Not for the first time, F1's key players appeared to do the right thing, but — perhaps due to all the stakeholders and money involved — arguably didn't do it soon enough.

F1 and the FIA now have some serious decisions to make and, with the Dutch, Spanish and Monaco GPs under threat, the earliest the season *could* get going is the Azerbaijan GP in June. In the grand scheme of things, of course, motorsport is hardly a priority at a time such as this and the safety of everyone is paramount, but the future of many livelihoods will depend on what happens in the coming months.

• We appreciate that many will feel the need for some escapism over the next few weeks. We have, of course, written a lot about COVID-19 and its impact in this issue, given the unprecedented situation, but we will continue to talk to teams, drivers and other key figures to bring you interviews and articles on your favourite sport. Also look out for historical pieces, as well as reports on any events that do take place.



Kevin Turner
Editor
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NEXT WEEK 26 MARCH
We look at some of the big stories in the British Touring Car paddock



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S Bloxham/Motorsport Images

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FREE WITH THIS ISSUE



NATIONAL SUPPLEMENT

Ginetta, the BRSCC and Mini Challenge all feature in this month's issue.



Stommelen (red helmet) is first to his Porsche 908LH at 1968 Le Mans – albeit three and a half months late

AS F1 REELS, LE MANS COMES

LE MANS 24 HOURS

As the crisis of the coronavirus pandemic escalates around the world, the Le Mans 24 Hours organisers have given themselves a D-Day of 15 April as to whether the race can go ahead on its traditional June date. That's the deadline that race organiser the Automobile Club de l'Ouest has given for pushing ahead with the 2019-20 World Endurance Championship season finale or postponing it to later in the year.

The statement from the ACO on Monday afternoon followed on quickly from the cancellation of this weekend's Sebring 1000 Miles and what has been billed as a postponement of the Spa WEC round on 25 April. But the French organisation, also promoter of the WEC, was at pains to stress that there will be a Le Mans 24 Hours this year.

"We are monitoring the situation and following instructions issued by the authorities," said ACO president Pierre Fillon on Monday afternoon. "Whatever happens, the Le Mans 24 Hours will go ahead this year."

The move clearly buys the ACO some time as the effects of what has officially been declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation takes hold and the sporting calendar all but shut down in Europe. There can be no way of second guessing how the crisis will unfold or how governments will react in a fast-moving situation.

That was illustrated by a TV address from French president Emmanuel Macron on Monday evening that the country was being placed in an effective lockdown. Schools, bars and restaurants have been closed, and the population ordered not to leave their homes except to travel to and from work if unavoidable, buy groceries, exercise or attend medical appointments. The curfew, which will last for a minimum of 15 days, is being policed with fines.

The European Union then announced on Tuesday that it is closing its borders to non-EU citizens for a 30-day period that will continue up to the date of the ACO's decision. Many experts are suggesting that, in the UK at least, the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus may not peak for another three months.

A delay to Le Mans wouldn't be unprecedented. The 1968 race was postponed until September as a result of civil unrest in France, but moving it back this year would be more problematical. The WEC's switch to the 'winter-series' format means that the 2020-21 season is due to start on 5 September at Silverstone.

Pushing the race back into July or August could still impact on the preparations of manufacturers and teams in what is already an ultra-short off-season. That suggests a wholesale rejig of the 2020-21 calendar may be required should Le Mans not be able to go ahead on 13-14 June as planned.

The sporting regulations also state that there must be a minimum of six races in the championship, including Le Mans. That means that, even though there have been five rounds already, Le Mans would still need to take place even if a new slot was found for Spa.

The announcement of the 15 April deadline came a few hours after the postponement of the Spa round. WEC boss Gerard Neveu said it was the "only responsible option — the health and well-being of our competitors, fans and members of the paddock has to remain our priority".

That was a stark change in rhetoric from last



UNDER THREAT

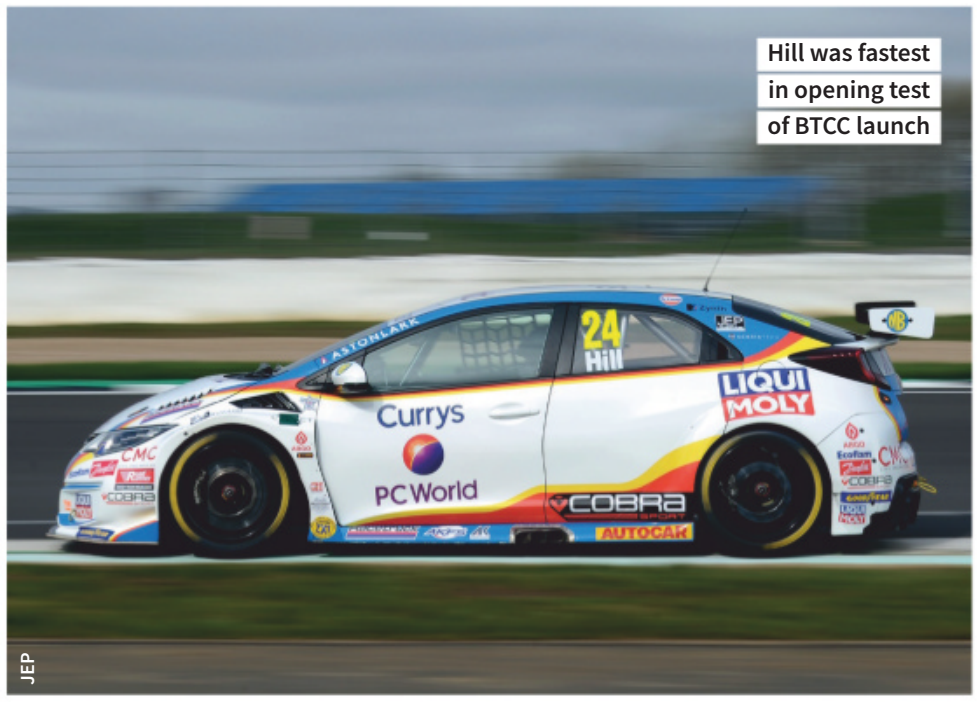
Thursday, when the Sebring race set for this Friday (tomorrow) was called off early in the morning. It followed the imposition the previous evening of travel restrictions to the US from the 26 Schengen nations in Europe. That, said Neveu, "will prevent a number of drivers, teams and key personnel from participation".

The same reason was cited for the postponement later in the day of the Sebring 12 Hours round of the IMSA SportsCar Championship. It followed a statement from the US organiser on Wednesday that the 'SuperSebring' IMSA/WEC double-header would go ahead as planned. The 68th running of the 12 Hours will now take place on 14 November, the date originally scheduled for the Sebring Encore, the non-championship IMSA race open to LMP3, GT3, GT4 and TC machinery first held in 2018. The Long Beach round, part of a double-header with the IndyCar Series, was subsequently postponed, which means that as it stands IMSA's season is due to resume at Mid-Ohio on 3 May.

The GT World Challenge Europe, meanwhile, has put in place a contingency plan should the coronavirus crisis continue to escalate. The series has vowed that it will run a 10-race schedule this year. Series boss Stephane Ratel has suggested that the start of the series could be delayed until the Sprint Cup event at Zandvoort on 27-28 June. He explained that his eponymous organisation had already lined up alternatives for the Brands Hatch, Silverstone and Paul Ricard events between now and then, without going into details.

GARY WATKINS

P16 AUSTRALIAN GP SAGA



Hill was fastest in opening test of BTCC launch

BTCC delayed until mid-May as openers axed

BTCC

The British Touring Car Championship postponed the start of its season until mid-May just as Autosport went to press, with series organiser TOCA planning to reorganise its opening three rounds for later in the year.

With the Football Association and English Football League announcing late last week its suspension of fixtures until early April, the BTCC — which draws crowd figures on a par with the EFL's Championship — was surely living on borrowed time amid the growing coronavirus pandemic, particularly regarding its scheduled season opener at Donington Park on 29 March.

As motorsport fixtures intended for the next few weeks collapsed like dominos over the weekend and on Monday, the BTCC-supporting Porsche Carrera Cup GB bucked the trend by holding its scheduled test day at Silverstone on Monday, as the BTCC prepared for its Launch Day at the same venue on Tuesday.

That evening, TOCA announced that spectators would not be able to attend the Launch Day, but it went ahead nevertheless on Tuesday. Then, during the lunch break, came the announcement that the dates at Donington, Brands Hatch on 12 April and Silverstone on 26 April have all been postponed, with the season now set to kick off at Thruxton on 17 May.

This pre-empted an anticipated statement from British governing body Motorsport UK (see p58).

TOCA confirmed in its statement that "our firm intention is to run the full season of 10 events and we will work closely with the circuits and our stakeholders in order to reschedule new dates for all postponed events. These will be confirmed and announced when there is further clarity regarding the eventual resumption of major sporting events."

Like Formula 1, the BTCC has a summer break, in its case between mid-June and late-July. This would be an obvious target to shoehorn in some of the rearranged dates. There is also a tasty four-week gap in between Knockhill's end-of-August round and Silverstone at the end of September. Slot an event in the middle of that, and there wouldn't even necessarily be back-to-back weekends.

In the meantime, some cars were actually going around a race track during Tuesday, with the 29-strong BTCC field all taking to the Silverstone International Circuit, which hosts the series for the first time in September.

As Autosport went to press, Jake Hill had set the quickest time in the three-hour morning session in his MB Motorsport (formerly AmD Tuning) Honda Civic Type-R. He lapped 0.315s clear of the West Surrey Racing-run BMW of Andrew Jordan.

MARCUS SIMMONS

P58 NATIONAL RACING OFF



Juncadella switches to GT as entries are boosted for 2020

GT WORLD CHALLENGE EUROPE

Daniel Juncadella is moving across from R-Motorsport's defunct DTM squad to race in the renamed GT World Challenge Europe with the Swiss Aston Martin entrant.

The Spaniard (above) is joining an expanded three-strong entry of Vantage GT3s across the GTWCE's Endurance and Sprint Cups.

Juncadella, a race winner in the DTM with Mercedes, will join up with GT regulars Jake Dennis (his 2019 DTM team-mate) and Ricky Collard in the five enduros. The deal marks a return to the series formerly known as the Blancpain GT Series for the Spaniard, who won a round with the Auto Sport Promotion Mercedes team in 2017.

R-Motorsport has now confirmed its full programme in the GT3 arena after a series of announcements, including those that Luca Ghiotto and Tom Blomqvist were joining the Arden/Jota-run team. They will join up in the second pro class Aston alongside Marvin Kirchhofer for the long races, while Hugo de Sadeleer, ADAC GT Masters promise Max Hofer and ex-Barwell Motorsport Lamborghini driver James Pull will race its entry in the Silver Cup class.

Ghiotto and Blomqvist will share one pro car in the sprints, Kirchhofer and de Sadeleer the other. Collard and Pull will drive the silver car.

R-Motorsport team principal Florian Kamelger said: "Our driver line-up consists of already established R-Motorsport drivers and young talent. The support of junior drivers is something we especially care about."

The team also revealed that it will again contest the Kyalami 9 Hours Intercontinental GT Challenge race in November, but has yet to confirm a number of cars or drivers. It is also entering the GT4 European Series for the first time.

Bumper entries for both segments of the GTWCE were announced ahead of last week's official pre-season test at Paul Ricard. A total of 53 entries were revealed for the enduros, which has since been revised upwards to 55, while 33 cars are on the full-season list for the sprints.

A total of 28 cars will contest all 10 events on the GTWCE calendar, which appears likely to undergo further revisions as the coronavirus pandemic evolves (see page 4).

Series organiser Stephane Ratel explained that he had decided to increase the maximum entry for the Sprint Cup from 28 cars as a result of the world health crisis. "The Sprint Cup has shown fantastic growth and has surpassed our own targets," he said. "We had 35 requests and it made sense to push the limit up because of all the uncertainty: we know there is a possibility that some teams will end up staying at home as a result of losing sponsors or drivers."

ASP Mercedes driver Raffaele Marciello, overall BGTS champion in 2018, set the overall quickest time as he topped three of the four sessions over the course of the Ricard test.

GARY WATKINS

Pro GT race for 'Olympics'

MOTORSPORT GAMES

The promised expansion of the FIA Motorsport Games for year two in 2020 will include a one-driver GT3 sprint event for professional drivers. It is one of nine new competitions, including four rally disciplines, added to the roster for this October's competition at Paul Ricard.

Event promoter Stephane Ratel revealed that it was felt important to add another circuit-racing category for professional drivers to TCR touring cars in motorsport's Olympic-style competition on 23-25 October. "We needed a bigger pro element in the Games and probably the easiest way to do it is in GT racing," said Ratel, while stressing that the new event was in no way a replacement for the Macau GT World Cup in November.

The format and schedule for the event, which follows on from last year's inaugural Games in Vallelunga, has yet to be determined, but Ratel explained that the new competition would take place on the Sunday after the existing amateur GT Sprint Relay, formerly the GT Nations Cup, has been run on Friday and Saturday.

"The idea is that a team could use the same car in both events," he said. "They could make entries in the pro race on the back of their entries in the race for bronze and silver-rated drivers."

Ratel hasn't ruled out adding more events to the roster in time for November. He said that he was disappointed that he had been unable to finalise an endurance race for either LMP2 or LMP3 cars on the Games schedule.

The Games will include separate competitions for the FIA's Rally2 and Rally4 categories, as well as a stage rally for historic cars of the 1970s and early 1980s, and a regularity run for machinery built up until 1990.

GARY WATKINS





DTM Audi has unveiled the liveries of its six factory RS5 DTM contenders. Clockwise from top left are the cars of Loic Duval, Nico Muller, Robin Frijns, Mike Rockenfeller, Rene Rast and Jamie Green. Meanwhile, R-Motorsport Aston Martin refugee Ferdinand Habsburg has completed a deal with privateer Audi squad WRT to drive an additional car, and will line up alongside Ed Jones and Fabio Scherer, bringing the total field to 16. **Photograph by Audi Sport**

Neal back in his Honda after serious bike shunt

BTCC

Three-time British Touring Car champion Matt Neal got back behind the wheel of his Team Dynamics-run Honda Civic last week as he bids to recover from injury in time for the start of the 2020 season.

Neal, 53, sustained multiple fractures and a collapsed lung while out mountain-biking with friends. That meant that Neal's friend, fellow triple BTCC title winner, Gordon Shedden, replaced him for early pre-season testing alongside team-mate Dan Cammish, and has been on standby to fill in for Neal in the early races if required.

After completing 70 laps of the Brands Hatch Indy Circuit last Tuesday, and 30 on Wednesday, Neal (right) is confident that he can be fit in time for the start of the season, whenever that may be.

Neal said he was "pretty sore" after his run at Brands, but added that testing on three days this week — Silverstone's Media Day on Tuesday, Donington on Thursday and Croft on Friday — would be "a bit of an acid test for me, but I've almost made up my mind I'm going to go for it. It's just managing the pain really."

Dynamics was one of several BTCC teams in action at Brands. "I never really got a run on new tyres and all the rest of it," said Neal. "But there were a few things we needed to try on the car, so we did that, and apart from that I just wanted to get miles under my belt."

MARCUS SIMMONS



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Neuville rails against slower WRC future

WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

Hyundai ace Thierry Neuville has slated the World Rally Championship's proposed technical regulations for 2022.

The rules put an increasing reliance on off-the-shelf components and a reduction in available transmission, braking, suspension and aerodynamic technology. Named Rally 1, it sits at the top of a revised five-tier pyramid intended to increase accessibility for aspiring drivers and teams in national-level competition, while increasing sustainability and reducing cost in the WRC.

"I asked my boss [Hyundai chief Andrea Adamo] straight away if he agreed on this shit," said Neuville on last weekend's Rally Mexico. "Cost reducing, making the car technically less interesting – putting five gears back, no centre diff, less aerodynamic, less wheel travel on the suspension. I don't see the point, to be honest.

"From three years ago we decide to pep up the WRC and give it a new life and it worked very well to be honest. From the promotion side, from the spectacle side – and now we go back to R5-plus. I don't know if I'm really interested to drive these cars but we're going to find out."

But M-Sport team principal Richard Millener said: "Without wishing to sound rude to any of the drivers, they aren't the ones funding the programme.

"When you look at where the manufacturers are competing at the moment – principally Formula E – it's all provided for you: you just put your badge on it and go. We don't want to go down that path – the WRC will always require specialist engineering and the manufacturer's showroom product, but keeping our series accessible to reach that target of four or five manufacturers, although it's not going to happen in the next two or three years, is the right way to go."

NICK GARTON

P30 RALLY MEXICO

Brit F3 ace Simmons secures Euroformula seat

EUROFORMULA OPEN

Former BRDC British Formula 3 title contender Ayrton Simmons is heading to the continent this season to race in Euroformula Open.

The 18-year-old Hispano-Essex racer, whose third place in British F3 last year put him into the finals for the Aston Martin Autosport BRDC Young Driver of the Year Award, will drive an HWA-powered Dallara run by Double R Racing.

Simmons has already had three days in the older-spec Dallara, mainly at Pembrey, and gave the brand-new Dallara 320 a run at Silverstone. "We just want him to get up to speed," said Double R boss Anthony 'Boyo' Hieatt. "Well, to be honest he's already up to speed. He's quick."

Simmons's next test is planned for Snetterton, with EFO having cancelled its official runouts at Barcelona and Paul Ricard due to the coronavirus situation.

This has also disrupted Double R's bids to recruit other drivers. "It has affected our discussions, but we fully intend to be out with at least two cars," said Hieatt. "There's not much running we can do at the moment, but we're planning to be ready to go when everything gets the all clear."

MARCUS SIMMONS





WRC What? Has a time machine taken us back to 1994? Action sports hero Ken Block appeared on Rally Mexico last weekend with this reworked Ford Escort Cosworth Group A car. Featuring modern suspension, sequential gearbox and fly-by-wire throttle, it suffered a misfire before Block retired on the third stage with engine problems. "I'm just a rally tourist – racing at the top level isn't realistic anymore," he said. **Photograph by McKlein**

Kristoffersson back on WRX grid

WORLD RALLYCROSS

Two-time World Rallycross champion Johan Kristoffersson will return to the series this year with a works-built Volkswagen Polo Supercar, run as a private effort by Kristoffersson Motorsport.

Kristoffersson, who won 11 of the 12 rounds in 2018 on the way to his second WRX crown (below), was left without a rallycross seat when the PSRX Volkswagen team withdrew from the series at the end of that season. The Swede raced in the World Touring Car Cup last year, but his plans of continuing in the series were cut short when VW ended its works internal-programmes in November.



Kristoffersson will now drive a Polo "identical with the one that took him to the title in 2018", run out of KMS's workshops in Arvika under the Volkswagen Dealerteam Bauhaus banner.

"My aim is to fight for the title," said Kristoffersson. "It's been a hectic period and there have been many alternatives, but right now I feel really satisfied. Rallycross is very close to my heart and returning to rallycross means that rally and racing will be put in the background for 2020. All our energy and focus is on World RX."

The mid-April WRX opener at Barcelona has been cancelled due to the coronavirus.

HAL RIDGE

IN THE HEADLINES

NASR MISSES INDY DEBUT

Ex-Formula 1 driver Felipe Nasr should have made his IndyCar Series debut with Carlin in St Petersburg last weekend – if the race had happened. Latter-day IMSA star Nasr was confirmed in the car for this race only. Carlin has also named Conor Daly to stand in for Max Chilton for the four oval races apart from the Indy 500.

FRAGA IS RED BULL JUNIOR

Recently crowned Toyota Racing Series champion Igor Fraga has joined the Red Bull Junior programme ahead of his rookie FIA Formula 3 season with Charouz Racing System. The 21-year-old Brazilian was third in last season's Formula Regional European Championship, his first campaign in cars outside the Americas, and started 2020 by beating Red Bull protege Liam Lawson to the TRS title.

FARFUS OUT OF HYUNDAI

BMW factory driver Augusto Farfus has dropped out of Hyundai's World Touring Car Cup line-up for 2020, after just one season. BRC Racing has scaled back from running all four i30 N TCRs and will field a pair for reigning champion Norbert Michelisz and Gabriele Tarquini. Team Engstler will run the other two for Nicky Catsburg and Luca Engstler, son of team boss Franz, who steps up after success in lower-level TCR competition.

COLLET TOPS RENAULT TEST

The Formula Renault Eurocup squeezed in two days of coronavirus-unaffected testing at Valencia last week. Renault F1 protege Caio Collet topped the times with R-ace GP, although ART Grand Prix's Victor Martins was quickest on day one with a lap good enough for second overall. Next were Mikhail Belov (M2 Competition) and Paul Aron (ART). Fifth was Lorenzo Colombo – the 2019 race winner has been confirmed with Italian team Bhaitech for this year.

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The other tales from Melbourne

Even though the race had to be cancelled , there was enough time for other stories to surface before events ultimately overtook the Australian Grand Prix

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

The coronavirus crisis is challenging the modern way of life like never before — and it has already had a defining impact on the 2020 Formula 1 season.

The dramatic cancellation of the Australian Grand Prix will forever be the story of what should have been F1's 25th race at Albert Park but, before events took the serious turn they did, there had been *some* semblance of normality around the chaos of the COVID-19 speculation. There was just enough time for the next chapters in several sagas that had started rumbling in pre-season to unfold.

Let's start with the Ferrari 2019 engine 'settlement' that enraged the seven teams not running the manufacturer's powerplants after its deal with the FIA was announced just before the end of winter testing. It emerged last week that there had been an exchange of correspondence between the non-Ferrari/Ferrari-powered teams and the FIA. The non-Ferrari teams apparently expressed serious concern at the situation, and the Prancing Horse's squads were frustrated with the tone emanating from the aggrieved teams.

The non-Ferrari seven were set to hold a joint press conference on the subject in Melbourne, but this was abandoned due to the severity of the coronavirus situation. But the topic came up regularly during media briefings the day before the race was called off.

When Williams deputy team principal Claire Williams was asked if she thought that the full details of the settlement would be forthcoming, she intriguingly said: "We have to wait and see — I believe it's up to Ferrari to approve that disclosure."

"Running DAS is risky because that opens up the possibility that a team will file a protest"

It later emerged that Mercedes is no longer a part of the seven-team camp, and will not take part in any further action. But, assuming F1 can return from its unexpected hiatus, the calls to address the unanswered questions regarding the settlement will surely return to the top of the paddock soap opera bill.

The most notable tech development from winter testing — Mercedes' dual-axis steering system — was also discussed at length. Valtteri Bottas said the team would have been "happy to run it" in Australia, but at the same time he acknowledged it had to "calculate the possible risk of it being taken away".

The reason why running DAS is risky for Mercedes is because, if it uses the system during any on-track sessions, that opens up the possibility that another team will file a protest and the race stewards would have to judge its legality for the first time. It has been suggested that Red Bull would have protested Mercedes over DAS had the reigning champion squad used it in Melbourne.

The coronavirus suspension does afford more time to rival squads looking to implement their own version, but — as well as the difficulties of keeping factory work up when workers cannot leave home in many countries — such an approach would be costly. Racing Point technical director Andy Green has already said there is "no chance" his team will pursue the idea.

But DAS is ready to roll on the Mercedes if and when F1 2020 gets going again. So, as with all the topics covered here from last week's truncated event, it will eventually become a talking point again.

Sticking with Racing Point, the team had caused a stir with the striking similarity of its RP20 to Mercedes' W10 car from 2019. The team showed well in testing and was expected to lead the midfield in Melbourne. But Racing Point drivers Sergio Perez and Lance Stroll played down the team's chances of getting anywhere near the top three squads, which Ferrari had suggested could happen once the season got under way.

"I think we definitely have a good car, but I think the top cars are still quite a bit ahead," Perez said when asked if Racing Point would be a podium contender this year. But, like the DAS scenario, the RP20 remains ready to rock — and it would have been great to see just where it would have placed in the Albert Park race. Racing Point has forged a reputation as a team that shines with limited resources, and it will be intriguing to see what it can achieve now its financial problems have been eased.

Another topic discussed by high-profile figures last weekend was the Albert Park track itself, as there is an expectation that the circuit will be resurfaced in 2020 or next year. Part of that plan is likely to involve an assessment of potential changes to the layout to improve overtaking — an issue in recent Australian GPs.

But the coronavirus-caused cancellation will be a significant challenge for the Australian Grand Prix Corporation when it comes to making any changes. The race is surely likely to take a financial hit as it is not expected to rejoin the rejigged calendar.

The roads used by the race are also public highways, which would have to be closed again to allow them to be resurfaced, and this would further disrupt a city that bore the brunt of F1's struggles with the global pandemic. Support for the works may well be harder to come by as a result.

Thanks to the effective cancellation of normal life for the immediate future, it will be quite a while before the next chapters in these storylines are told.

P16 HOW THE AUSTRALIAN GP WAS CANCELLED

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The WRC's old spectator problem

The scale of misbehaviour has diminished since the crazy days of Group B, but it's still an issue — so broadcasting technology is being employed to help keep the stages safe

NICK GARTON

To World Rally Championship fans of a certain age, the prospect of having your collar felt by Michele Mouton would probably be right at the top of their bucketlist. In her current role as FIA safety delegate, however, it is something to be avoided at all costs.

Mouton holds responsibility for overseeing the safety of every stage mile and, as remarkable as it seems, the behaviour of fans is no less a concern now than it was in her heyday at the wheel.

Across social media in particular, there is a senseless celebration of the very thing that blighted the existence of Group B in the 1980s, and regularly caused stage cancellations in the era of Colin McRae, Richard Burns and Carlos Sainz: lunatic fans.

Emblematic of this problem is the meme that shows an Audi Quattro airborne at Fafe on Rally Portugal with an unbroken sea of people in front of it. The next shot shows a Subaru Impreza 555 in the same position, with the crowds now standing on the verge, and the third shows a modern Hyundai i20 WRC from the same angle on the same jump, with not a soul on either side.

For a voluble community of fans, the pictures are emblematic of everything that they believe is wrong with the modern WRC. To them, every inch surrendered from the path of a rally car diminishes and sanitises the sport — and boy do they like to go on about it… Keyboard warriors are one thing, but there is still a minority who will put themselves in the firing line and then post the resulting images for 'likes' among this community.

"Sometimes they are just the distance of a phone from the car's bumper. It's incredible"

Since last year, Mouton's quest to eradicate questionable judgement has been joined by another fan favourite, Nicolas Klinger. The hugely experienced former co-driver, who won rallies and titles alongside Nicolas Vouilloz, Thierry Neuville and Julien Maurin, is passionate about their quest to stamp out the dying embers of the bad old days.

"At the moment, it's exactly what we are chasing: the fans," he explains. "The normal spectators that are staying in spectator areas are OK and I think they respect the rules, but it's the big fans… Sometimes they are just the distance of a phone from the bumper of the car and it's just incredible."

For the past four years, Mouton has driven through the stage ahead of the course cars and remonstrated with anyone in a dangerous position. All too often, however, they would sneak back after she had moved on, and it was Klinger who seized upon the solution that had practically been staring them in the face: "It was after Rally Germany last year, because we go through with Michele and we move a group of spectators and there was a TV guy who said, 'Let me watch them if they come back', and we shared a group contact."

Since the Monte Carlo Rally this year, Klinger has his own post within the service park, with a screen showing multiple in-car feeds simultaneously. "When Michele goes through I'm on the radio and I hear everything she is doing and her instructions back to the double-zero car behind," he says. "I'm already aware when the stage starts about where we could have some issues, so with one pass I can see if the problem is still there. If we discover something we can alert the nearest marshals."

It isn't always fans who find their misdemeanours being captured in HD. FIA media delegate Vera Dussausaye has begun working with Klinger to raise safety standards among the photographers who go out into the stages to make sure that they, too, are out of the firing line. "It's amazing because we have the system in place now," she says. "All those examples of dangerous positions, we can collect them and use them in the photographers' briefings. By the end of the season we will have a significant amount of bad examples, and we can add comments and graphics to specifically show them the appropriate places to go."

Already, Klinger's all-seeing eye is evolving. The FIA has joined forces with tech giant Siemens to further develop the means of spotting potential issues before they occur. "There are no limits to technology," reckons Klinger. "We can track the stage on Google Maps, mark on the safe boundary, the approved spectator areas and the areas where you definitely know there could be a problem. The cameras can be programmed to detect anything — maybe a bumper in the road — and can identify the exact location and alert the organisers."

Hope is therefore at hand for genuine rally fans who just want to go out and witness the heroics on stage — those who have long despaired over the antics of the thrill-seeking minority.

Equally, the WRC itself can only gain if much-needed multinational sponsors can see the risks being managed and minimised in every possible way. It is of course another quantum leap from where rallying was in the 1980s — which is something for which we should ultimately be thankful.

P30 RALLY MEXICO REPORT

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YOUR SAY

I have not heard nor read of any minimum requirement for the number of races for a Formula 1 season to be considered a world championship

RICHARD TOTTINGHAM

How many races make a championship?

In the press briefing prior to the Qatar GP, the CEO of Dorna Carmelo Ezpeleta was asked how many grands prix would be needed to be a world championship. His reply was 13.

So the MotoGP world knows how many races they must have. I am guessing that it is akin to how many laps must be run for full points to be awarded in the event of a red flag and no restart.

However, I have not heard nor read of any minimum requirement for the number of races for a Formula 1 season to be considered a world championship. If the season start gets delayed even more, it would be pretty galling to reach the end of the season and be told: "You can't be world champion. We haven't had enough races."

Likewise for other categories of racing, or other sports, for instance football. Are there any criteria already set out for awarding a championship if not all the races or matches have taken place? Dorna knows what it has to do for MotoGP, Moto2 and Moto3, but what of the rest of the sporting world?

Richard Tottingham
London

Wise words from Melbourne

Disregarding the old cliche of all Frenchmen thinking they are philosophers (for example Eric Cantona and his seagulls), Romain Grosjean (right) may have made the wisest comment in the Melbourne paddock: "No race here in Melbourne. Feels like a big thing for us as we prepared very hard for it *but* actually a very small thing compare to the challenge the world is facing right now."

Graeme Innes-Johnstone
Elland, West Yorks

Time to open up the archives

Very sad to hear of the cancellation of the first three grands prix of the new decade. It is necessary and the responsible thing to do in light of the growing threat of the coronavirus.

With the 'new season' now starting in May, it's almost



a hark back to the 1960s when the F1 season of the day got into full swing having just completed the Tasman series.

With no races until the Dutch Grand Prix to report on now, I'm hoping Autosport will be able to print some more of their splendid features and articles instead on racing from the archives or classic events from the past 70 years...

MA Smith
By email

Rest assured we've got lots planned to keep readers absorbed before normal service is resumed — ed

Alfas' efforts to keep everyone amused

Further to my previous letter (12 March), I have found a race report online that says: "In the early laps they [the Alfas] switched around between themselves several times to keep everyone amused." As I was watching from somewhere about half way round the lap, maybe this is the cause of the discrepancy.

WR McConnel
By email

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How a pandemic punctured F1 2020

The expectation was for a thrilling start to a new season. Instead the drama came from an unfolding global health crisis — and Formula 1's response to it

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

PHOTOGRAPHY motorsport IMAGES





SBLOXHAM

So, 2020 is going to be rather different to the year we were all expecting. The rapid spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus around the world has led multiple governments to take healthcare action unprecedented in the modern age. In many places schools are closed, mass-gatherings banned and, in some countries, entire borders are shut. At the time of writing this only covers a handful of nations, but that could be very different by the time you read these words.

In times such as these, sport becomes a luxury — something that must be done away with for the good of the whole. And that's eventually what happened in Melbourne last week, when Formula 1 — the epitome of luxury — found itself at the centre of a crisis, which has since punctured the 2020 season before it had even begun.

The paddock had travelled to the season-opening race in Australia under a cloud of unease. The coronavirus situation was, it seems, still in a relatively early stage in Europe, where all of the teams are based — apart from in Italy, where the seriousness of the situation threatened the participation of Ferrari and AlphaTauri well ahead of the 15 March race date. But things carried on just about as usual following the end of winter testing, and the circus travelled to the far side of the world for what has become its traditional curtain raiser in one of the globe's most vibrant cities.

But that was about as normal as it ever got. As Jonathan Noble explains in his summary of the events that led up to the cancellation of the Melbourne race (see pages 20-21), build-up publicity events — of which there were few, despite being this supposedly being the first race of a new campaign — had a noticeably different atmosphere. The drivers were sealed off as much as they could be, handshakes were generally off, and most paddock personnel were wondering if they had already been exposed to the coronavirus, or if they were now mixing with others who were carrying COVID-19.

Even as the final arrangements to the paddock and circuit facilities at Albert Park were still being put into place last Wednesday, it was revealed that three team members — one from McLaren and two from Haas — were being tested for the virus. This number grew to eight from several squads on Thursday, plus one person understood to be a local photographer, as the Australian Grand Prix formally got under way with the pre-event media day. That evening it was revealed that a McLaren team member had tested positive.

What followed were examples of the best and worst of F1. McLaren immediately withdrew from the event altogether, with 14 more of its personnel placed into quarantine on Friday morning as a result of being in close contact with the staff member who had tested positive. The team felt it had to take a lead, and it absolutely set an example.

The bosses of the rest of the teams were summoned to a meeting with Ross Brawn — and FIA president Jean Todt, joining in by phone — at Melbourne's Crown hotel to discuss what would happen next. F1 CEO Chase Carey was flying from Vietnam at the time, where he had been discussing the future of the inaugural Hanoi race in what was a rapidly deteriorating situation. A vote was taken to work out the majority position for what would happen next, and the results of the initial ballot seemed to suggest that the Friday practice day would go ahead as planned, albeit without McLaren and those teams that immediately voted against the event proceeding.

But Toto Wolff's phone call with overall Mercedes chief Ola Kallenius, and the Mercedes team boss's subsequent decision to withdraw his squad, changed the vote tally. This meant the FIA — which it has been rumoured wanted the event called off as soon as the news broke regarding the initial paddock tests on Wednesday — could step in and end the chances of the GP taking place, as fewer than 12 cars would be available to race, per the regulations.

In flippant terms, so far, so good: late-night negotiation drama,

"The decisions taken should make for fascinating watching on the next series of Netflix's *Drive to Survive*"

a vote-changing call from Europe, some drivers already apparently quietly departing Australia. Presuming the very serious COVID-19 situation eases (and of course we all hope it does) as quickly and painlessly as possible, the explanations of the key players involved in that meeting and the decisions taken there should make for fascinating watching on the next series of Netflix's *Drive to Survive*. But let's get through the crisis before the trivial stuff can return...

It was what happened the following morning that really didn't look good for F1 — aside from the reputational damage already done by flying off to Australia with a pandemic looming (which we'll get to later).

When dawn broke on Friday morning — grey, gloomy, foreboding for the inevitable touch of pathetic fallacy — bad news was coming for the spectators travelling through Melbourne still hoping to watch at least the F1 practice sessions. But no news was officially communicated from F1's various stakeholders, who by this stage knew the event was going to be called off.

By 8am, the Australian Grand Prix Corporation had seemingly had no word that the F1 action would not take place, and so it released a statement saying the event would carry on as planned, even if it later meant this would just cover the support categories. The F1 two-seater car began its demo runs, Supercars and TCR teams began prepping their machines, fans made their way to Albert Park.

But when they got there, most found the gates shut to the public. By this stage, at 9am, the chief health officer of Victoria's government had declared that no spectators would be allowed in on public health grounds. Trams from the CBD city-centre were barred from stopping at the usual Albert Park gates, while those fans already at the venue continued queueing in hope rather than expectation.

At the same time, the wheels were firmly in motion to officially end the 2020 Australian GP, but there was still a baffling lack of official communication coming from F1 and the FIA. Approaching 10am, TCR Asia Pacific Cup drivers were being strapped into their cars and sent to the dummy grid for their first race — which never took place because of what happened next.

At just past 10am, the statement many had long been expecting finally arrived from the AGPC: "At 9am today the Australian Grand Prix Corporation was advised by Formula 1 of their intention to cancel all Formula 1 activity at the Formula 1 Australian Grand Prix.

"In light of this decision and updated advice this morning from »



Esteban Ocon dons a facemask in the paddock

TEE



Haas was among first teams to self-isolate crew members…

HONE



…then a positive test at McLaren prompted its immediate withdrawal

SUTTON



McLaren felt it had to set an example to the paddock

the CHO of the Victorian government's Department of Human and Health Services, the Australian Grand Prix Corporation confirms the Formula 1 Australian Grand Prix is cancelled immediately.

"Last night a member of the McLaren Racing team tested positive for the COVID-19 virus. A further seven individuals returned negative results, confirming that they do not have the COVID-19 virus. Additionally, a ninth individual has been assessed and tested for the COVID-19 virus, with the results of this test pending. This individual is not associated with any Formula 1 team, the FIA or associated suppliers. Our first priority is the safety of everyone including attendees, our personnel, all event partners and members of the local community."

The Melbourne paddock had seemed subdued on the opening days, and it was even quieter on Friday. The mechanics from the teams prepared to take part in practice – Red Bull, AlphaTauri and Racing Point – showed up for the usual pre-FP1 curfew lift, but the rest of the squads sent in skeleton crews at that stage.

Australian Grand Prix timeline

WEDNESDAY 11 MARCH

1000

RED BULL MEDIA EVENT

With Melbourne on alert for coronavirus after a case was discovered at a restaurant near the circuit, the first major promotional event of the build-up highlights a different feel to the weekend. At a docklands event, Red Bull says there will be a two-metre exclusion zone around its drivers for the media at all times. Already there is speculation that some F1 personnel were being tested for the virus after arriving at the track.

1700

TEAMS CONFIRM STAFF TESTS

With the paddock abuzz with rumours, two teams confirm that they have staff members being tested for coronavirus. One member from McLaren and two from Haas have self-isolated after displaying symptoms. They had each been taken to a specialist unit at the circuit for evaluation before undergoing coronavirus tests and being put into quarantine at their hotels in Melbourne.

1800

AUTOGRAPH SESSIONS AND SELFIES CANNED

In a bid to minimise the risk of transmission of the virus to drivers, race organisers announce that they are scrapping all official autograph sessions over the Australian Grand Prix weekend. Furthermore, any close interaction with drivers – including selfies – is being discouraged in a bid to keep drivers safe. Daniel Ricciardo and Esteban Ocon are pulled from a Renault press conference because of the risks.

THURSDAY 12 MARCH

1000

TELEVISION SCRUMS SCRAPPED

Following agreement among teams and as a further measure to protect drivers, F1's traditional television scrums are banned for the Melbourne weekend. Extra precautions are also taken with written media, as extra barriers are put up and exclusion zones are imposed around drivers for briefings with journalists.

1200

TWO MORE HAAS PERSONNEL TESTED

Concerns about the coronavirus situation getting worse in the paddock are highlighted when Haas confirms that two more of its personnel have been put into self-isolation after showing symptoms. F1 is on tenterhooks waiting for the test results from them and the other personnel as the paddock seeks some clarity about the situation.

1600

HAMILTON 'SHOCKED' F1 IS HAPPENING

With F1 clearly on edge over the developing situation, Lewis Hamilton goes public in saying what most team members are thinking. Asked by Autosport if he feels comfortable being at the Australian GP, he says he is "surprised" and "shocked" that the F1 season opener is going ahead amid the coronavirus situation. Sebastian Vettel backs him up by saying F1 drivers could 'pull the handbrake' on the event if matters get worse.

1800

RUMOURS OF MORE CASES

Amid increasing speculation about how the situation is developing inside the paddock, there is talk that more team personnel plus a local photographer have now also been put in self-isolation after displaying coronavirus symptoms. Questions are also starting to be asked about how long the test results from the original three F1 personnel are taking.

By the time the official cancellation announcement came through, the paddock pack-up was in full swing. McLaren team principal Andreas Seidl later revealed that other squads had "offered immediate help on Friday to dismantle the garage and pack the freight, which was obviously a challenge for us missing 14 of our core guys". He added: "This is the spirit of F1 and racing we all embrace."

Sources began revealing the details from what had been talked about at the meeting the previous night, where the rest of the 2020 season had also been discussed. Rumours flew and speculation mounted. Despite the seriousness of the situation, the unfolding events fizzed for the media on the ground.

At 11.45am – 15 minutes later than apparently planned – Carey, AGPC chairman Paul Little and CEO Andrew Westacott, plus FIA race director Michael Masi addressed the media. The event was packed, with dedicated F1 press from around the world and local Melbourne and Australian publications crammed in together. »



Carey insisted he made the right decisions

TEE

Jonathan Noble

FRIDAY 13 MARCH

2200
McLAREN WITHDRAWS FROM RACE

McLaren drops a bombshell when it announces it is withdrawing from the Australian GP because the staff member tested earlier in the week is confirmed as having coronavirus. The Woking-based team says its duty of care to its own personnel and the rest of the paddock means it has no choice but to pull out.

0100
TEAM PRINCIPALS' MEETING

F1 team principals are called to an emergency meeting with Ross Brawn to discuss the next steps and whether or not the GP should go ahead. FIA president Jean Todt joins the meeting via telephone. With McLaren already out of the event, it is agreed that the sport's bosses will abide by what the majority of teams want to do. Haas and Williams abstain on a vote about whether or not to continue. Ferrari, Alfa Romeo and Renault make clear they won't carry on. But Mercedes, Red Bull, AlphaTauri and Racing Point say they want to push on for Friday at least, meaning that F1 agrees to keep the event on.

0200
WOLFF CHANGES VOTE

Shortly after the meeting, Mercedes boss Toto Wolff receives a call from Daimler CEO Ola Kallenius, and they discuss the situation. Wolff is made aware of the deteriorating situation in Europe but is left to decide for himself what he should do. In the end, he decides Mercedes needs to withdraw from the race too, so phones Brawn and the other teams to let them know. There are now enough team withdrawals to allow the FIA to cancel the event as less than 12 cars will be entered.

0800
AUSTRALIA PUSHES ON WITH RACE

Despite the decision of teams to cancel the race, there is still no official word from FOM nor the FIA. A statement from the Australian GP organisers claims that the event will carry on, even if the F1 cars do not run. Spectators begin arriving at the track. Word also emerges that some drivers – including Kimi Raikkonen and Sebastian Vettel – have flown out of Australia.

0900
F1 INFORMS GP ORGANISERS OF PLAN TO SCRAP RACE

F1 informs the Australian GP organisers of its intention to cancel the event, as a number of teams write letters to the FIA stating that they are withdrawing from the race. Local health officials also declare a change of advice in that spectators will now be banned from the track, effectively sealing the fate of the GP. Shortly afterwards, a joint statement confirms that the 2020 Australian GP has been cancelled.

1145
CAREY AND WESTACOTT PRESS CONFERENCE

Australian GP boss Andrew Westacott and F1 CEO Chase Carey hold a joint press conference outside the paddock to discuss the cancellation of the race. Carey insists that F1 made the "right decisions" in pushing on with the race and cancelling it when it did, while an emotional Westacott expresses his sympathy for fans, workers and officials whose weekends have been ruined. Teams pack up and get ready to leave Australia.

MAUGER

After opening statements, questions were taken. Carey insisted that F1 had "made the right decisions" in what was a "very fluid situation", while Westacott emotionally referenced the "element of sadness and disappointment that [we] have for the 600 suppliers, the 12,000 staff that work the event on the weekend, the 180 staff that we have [at the AGPC]." Westacott also stressed that when it came to the possibility of F1 personnel being put in danger by the decision not to cancel the race earlier, there was "no suggestion of that whatsoever".

Walking away from the press conference, there was no answer to questions regarding the Bahrain and Vietnam races, which were set to take place one and three weeks respectively after the Australian event. All Carey had to say on the matter was: "At this point our focus really is dealing with the issues this weekend — clearly, I just came in from Vietnam, so we are in discussion with partners on the upcoming races". But by this stage the cancellation of those race dates was expected imminently, and indeed confirmation that Bahrain and Vietnam were off was sent out on Friday night in Melbourne.

"Formula 1 and the FIA continue to work closely with the race promoters in Bahrain and Vietnam and the local authorities to monitor the situation and take the appropriate amount of time to study the viability of potential alternative dates for each Grand Prix later in the year should the situation improve," read an F1 statement.

"As a result, Formula 1 and the FIA expect to begin the championship in Europe at the end of May but, given the sharp increase in COVID-19 cases in Europe in recent days, this will be regularly reviewed."

And so, the question of what happens next for F1 2020 is a big one. F1 and the FIA are not to blame for the massive uncertainty surrounding the next phases of the coronavirus outbreak. But the message that the F1 season will not begin until the end of May threatens the expected race dates for the Dutch, Spanish and Monaco GPs.

As a result, there is now a suggestion that — assuming the pandemic eases or is downgraded — that a shortened season will get underway in Azerbaijan, on what would be its existing 7 June slot. Brawn has indicated that abandoning F1's traditional summer break would allow it to put back some of the postponed races in a logical order around the existing European mid-season. So, the possible calendar would run as already issued from Baku to the Hungaroring, with Zandvoort's return slotting into August. China, Vietnam and Bahrain could yet come back at the end of the year, following a path from Brazil to Abu Dhabi. But Australia, Spain and Monaco would likely be abandoned for 2020 in this hypothetical situation.

In the case of Melbourne and Monaco, the urban nature of the races mean they cannot be easily moved, and in the Australian race's case it would be costly to return all of the infrastructure to Albert Park, with Westacott explaining "we can't be leaving it here for days and weeks". In Spain, the tough financial circumstances at the Barcelona circuit are believed to be an additional concern.



Wolff's call to change Mercedes vote crucial in tipping the balance

STALEY

The future of F1 2020 is one massive question but, in comparison to the situation facing humanity, it is a relatively small one. If the developing coronavirus saga means more cancellations, then — surely — so be it.

But there are also a number of smaller questions still outstanding from the Melbourne proceedings at the time of writing.

One of the many fascinating political and human stories to emerge from this whole sorry situation was the news that three teams were willing to continue with Friday's practice sessions unless more F1 team personnel tested positive that day. It would certainly be of use if they could provide full explanations for this. Not for anything in the way of recrimination, but just because it would be most intriguing to hear what their individual thought processes were at the time. The same is true of the squads that were clear from the start of the meeting on Thursday night that they would not be taking any further part in the event.

"Saying nothing or acknowledging you don't have the answer is better than saying the wrong thing"

It would also be useful to know why the AGPC issued its statement saying the event was still going ahead as planned, as this surely contributed to at least *some* fans turning up in Albert Park, where they were eventually effectively locked out once Victoria government health officials had decreed that the event would be closed to spectators.

There must have been a reason why this statement was issued, even if it was as simple as the bureaucracy stemming from the F1/FIA/teams meeting meant there was a delay in information reaching the AGPC. But it would be good if the race organiser — which did do sterling work in many areas throughout this week, it must be said — could explain this in full. Transparency, from everyone involved in last week's event, is of great importance.

Before we get to the final conclusions from what was a difficult and dramatic week in Australia, let's also take time to consider the actions that can be applauded.

First, McLaren's decisive action to withdraw from the race as soon as the positive test was confirmed. The 14 additional personnel in quarantine are "being supported by senior team personnel, who will stay behind with them during the quarantine period", per a McLaren statement, and this is another reason for respect to be given to the squad. It has since been confirmed that McLaren racing director Andrea Stella is one of the senior managers still in Australia to support the quarantined staff.

As Luke Smith explains opposite, Lewis Hamilton received much praise, deservedly so, for his strong words in response to a question from Autosport — the six-time champion saying that it was "shocking" that the event had got as far as it did. Kimi Raikkonen also questioned the situation. And while not all drivers could or would do the same, let's not judge them too harshly. In a situation as severe as the one currently gripping the world, saying nothing or acknowledging you don't have the answer is surely better than saying the wrong thing.

Ultimately, given what was already happening before the F1 paddock travelled to Australia, it appears as if the championship really hoped it would be able to at least hold the first race. "The situation today [when the race was formally cancelled] is different than it was two days ago, which is different than it was four days ago," said Carey. "So trying to look out and make those sorts of predictions when it's changing this quickly is challenging."

It is indeed extremely challenging, which is surely why the better »



Hamilton voiced his shock that the teams were even in Melbourne

Hamilton makes his stand

The Formula 1 paddock convened for the first media duties of 2020 under a cloud on Thursday in Melbourne as three paddock personnel awaited results for coronavirus tests. But as the paddock came together, frequently sanitising hands and surfaces, the message from the drivers was clear: if there's a race, we'll race.

Coronavirus was the only logical starting point for every media session, but most offered a similar response to questions. Charles Leclerc, Max Verstappen, Sebastian Vettel and Daniel Ricciardo all said they had to "trust the FIA" on a call about their safety. "I'm here to compete and race cars," added Ricciardo. "I'm not really much more than that in this situation."

But just moments before Ricciardo's comment, F1's most visible and vocal star had proved that the drivers could be so much more than that – that they *can* have a view reaching beyond racing.

Lewis Hamilton again proved himself to be – publicly at least – more in touch with the world outside F1 than his peers, recognising the magnitude of the situation.

"I am really very surprised that we're here," Hamilton said. "I think it's great that we have races, but for me it's shocking that we're all sitting in this room."

Asked why F1 had got so far down the line in allowing 1500 people to fly to the other side of the world to attempt to have a race, Hamilton dryly replied: "Cash is king."

Hamilton has been F1's moral leader for some time now. He was notably outspoken about environmental matters last year, pleading with fans to make changes in their lives. He wears his heart on his sleeve – and is unapologetic for doing so.

"I don't feel like I should shy away from the fact of my opinion," he added. "I was walking through and seeing just everything going ahead as normal, like it's a normal day – but I really don't think it is."

"I was seeing everything going ahead as normal, like it's a normal day – but I really don't think it is"

His assessment rang true when, six hours later, the positive test returned, setting the wheels in motion for the cancellation of the race and a likely delay of the season opener until June. It was an extraordinary 24 hours.

The closest any other driver came to calling out the decision to race was Kimi Raikkonen, saying: "I don't know if it's the right thing that we are here… probably not. But it's not up to us, it's not our decision. I think if it would be purely all the teams' decision we probably wouldn't be here."

As per a leaked Emirates passenger list, Raikkonen and former Ferrari team-mate Vettel were both on a flight early on Friday morning prior to the official cancellation of the race.

On a chaotic weekend where few were willing to take a proper stance, Hamilton refused to toe the party line. He had the courage to say what so many were thinking, but few properly did.

It was another reminder that once Hamilton's glittering F1 career comes to a close, the paddock will be a poorer place.

LUKE SMITH



Banning spectators from the track effectively sealed the race's fate

solution would have been to follow what so many other sporting bodies – including MotoGP and Formula E – had done and cancelled or postponed events at a much earlier stage.

At least 1500 people have paddock passes for each GP, and very few of them surely needed to be in Melbourne during the developing coronavirus saga. Yes, the situation felt – and certainly was – different the previous weekend when most paddock personnel travelled, or had travelled, to Australia. There should rightly be a lot of soul-searching in the coming days and weeks. Especially if, and this is only speculation and not guaranteed, there is a spike in coronavirus cases in Melbourne once the F1 circus has left town.

By not making the call to abandon the race days or even weeks ago, F1 surely made a major misstep. Of course, huge amounts of money and prestige were on the line, but these things utterly pale into insignificance when compared with critical public healthcare situations. There is a real chance that history will judge the events

that happened last week very harshly. Equally, it may be judged as an overreaction, but such things are ultimately a circle of results. You can't have a judgement without an action or inaction.

Clear leadership and responsibility was needed and it just wasn't forthcoming. No matter how you look at it, this was not a good series of events for F1.

The right decision was ultimately taken, but it came far too late. At least when it comes to the Bahrain and Vietnam races there is no need to wonder about what will happen in the coming weeks.

Sport is a luxury in the face of a pandemic, but in regular times it serves to be a wonderful distraction from the challenges of life. The coronavirus saga has indeed punctured F1 2020, but there is hope that it can be patched and reinflated at some stage.

For now, though, let's focus on the truly important things – enduring a difficult and dangerous situation as best we can, and learning the lessons of past mistakes to improve. That is, after all, one of humanity's greatest enduring strengths.



Fans turned up more in hope than expectation

SUTTON



MAUGER



When America realised it's only a sport

Motorsport types like to shut out the outside world. But when state governors begin to get involved, there's not a lot they can do. This is how the coronavirus scuppered IndyCar

DAVID MALSHER-LOPEZ

PHOTOGRAPHY motorsport IMAGES

Last Friday, not long after 1130 local time and around 15 minutes earlier than scheduled, the red-chequered flags ended the SRO GT4 Americas practice session around the 1.8-mile road/runway course in St Petersburg, Florida. Radios crackled bearing ominous news; cars trickled into the pits, drivers bemused; and the cars for the next session, sitting on a dummy grid ready to hit the track, were instead sent back to the paddock. It was all over.

On reflection, maybe it's surprising that even five practice sessions — for USF2000, Indy Pro 2000, IMSA Porsche GT3, Indy Lights and finally that abbreviated GT4 session — had run before the day's action dribbled to a standstill. Barely five minutes later, IndyCar confirmed that not only had the Firestone Grand Prix of St Petersburg (along with its support races, naturally) been cancelled, but so too were the next three rounds, set for April at Barber Motorsports Park, the streets of Long Beach and the Circuit of The Americas. Finally, the coronavirus pandemic had caught the US motorsport scene with a devastating uppercut.

Some reeled at the news, but those with a more acute sense of the inevitable had already seen the blow coming, for there had been several 'uh-oh' moments over the previous 24 hours. McLaren had withdrawn from the Formula 1 season opener in Melbourne when a team member tested positive for COVID-19, throwing the whole Australian GP into jeopardy and ultimately leading to its cancellation. And while, that same day, St Petersburg mayor Rick Kriseman and race promoters Kevin Savoree and Kim Green had proclaimed the 17th edition of the IndyCar race there would go ahead as per schedule, that night even the mighty NBA announced its 2019-20 season would be suspended indefinitely. On Thursday, about 90 minutes after NASCAR declared that its Atlanta (15 March) and Homestead (22 March) races were to be run behind closed doors, IndyCar had made the same decision regarding St Petersburg.



Graham Rahal, who scored his first IndyCar win at St Pete 12 years ago, said: "Right now we all need to be cautious and be aware of what we're doing, so in consideration of that I think it's best that there aren't fans here this weekend. I know I'm really disappointed in that, I know a lot of the other drivers and teams will be too, because we all thrive off the fan involvement and obviously we're not going to have that.

"At the same time, I think it is the right decision for us to race. We're different from other motorsports that are happening this weekend; this is a temporary street course. There's been a lot of effort to build this track and for the city — I'm sure for Mayor Kriseman, it's a hard time for him. There's too much gone into this to not see it through, in my opinion. We can't postpone these events — the track's been built. If we postpone, it's cancelled..."

You could see Rahal's point, but still this closed-door policy didn't seem feasible somehow. It's one thing to shut the gates at an oval or a natural road course, and for the organisers to accept the financial gut punch of zero fan turnout and no vendors on site, but how on earth could that work on a street course? Sure, banning spectators would heavily reduce the virus risk to the drivers and others inside the paddock, but the fans — and St Pete is one of the more popular stops on the IndyCar schedule — would just find other vantage points from where they could watch the race. Which of course meant they would be congregating in large groups — specifically what America's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) was advising the population to avoid during a viral pandemic. There was the small matter of ethics too. What kind of series has the temerity to inconvenience a city's population by shutting off various avenues, streets and boulevards and then forbids them to watch? It would be like hosting a huge party in your neighbour's backyard and then locking him out.

The same thought had struck Jim Michaelian, president and CEO of the Grand Prix Association of Long Beach, on Wednesday night when California governor Gavin Newsom backed the state's Department of Public Health in recommending the cancellation of any gatherings of 250 or more people, or any gatherings in venues too small to allow at least six feet of space between individuals. "We're aware of the statement the governor made last night," Michaelian told the *LA Times*, "and we're in discussions with the officials here in the city, and also with our various partners in the grand prix to see what our options are. We'll be making a decision with regard to the Grand Prix in the near future... The situation is very fluid and we're exploring the various options that are available to us under some rather challenging circumstances."

Some 2500 miles east, the optimists in St Petersburg kept the faith into Friday

"There's nothing else for race fans to watch – and now we've even locked out the local ones!"

morning, and it seemed as if North America would become the focus of attention for motorsport fans of a catholic taste — NASCAR at Atlanta Motor Speedway, IndyCar in St Petersburg, and the World Rally Championship in Mexico... "If IndyCar can't get decent TV figures this weekend, we're really in the shit," said one senior figure, half-seriously. "There's nothing else for race fans to watch — and now we've even locked out the local ones!"

In order to keep paddock numbers to a bare minimum, a new heavily revised and condensed schedule was devised, whereby the support series would compete on Friday, when the IndyCar crews wouldn't even be allowed into the track, while Saturday and Sunday were for IndyCar. That seemed sensibly strict, as were the screenings and questionnaires that needed to be completed before entering the paddock. And so when the engines fired for the opening USF2000 session, and as series after series hit the track, all seemed well... »



Postponed Sebring 12 Hours will now round out the IMSA calendar

LE PAGE

Then came the newsflash: NASCAR was shutting down and pulling out of Atlanta, and wouldn't be venturing to Homestead the following week. Seemingly seconds later, IndyCar had canned its first four races. It put you in mind of that great line from John Cleese in the movie *Clockwise*, when seemingly everything that could have gone wrong has gone wrong, every glimmer of positivity extinguished. "It's not the despair," he groans, "I can stand the despair. It's the *hope*."

Team Penske president Tim Cindric summed it up neatly and forlornly on Twitter. "For some reason, I've always looked forward to Friday the 13th. Today the myth became somewhat of a reality for the racing world. Hoping everyone does their part to get this under control so we can all get back to doing what we love."

IMSA, like IndyCar, had to go through a backtracking process. On Wednesday, it announced that the Sebring 12 Hours (set for this coming Saturday) was still on, but later that night learned that the World Endurance Championship race to be held as the other half of 'SuperSebring' week had effectively been kyboshed by US-imposed travel restrictions from 26 countries. Sure enough, come Thursday, IMSA announced the legendary 12-hour race had been postponed until November, to serve as the season closer.

Without wishing to drag politics into it, there can be little dispute that the United States — or the people with the power to make a difference — initially reacted too late and too mildly to COVID-19, failing to appreciate the speed at which it could spread and the need for 'social distancing'. This out-of-touch outlook was reflected by the motorsport community, which, let's be honest, all around the globe can often be perceived as living in its own little bubble.

Through February, as the virulence of the virus became apparent to those with a more worldly view, you can only imagine the majority of US motorsport participants preferred to watch national news channels that focused instead on trying to tear apart the contenders in the race for Democratic leadership heading into this November's election.

The week before, while many within the Formula 1 community were questioning the wisdom of transporting 1500 people halfway around the world for the Australian GP in the midst of a growing epidemic (as it was then), there was a somewhat head-in-the-sand attitude from some authority figures within — and associated with — IndyCar. From the outside, you get the impression that F1's decision-makers thought that trying to hold the Australian Grand Prix was worth the risk. In IndyCar, it felt there was an underestimation of the risk, and that 'actively monitoring the situation' and introducing more hand-sanitising stations would stave off the threat



LEVITT

L-r: Roger Penske, Chip Ganassi and IndyCar CEO Mark Miles



There's a desire for Long Beach to return if the Olympics are canned

"I honestly don't think we as a nation woke up soon enough to the coronavirus threat"

of shutdown races and scared-off fans.

Despite the city of Austin, Texas, cancelling the huge SXSW music and tech festival, the BNP Paribas tennis tournament in Palm Springs, California getting canned, and Bahrain declaring its F1 GP would be held behind closed doors, as late as Sunday 8 March IndyCar CEO Mark Miles was telling Autosport: "At this point our expectation is that all of our events will go ahead as originally scheduled and as planned — to include fans on site... Thus far we are in very frequent contact with all our promoters with events through May and all expect that their events will not be significantly impacted."

This Monday, Autosport spoke to a politician who didn't wish to be named, recapped this false optimism/obliviousness/underestimation — delete as you see fit — as seen through this author's eyes, and asked if he thought motorsport event organisers and series leaders should have been more aware. "Yeah, of course they should — but shouldn't we all?" he replied. "I honestly don't think we as a nation woke up soon enough to the coronavirus threat and its potential effects. But I think also what caught out a lot of organisations, like sports governing bodies, was how quick city mayors and state governors and so on can get new rules passed and in place when they put their minds to it and see that it's urgent. And then when one or two get it done, you see the domino effect: suddenly they all wanna do it so they're not the ones who are getting called out as irresponsible by keeping schools open or letting big crowds get together at a convention centre or a festival or whatever."

What's next? Well, the CDC has issued a recommendation that for the next eight weeks no groups of more than 50 people should gather, and should this advice be heeded — and surely it will — that will postpone IndyCar's fifth round, the Grand Prix of Indianapolis, IMSA's trip to Mid-Ohio and six NASCAR Cup rounds. IndyCar and IMS sound committed to running the 500 on Memorial Day Weekend, as scheduled, and Detroit GP organisers are ploughing on in preparation for their double-header the following week.

Should the Olympics be cancelled or postponed, the four-week gap that IndyCar left in its schedule this summer (last two weeks of July and first two weeks of August) to allow TV partner NBC to cover the action from Tokyo would be a tempting place to slot postponed events, and Miles confirmed to Autosport that holding double-headers to rebulk the championship was under consideration. One of those races could be IndyCar's second biggest event of the year, the Grand Prix of Long Beach, if Jim Michaelian has his way. Despite inevitably requiring *a lot* of cooperation from the city and local businesses, he believes there's a chance of rescheduling the 46th edition of America's greatest street race this year.

"We are continuing conversation with IndyCar and IMSA to see if we can reschedule the Acura Grand Prix for later this year," he told Autosport on Monday morning. "Not an easy task coordinating all of the various elements together again, but we're giving it our best effort. Barring that, we will notify all our spectators and clients that the 2021 Acura Grand Prix of Long Beach will be here next 16-18 April. We're very disappointed that we were not able to conduct the 2020 race in April because it was looking like it was going to be another fabulous weekend in Long Beach. But everyone's safety and wellbeing were foremost in our minds and so the steps we took were the right thing to do."

However much we adore our sport, there are surely few who would dispute such reasoning. It seems everyone in US racing has now been forced to look beyond his or her traditional field of vision and acknowledge that, at the end of the day, it *is* only a sport.

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UNHAPPY OGIER MOVES TO THE FRONT IN MEXICO

He didn't want to be there, but the Toyota star still delivered — and took the lead in the world championship race

NICK GARTON

PHOTOGRAPHY **McKLEIN**



Ogier never wanted the rally to take place, but was happy with his performance and the points it brought

With two hard-fought rounds under its collective belt and the balance of power teetering between Toyota and Hyundai, the World Rally Championship field decamped to the sunshine and its annual dose of Mexican fervour. By the time they left Central America, Sebastien Ogier had claimed his first win in a Yaris WRC and propelled himself to the top of the table. But he was unhappy that the event had taken place at all, and how long it will be for any rallies take place to put his leading position under threat is anyone's guess.

The teams arrived having done what they could to prepare for their first all-gravel event of the season, with Hyundai dispatching Dani Sordo and Ott Tanak to Portugal for an outing on the Rally Serras de Fafe, and M-Sport taking in an extensive test in Spain. In addition to their dusty mileage, Malcolm Wilson's team called upon Ford's technical muscle to simulate the Mexican running conditions in a climatic chamber.

Before the start, Toyota's championship leader Elfyn Evans was busy tipping illustrious team-mate Ogier to take his first win for the squad, the self-effacing Brit quite happy to admit that his own victory odds were considerably longer. His status atop the points table would oblige him to run first and sweep the long gravel stages on the opening day of the competition, handing buckets of time to those further back. "Seb is a six-time world champion for a reason and he's always famously strong in Mexico," Evans said. "In my mind there's no doubt, it'll be business as usual for him this week."

Equal with Evans on points, and running a similarly unfavourable second on the road, Hyundai's Thierry Neuville had a different pick for victory: he was backing team-mate Dani Sordo. "Our target here is to be ahead of Ogier — and Elfyn, of course!" he said cheerfully. "But we also know that if Dani has a trouble-free run, then even being sixth on the road I think there is no chance to hold him."

Such a victory would no doubt have been popular with Sordo's substantial Mexican fan base, but on the third stage, the vertiginous climb of El Chocolate, an incorrectly fitted radiator hose came off, prompting a five-minute repair stop. "I don't know if I feel frustrated or sad," said the Spaniard. "I don't have any feeling... We can be faster but it is pointless. We fight for nothing."

In the end, Sordo did fight back, setting the fastest time through SS5 at Las Minas. On his second run through El Chocolate, however, his Hyundai's engine succumbed to the injuries incurred while running with no water earlier in the day — rally over.

With one of the pre-event favourites down, it was time for the other to come into his own and, when the moment arrived, Ogier predictably delivered a captain's innings. In the lead-up to Mexico, considerable clickbait had been generated about 2020 being Ogier's worst start to a season — overlooking the fact that second and »

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fourth in two starts with a new team is a record that most drivers would be more than happy with. Arriving in Leon, he was only troubled by the threat that he feared the WRC's presence posed to Mexico's hitherto successful containment of the coronavirus. He was distracted through shakedown and the opening spectator stages in Guanajuato city centre, but pledged to get his head straight once the rally set off for the hills at the start of day two.

And so it was. Ogier was right on the pace through El Chocolate, then assumed the lead on the next stage after reigning champion Ott Tanak, mounting a charge, went off and damaged his Hyundai.

Ogier's progress through the stages was a vision of cool, calm efficiency. Not that he was entirely happy, with much grumbling being focused upon the obstacle course that was apparently being laid out for him. "The guys in front put some big, nice rocks in the road!" he said after the first run through Las Minas.

Adding insult to injury, as the field came down into the valley for a spectator-pleasing blast through Parque Bicentario, ostensibly an



Tanak never found the confidence to push hard so opted to stay out of trouble



Neuville was fastest in street stage that kicked off the event

asphalt stage, he found the same treatment being meted out. "Even on this stage they managed to put rocks on the road!" he said.

Playing the part of Dick Dastardly with some relish was Neuville. With both of his Hyundai team-mates hitting trouble, the Belgian was going all-out to overcome his road position and put himself in with a chance to challenge for the win — using as much of the surrounding scenery as possible to aid his cause. "Obviously I tried very hard, to be honest," he said. "Maybe I am missing a bit of the rear wing. Now we need a new windscreen."

Neuville had beaten the rest of the field in the 910-metre dash through the streets of Guanajuato on Thursday night and was keeping Ogier in his sights through most of the first full day, despite a dog running out in front of his car. Then came SS9 late on Friday afternoon when suddenly the Hyundai pulled up. The bonnet was opened to reveal an electrical fault and a puff of smoke that carried Neuville's hopes of victory off down the hillside. Thus the road in front of Ogier opened up both physically and metaphorically.

After all the dramas of the day, second place was held by the fastest of the M-Sport Ford Fiestas, and on this rally it was Teemu Suninen who stepped up to the plate. Admittedly, the Finn was desperate to deliver in Mexico after two decidedly sub-par outings in Monte Carlo and Sweden, but he came through in Mexico with flying colours. "Of course when the team boss asked me to do proper results there was no other option," he said. "Luckily it ends up well!"

Suninen's speed brought some much-needed cheer to the M-Sport squad after team-mate Esapekka Lappi ended the second run through El Chocolate with the back of his car wreathed in flames. Neither the attendant marshals nor co-driver Janne Ferm could make much impression with their extinguishers; and then Lappi, for reasons even he could not explain, jumped into the car and drove off. A few hundred metres down the road, with the Fiesta looking like it had emerged from a Jason Bourne movie, he leaped out and sat forlornly in the road watching a very expensive rally car go up in smoke. »

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Suninen was spurred on by the need to deliver for M-Sport – third place was their reward

Team principal Richard Millener could not contain his woe at the spectacle. "It's the worst thing that can happen to any team, especially this team," he said. "Our insurance arrangements are going to mean a total loss, unfortunately. It will be the first time since 2015 that we have completely lost a car, but at least back then we knew we would be out again earning money very soon. In the current world situation, we can't say when that will be."

Saturday dawned with a new road order in which Neuville, restarting under Rally 2 rules, was forced into Cinderella's apron in order to sweep the stages from first place on the road. On the day's first timed run through Guanajuatito, his best efforts were muffled by the gravel to the tune of 25.4 seconds when compared to the stage-winning pace of Ogier's Toyota. At that point Neuville managed to lose just over two minutes due to an unspecified technical issue on the road section, which was later ascribed to a recurrence of his electrical fault from the previous day. This 'misfortune' resulted in his Hyundai being obliged to drop back and start fourth on the road at the start of the next stage, Alfaro, which Neuville duly won from team-mate Tanak.

Many were they who questioned whether this had been a mechanical affliction or rather a case of Hyundai loading the deck against the Toyotas. Neuville's response to enquiries was a rakish smile before lighting up the sector times on the third stage of the day. Leaving no margin for error, this was indeed spectacular stuff and a second straight stage win beckoned – right up to the point where he slid off down a handily placed access path. The incident cost around 10s, but even this was considerably less than what might have been lost by starting first on the road.



M-Sport crew survey the damage to Lappi's burned-out Fiesta

Neuville's running-order reshuffle had meanwhile left the Toyotas of Evans and Kalle Rovanpera to flounder on considerably dirtier stages than they had been expecting, and both men watched their podium hopes ebb away into the dust.

The third man in this particular battle was Tanak who, with an infinitely cleaner road surface beneath him, began to pull clear of the Toyotas and take great bites out of Suninen's hold on second place. There was plenty of vigour being put into Tanak's performance at this point in the rally, and for good reason. Not only was the Estonian trying to get on terms with Suninen and Ogier, but also the gimlet eye of Hyundai team principal Andrea Adamo was getting its first opportunity to compare the speed of his two top men running in almost identical conditions.

Despite Neuville's slip-up on the third stage of the day, that result was 5-3 in the Belgian's favour in the internecine standings of the Alzenau team. You can be sure that this will not be the last time such comparisons are made.

"It's been a very demanding weekend," Tanak said afterwards. "I would say I never felt fully confident to really go and push in the stages, so I really tried to approach kind of, let's say, in a more nice way or just stay away from trouble."

Suninen put up fierce resistance to the world champion's advance through much of the afternoon, surrendering only tenths until the Hyundai driver finally gained a few seconds on the second pass through Derramadero. Tanak had a 28s deficit to the lead, but by then the decision had already been announced to cancel the final day's running and any faint hopes of victory were snuffed out.

Ogier duly cruised through to collect a record-equalling sixth win in Mexico, tying with his old nemesis Sebastien Loeb and gaining an eight-point lead over Evans at the top of the 2020 points table.

Nevertheless, Ogier's first win in a Toyota was something of a bittersweet moment. "It's definitely a strange victory for me this weekend," said the victor. "I did not want to race basically and I've been convinced to do it and I've done my job, but for me protecting human life should go first and I hope we didn't bring any harm here to our friends in Mexico.

"I think we've done a good race, we've done two good days without any mistakes, pushed when we needed and tried to control the race up to the end. Mexico remains a big challenge every time and it's still some good points for the championship."

POWERED BY motorsport STATS

IN THE HEADLINES

SALUD SALUTE
Thierry Neuville's donation of €10,000 to a local charity or association at each round of this year's WRC went to Rally de la Salud, a group that provides free medical care to those in need within the rural Guanajuato community.

BUSY BOSSES
Neither of the two drivers-turned-principals were in Mexico – Malcolm Wilson (M-Sport) was on duty at home for his eponymous rally and Tommi Makinen (Toyota) had prior commitments.

KEEPING A DISTANCE
All non-essential contact was minimised in Mexico, with Sebastien Ogier turning down selfies and autographs. "I was trying my best to respect what everyone is trying to do at the moment," he said.

GUS'S UPS AND DOWNS
Gus Greensmith had the most eventful run, including a brief inversion and a three-point turn in the middle of Friday's Leon city stage, but raised a smile in the end. "It's been all right in some places and not all right in others," he said.

DOG'S LUCKY ESCAPE
The dog that ran into the path of Thierry Neuville's Hyundai on SS8 was very fortunate – footage on the Belgian's Facebook fan page revealed the pooch just brushed the rear wheelarch with its tail!

SURPRISE VICTOR
WRC 2 winner Pontus Tidemand was an unexpected entry in Mexico. The Swede's largely unsponsored Skoda Fabia R5 Evo underlined why events are being planned on a round-by-round basis.

BOLIVIAN'S WIN
Bolivian youngster Marco Bulacia Wilkinson took WRC 3 victory in his Citroen C3 R5 after pacesetter Oliver Solberg knocked the sump off his VW Polo GTI.

RESULTS ROUND 3/13, RALLY MEXICO, 12-14 MARCH

POS	DRIVER / CO-DRIVER	TEAM / CAR	TIME
1	**Sebastien Ogier** (FRA) **Julien Ingrassia** (FRA)	Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT / Toyota Yaris WRC	2h47m47.6s
2	**Ott Tanak** (EST) **Martin Jarveoja** (EST)	Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT / Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC	+27.8s
3	**Teemu Suninen** (FIN) **Jarmo Lehtinen** (FIN)	M-Sport Ford WRT / Ford Fiesta WRC	+37.9s
4	**Elfyn Evans** (GBR) **Scott Martin** (GBR)	Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT / Toyota Yaris WRC	+1m13.4s
5	**Kalle Rovanpera** (FIN) **Jonne Halttunen** (FIN)	Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT / Toyota Yaris WRC	+2m20.5s
6	**Pontus Tidemand** (SWE) **Patrik Barth** (SWE)	Toksport WRT / Skoda Fabia R5 Evo	+10m29.3s
7	**Nikolay Gryazin** (RUS) **Yaroslav Fedorov** (RUS)	Hyundai Motorsport N / Hyundai i20 R5	+12m27.0s
8	**Marco Bulacia Wilkinson** (BOL) **Giovanni Bernacchini** (ITA)	Marco Bulacia Wilkinson / Citroen C3 R5	+13m37.5s
9	**Gus Greensmith** (GBR) **Elliott Edmondson** (GBR)	M-Sport Ford WRT / Ford Fiesta WRC	+13m56.5s
10	**Ole-Christian Veiby** (NOR) **Jonas Andersson** (SWE)	Hyundai Motorsport N / Hyundai i20 R5	+15m32.2s
OTHERS			
16	**Thierry Neuville** (BEL) **Nicolas Gilsoul** (BEL)	Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT / Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC	+42m38.1s
R	**Esapekka Lappi** (FIN) **Janne Ferm** (FIN)	M-Sport Ford WRT / Ford Fiesta WRC	SS8-fire
R	**Dani Sordo** (ESP) **Carlos del Barrio** (ESP)	Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT / Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC	SS7-overheating

STAGE TIMES

STAGE	FASTEST	LEADER	SECOND
SS1 **Monster Energy Street Stage GTO 1** (0.70 miles)	Neuville 59.1s	Neuville	Evans +0.4s
SS2 **Monster Energy Street Stage GTO 2** (0.70 miles)	Neuville 57.5s	Neuville	Evans +1.1s
SS3 **El Chocolate 1** (19.54 miles)	Tanak 23m34.6s	Tanak	Suninen +10.6s
SS4 **Ortega 1** (10.71 miles)	Ogier 9m29.1s	Ogier	Suninen +5.3s
SS5 **Las Minas 1** (8.51 miles)	Sordo 9m01.2s	Ogier	Suninen +7.8s
SS6 **Parque Bicentenario** (1.68 miles)	Neuville 2m30.3s	Ogier	Suninen +9.7s
SS7 **El Chocolate 2** (19.54 miles)	Tanak 23m16.2s	Ogier	Suninen +8.2s
SS8 **Ortega 2** (10.71 miles)	stage cancelled		
SS9 **Las Minas 2** (8.51 miles)	Tanak 8m53.5s	Ogier	Suninen +12.0s
SS10 **SSS Autodromo Shell V-Power 1** (1.45 miles)	Ogier 1m39.0s	Ogier	Suninen +13.0s
SS11 **SSS Autodromo Shell V-Power 2** (1.45 miles)	Ogier 1m37.4s	Ogier	Suninen +13.5s
SS12 **Street Stage Leon** (0.45 miles)	Rovanpera 45.7s	Ogier	Suninen +13.2s
SS13 **Guanajuatito 1** (15.51 miles)	Ogier 16m44.8s	Ogier	Suninen +22.9s
SS14 **Alfaro 1** (10.56 miles)	Neuville 10m39.5s	Ogier	Suninen +27.6s
SS15 **Derramadero 1** (13.53 miles)	Tanak 12m25.7s	Ogier	Suninen +28.3s
SS16 **Guanajuatito 2** (15.51 miles)	Neuville 16m36.0s	Ogier	Suninen +30.3s
SS17 **Alfaro 2** (10.56 miles)	Tanak 10m37.1s	Ogier	Suninen +28.1s
SS18 **Derramadero 2** (13.53 miles)	Tanak 12m19.0s	Ogier	Tanak +27.4s
SS19 **SSS Autodromo Shell V-Power 3** (1.45 miles)	Neuville 1m38.4s	Ogier	Tanak +27.0s
SS20 **SSS Autodromo Shell V-Power 4** (1.45 miles)	Neuville 1m37.1s	Ogier	Tanak +26.7s
SS21 **Rock & Rally Leon** (1.01 miles)	Neuville 1m38.6s	Ogier	Tanak +27.8s
SS22 **Otates** (20.88 miles)	stage cancelled		
SS23 **San Diego** (7.93 miles)	stage cancelled		
SS24 **El Brinco** (Powerstage) (5.99 miles)	stage cancelled		

DRIVERS' CHAMPIONSHIP **1 Ogier 62**; **2 Evans** 54; 3 **Neuville** 42; 4 **Rovanpera** 40; 5 **Tanak** 38; 6 **Suninen** 26; 7 **Lappi** 24; 8 **Tidemand** 8; 9 **Sebastien Loeb** 8; 10 **Takamoto Katsuta** 8.

MANUFACTURERS' CHAMPIONSHIP **1 Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT 110**; 2 **Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT** 89; 3 **M-Sport Ford WRT** 65

KLYNSMITH motorsport IMAGES

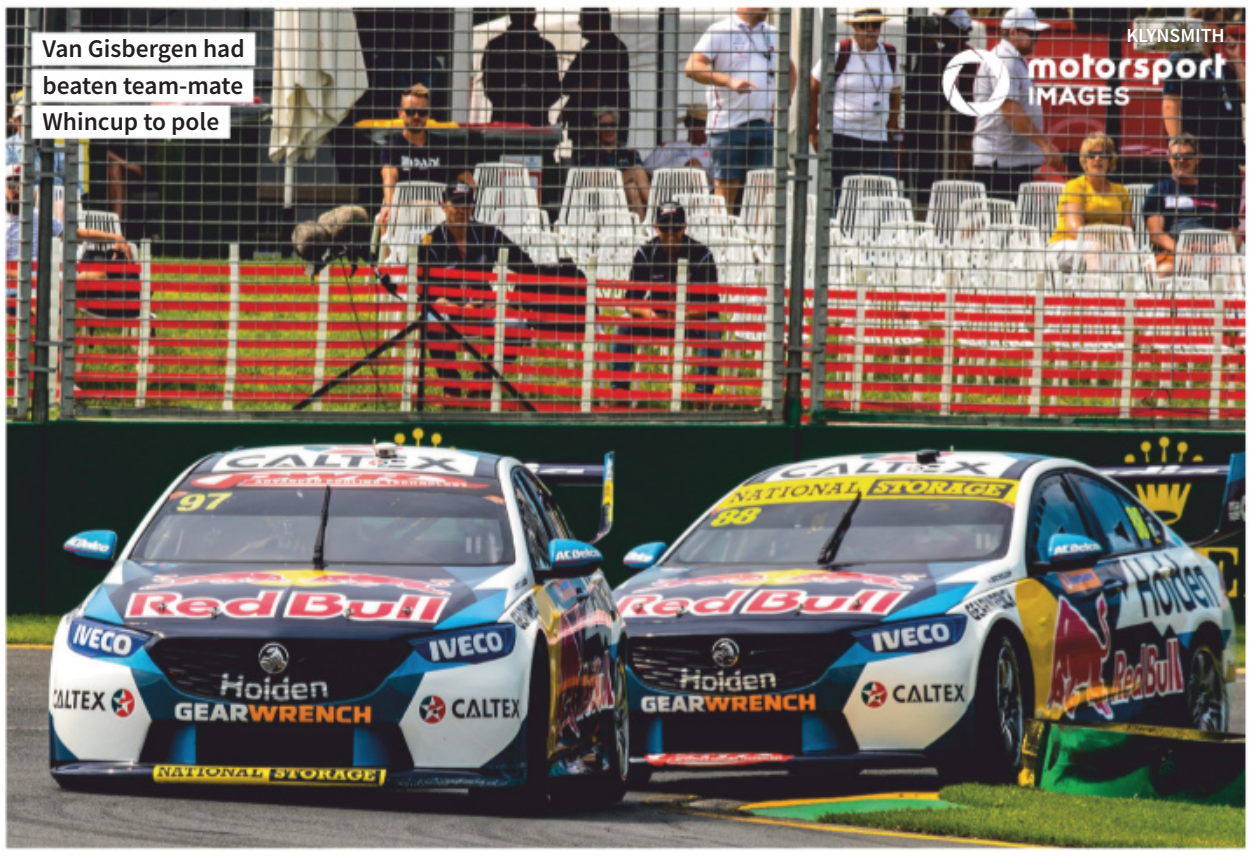
COVID-19 casts its cloud over Aussie GP supports

LAST FRIDAY'S CANCELLATION of the Australian Grand Prix was just the beginning of a bad weekend of breaking news for Supercars.

The Aussie series was caught in the middle of the 'will it, won't it?' saga following the positive coronavirus test in the Formula 1 paddock, with track action – including two qualifying sessions – having already been run on the Thursday.

Similarly, the grid had already been set for the star-studded S5000 race. James Golding was due on pole, with Jack Aitken sixth, Giancarlo Fisichella ninth and Rubens Barrichello bringing up the rear in 14th.

Adding to the confusion was the curious roll-out of information on the Friday morning. Even a few short hours before the third Supercars qualifying session at 1000, the communication from officials was that the event would go ahead. Things moved quickly from there, however. The scheduled start time for qualifying coincided with the official cancellation announcement – and by then the pack-up effort was well and truly under way.



Van Gisbergen had beaten team-mate Whincup to pole

While the cancellation itself cost Supercars four points-paying races, the bad news didn't stop there. By the Sunday, the next two rounds in Tasmania and New Zealand had been plunged into doubt by government rulings on both sides of the Tasman Sea.

On Friday afternoon, Australian prime minister Scott Morrison announced that, starting the following Monday, non-essential gatherings of over 500 people would no longer be allowed. Just like that, the chances of letting fans through the gate for the Symmons Plains round on the first weekend of April all but disappeared. Whether the event will even happen behind closed doors remains to be seen.

Then, around 24 hours later, things got worse again. New Zealand prime minister Jacinta Ardern announced the introduction of a 14-day quarantine period for anyone arriving from overseas – including Australia. Morrison followed suit with an identical mandate for Australia on Sunday.

Failing a rapid turnaround with the COVID-19 situation, that's set to rule out the category's first trip to Hampton Downs on the Anzac Day weekend in late April. The only good news is that the isolation rules didn't come into effect during the race weekend itself. Both the Auckland Warriors rugby league side and the Melbourne Victory football team found themselves on



Teams began to pack up prior to announcement of the cancellation

their respective wrong sides of the ditch...

As of Monday, neither of the next two Supercars rounds had formally been cancelled or postponed. The most up-to-date information from series officials was a statement acknowledging the potential need to make changes to the schedule.

"While discussions are currently taking place, Supercars has not made any decisions about upcoming events," it read. "We are continuing to monitor the situation and will comply with the latest government health advice as the coronavirus situation continues to evolve. Should we need to postpone an event, we are fully prepared to adapt our calendar to deliver a complete championship in 2020. The safety of our people and fans remains our priority. We will provide further event information when it becomes available."

If (and it's a big if) normal service can resume in time for the Perth SuperNight Barbagallo race in mid-May, the six-week winter break from mid-July to late-August could be used to stage any catch-up races required. Given that the Albert Park circuit is extremely unlikely to be rebuilt at any point this year, Phillip Island or Queensland Raceway could be given a reprieve as part of a reshuffle, after they initially missed out on a round for this season.

It's also feasible that both circuits return should it prove impossible to reschedule the Hampton Downs event in New Zealand.

ANDREW VAN LEEUWEN

The impact of COVID-19 on the 2020 calendar

FORMULA 1		
Australian Grand Prix	15 March	Cancelled
Bahrain Grand Prix	22 March	Postponed
Vietnam Grand Prix	5 April	Postponed
Chinese Grand Prix	19 April	Postponed
Dutch Grand Prix	3 May	Postponed

FORMULA E		
Sanya E-Prix	21 March	Cancelled
Rome E-Prix	4 April	Postponed
Paris E-Prix	18 April	Postponed
Seoul E-Prix	3 May	Postponed
Jakarta E-Prix	6 June	Postponed

WORLD ENDURANCE CHAMPIONSHIP		
Sebring 1000 Miles	20 March	Cancelled
Spa Six Hours	25 April	Cancelled

WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP		
Rally Mexico	12-15 March	Shortened
Rally Argentina	30 April-1 May	Postponed

INDYCAR		
St Petersburg	15 March	Cancelled
Alabama	5 April	Cancelled
Long Beach	19 April	Cancelled
Austin	26 April	Cancelled

NASCAR CUP		
Atlanta	15 March	Postponed
Homestead	22 March	Postponed

MOTOGP		
Qatar Grand Prix	8 March	Cancelled
Thai Grand Prix	22 March	Postponed
United States Grand Prix	5 April	Postponed
Argentinian Grand Prix	19 April	Postponed

AUSTRALIAN SUPERCARS		
Albert Park	13-15 March	Cancelled

SUPER FORMULA		
Suzuka	5 April	Postponed

WORLD TOURING CAR CUP		
Hungaroring	25-26 April	Cancelled

IMSA SPORTSCAR CHAMPIONSHIP		
Sebring 12 Hours	21 March	Postponed

EUROPEAN LE MANS SERIES		
Barcelona	5 April	Postponed
Monza	10 May	Postponed

GT WORLD CHALLENGE EUROPE		
Spa	19 April	Cancelled

DTM		
Pre-season Hockenheim test	16-19 March	Cancelled


CAS OIL
errea
sparco
LUCAS OIL

SEASON PREVIEW

GETTING BACK ON THE RAILS TO F1

Dropped by his team in Japan and by Red Bull, Dan Ticktum's single-seater career seemed to be over last summer. But now he's on the Formula 2 grid with the reigning champion team, and he's a new protege of Williams. How did that *happen?*

MARCUS SIMMONS

PHOTOGRAPHY motorsport IMAGES

DUNBAR

To describe someone as having 'a rollercoaster career' is a well-worn sporting cliche, but it doesn't do justice to Dan Ticktum. The highs – double Macau Grand Prix victory, Red Bull Formula 1 star-to-be, McLaren Autosport BRDC Award – take his rollercoaster above the clouds. Yet the lows plunge it off the rails completely and close down the whole amusement park for months of repairs, before those with faith in this enormous talent help send him back towards the next peak.

To compound this, he can be an outspoken chap. Old bores with gammon-tinted spectacles uphold this as a virtue when eulogising the characters of the 1960s and 1970s, but woe betide any 20-year-old post-millennial whippersnapper with ideas above their station. These youngsters have no idea what it is to live with the hardships of free education, full employment and a flourishing health-care system. How dare they have an opinion? And here comes that Ticktum guy, swaggering in to stir things up like a petrol-powered Greta Thunberg.

Thus it was that the social-media jackals revelled in Ticktum's June 2019 loss of his Super Formula seat and his banishment from the Red Bull Junior scheme. Yet now he's entering the 2020 season – whenever it starts, anyway – as the expected lead driver for reigning Formula 2 teams' champion DAMS, and a protege of F1 squad Williams as an Academy and Development Driver. Another remarkable comeback. "It's turned round pretty nicely, you could argue, so I'm looking at the positives now," asserts Ticktum who, when you think about his direct approach off-track and aggression behind the wheel, could just be the reincarnation of Alan Jones and Keke Rosberg that Williams has always wanted.

There certainly weren't many positives last year. In 2018, he'd fought for the Formula 3 European Championship title before being vanquished by Mick Schumacher's eye-opening late-season burst of success, yet bounced back to win Macau for a second time. Red Bull had also plonked him into Team Mugen's second car for a strong one-off Super Formula debut at Sugo, and this would be his main programme for 2019, bearing in mind he fell just short of the required tally of F1 superlicence points.

In a last-ditch bid to get him over the line on superlicence points for 2019, Ticktum went off to contest the Asian F3 Winter Series with Hitech GP. It was a vain quest because, one round before that finished, it was confirmed that the series didn't qualify to give points. Furthermore, results hadn't gone as expected in a series where the tyres are occasionally known to be less consistent than in European series, and where Ticktum suffered engine problems.

"I don't really want to talk about F3 Asia," he says, "but the thing I would like to say is there's a lot of speculation I gave up halfway through when I didn't do the last round, and the reason was that we found out there wasn't going to be any superlicence points for it, and my dad also managed to negotiate a refund for not completing the series. For the

"I WOULD HAVE BEEN IN F1 HAD I HAD THE POINTS. THAT'S HARD TO SWALLOW EVERY TIME I WAKE UP"

people who were saying I gave up, that's obviously rubbish.

"I don't want to go into too much detail about that and the superlicence. It's almost certain to say that I would have been in F1 had I had the points [Ticktum was linked to the Toro Rosso seat that went to Daniil Kvyat]. That's the hardest thing to swallow every morning when I wake up, that I'm having to fight to get the chance again knowing I pretty much could have had it if I'd had enough superlicence points. A lot of people are running into that trap now [one example is Juri Vips, who is racing as a Red Bull Junior in Super Formula this year]."

Never mind, because he'd surely make his name in Japan with Team Mugen... But that turned to disaster. After three races Ticktum had one point to his name, the same tally his predecessor Pierre Gasly had after three races in 2017. But whereas Gasly turned things around, nearly won the title and had earned an F1 debut by the autumn, Ticktum was dropped by Mugen, and then by Red Bull. »

FORMULA 2 ENTRY LIST

NO	DRIVER	TEAM
1	**Sean Gelael** (IDN)	DAMS
2	**Dan Ticktum** (GBR)	DAMS
3	**Guanyu Zhou** (CHN)	Virtuosi Racing
4	**Callum Ilott** (GBR)	Virtuosi Racing
5	**Marcus Armstrong** (NZL)	ART Grand Prix
6	**Christian Lundgaard** (DNK)	ART Grand Prix
7	**Yuki Tsunoda** (JPN)	Carlin
8	**Jehan Daruvala** (IND)	Carlin
9	**Jack Aitken** (GBR)	Campos Racing
10	**Guilherme Samaia** (BRA)	Campos Racing
11	**Louis Deletraz** (CHE)	Charouz Racing System
12	**Pedro Piquet** (BRA)	Charouz Racing System
14	**Nobuharu Matsushita** (JPN)	MP Motorsport
15	**Felipe Drugovich** (BRA)	MP Motorsport
16	**Artem Markelov** (RUS)	HWA Racelab
17	**Giuliano Alesi** (FRA)	HWA Racelab
20	**Mick Schumacher** (DEU)	Prema Racing
21	**Robert Shwartzman** (RUS)	Prema Racing
22	**Roy Nissany** (ISR)	Trident
23	**Marino Sato** (JPN)	Trident
24	**Nikita Mazepin** (RUS)	Hitech Grand Prix
25	**Luca Ghiotto** (ITA)	Hitech Grand Prix

WILLIAMS

Ticktum is proud to wear Williams colours and is keen to contribute



GROVE IS IN THE HEART

At one point over the winter, it seemed that hardly a week went by without Williams announcing a new 'development' protege. While the odd one of them wouldn't be your natural first choice from the list of talent available, Dan Ticktum is different.

Even so, it was hard to work this one out, beyond the fact that Ticktum belongs to the same Infinity management stable as first-team starlet George Russell. But that had nothing to do with it, he says.

"My dad's got a very good friend who is the son of Sid Watkins [the late F1 medical chief]," says Ticktum. "Alistair Watkins [CEO of Influence Sports & Media] is very well connected. Along with helping with all my media stuff, he helped open the doors to all the contacts in F1 teams. Most teams said 'go and do well in F2', but there were a couple that were interested to work immediately, one of them being Williams, and I felt that they offered the best situation for me at this time, and I felt… wanted, which I haven't really felt like for a while. For this year Francois [Sicard, DAMS boss] wanted me and Williams wanted me, so it's a nice feeling to have. I've got a lot to thank Alistair for really."

While Williams has had ownership of the back row of the F1 grid of late, Ticktum is hugely defensive of his new colleagues: "It really winds me up when you get all these ignorant people saying they're not doing very well, but that's just the last two or three years. If you look at their history they're an incredibly successful team, who should not be knocked by anyone in F1 or indeed out of F1. I feel like they're the brunt of a lot of jokes at the moment, which is unnecessary. They are having a tough time, they are an independent team which means that when you get into a hole and try to get out of it again it's difficult, but the environment at the factory is an incredibly positive one, and I feel that they'll be going in a positive direction in the next few months, and hopefully as soon as possible."

Ticktum is another to have faced the brickbats, including those who accuse him of paying for the privilege – something that those who have followed his career would know is not possible. His dad is an affluent man by normal standards, but it was a struggle to take his son beyond karting and F4, let alone into an F1 role. We're not talking Lawrence Stroll or Michael Latifi here…

"That is just absolute nonsense," retorts Ticktum. "We're not paying a dime. If I got to the stage in my career where I was paying to be on a Formula 1 programme, I'd give up probably because I feel that that's just wrong. It depends what deal you've got – if you've got a deal from an external sponsor it's different. But if it's your dad having to fork out a load of money for you to pay to be on a programme, that's not what I'd like to be associated with. I'd be exploring other avenues I think. I'm not paying, and I've got a very good opportunity."

"IF I GOT TO THE STAGE WHERE I WAS PAYING TO BE ON AN F1 PROGRAMME, I'D GIVE UP"

Ticktum is a renowned ace in the simulator – that's the role he performed for Red Bull on F1 race weekends, and it's one he is picking up again for Williams. "I am hoping to be in the car a couple of times this year at some point to help correlate – that will help," he says. "I've obviously got a lot of knowledge from Red Bull, but I want to make it clear that I'm not going in there and telling Williams about the way Red Bull runs, because I don't know a lot about it. The sim and all that – I'm not giving away secrets because that's just unprofessional, but in terms of the job I'm doing, I'm doing it exactly how I was for Red Bull, just trying to give the best feedback possible.

"I don't necessarily have to be very very quick, although that helps – I just have to be consistent and feel every change that they make and point them in a positive direction. The same job as I did for Red Bull pretty much."



Glory in Macau GP 2018 – his second win in the famous streets

TRIENITZ
GASPEROTTI



Ticktum had a couple of late-season FRegional outings in 2019…



…but that was a big step down from testing Red Bull F1 earlier in year

PORTLOCK



Super Formula deal ended in disaster

ISHIHARA



Ticktum out of luck in Macau 2019 comeback

PORTLOCK



With DAMS in pre-season F2 test in Bahrain

DUNBAR



DUNBAR

"The team had a very strong set-up with the previous-generation car, and the testing at Suzuka I did was not too bad," recalls Ticktum. "We were looking pretty good, and making good progress. And then when we got the new car [the Dallara SF19] it became apparent very quickly that to set it up in the right window was very, very difficult — the set-up window was very narrow, so I guess our team applied the similar sort of baseline to the new car and it just didn't work at all to start off with. Obviously I was very grateful to have the opportunity to drive for Mugen — they'd won the championship previously — but I have to say I didn't feel they reacted enough in the testing and make big enough changes."

Furthermore, 2018 champion Naoki Yamamoto had left Mugen in order to swap to Dandelion Racing, in response to his Mugen engineer Kazuya Abe departing for Team Le Mans. Yamamoto also told Autosport in an interview last June that some of the leading mechanics had moved on.

"We weren't learning enough in the time that we had basically," continues Ticktum. "That obviously meant that we hit the ground not running when the season started. Suzuka was a big, big struggle. But I managed to race pretty well and avoid lots of crashes and I finished eighth, which is not too bad. We went back to a very baseline set-up and we started playing around with the diff — we opened that up basically and changed a couple of other things, and I turned up at Autopolis and we were quickest in free practice one. The qualifying session was a disaster — there were five red flags, and I along with several other drivers didn't even get a lap in. In the race I made a mistake by myself on lap two, trying to go for a move on someone. I guess I got a bit desperate in that race — I was trying to get up there as quickly as possible, and I was on a very similar strategy to Yamamoto, and he finished second and I know my pace was as good as him.

"I'm almost certain that I had chassis damage after that race, because the way I hit the kerb it was directly underneath the car. At Sugo for the next race — where I'd qualified ninth the previous year [on Ticktum's one-off in 2018] and I'd never been there, never driven the car, never been to Japan and all the rest of it — I was literally last. That was when I knew something was up — either the car was damaged or something else was wrong. I don't know."

Ticktum was out: "Could I have performed better? Yeah, there's certain things I could have improved. I don't feel like I particularly let the pressure get to me. Did I enjoy being in Japan? Not entirely. I struggled with it to start with, maybe I could have adapted a bit better. There's all sorts of speculation and the team saying, 'He needs to get used to Japan, he needs to get used to the tracks there', but at the end of the day it's a track and a race car, you know? It doesn't matter whether it's in Japan or on the moon. I didn't feel like the team had a lot of confidence in me, let's say that. But there we go. It is a bit strange for a team not to have confidence in a driver that Red Bull put in an F1 car. But it's all done — I've learned a lot from it. People are going to ask, 'Am I still sour about being dropped?' And yeah, of course I am, but I'm in a very good position now."

Ticktum reappeared for two late-season outings in the Formula Regional European Championship with Van Amersfoort Racing — the team needed a driver, and it was *just* possible to earn some superlicence points if he won a few races, but it proved a tough ask when up against some good drivers who were fully up to speed from contesting the full season.

He then turned out for Carlin, with which he'd made his F3 debut in late 2016, in the Macau Grand Prix — Ticktum's debut in the new-for-2019 FIA F3 car: "I was very quick, but it all went wrong when David Beckmann crashed in FP2 [at Police bend], only a couple of hours before qually." Ticktum couldn't avoid the wreck on this blind corner: "The FIA didn't give me a penalty, so all the people out there saying I should have paid more attention to the yellow flags, if the FIA thought that they would have given me a penalty, and they didn't because they knew the yellow flags were not visible in any way from the cockpit.

"Obviously the car wasn't completely straight, shall we say, for qualifying. I didn't have my usual confidence round Macau, and also I was out in qually late and I got one half-decent lap, so that was unfortunate." Ticktum was a victim of the first-lap incident in the qualification race triggered by team-mate Logan Sargeant, who ironically escaped and sailed to a podium in the GP. Ticktum, meanwhile, lined up 26th and came through to 13th: "It wasn't meant to be."

By this point, Ticktum was on the verge of turning out with DAMS in the post-season F2 test in Abu Dhabi. This was the result of a summer of taking stock during his period of race inactivity. "There were a few people who said, 'Go and do F2', one of them being Christian [Horner, Red Bull team principal]," relates Ticktum. "I had a meeting with him just after I'd got dropped, just to go and say thank you for their belief in me and all the rest of it. And a lot of other people said, 'Get back over to Europe where you're relevant, in front of the F1 paddock, show people that you can put a championship together', all that sort of stuff. So we basically approached ART and DAMS, because at that point Carlin already had their drivers."

Ticktum already had a relationship with DAMS from some impressive late-season GP3 outings with the squad in 2017, and team principal Francois Sicard was receptive: "Francois knew me, and Sebastien Philippe from ART knows that I'm very quick. I feel like DAMS were slightly more keen but that we could have got a seat at ART if we'd pushed for it. At DAMS, I knew the people, I felt comfortable in the environment, and I believe that they have a quick car. So that's why we ended up there."

But still, having the wherewithal to join DAMS was a surprise for a driver whose moment of madness in British F4 in 2015, which led to a ban that ultimately lasted for 12 months, was partly caused by pressure to impress Red Bull because his father didn't think he could raise the budget for the following season's Formula Renault Eurocup. Ricardo Gelael, father of Ticktum's DAMS sidekick Sean, is renowned for being a benefactor towards his son's team-mates. But this appears to not necessarily be the case on this occasion. "My dad is successful, but would struggle to pay for a standard F2 budget in a top team," says Ticktum.

"WE HIT THE GROUND NOT RUNNING WHEN THE SEASON STARTED. SUZUKA WAS A BIG, BIG STRUGGLE"

The recent pre-season test in Bahrain prior to what was intended to be this weekend's opening round in the desert kingdom went much better than last December's Abu Dhabi running. "Abu Dhabi was really more of a test for me to get back in a race car," says Ticktum. "I was getting dialled back in to be honest, but we learned a lot there. We did some race runs and I was pretty terrible at managing the tyres, but we worked really hard over the winter to try to sort that out with all the tools that DAMS have.

"In Bahrain, it's a bit like when all the F1 boys are saying you can't really tell until everybody turns up at the first race, but there are fewer variables in F2 so you know more or less where everybody is. You never know what everybody's doing on fuel and that sort of stuff, but race runs we were very strong. Performance [qualifying] runs we were also very strong but I never really put a lap together. I wouldn't say we were the quickest in performance runs, but we were close. Fuel-corrected I was one of the quickest. We're looking strong for the races but I don't want to say much until the season starts, which is probably going to be five months away!"

When it does kick off, he'll find himself up against old F3 sparring partners Schumacher, Marcus Armstrong and Robert Shwartzman. Ticktum copped a lot of flak in 2018 for posting comments on social media about Schumacher's sudden burst of form. "I feel like all that stuff's been completely put to bed," he sighs. "I saw Mick at the Bahrain test and said hello, and everything was normal."

Even so, the renewal of the competition between the Euro F3 'class of 2018' will be a focal point of F2 for those watching, if not necessarily for the drivers themselves. "There are a lot of very good drivers in that championship, so I haven't really thought about it at all to be honest," declares Ticktum. "I feel that I've got a bit more of a mountain to climb than the Armstrongs and the Schumachers because they've been racing on relevant tracks [in 2019] in relatively relevant cars. I'm not really overly concerned about what they're doing. I may start a bit slower than them, I may not, but I just need to go and do the best that I can and tick every box."

If Ticktum can do that, it will cap a seemingly impossible turnaround in his career. Just a few months ago, it looked all over in his bid to reach F1. But in a world where second chances seem to abound for Red Bull rejects (see Kvyat, Alex Albon and Brendon Hartley), that rollercoaster could be maintained for a jump-off point at its highest peak.

SEASON PREVIEW

PREMA'S RACE OF CHAMPIONS

Team-mates Frederik Vesti and Oscar Piastri may be rookies in this season's FIA Formula 3 Championship, but all eyes are on them as they step up as the 2019 kings of Formula Regional and Formula Renault

PETER ALLEN

PHOTOGRAPHY **FIA F3 CHAMPIONSHIP** motorsport IMAGES



Vesti has got to grips with F3 in Bahrain test


TRIENITZ

Vesti (left) versus Piastri (right) will be an intriguing intra-team Prema fight


PORTLOCK


DUNBAR

Prema Racing dominated the first season of the FIA Formula 3 Championship in 2019. In addition to its well-proven engineering strength, an undoubted key to its supremacy was the quality of its driver line-up. Champion Robert Shwartzman, runner-up Marcus Armstrong and third-placed Jehan Daruvala were all contesting their first full seasons on the Formula 1 bill, but all three had come into it as proven race winners in the F3 European Championship, giving Prema an exceptional combination of talent and experience.

Its unquestionable status as FIA F3's number-one team meant the Rene Rosin-run squad essentially had the pick of whoever it wanted to form its driving trio for 2020. Often in junior single-seaters, that can encourage a team to recruit the highest-placed drivers from the previous season who haven't moved on. Yet none of Prema's new FIA F3 charges are proven at this level, and two — Oscar Piastri and Frederik Vesti — are championship rookies.

Piastri and Vesti are not just any old rookies though. The two 18-year-olds are effectively the best-qualified newcomers on the grid, as the champions of the two series in Europe — Formula Renault Eurocup and Formula Regional European Championship respectively — that are based on the Regional F3 concept: the tier below FIA F3 on the governing body's ladder. Both championships adopted the Tatuus T318 chassis last year, and are locked in a fight for supremacy in their part of the junior single-seater market.

"ITS STATUS AS FIA F3'S NUMBER-ONE TEAM MEANT PREMA HAD THE PICK OF WHOEVER IT WANTED"

While the Italian-based Formula Regional European series enjoys FIA backing and Ferrari support, it was Renault's contest that had the better grid numbers in 2019 as it aims to continue its heritage as an important talent pool. That the rivalry's first champions, Piastri and Vesti, are stepping up to FIA F3 in the same team — and expected to be fighting at the front with Prema — will provide an obvious opportunity to measure the strength of the two categories.

The sole FIA F3 pre-season test took place two weeks ago at the Bahrain International Circuit, where the opening round was due to take place this weekend in support of the Bahrain Grand Prix before its cancellation due to the coronavirus pandemic. Piastri spent last week at home in Melbourne because he was intending to take in the doomed Australian Grand Prix with Renault as a newly recruited member of its young-driver academy.

Piastri defeated Victor Martins to win the Eurocup title by a »

slim 7.5 points. He effectively snatched Renault backing from his French rival, as an academy place is automatically on offer to the champion, and Martins will continue in the Eurocup this year without the manufacturer's support. As well as getting to know compatriot Daniel Ricciardo at Enstone, Piastri can call on another of Australia's greatest F1 exports for advice after being taken on by Mark Webber's management agency ahead of this season.

For now, Vesti is not attached to any F1 team or grand prix winner, although he is rumoured to have received at least one approach from a top squad. Such interest in the Dane's services is no surprise after his dominant run to the Formula Regional crown in what was his first year driving for Prema.

The pace advantage Prema appeared to enjoy in Formula Regional was perhaps even greater than in FIA F3, but Vesti comfortably put away Ferrari-backed team-mate Enzo Fittipaldi, winning 13 of the 24 races. After taking part in the Macau Grand Prix in place of the injured Daruvala (Vesti fought back well from a qualifying race hold-up to finish 10th), he secured the backing to make his step up with Prema a full-time one for 2020.

Vesti feels racing in Macau helped him to find the limits of the FIA F3 car, even though it's so different to anything else on the calendar. "When you come back to a normal track [after Macau], it's easier to just sit in the car and go quickly straight away, which is a very important part of the FIA F3 championship now because there's such a small amount of practice and driving," he says.

Although Vesti has raced exclusively on Pirelli tyres so far in his car racing career, those used in FIA F3 are considerably different and one of the greatest challenges for a rookie to adjust to. "The driving style is very different because of the extra downforce, more power and the different tyres," he says of the step up from Formula Regional. "There's much more grip and you can make a difference with this grip, whereas in Regional it's a bit easier to find the limit. In FIA F3 you feel like you are on the limit, but there's still a few tenths to find, and this is probably the biggest difference."

Strong race pace on the high-degradation tyres is crucial to winning in FIA F3, and Vesti looked good in this regard in the Bahrain test, though admits that nailing a qualifying lap was more of a challenge. "We had a very productive and positive test, which makes me quite confident," he says. "My race runs were very strong but the grip of the new tyres is really, really high, and coming from Regional, coming from Macau, I had to get used to that a lot on that one lap. To really extract the full potential was not so easy for me. But in the end I got it and I understood why it was difficult.

"I'm very confident that I can make the next step that will be very important for the season, and be consistent. My main focus right now is on my development."

"The car is quite a big step from the Formula Renault – a lot more power and a lot more aero, which is awesome to drive," says Piastri. "I think the new Formula Renault prepared me somewhat; the



Piastri's Renault Euro title put him on F1 junior programme

MARC DE MATTIA / DPPI

FORMULA 3 ENTRY LIST

NO	DRIVER	TEAM
1	**Oscar Piastri** (AUS)	Prema Racing
2	**Frederik Vesti** (DNK)	Prema Racing
3	**Logan Sargeant** (USA)	Prema Racing
4	**Max Fewtrell** (GBR)	Hitech Grand Prix
5	**Liam Lawson** (NZL)	Hitech Grand Prix
6	**Dennis Hauger** (NOR)	Hitech Grand Prix
7	**Theo Pourchaire** (FRA)	ART Grand Prix
8	**Alexander Smolyar** (RUS)	ART Grand Prix
9	**Sebastian Fernandez** (VEN)	ART Grand Prix
10	**Lirim Zendeli** (DEU)	Trident
11	**Devlin DeFrancesco** (CAN)	Trident
12	**Olli Caldwell** (GBR)	Trident
14	**Enzo Fittipaldi** (BRA)	HWA Racelab
15	**Jake Hughes** (GBR)	HWA Racelab
16	**Jack Doohan** (AUS)	HWA Racelab
17	**Richard Verschoor** (NLD)	MP Motorsport
18	**Bent Viscaal** (NLD)	MP Motorsport
19	**Lukas Dunner** (AUT)	MP Motorsport
20	**Calan Williams** (AUS)	Jenzer Motorsport
21	**Federico Malvestiti** (ITA)	Jenzer Motorsport
22	**Matteo Nannini** (ITA)	Jenzer Motorsport
23	**Niko Kari** (FIN)	Charouz Racing System
24	**Igor Fraga** (BRA)	Charouz Racing System
25	**David Schumacher** (DEU)	Charouz Racing System
26	**Clement Novalak** (FRA)	Carlin
27	**Enaam Ahmed** (GBR)	Carlin
28	**Cameron Das** (USA)	Carlin
29	**Alex Peroni** (AUS)	Campos Racing
30	**Alessio Deledda** (ITA)	Campos Racing
31	**Sophia Florsch** (DEU)	Campos Racing



Vesti was late call-up for FIA F3 debut in 2019 Macau GP

TRIENITZ

weight is very similar, but the tyres [Piastri ran on Michelin and Hankook in FRenault] and aero are quite a lot different. The tyres are the biggest challenge, mainly in race runs. Also, only having one or two laps on new tyres compared to six or seven laps consecutively in Formula Renault means you have to be on it straight away."

None of the Prema drivers set headline one-lap times during the test. "The test went reasonably well," adds Piastri. "I improved consistently across the race runs we did, which is the biggest area I need to adapt compared to previous years. My performance runs were generally pretty good, so I was happy with the test overall, but there are still some improvements to make."

"IN FIA F3 YOU FEEL LIKE YOU ARE ON THE LIMIT, BUT THERE'S STILL A FEW TENTHS TO FIND"



Piastri (81) battled Sargeant (31) in 2017 British F4

JEP

While the arrival of Piastri and Vesti is getting the bulk of the attention, it would be foolish to not consider Prema's third driver, Logan Sargeant. The American struggled with Carlin for much of last season (he finished 19th in the standings), but third place on his Macau Grand Prix debut provided a glimpse of what he might do with a frontrunning team and a year's experience under his belt.

Sargeant was Prema's fastest driver in the test, with the fifth-best time overall, and his experience could give him an edge over his team-mates, at least initially. Two further tests scheduled during the first half of the season will help the rookies to overcome any lack of knowledge they face. Piastri certainly knows what Sargeant can do: the two raced against each other in British F4 as single-seater rookies in 2017, with Piastri coming out on top in a battle for second overall behind title winner Jamie Caroline. Moving up to the Renault Eurocup in 2018, Sargeant then took fourth with champion squad R-ace GP, while Piastri was eighth with Arden.

While Vesti is less familiar with his team-mates, he has continuity in the form of engineer Pedro Matos, who helped him to his Formula Regional triumph in 2019. Before that, the Portuguese engineered Piastri with Arden in British F4.

Once again, Prema appears to have an evenly matched line-up, with three drivers pushing the team on. "We have a very good relationship," says Vesti. "We're all very calm and we all have the same goals. The good thing is that we all understand that we work for the team. Each of us wants to win the championship, but in order to do that we need to work together. So it's a positive battle."

It's that collaborative driving strength across the three cars that could make Prema just as tough to beat again this year.

THE F4 TOP DOGS MOVING UP

There's another pair of drivers who come into FIA F3 in the spotlight as highly rated champions at a lower level: Theo Pourchaire and Dennis Hauger.

Last year, the pair did battle in the very competitive German F4 series, just as Juri Vips and Marcus Armstrong had done a couple of years before them. Pourchaire won out in the end by just seven points over Red Bull Junior Hauger, who did go on to claim the Italian F4 title against a slightly lesser-quality, albeit higher-quantity, field. Both caught the eye in their first seasons racing the Tatuus F4 chassis after victories in the Mygale used in France (for Pourchaire) and Britain (Hauger) in 2018.

Both drivers come into FIA F3 with leading teams – Pourchaire with ART Grand Prix and Hauger with Hitech Grand Prix – but no F4 graduate has yet to make a success of the considerable leap into what was previously GP3. Pourchaire is the youngest driver on the grid at 16, while Hauger turned 17 on Tuesday of this week.



Hauger joins Hitech as Red Bull Junior and Italian F4 champion

DUNBAR

After challenging with Vips in 2019, Hitech looks best-placed to take the fight to Prema again this year, as Hauger is joined by second-year FIA F3 racers Liam Lawson and Max Fewtrell of the Red Bull and Renault junior stables respectively. ART, on the other hand, could be more reliant on Pourchaire and fellow rookie Alexander Smolyar (third behind Piastri and Martins in last year's Eurocup), with Sebastian Fernandez needing to improve upon a best finish of 12th last year for Campos Racing.



Pourchaire is at ART as reigning title winner in German F4

PORTLOCK

Other contenders could include F3/GP3 veteran Jake Hughes, who returns for another year with HWA alongside famous names Enzo Fittipaldi and Jack Doohan, with the German giant entering its second year running its own F3 squad. Richard Verschoor and MP Motorsport continue their loyalty and will hope to build on their shock Macau Grand Prix triumph. More British interest comes in the form of Enaam Ahmed at Carlin.

It was Tasmanian Alex Peroni who set the fastest time of the Bahrain test for Campos – his first time back in the FIA F3 car since a scary accident at Monza last September that left him with a fractured vertebra.

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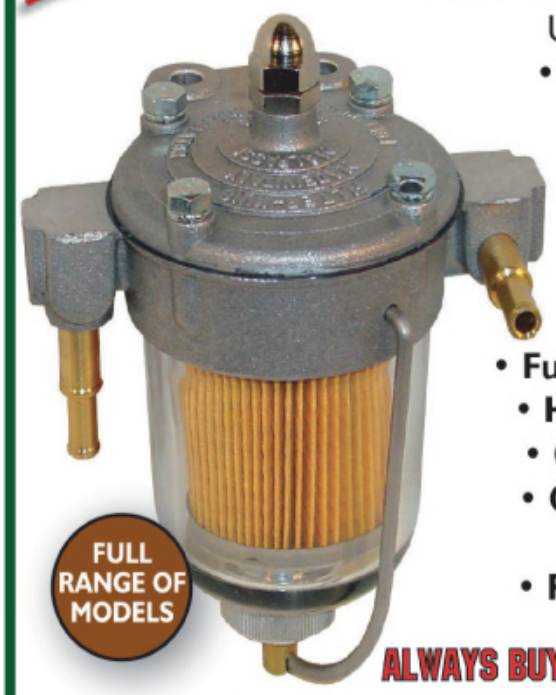
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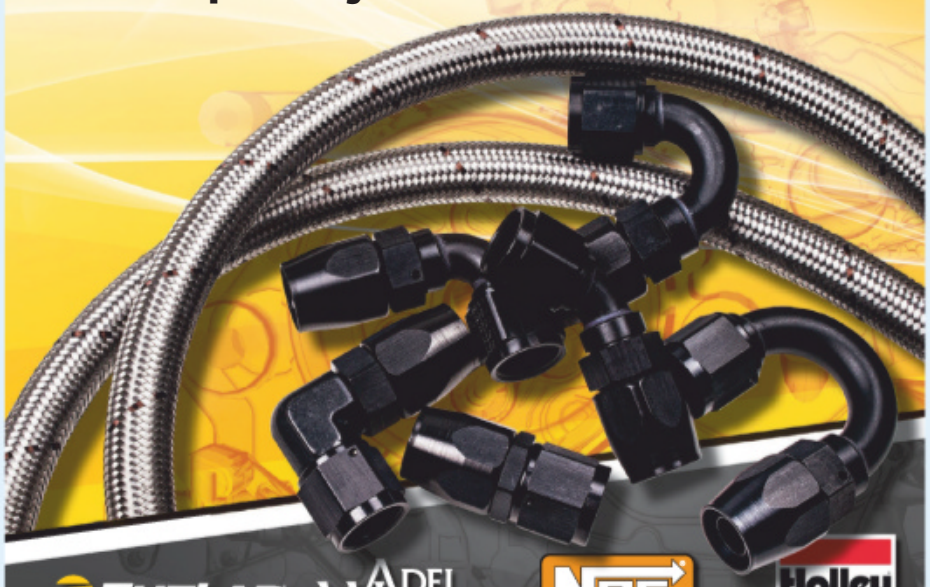


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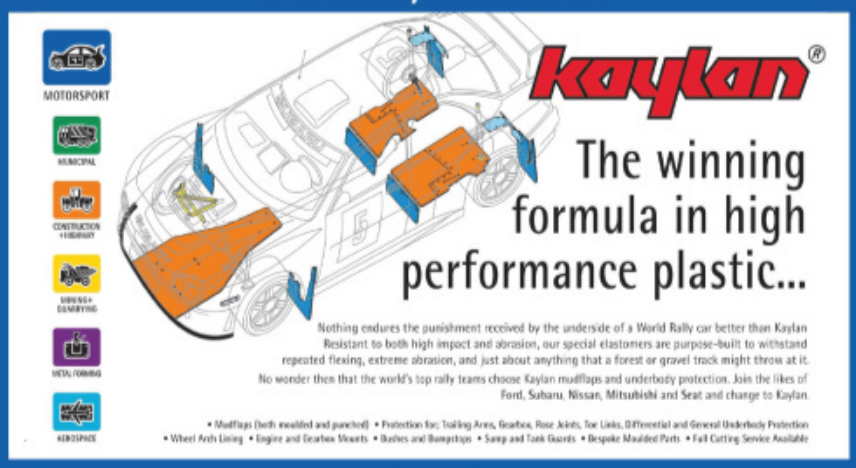


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MOTORSPORT UK SUSPENDS ALL

CORONAVIRUS

No Motorsport-UK sanctioned events will take place until at least the start of May, due to the coronavirus pandemic.

In the wake of the escalating health crisis, the UK governing body has acted to comply with the latest government advice to try to halt the spread of the virus. UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson urged social contact to be kept to a minimum and discouraged all but essential travel in a bid to slow the spread of the disease. The government also said events that require emergency workers to attend would not be supported.

Motorsport UK announced on Tuesday that all of its event permits would therefore be suspended until the end of April.

The Goodwood Members' Meeting due to take place next week and the opening two Scottish Motor Racing Club fixtures had already been postponed, while last weekend's West Cork Rally, a round of the British Rally Championship, was cancelled at short notice. The club circuit racing season was due to begin this weekend with two meetings at Silverstone.

A number of clubs have said that, in the face of the postponements, all entry fees would either be refunded or deferred to be used for a future round.

RICHARDS EXPLAINS MOTORSPORT UK DECISION

It was only a week ago that Motorsport UK chairman David Richards told Autosport the governing body was optimistic that club motorsport would be able to continue despite the threat of the virus.

But given how quickly the situation has worsened in the UK – 55 people were confirmed to have died as Autosport went to press on Tuesday – he said that the governing body had to follow the latest government advice and stop all motorsport events.

"Clearly we live in challenging times and exceptional measures are required," said Richards in a statement.

"The decision to suspend Motorsport UK permits on a temporary basis is not one that was taken lightly as the industry employs many thousands of people.

"However, we have an overriding responsibility to our members and the friends and families of our community. Furthermore, our social responsibilities extend to the broader population and the potential drain on valuable public health resources on which we are all reliant.

"OUR INDUSTRY NEEDS GOVERNMENT SUPPORT SO IT CAN BE SUSTAINED"

"The situation is very fluid and we will continue to monitor developments over the coming weeks and hope that we can resume the annual motorsport calendar at the opportune moment.

"In the immediate short term, our efforts need to be focused on ensuring that the industry that backs up the sport has the financial support that it requires from the government in order that it can be sustained beyond this extraordinary scenario."

BRITISH GT PLANS ALTERNATIVE CALENDAR

Numerous categories are affected by the governing body's decision, and British GT Championship organisers say that they are already in discussions with circuits about alternative dates.

The scheduled Oulton Park season opener (11-13 April) has been postponed but series bosses are also pursuing fresh plans for the second event, scheduled to run at Snetterton in mid-May.

"We are monitoring the situation very closely, as you would expect," said championship manager Lauren Granville in a statement. "Our primary concern remains the safety of team members, drivers, fans and staff.



British GT organisers are preparing new dates for the first two events

JEP

EVENT PERMITS UNTIL MAY

"We are already discussing potential new dates with representatives from Oulton Park and Snetterton in the event British GT's first two rounds are postponed. Ultimately, we fully expect this season to feature seven rounds."

If round two at Snetterton is also postponed, the season would begin with the Silverstone 500 on 7 June.

BRITISH RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP ALREADY AFFECTED

One of the first events to be hit was last weekend's second round of the BRC, the West Cork Rally.

The Clonakilty-based event was called off 48 hours before it was due to get under way after Irish prime minister Leo Varadkar said all outdoor gatherings of more than 500 people should not proceed.

The following round, Rally Tendring and Clacton – which was due to take place on 25-26 April – has also been called off and BRC bosses do not yet know if other subsequent events will follow suit.

Reigning two-time champion Matt Edwards has suggested imposing a spectator ban on all remaining rounds. "That would be enough to put off casual spectators," said Edwards. "It would reduce numbers and help to mitigate the spread, which has to be the main focus."

From a logistical point of view, BRC manager Iain Campbell has argued that this would not be possible, particularly on forest events where there are multiple ways in and out of a stage, meaning upholding a no-go area would prove problematic.

"It would take a huge security force from a long way out to ensure no spectators got into the forest [in the first place]," said the Scotsman. "That in itself has huge budget implications."

Last year's BRC runner-up Tom Cave added: "You only have to look at what is going on around the world – we need to take action. There is more to life than just doing a rally. I am sure it will be back in 2021."

STEPHEN LICKORISH, JAMES NEWBOLD & JASON CRAIG


Richards says the drastic measures are needed

SUTTON



BRC was already affected by coronavirus threat

JEP



Caterham 420R series is run by the BRSCC

ROBERTS

National championship status for Caterham 420Rs

CATERHAMS

The top-level Caterham Seven 420R series has secured national championship status from governing body Motorsport UK for this season.

The British Racing & Sports Car Club-operated category, which features 2.0-litre Caterhams complete with a full race chassis and sequential gearbox, is the highest rung of the four-tier manufacturer-backed Caterham ladder.

It will now be known as Caterham Seven Championship UK and the winner will be considered a national champion. Very few other circuit racing series have such status – British Touring Cars, British GT, BRDC British F3 and British F4 are the others.

Caterham motorsport director Simon Lambert believes the move reflects the 420R category's success, as he says more drivers are using it as a springboard into GT racing. He cites 2018 British GT champion Flick Haigh, who started her racing career in Caterhams, as one example.

"It's great – it's good for us and it's really good for the drivers," said Lambert. "You can come away from it and say you've won a national series and are a British champion.

"It's been something that's been on my radar for quite a long time. It originates from what we hear about our series from outside – we've long felt that people are looking at the top Caterham series as the very top end of club racing.

"The BRSCC have been very helpful and have been pushing Motorsport UK. We have no ideas of grandeur, we just want to be the very best in club racing.

"Because of the way the Caterham ladder is, you're bringing people in at the bottom at a level playing field and each year they get better and faster, so by the time they get to 420R we've got some really good drivers."

STEPHEN LICKORISH

Burns hopes to go one better in GT4 Supercup

GT4 SUPERCUP

Two-time Ginetta GT4 Supercup runner-up Will Burns will have another attempt at winning the title this year, when he will again drive for Rob Boston Racing.

Burns finished second in the standings in both 2016 and last year, on each occasion finishing fewer than 15 points behind the eventual champion. He has taken eight wins across four years in the category.

"I definitely come into 2020 with unfinished business in the series," said Burns. "To twice take the title battle down to the final race of the season and miss out is agonising, and I'm determined to come back stronger and challenge for the title once again."

Burns will be joined at Rob Boston Racing by Fin Green, who had a mixed first season in the category last year.

Another driver who is set to race in the series is double BMW Compact Cup champion Stephen Roberts, who is looking to contest selected rounds.



Two-time runner-up is aiming for the title

JEP

Roberts started his career in Formula Ford 1600, before moving on through the British Formula BMW and Ford championships. After a lay-off, he came back to take the 2013 and 2015 BMW Compact titles and has more recently raced Mazda MX-5s. "I just want to do something competitive and on the TOCA support package," he said. "But I will only be able to do two or three rounds though."

Also joining the GT4 Supercup grid will be Nick Halstead. The Ginetta GT5 Challenge racer will step up to racing a G55 this year with Fox Motorsport.

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McKenna will move to Porsche Carrera Cup GB

GT5 Challenge champ McKenna to race Porsche with Redline

PORSCHE CARRERA CUP GB

Reigning Ginetta GT5 Challenge champion Scott McKenna will move into Porsche Carrera Cup GB with frontrunning squad Redline Racing this season.

The 18-year-old, who won six races on his way to the GT5 title, joins the most successful team in Carrera Cup GB history – Redline has claimed 10 drivers' titles, with past champions including Tim Harvey and Dan Cammish.

"This was a long-term goal – this championship, in my opinion, is one of the best championships around and you're able to showcase your talent," said McKenna.

"I couldn't have joined a better team than Redline, and they actually started in my grandad's garage decades ago in Middlesbrough. The history between us is massive and so I'm doing Porsche Carrera Cup with the best team but also one with a close relationship to us.

"It's my first year in the series but, if you look at the grid, for some people this is their fifth season in the championship. I'm just going to be aiming for consistent top-fives and, as long as I keep progressing and learning, I would love to think we would see some podiums."

McKenna will be joined by category regular Jamie Orton and former British GT Championship driver Matty Graham at Redline. The team's Carrera Cup line-up is completed by Argentinian Porsche Supercup racer Dorian Mansilla and former Blancpain driver Josh Caygill.

Redline will also compete in the new Porsche Sprint Challenge GB series for the Cayman GT4 this year. Its line-up includes two-time Le Mans 24 Hours starter Archie Hamilton, who has not raced regularly since 2015, Ginetta Junior graduate Ethan Hawkey, and Am drivers Chris Car and Nigel Rice.

STEFAN MACKLEY

Academy puts Cowley in Mustang

BRITISH GT

British GT squad Academy Motorsport has completed the line-up in its Silver class Ford Mustang GT4, with Matt Cowley joining the previously announced Jordan Albert.

Cowley, 22, won the US F1600 Series in 2017 and switched to GT racing last year with Academy in the GT4 European Series, scoring a best finish of 12th at Zandvoort in an Aston Martin Vantage GT4.

He has been a regular in FF1600s too, finishing a close second in the Walter Hayes Trophy final in 2018.

Cowley tested the Mustang at the Snetterton Media Day earlier in the month, and said that he "really liked the way the car drove and handled".

"I'm really excited to have the chance to race in British GT with Academy Motorsport, Jordan Albert as a team-mate and a competitive package," he said.

Team boss Matt Nicoll-Jones added: "He's a great asset to have in the team, and I'm sure that he and Jordan will form a competitive pairing."

JAMES NEWBOLD

IN THE HEADLINES

ALUN MORGAN 1942-2020

Alun Morgan, a pioneer of bringing racing to Pembrey Circuit in the 1980s, died recently following a long illness. Morgan competed in autocross, rallies, speed events and autotests, and excelled in hillclimbs with his ex-John Pascoe Downton-tuned 1293cc Mini Cooper S before moving to MG Midgets. When not competing or organising, he mucked in as team manager or capable spanner-wielder at events across Europe.

PAUL TO SINGLE-SEATERS

British GT driver Dominic Paul will contest the MotorSport Vision Racing F3 Cup with championship-winning squad Chris Dittmann Racing this season. "I really enjoyed the British GT Championship last year, but I'm looking forward to learning in F3 – it's great training for me for the future," he said. CDR has won the past two F3 Cup titles with Cian Carey.

FLETCHER IN MAZDA MOVE

Ex-Mighty Mini and Volkswagen Racing Cup driver Brayden Fletcher will be racing for the newly formed Paddock Promotions team in this year's Mazda MX-5 SuperCup. The team was founded by Fletcher's brother – British GT4 Pro-Am champion Kelvin – and his co-driver Martin Plowman. "We are planning to run about four cars at the moment, with my former GT team-mate at RJN, Richard Taffinder, in one and Will Killick, the son of our sponsor, in another," said Plowman.

NASCAR AT DONINGTON

There was a rare sight at Donington Park's general test last week, when a full-blown ex-NASCAR racer took to the track (below). "It was the first time we had driven it – it was a Waltrip Racing Toyota originally, but then ran in 2011-13 as a Chevrolet with an 850bhp Childress engine," said co-owner Jack Tetley. Nick Maton – who also co-owns the car – and his father Jack also drove the machine.





Diffey father and son are set to race Lotus Formula Junior cars this year

MAWP+SPORT

Ex-Warr Lotus Formula Junior returns to the track

HISTORICS

A major restoration effort by Robert and Sam Wilson enabled Simon Diffey's Formula Junior Lotus 20/22 to run at last week's Goodwood Members' Meeting test day, almost 45 years after its second race there.

Raced initially as a 20 by future Team Lotus F1 manager Peter Warr, it finished seventh in the FJ heat and 13th in the final at the 1961 Tourist Trophy event. Updated to 22 spec with an 1100cc unit, Warr won in it at the Nurburgring in April 1962.

Elite graduate Jon Derisley competed in the car in F3 trim at the 67th Members' Meeting in 1965 and also raced the 20/22 in the Monoposto Formula, before switching to speed events. Inherited by daughter Judi — a Goodwood marshal and 750 Motor Club racer — it remains very original. A perforated chassis longeron was changed and corner damage addressed during restoration.

"I've been chasing this Lotus dream for 20 years," said Diffey. "I met Judi at the '99 Revival, when I finished third in the FJ race in William Taylor's 20. So I was honoured when she invited me to be her dad's car's next custodian in 2018.

"But the Lotus thing goes back further for me, to the inaugural Monaco Historic GP in '97. As a VSCC guy I was invited down by Sean Danaher and sat next to William and Clive Chapman on the plane. They befriended me and, without knowing who they were, I ended up partying with Hazel Chapman and Bette Hill! That I can now race against my son George, in the Lotus 20 we've owned for many years, is fantastic."

MARCUS PYE

Top Caterham squad CTS expands to Ginettas

GINETTA G40 CUP

Frontrunning Caterham squad CTS Motorsport will expand into the Ginetta G40 Cup this season, running two past club racing champions.

The team has achieved success in a variety of different Caterham-based categories in the past and made a one-off outing in the Radical SR1 Cup last year. It will now branch into the G40 Cup, running 2018 series champion Tom Golding and 2015 Porsche 924 champion Adam Croft, who has more recently raced with CTS in Caterhams.



Golding won Ginetta G40 Cup title in 2018

"We're thrilled to make this step to the Ginetta G40 Cup," said team boss Mark Ashman. "Although we won't move away from the Caterham side of the business, we are keen to expand the team and progress into other championships.

"It's fantastic to have Tom and Adam on board. Tom knows the Ginetta well; he has won two championship titles to prove that [having previously won the Ginetta Racing Drivers Club crown too]. Although Adam is fairly new to the Ginetta, we have worked together for a number of years. He is an accomplished racing driver, with a number of accolades to his name."

- A number of other drivers have also been announced as competing in Ginettas. These include brothers Charlie and Daniel Budd, who previously raced Mini Se7ens, and will again contest the GT5 Challenge. Frontrunner Gordie Mutch will also be back for another GT5 bid.





VIVA LA GOODWOOD Paul Chase-Gardener, owner of the ex-Gerry Marshall Vauxhall Firenza 'The Old Nail', tested a replica of its Shaw & Kilburn Viva GT predecessor during Monday's Historic Racing Drivers Club Goodwood trackday. The original S&K Viva HB, with its slant-four engine, was developed by Dutch tuning guru Bill Blydenstein and won many Special Saloon races with 'big Gerry'. **Photograph by Jeff Bloxham**

Superkarts begin testing despite winter turmoil

SUPERKARTS

Superkart drivers have began testing, despite the paddock being thrown into turmoil over the winter when a tender by UK Superkart for the British Superkart Championship was withdrawn by Motorsport UK.

The governing body cited reasons as "the absence of goodwill which prevented the collaboration necessary to procure a championship of this stature".

Russell Anderson was tasked with chairing a Superkart Working Group with a view to bringing invited parties together in an attempt to remove previous differences and take the discipline forward. Two meetings have been held so far, but there seems little chance of any British Superkart Championships taking place in 2020.

Despite this setback, the Superkarts had their first taste of track action this year with a test day at Silverstone recently.

Using the National Circuit, Liam Morley in his Division 1 Anderson VM laid down an early marker to the opposition by putting in a lap that was unofficially half a second inside the lap record. "We were only running in this morning before trying for a quick lap later," he said.

Ross Allen, on the unique twin 125cc-engined Jade IAME kart, was only marginally slower than Morley.

The season was due to start at Knockhill on 5 April with a Formula Superkart Club Championship round. But this has been postponed due to the coronavirus outbreak.

GARY JAMES



CHICANE MEDIA

WRC 2 driver wins boss's home event

BTRDA RALLY SERIES

WRC 2 driver Adrien Fourmaux has described taking a breakthrough win on his boss's home patch as "an honour". Fourmaux's first outright victory came on the latest round of the BTRDA Rally Series, the Malcolm Wilson Rally, in Cumbria last weekend. Using the event as a shakedown for Rally Portugal, Fourmaux (above) set scratch times on six of the seven stages in his Ford Fiesta R5 Mk2 to finish over a minute ahead of the Fiesta RS WRC of Stephen Petch. "To win it for Malcolm and everyone in his M-Sport team is just amazing — it is an incredible feeling," said Fourmaux.

AUTOSPORT PLUS

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How Ferrari threw away golden victory

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Overtaken by events

Club motorsport cannot escape the consequences of the measures put in place to counter the coronavirus pandemic. And it's possible that it could be changed forever

STEPHEN LICKORISH

The word 'unprecedented' has been used a lot in recent days. And justifiably so. It's regularly being quoted that the coronavirus pandemic the world is now facing is our greatest challenge since the two world wars. The UK government has said that every single person in this country will have to adapt their way of life and will be affected by measures to halt the spread of the virus. And club motorsport is no different.

It's amazing how quickly the crisis has escalated. Just a week ago, it was a very different story. There were around 450 confirmed cases and eight fatalities in the UK. Speaking to a few club bosses and series coordinators at the end of last week, they were still relatively optimistic that smaller club race meetings could continue to be held, despite international events all over the globe one by one being cancelled or postponed.

"We've had a number of questions from competitors but, as club motorsport is really done behind closed doors anyway, as we have very few spectators – even if they say no spectators, I don't think that would have a terrific effect," said one series boss. "I'm optimistic that it will be fine."

Aside from some of the larger historic meetings and British Touring Car Championship events, the vast majority of motorsport fixtures in the UK attract very few spectators. Even if spectators had to be barred, at that point in time it still looked like small events could possibly continue.

> **"Having doctors' time wasted on someone hurt in their hobby is not acceptable at this time"**

Unlike many other sporting gatherings, there needs to be very little close contact between people in motorsport. Governing body Motorsport UK last Friday issued updated advice, suggesting a number of safeguarding measures, including that event briefings should take place outdoors, for example. And if pit garages were not used, then there would be very little need for close contact indoors at all and the risk of spreading the virus would be relatively small. So, at that point, it was very much still business as usual, with just a few tweaks here and there to working practices.

But this week the situation has dramatically escalated. Instead of cases in the hundreds, at the time of writing officials estimate there are as many as 50,000 people infected with the disease across the UK, a reduction in tests being carried out on those with only mild symptoms meaning it is impossible to know the true number. And with that, far greater restrictions on public life were introduced by the UK government.

While activities like going to the pub or kids going to school were not officially banned by the government on Monday, and neither were mass gatherings, social-distancing measures were introduced and all but essential travel was discouraged. But the key point concerned public events where emergency workers were required to be present, as these would no longer be supported. Motorsport meetings obviously fall into this category. That's the reason why there was no alternative but to cancel all club motorsport events immediately.

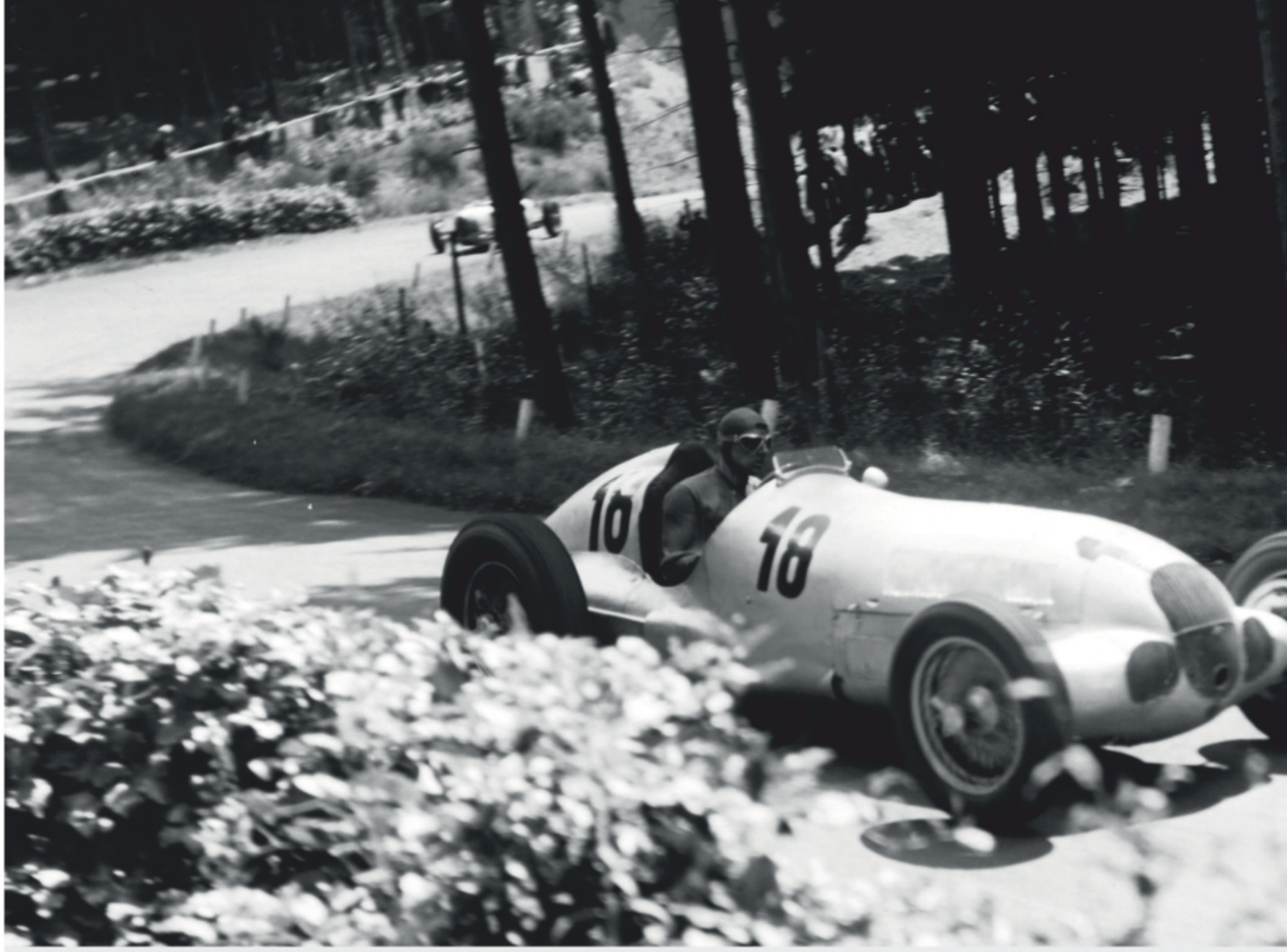
Some have questioned this decision, pointing out that the majority of ambulances at events are private ones and not from the NHS. But that is completely irrelevant, because it would be to NHS hospitals and facilities that any injured drivers would be taken. Having vital hospital beds and doctors' time and energy wasted on someone hurt engaging in what is just an enjoyable hobby is not acceptable at a time like this when the health service is facing genuinely unprecedented demand. Quite simply, as much as we all enjoy club motorsport, it is a luxury that cannot currently be justified.

Looking at the statements from any club and organisers that have already cancelled UK events, that point about medical teams is prominently made. "While action could be taken to reduce the overall number of people on site to below 500, clearly our events require a medical team and we therefore have to consider the potential impact this could have on the emergency services, at a time where they will be under great pressure," said the Scottish Motor Racing Club's statement, the club being the first to cancel given the tighter restrictions the Scottish government had put in place.

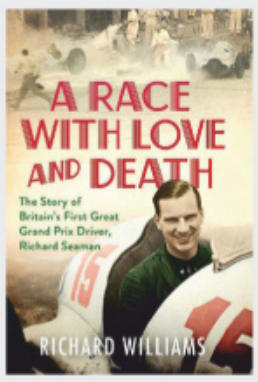
It is a very similar story with the one issued by BTCC organiser TOCA. It read: "TOCA of course completely respects the government's directives. The health of our entire nation – not just our competitors, fans, marshals, officials and personnel – is of absolute importance."

Initially these measures restricting race meetings apply until the end of April. But, in reality, who knows how long they will last and the impact they will have? Will all clubs, categories, teams and circuits survive until life can return to normal? It is highly unlikely that they will. Club motorsport could be changed forever as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

But, as devastating as that is for everyone involved for a plethora of reasons, it's not the most important issue. In these truly unprecedented times, protecting lives is top priority now.



RAISING THE BAR ON THE TALE OF RICHARD SEAMAN



BOOK REVIEW
A RACE WITH LOVE AND DEATH
RRP £20.00

Hours after Richard Seaman had claimed his first victory in a car race, he set about helping to organise the funeral of his team-mate.

Such was the life of a 1930s racing driver — or 'racing motorist' to use the parlance of the time. Aged 21, Seaman had scored his breakthrough win in the 1934 Prix de Berne voiturette race — curtain raiser to the prestigious Swiss Grand Prix — at the wheel of an MG Magnette. When his team-mate Hugh Hamilton crashed his Maserati on the final lap of the big race, it fell upon Seaman to liaise with the British Consul and comfort Hamilton's mother when she arrived in Switzerland. Enjoying a holiday by the sea in Folkestone, Seaman's father, who had endured a weak heart for many years, caught sight of the newspapers and, erroneously believing it was his son who was dead, suffered a stroke.

It's a far cry from the rich mums and dads of today's Formula 1 aspirants bickering about whose heirs to the family fortunes were taking liberties with track limits.

That Swiss episode from 86 years ago is just one from *A Race With Love and Death*, the eagerly anticipated biography of Seaman by Richard Williams. Seaman's is a fascinating story that has been told before but, as you'd expect from one of the finest sports writers of our lifetime, Williams advances our understanding of the subject by elegantly weaving a narrative that combines the *Boy's Own* derring-do of a between-the-wars hero with the suffocatingly stuffy expectations of British society that Seaman was trying to escape. And the growing threat of war into which he plunged feet-first by signing in 1937 for Mercedes, driving for the Nazis until his death in the 1939 Belgian Grand Prix at the age of 26.

This book gives you all the detail a purist would want from a racing biography, but it's also an easy-to-read yet fascinating social documentary of the era. Credit to Williams, who in his research has plundered the archives of Mercedes in Stuttgart, the National Motor Museum in Beaulieu and the Brooklands Museum, as well as delving deep into the histories of the (very exclusive) schools that Seaman attended, to further enrich his prose.

Naturally, the loyalties of Seaman — a Briton driving for the Germans — were very much questioned during the turbulent 1930s, and have been ever since. Williams, who has long had a fascination with the man who was 'Britain's first great grand prix driver' (as proclaimed by the book's sub-title), leans to the side of forgiveness. Seaman had contemporaries at Cambridge University whose intellectual club presaged spying for the Soviet Union; on his rise to prominence he drove for the team of Whitney Straight, whose family was quasi-bohemian in its attitudes; as a driver, he eschewed the Brooklands 'set' in favour of exhorting his doting mother to sign cheques so that he could learn his trade on the road circuits of Europe; he embraced modern culture such as the 'dangerous' new musical genre of jazz that was





Seaman (left) with Manfred von Brauchitsch

terrifying conservatives; he confided in, and sought advice from, noted racer Earl Howe about his misgivings in driving for Mercedes; and he married a headstrong teenager whose father was BMW's general director, and who had withdrawn his daughter from school when the pupils were all instructed to join the League of German Girls – the female equivalent of the Nazi Hitler Youth.

Yes, Seaman railed against the complacency, narrow-mindedness and superiority complex over foreigners of his countrymen – how he would be depressed that nothing has progressed in the eight decades since – and he loved not just Germany, but his European experiences. Yet he also was deeply cynical of Hitler. The end impression of Seaman's politics from Williams's beautiful book is that you'd imagine him climbing into the cockpit of a Spitfire to do his bit for his country, and, if he survived, becoming a pro-European, Heseltinesque One-Nation Tory or a fabulously wealthy Liberal.

'If he survived' being the key phrase regarding an era when racing was just about as dangerous as war. As Seaman's chum Pat Fairfield, killed in the 1937 Le Mans 24 Hours, said to his family: "I don't know why you worry so much about my getting hurt or killed. There is going to be a war, and if I don't get killed driving I shall probably get killed fighting, and I should rather die doing something I love than be killed doing something I loathe, and I should loathe to have to kill."

MARCUS SIMMONS

autosport.com/podcast



Why did it take so long for Formula 1 to cancel the Australian Grand Prix following the withdrawal of McLaren? Should a decision have been made earlier or was it right to wait? On this edition of the Autosport podcast, the team discusses what proved to be a chaotic and farcical episode Down Under following the outbreak of the novel coronavirus in the GP paddock.

YouTube youtube.com/AUTOSPORTdotcom



In the wake of the announcements that the Australian, Bahrain and the inaugural Vietnamese grands prix have either been cancelled or postponed, Autosport technical editor Jake Boxall-Legge has taken a trip down memory lane to look at five other notable times that Formula 1 races have been cancelled in the past 40 years. **Go to bit.ly/cancelledF1**

AUTOSPORT PLUS bit.ly/FEcoronavirus

Why FE's coronavirus response is the example F1 had to follow

Confusion and disinformation surrounded the cancellation of the Australian Grand Prix. As world motorsport – and Formula E in particular – has shown, examples were set that F1 could easily have followed.

BTCC

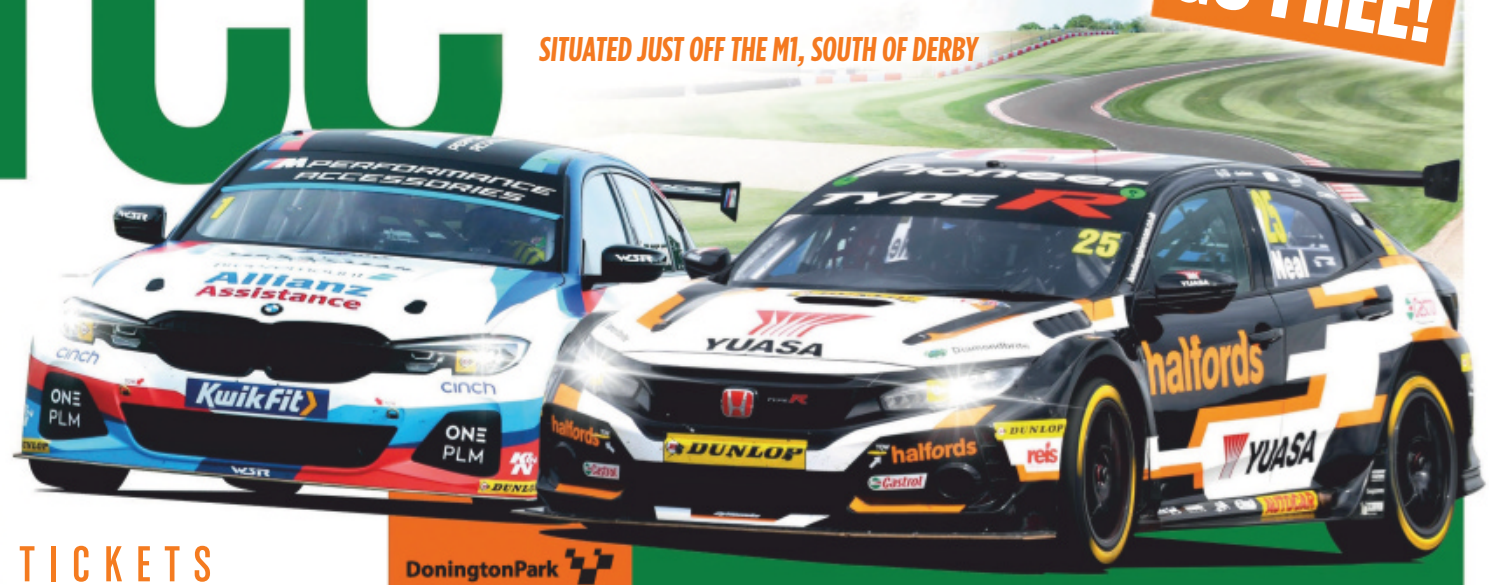
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The Heidfeld/Reynolds finishing position in Gold Coast 600

NICK HEIDFELD

The (very) hot take on an Australian Supercars cameo

MATT KEW

For 12 seasons Nick Heidfeld was a loyal servant to Formula 1, but he was unceremoniously benched by Lotus for the 2011 Belgian Grand Prix in favour of Bruno Senna. After legal proceedings were dropped, the two parties reached an amicable settlement to go their own way. From there Heidfeld went on a spree. He returned to Le Mans, contested the Nurburgring 24 Hours and made a cameo appearance in the Porsche Supercup — all in 2012. He also headed down under for a crack at Australian Supercars in the Gold Coast 600.

"After I was out of F1, I looked forward to try different tasks — I just enjoy it," recalls 42-year-old Heidfeld. "I just wanted to have fun and drive some different cars, and I also knew some people from my F1 times who had moved to Australia."

The eight-time F1 podium finisher linked up with David Reynolds to drive for the Rod Nash Racing squad in its Ford Falcon FG.

"THIS WAS THE ONLY TIME I HAD A CHILLED VEST AND EVEN A COOLING SYSTEM FOR THE HELMET"

The pair retired from the first race, and that more or less set the tone for the headline two-hour enduro the following day.

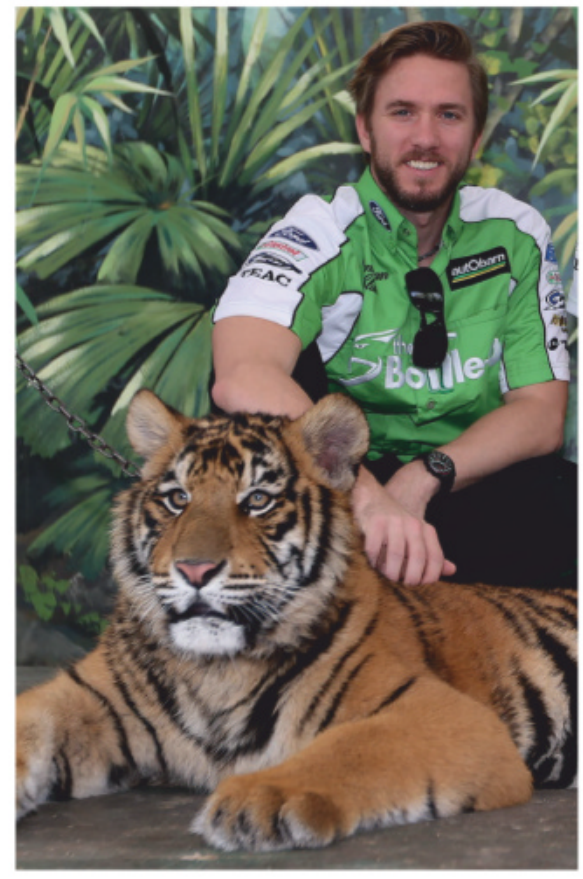
Heidfeld took the race start in 17th, but suffered damage on the first lap and was then turned around at the hairpin. He began a recovery drive and, when Reynolds took over, they moved into the top 10. But Reynolds also made errors in the second half and they eventually wound up 13th as fellow Ford runners Will Davison and Mika Salo bagged the spoils.

If things for Heidfeld were a touch heated on track, they were worse for the single-seater ace inside the closed cockpit. "It was f***ing hot," he recalls. "This was the first and only time where I had a chilled vest and even a cooling system for the helmet."

There had been little in the way of preparation for the event, however. Just the one test and no simulator sessions ("lucky, because I don't like that," Heidfeld adds).

With life well established in Europe, he didn't have the desire to move, or keep flying back to forth. The Gold Coast outings were it for Heidfeld's time in Australian Supercars. Even so, and despite the result, he'd enjoyed the experience.

"It was obviously completely different to anything I did before that," he says. "I really liked the atmosphere and had a very nice team-mate. David was such a fun guy.



The track was not easy. There was a really quick chicane which you had to hammer quite hard over the kerb. Other than that, it was not an outstanding circuit, but it's a big and famous event — there were good crowds there.

"It was a fun thing to do after my Formula 1 career when I wanted to tick off the boxes."



FROM THE ARCHIVE

Rene Arnoux (Ferrari 126C3) receives a full service during the 1983 German Grand Prix at Hockenheim (note that despite the hazards of refuelling, only one member of the pit crew appears to have fully closed his visor and only a couple are wearing gloves…). Arnoux qualified right behind polesitter and team-mate Patrick Tambay, but muscled past on lap two and took command, only relinquishing the lead (to Nelson Piquet's Brabham-BMW BT52) during the pitstops. At the finish, Arnoux was more than a minute ahead of runner up Andrea de Cesaris (Alfa Romeo 183T).

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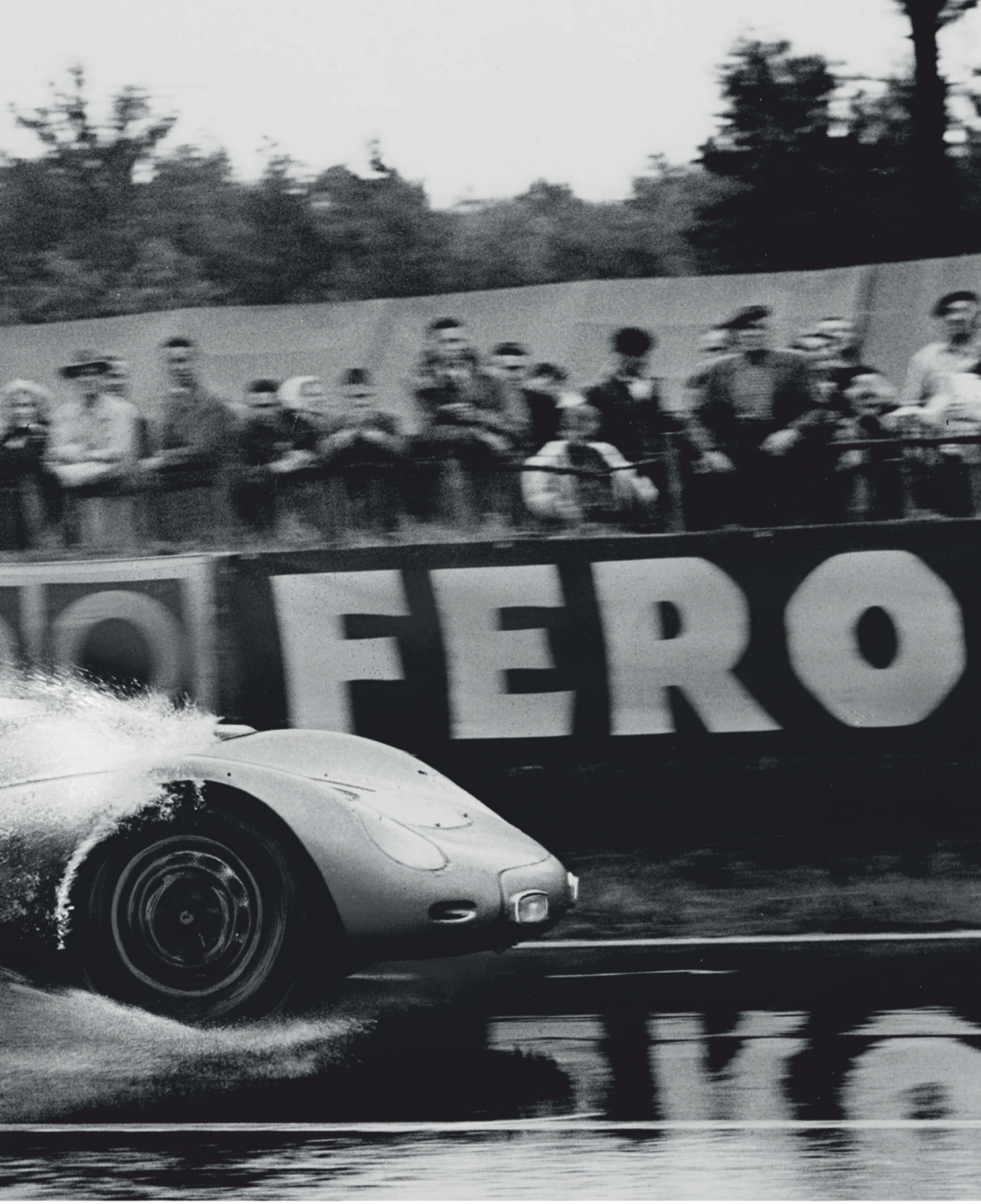


FROM THE ARCHIVE

The cropped wraparound screen and tonneau cover on the Porsche 718 RSK shared by Edgar Barth and Paul Frere is almost comically inadequate for keeping at bay the results of the downpours that characterised the 1958 Le Mans 24 Hours. The at times torrential conditions caused more than a dozen accidents, of which one was fatal, costing the life of French gentleman driver Jean-Marie Brussin. The 1498cc #31 Porsche finished an impressive fourth, behind the larger-engined (but still only 1588cc) 718 of Jean Behra/Hans Herrmann.

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Senna's wet weather warning

19 March 1981

Among the many qualities that Ayrton Senna displayed as a driver, his prowess in the wet is often the most praised. It was therefore apt that when Autosport reported on his maiden car victory, it came at a damp Brands Hatch.

Just two weeks after his Formula Ford 1600 debut at the same circuit – finishing an impressive fifth – Senna stunned his rivals by showcasing the skills in his Van Dieman RF81 for which he would become revered.

The experienced Rick Morris (who incredibly still races in FF1600 today) won the first Townsend Thoresen FF1600 heat, but the conditions worsened as the afternoon progressed.

"The second Formula Ford heat served to underline the promise of young [Senna] da Silva, who withstood both a concerted attack from Enrique Mansilla and a very hard downpour to win by one second from the Argentine driver," wrote Jeremy Shaw in his report.

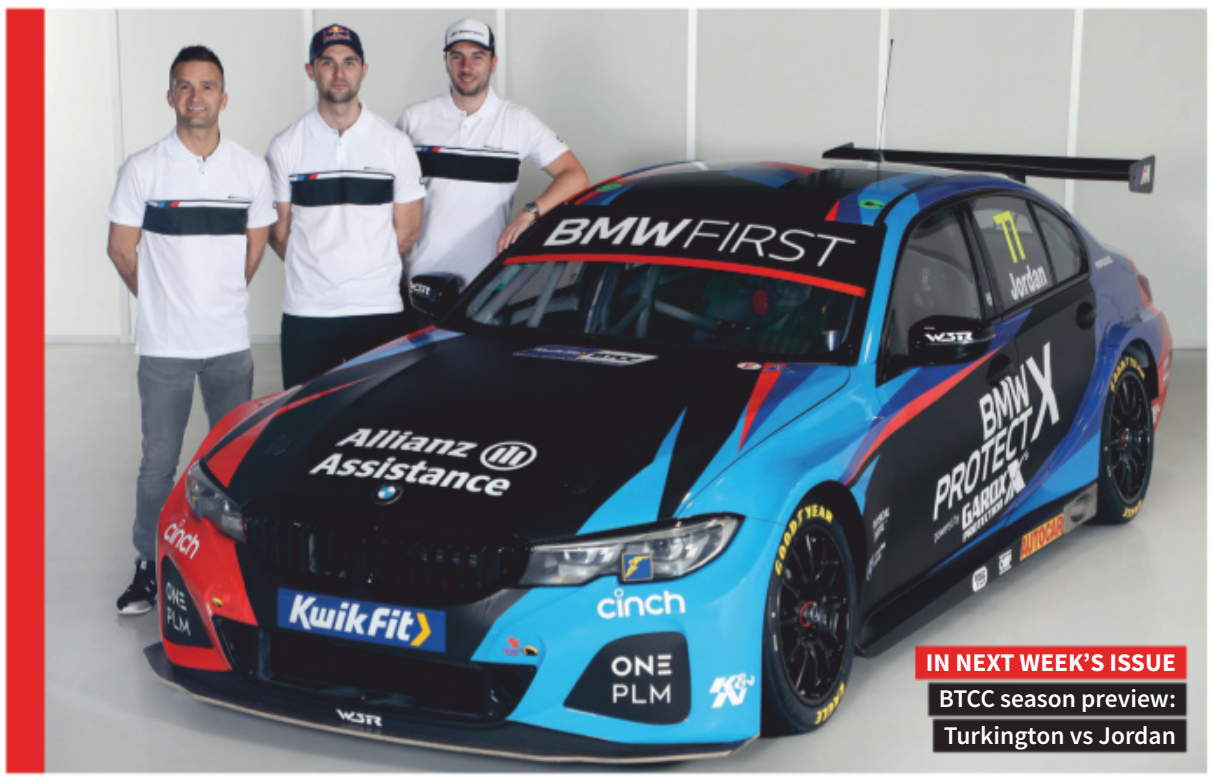
Senna was challenged in the final race – also affected by a setting sun – by Andy Ackerley, but the latter spun while trying to brake late and pass around the outside of Druids corner.

FF1600 races are rarely decided by a huge margin, and Senna's race-three victory of more than nine seconds in the 15-lap dash demonstrated what was to come.

"With [Roberto] Moreno out of the way, I was looking forward to a really good year... And now this bloke arrives!" said Steve Lincoln, who finished the final race in third.

Elsewhere, the twin-chassis Lotus 88 Formula 1 car remained at the centre of controversy after its debut at Long Beach – a race dominated by Williams. Geoff Brabham beat Jacques Villeneuve Sr in the Formula Atlantic support race.

CRAIG WOOLLARD



IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE

BTCC season preview: Turkington vs Jordan

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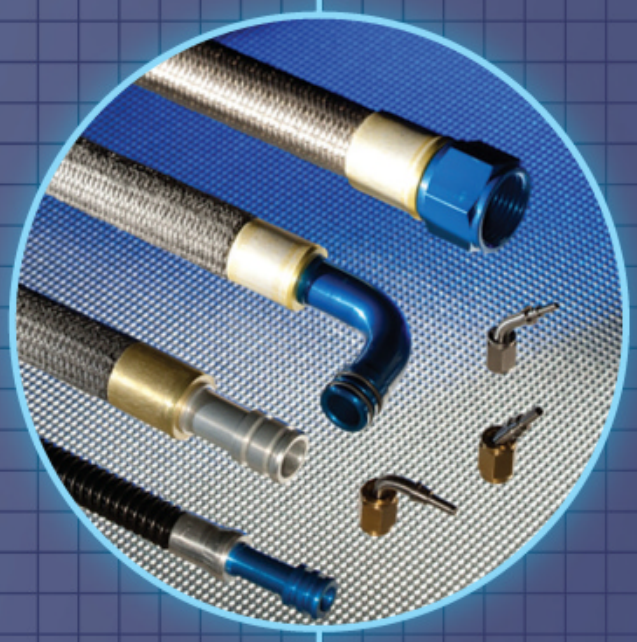
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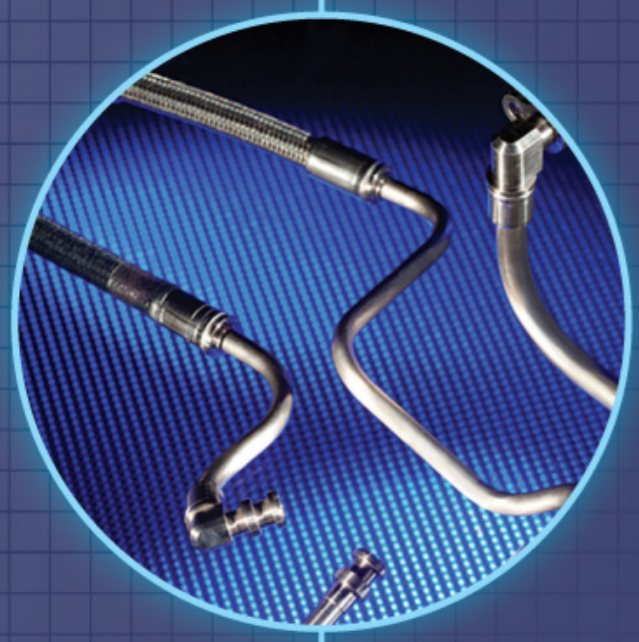
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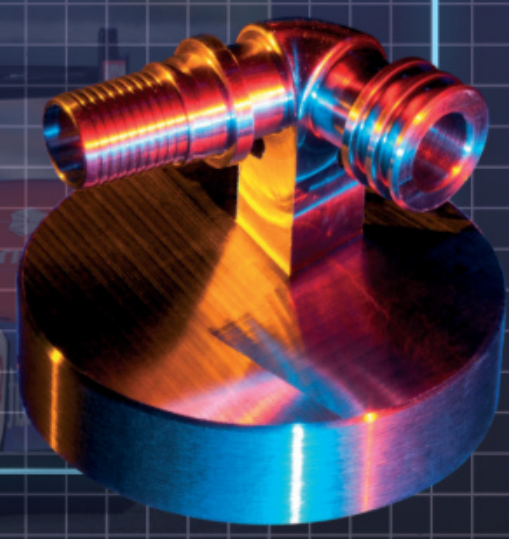
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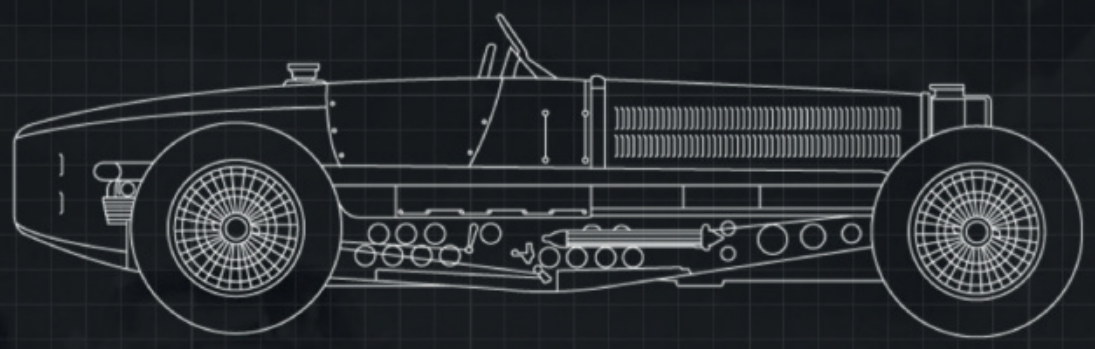
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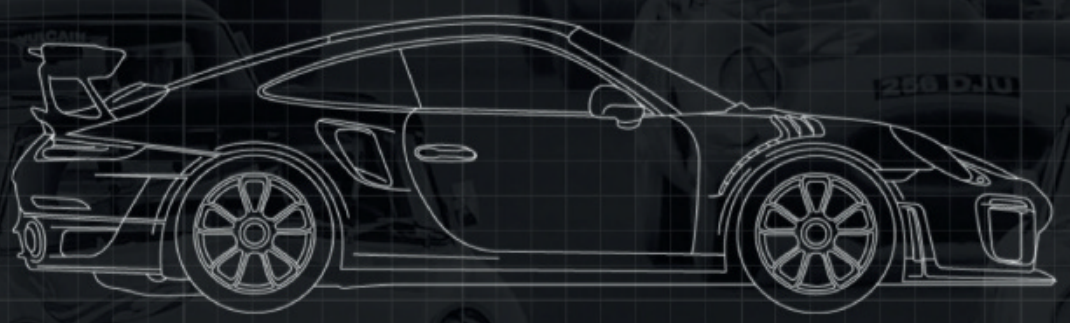
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GINETTA'S NEWEST CHALLENGER

Getting behind the wheel of the national racing stalwart's latest design





HOW THE BRSCC PLOTS A RETURN TO GROWTH



THE JOYS OF RACING IN CLUB-LEVEL SINGLE-SEATERS



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A STAPLE PART OF NATIONAL MOTORSPORT

There are few manufacturers that have as much involvement in national motorsport as Ginetta.

The Yorkshire company has run as many as five separate grids in the UK, catering from amateurs taking their first steps on track in the Ginetta Racing Drivers Club class to teenagers learning the ropes in Ginetta Junior and others racing on the British Touring Car support bill in the Ginetta GT4 Supercup. And some successful racers have risen through those ranks, perhaps most notable being McLaren Formula 1 driver Lando Norris – who made his car racing debut in Ginetta Junior.

As part of that ladder of series, there are hundreds of people racing Ginettas each year – and even more who drive the cars in other multi-marque categories.

Another person to get behind the wheel of a Ginetta recently was our track tester Ben Anderson. He sampled the GT5 Challenge-spec G40, the much more powerful G55, and Ginetta's latest project, its new G61 LMP3 challenger, and gives his take on each machine (page 8).

It is a time of change for the British Racing and Sports Car Club, as one of the UK's largest race organisers has a new management team in place. It's enjoyed mixed fortunes in recent seasons – some fantastic successes along with a few disappointing failures – and we look at the club's new vision in this issue (p14). We also look back at the club's past with a retro feature on a 1986 BRSCC meeting at Brands Hatch (p20).





STEPHEN LICKORISH
NATIONAL EDITOR



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Charlie Spalding/Ginetta; Hawkins; JEP; Mason

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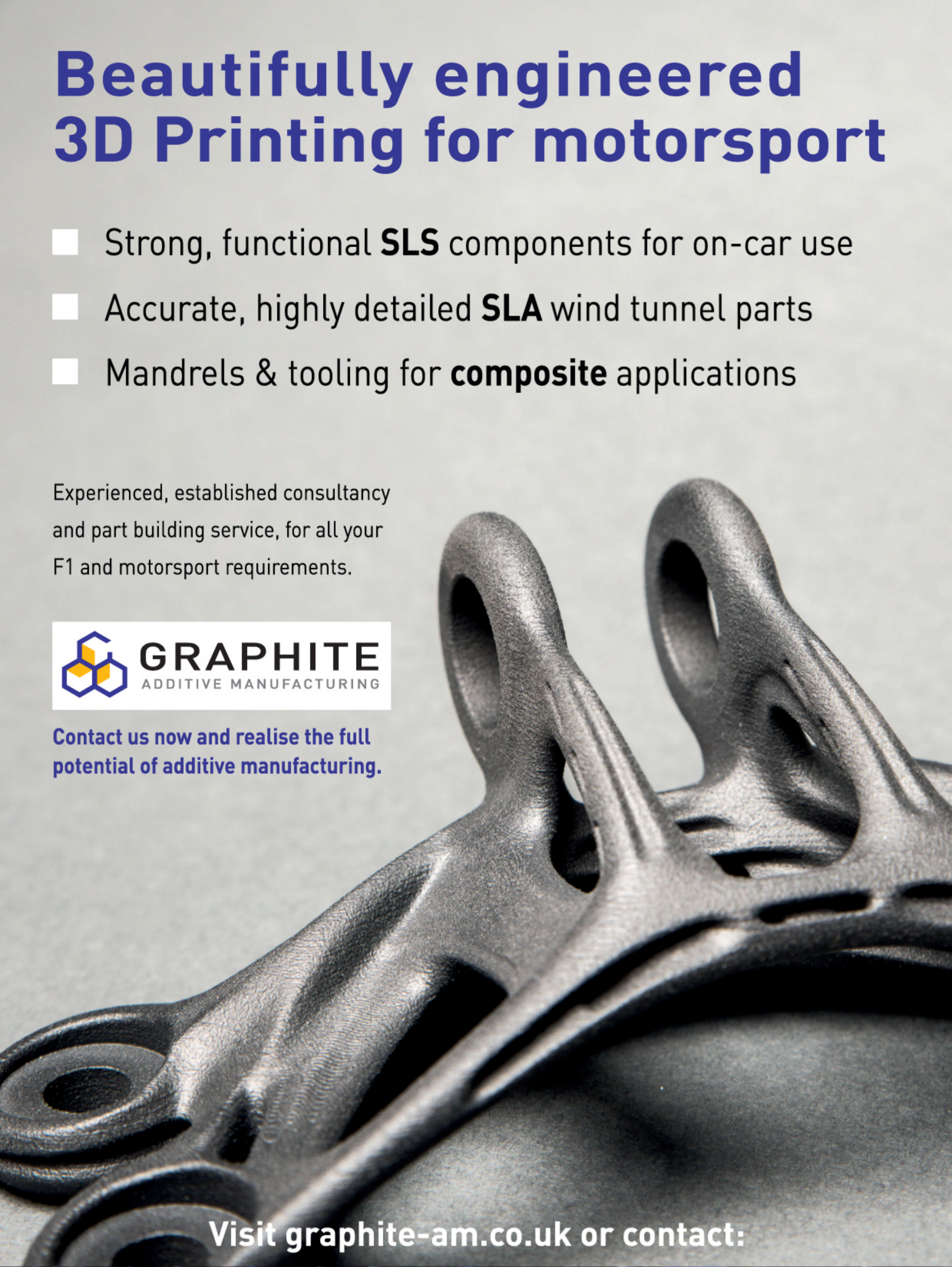
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OPINION
MICHAEL MOYERS


JEP

STILL EMBRACING CLUB MOTORSPORT

The two-time Walter Hayes Trophy winner and single-seater stalwart is enjoying racing now more than ever, and still has plenty of ambition

I think UK club racing is quite healthy at the moment – there are lots of options for aspiring racing drivers, whether they want to take it very seriously or just treat it as a bit of a hobby.

There are many different formulas that you can take part in, and they're very varied, which is fantastic. They also provide a brilliant atmosphere for racing because they're less political than formulas at a higher level, and you find that people actually enjoy themselves a lot more.

When you race at a higher level, there's so much more at stake and so you can just see that there's not quite so much enjoyment, purely because of the money involved. When you go and have a look around a club-level race meeting, it's all still very serious but everybody is enjoying themselves – which is great to see, because, at the end of the day, that's what it's all about isn't it? You go

> "I'm still really happy racing in Formula Ford and I'm looking at doing some racing in historics"

motor racing first and foremost to enjoy yourself.

I've always loved single-seaters, open-wheel racing – that's all I've ever been interested in. Obviously, I've tested other cars – Porsche Carrera Cup, Radical SR3 and Ginetta LMP3 – but I've always been in love with single-seater racing and I've always found that Formula Ford has given me the most pleasure.

The racing is unbelievable, and you actually get to develop the cars – that's something I find really interesting. We dabbled a bit in Formula BMW in 2006/07 but they were really just part-seasons – that's when it was quite eye-opening with regards to the gap between us being able to do it on a certain financial level and the people at the sharp end who had got three times the budget. It was really a case of saying to ourselves that if we couldn't afford to do it properly and be competitive then there was no point doing it at all – which is why we then dropped back down to a level that was more affordable and where we could be competitive.


Spell in Formula BMW was tough for Moyers
JEP

Looking back now, one of the main reasons we weren't successful was because the stakes were a lot higher – I knew I had to hit the ground running and get results from the word go. Because I was putting so much pressure on myself, the results weren't coming. What I've realised now is that when I go racing and put less pressure on myself the results naturally come – so it was a real tough lesson. I know if I had just relaxed and enjoyed myself a little bit more I would have been more successful at that level, but obviously hindsight is a wonderful thing.

I still really enjoy the racing and I'm still really happy racing in Formula Ford, and I'm going to be looking at doing some sort of racing in historics in the future as well. My dad has been involved in motorsport all of his life, hence I've been around race cars since I was a baby, basically. He worked on James Hunt's McLaren in 1976, and he's run Gil de Ferran, Tommy Byrne and Eddie Irvine – there's so much history and I think hearing about all these stories has certainly had an effect on my aspirations to race in more historic cars. The idea of jumping into something more raw is really attractive to me. An historic F1 car, 500bhp and an H-pattern gearbox – that is my kind of heaven.

I don't know exactly what the plans are for this year yet regarding Formula Ford but I've always said to myself that as long as I can prepare myself in a way that means I know I can be competitive then I will continue to do it. If I can't stay fit, if I'm not mentally prepared or I'm too busy doing other things so that it means I can't commit myself fully then I just won't do it. If I'm going to have another attempt at winning the Walter Hayes Trophy, and try to be a three-time winner, I'm only going to enter that race if I feel like I can commit myself to a point that I'm giving myself a realistic chance of winning, because if not then I'm wasting everybody's time, and that's not fair on anyone.

I'm very much just from a normal background – there's no rich family behind me or anything like that. We do this purely based on the fact I have half a dozen really loyal sponsors who all chip in a little bit for us to make sure that we can get out. It's so tough just getting on the grid and getting an entry, let alone winning these events, so I think that's why it means more when we do well. I think we get more emotional than anyone else because of the journey to get there – obviously, it's not easy for anybody, but it's particularly hard for us because we're just normal people. ■

JCW MINI

Another championship is set to come to the attention of the British Touring Car fan base in 2020

BY STEFAN MACKLEY

PHOTOGRAPHY **GARY HAWKINS**

This season the JCW Mini Challenge Championship will join the TOCA support bill in place of Renault Clios and promises to provide just as many thrills and spills.

The current car, based on the third-generation F56 Mini hatchback that was introduced into the championship in 2015, has been completely redeveloped from the road-going version.

Championship director Antony Williams says: "The cars are quite difficult to drive in comparison to some of the other single-make series that have been around recently.

"That makes the style of driving look like people are being quite over-exuberant, or perhaps struggling to control it, and that's true because ultimately it's a difficult car to drive. We've made it deliberately very aggressive and it really sorts the men from the boys."

While entertaining to watch, the outright performance of the cars should also exceed that of the outgoing fourth-generation Renault Clio.

"I wouldn't be surprised this year if we don't see a 2m03s around Snetterton, which would be three seconds quicker than a Clio there," adds Williams.

"Donington Park we're really quick at, whereas Brands Indy we don't really get the chance to stretch our legs quite so much and the difference there is a bit smaller, perhaps only half a second."

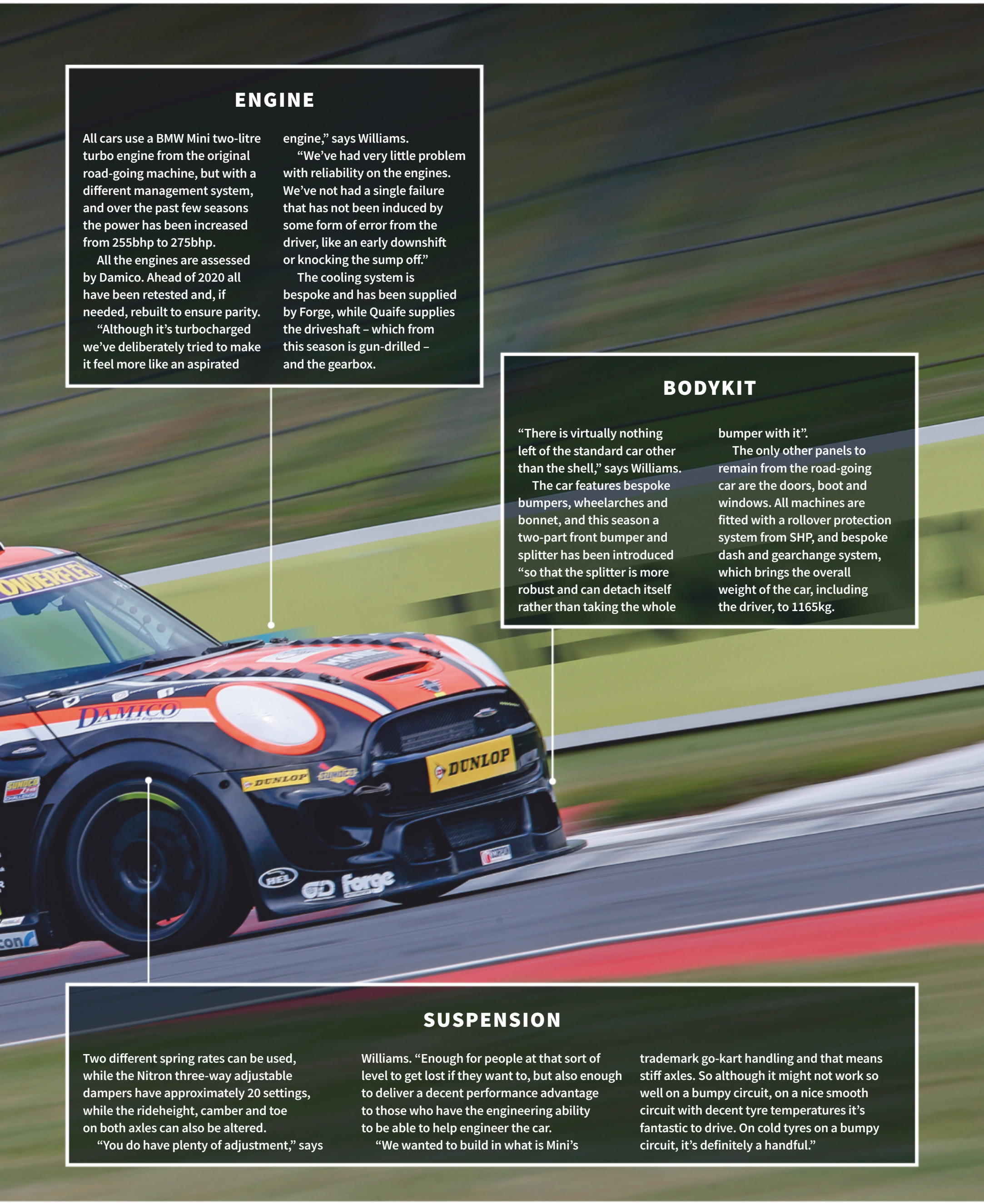
TYRES

Following the British Touring Car Championship's lead, Mini Challenge will switch from Dunlop to Goodyear tyres for the coming campaign, but Williams expects there will not be a huge performance difference.

"Because Dunlop is a subsidiary of Goodyear, ultimately what they've done is make sure the specification of tyre is virtually identical [to last season]; there are very subtle changes, but it's virtually identical," he says.

"The Goodyear, like the Dunlop, is a very hardwearing, durable tyre; it's very reliable, and consistent and enables drivers to deliver quick lap times, not just on the first or second lap but even on their ninth or 10th lap."

Drivers will be limited to a total of just six tyres for Friday testing, as well as qualifying and races on Saturday and Sunday, in a bid to cut costs.



ENGINE

All cars use a BMW Mini two-litre turbo engine from the original road-going machine, but with a different management system, and over the past few seasons the power has been increased from 255bhp to 275bhp.

All the engines are assessed by Damico. Ahead of 2020 all have been retested and, if needed, rebuilt to ensure parity.

"Although it's turbocharged we've deliberately tried to make it feel more like an aspirated engine," says Williams.

"We've had very little problem with reliability on the engines. We've not had a single failure that has not been induced by some form of error from the driver, like an early downshift or knocking the sump off."

The cooling system is bespoke and has been supplied by Forge, while Quaife supplies the driveshaft – which from this season is gun-drilled – and the gearbox.

BODYKIT

"There is virtually nothing left of the standard car other than the shell," says Williams.

The car features bespoke bumpers, wheelarches and bonnet, and this season a two-part front bumper and splitter has been introduced "so that the splitter is more robust and can detach itself rather than taking the whole bumper with it".

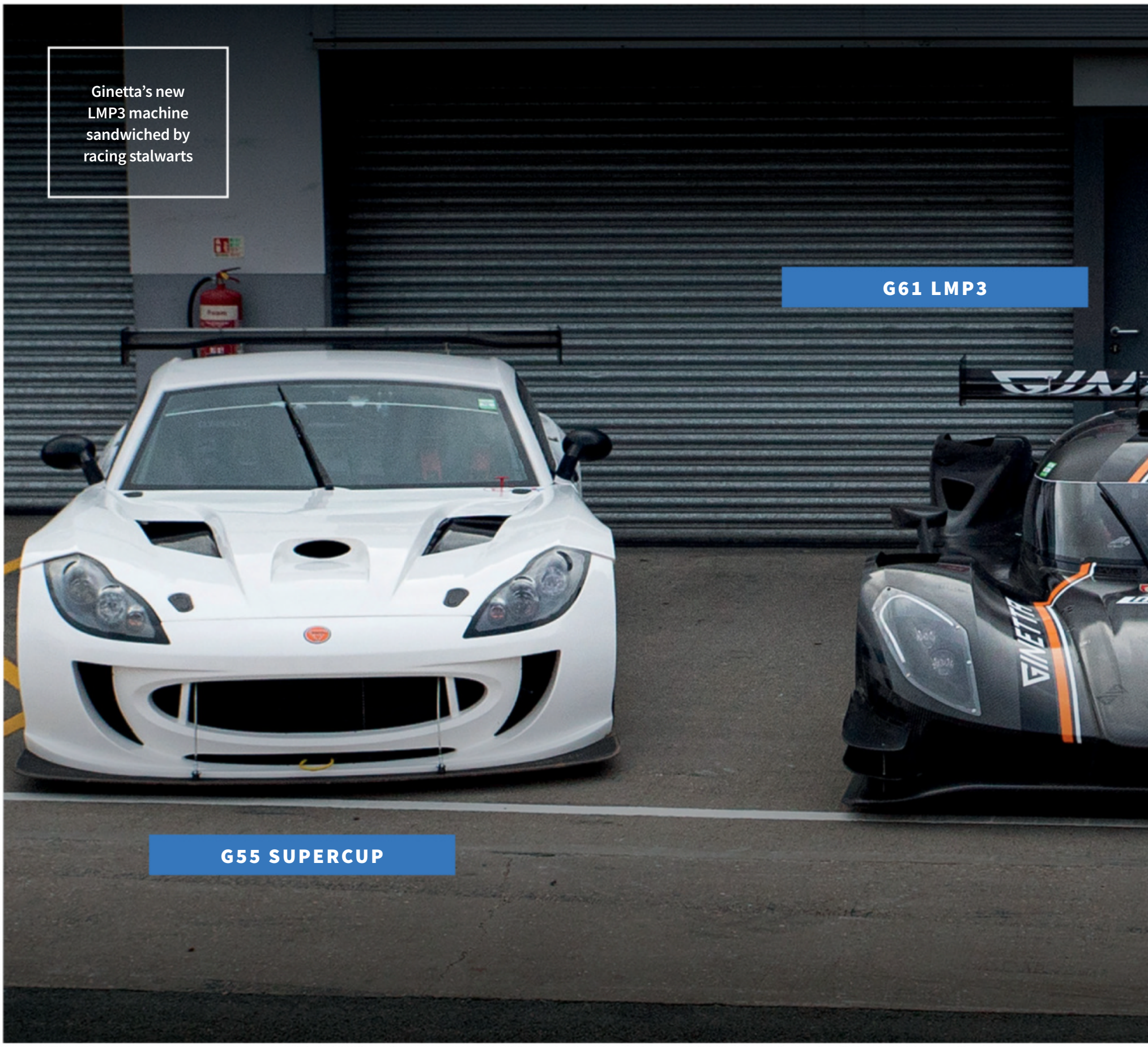
The only other panels to remain from the road-going car are the doors, boot and windows. All machines are fitted with a rollover protection system from SHP, and bespoke dash and gearchange system, which brings the overall weight of the car, including the driver, to 1165kg.

SUSPENSION

Two different spring rates can be used, while the Nitron three-way adjustable dampers have approximately 20 settings, while the rideheight, camber and toe on both axles can also be altered.

"You do have plenty of adjustment," says Williams. "Enough for people at that sort of level to get lost if they want to, but also enough to deliver a decent performance advantage to those who have the engineering ability to be able to help engineer the car.

"We wanted to build in what is Mini's trademark go-kart handling and that means stiff axles. So although it might not work so well on a bumpy circuit, on a nice smooth circuit with decent tyre temperatures it's fantastic to drive. On cold tyres on a bumpy circuit, it's definitely a handful."

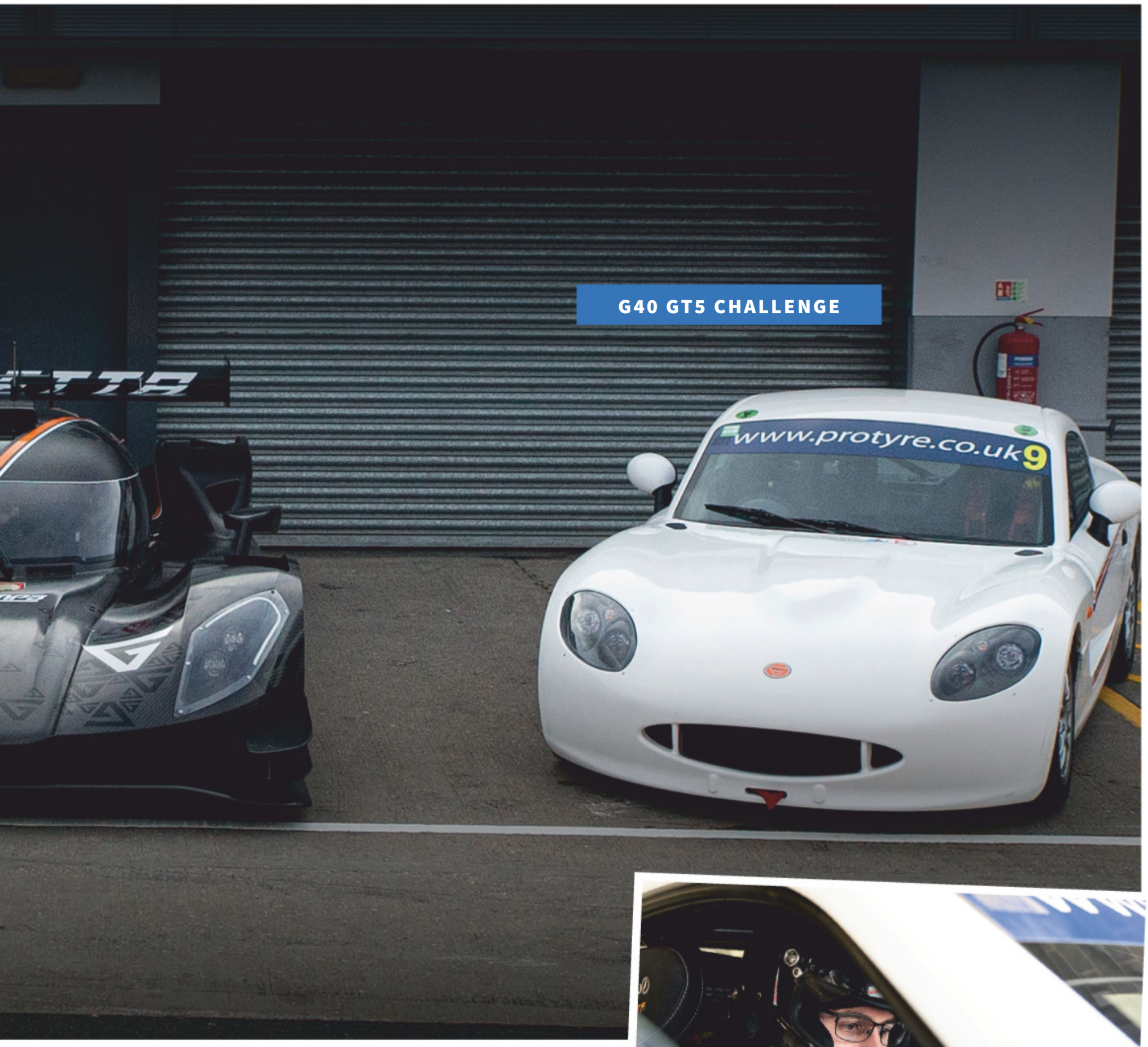


HOW GINETTA HAS ADDED TO ITS RACING LADDER

Autosport gets behind the wheel of two of the manufacturer's long-serving machines, along with its new LMP3 challenger

BY BEN ANDERSON

PHOTOGRAPHY **CHARLIE SPALDING/GINETTA**



G40 GT5 CHALLENGE



Anderson sampled the G40, G55 and G61

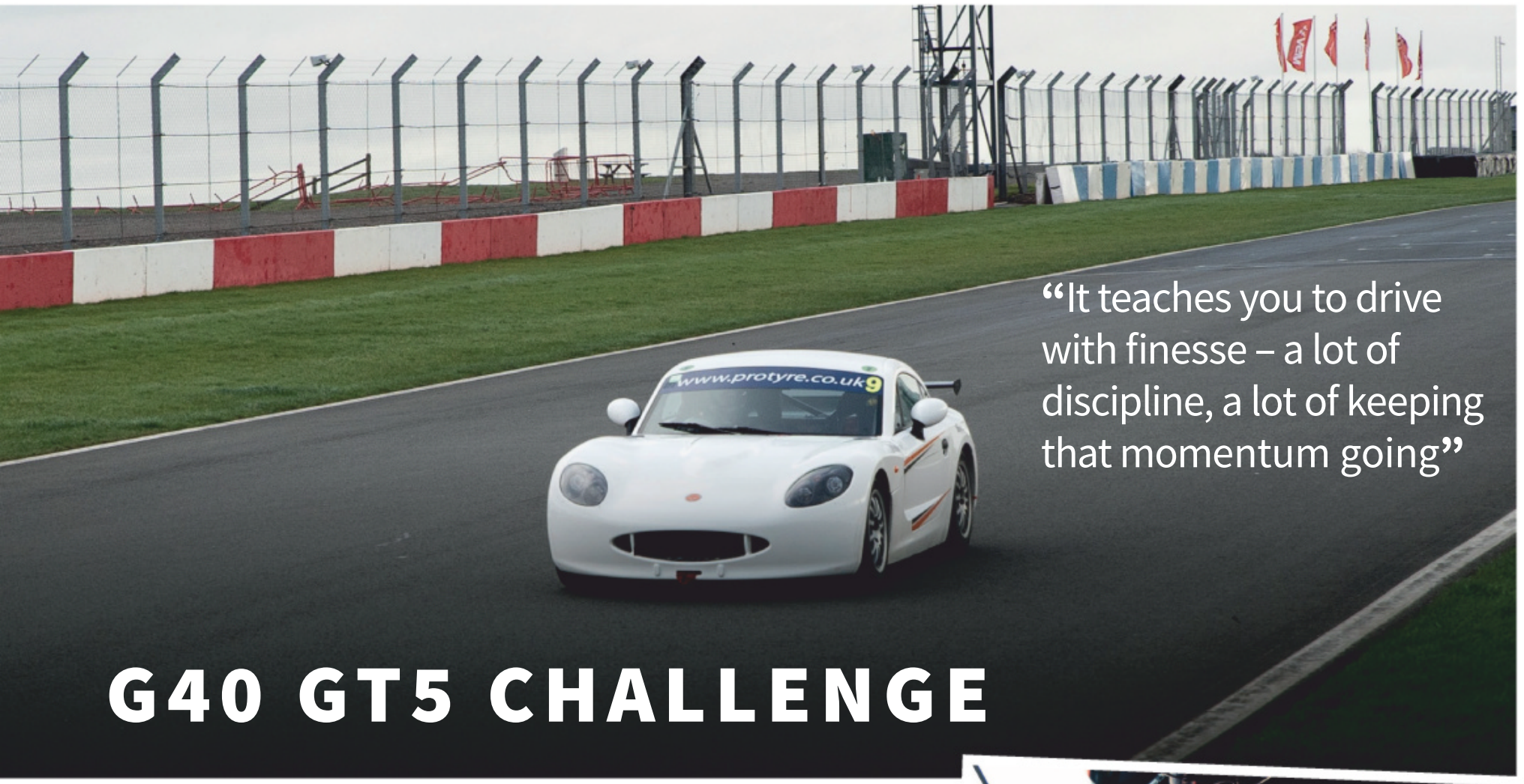
When certain championships have been around for a while, they can lose their sheen and sort of fade into the background, becoming part of the racing furniture, as it were.

Lawrence Tomlinson took over Ginetta in the mid-2000s, and there's no doubt that he breathed fresh life into the struggling British sportscar manufacturer by developing a new, modern-looking range of GT-inspired racing cars and creating new opportunities for talented drivers to build careers through his 'ladder to Le Mans' programme. The subsequent success and longevity of Ginetta Junior, the GT5 Challenge, Ginetta Racing Drivers Club and the GT4 Supercup has established Ginetta as a cornerstone of Britain's national racing landscape – so much so that we take seeing these cars populating the UK's race tracks almost for granted.

But that doesn't mean the battle is over. For all that relatively recent progress, Ginetta still lacks the prestige and international renown that helps the likes of Aston Martin, Bentley, Ferrari, Porsche, McLaren et al to remain at the forefront of GT/sportscar racing, almost come what may.

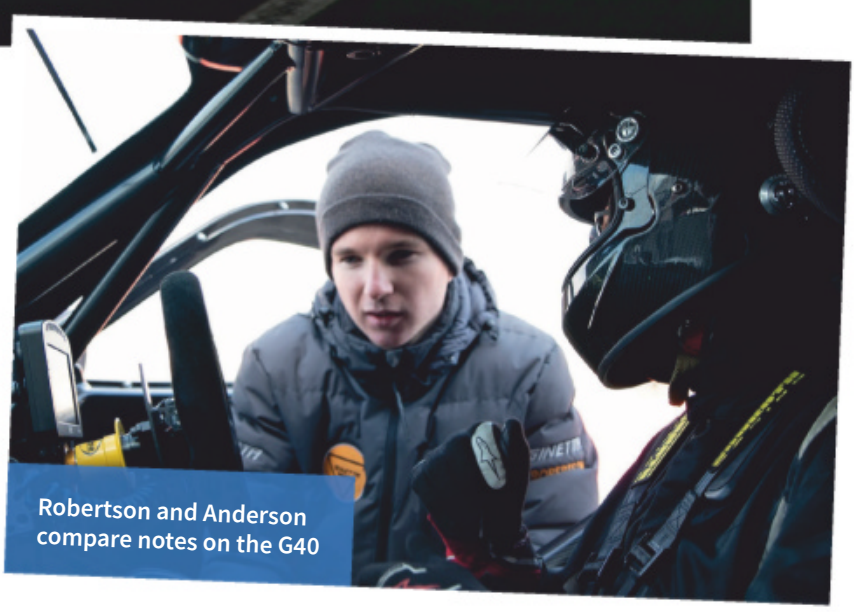
That's why Ginetta's fledgling LMP1 programme and its latest offering to the ACO's burgeoning LMP3 category are so welcome. They offer a clear route to competing at the very pinnacle of endurance racing, at a time when the premier prototype category is in flux and needs support.

Ginetta is producing cars that can take you all the way to Le Mans, which means they can potentially fulfil dreams. This strengthens Ginetta's sportscar ladder, which should in turn keep its stalwart championships at the forefront of people's minds, rather than fading from their consciousness. ▶



"It teaches you to drive with finesse – a lot of discipline, a lot of keeping that momentum going"

G40 GT5 CHALLENGE


Robertson and Anderson compare notes on the G40

The Ginetta G40 will never fade from my own mind. Sliding back into the cockpit on this chilly Donington Park morning, the memories of nine years ago come flooding back. I raced one of these cars when they were new to the scene in 2011, competing on the then-recently reconfigured Snetterton 300 circuit as a British F3/GT support act, against a field that included one of my childhood racing heroes: Caterham legend Clive Richards.

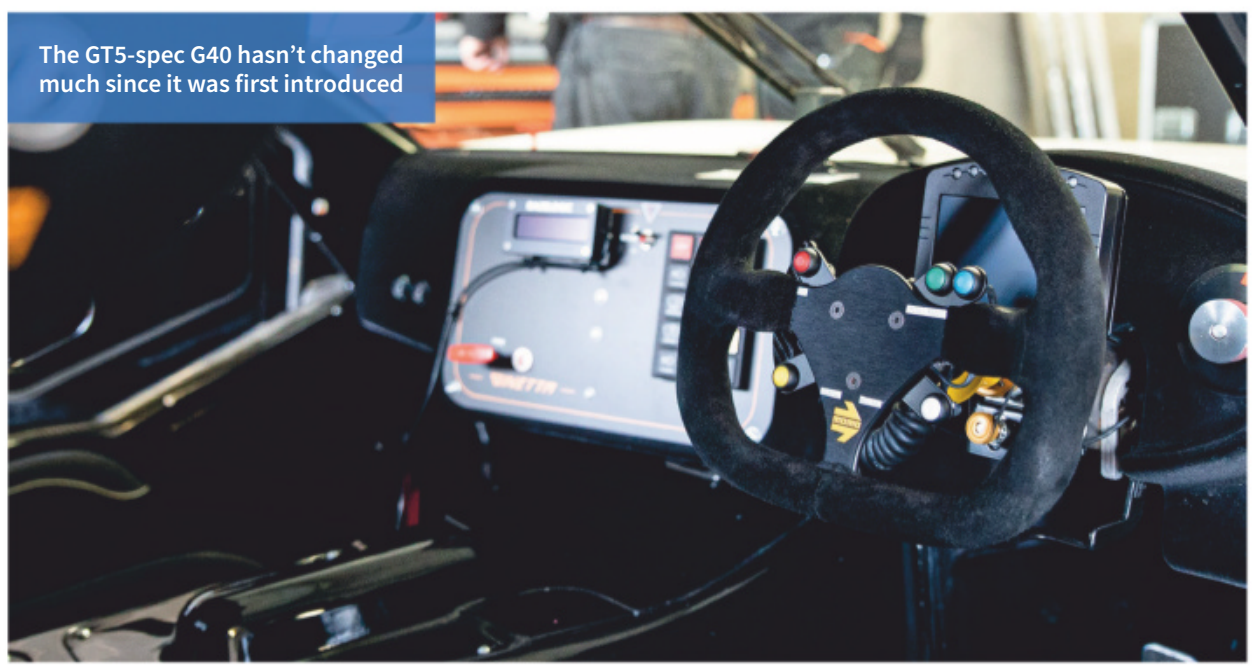
I unexpectedly took pole in crash-shortened, rain-affected qualifying and finished on the podium after spinning on lap one of the first race. I even caught Richards before he spun off in front of me. Fellow members of the media placed bets on how badly I'd do; I recall several of the F3 fraternity (which included Felipe Nasr and Kevin Magnussen), whom I was also there to report on for Autosport, giving me V signs from the pitwall as I drove past on the main straight!

This car looks very similar to the one I raced almost a decade ago, and in fact I'm told not much has changed at all in the basic specification, save for the addition of a rear spoiler to calm the car down. Ginetta factory driver Charlie Robertson, finalist in the 2013 McLaren Autosport BRDC Award, heads out first for some installation laps, but the car unfortunately suffers an electrical shutdown when I'm aboard.

The track is drying but still wet in patches when I head back out after some swift repairs. After half a dozen laps, and a best lap of 1m29s, I can feel the car moving around on its wet Michelins through the drier corners – much how I imagine the Junior version of this car, which runs 60bhp less and on treaded tyres, feels.

Later, on Michelin slicks, we're down to 1m22s in the damp. By then, I've had a run in the G55 Supercup car (more of which later) and the G40 feels agricultural in comparison. But the consequence of all this clearly telegraphed weight transfer, and gradual loading and unloading of the steering, is that drivers near the beginning of their careers will learn important lessons about how the car reacts to their inputs, and feel exactly what the G40 is doing. No point reinventing the wheel if the technology still does the job...

"The G40 is the perfect car to learn in for any driver, because it's got that level of weight transfer," Robertson says. "Every input you put in the car will directly feed back to you, so if you are really aggressive, it'll be really aggressive back to you and snap. You've got to be a smooth driver, and it really teaches you to drive with finesse – a lot of discipline, a lot of keeping that momentum going. It's like being back in Cadet karts."


The GT5-spec G40 hasn't changed much since it was first introduced



Robertson describes the G55 as the G40's "big brother"

G55 SUPERCUP

Taking the G40's bigger, meaner-looking brother out for a spin is not quite the same trip down memory lane. I haven't raced one of these, but I do have distant experience of this car's forefather – the G50 (and its cousin, the G50 Zytek).

Racing in the G50 Cup at Silverstone in 2009 was the other truly transformative experience of my early Autosport racing career. For the first time, I found myself getting slower the more I drove the car, but after carefully studying the data with help from my sister Jenny – who is now an engineer in KTM's MotoGP team – coupled with some set-up help from Frank Wrathall, I eventually ran inside the top 10 and lapped within a few tenths of the pace in front of those similar British Touring Car crowds who'd seen me disgrace myself in the Porsche Carrera Cup a year prior.

This is where I learned the transformative power of data and self-awareness of technique.

The G55 nevertheless takes me back to this time because it is what came next. It actually doesn't feel too far removed from the G50, just everything – power, braking performance, grip – amped up to a new level. Although, Robertson warns me, the power-assisted steering makes the car very direct on corner entry, it also makes handling nearly 1100kg and 355bhp more straightforward.

It's the sort of car that showcases Ginetta's endurance racing DNA. It's so smothered in grip and benign enough in its behaviour that you can get quite comfortable quite quickly. And it's stealthily rapid. I'm straight down to 1m13s (Robertson tells me 1m09s is frontrunning pace) without taking risks or fully exploring the braking potential. I know I'm giving away time at Redgate and the chicane while I'm finding my feet.



The Supercup machine features a step up in power and braking

> "You forget how good the guys at the front of that championship really are"

But as the speed builds you really feel the inertia of the car. There is a lot of mass to manage, so you need to be alert and precise with your inputs to avoid trouble. It feels like a definite step up from the G40.

"That car is effectively the G40's big brother," says Robertson, who won the Supercup in 2014 after switching from single-seaters. He describes the G55 as "probably one of my favourite racing cars I've driven".

"It's a similar way of build [to the G40] – a spaceframe chassis with the shell bonded on, then a 3.7-litre V6 with almost 400 horsepower straight to the back wheels, which is a different beast to the G40. The splitter and the wing and the big slick tyres really make the car suitable to a downforce driver – you can really attack the corners, come off the brake, really roll the speed.

"I felt really at one with the G55. It's basically a G40 on steroids. The guys in that class at the top are pukka. I went out today just warming up and Will Burns came past. I was flabbergasted by how fast he was! You forget how good the guys at the front of that championship really are. They're really pushing the envelope with the car." ▶



G61 LMP3



Driving the prototype was a new experience for Anderson

And now for something completely different. Ginetta's new-for-2020 LMP3 car: the G61-LT-P3. This is what Ginetta calls a "reimagining" of its original LMP3 effort, designed and built in conjunction with ex-Williams F1 engineer Ewan Baldry. It dominated this junior prototype sportscar category in 2015 before falling out of favour compared to rival models offered by French constructors Ligier and Norma.

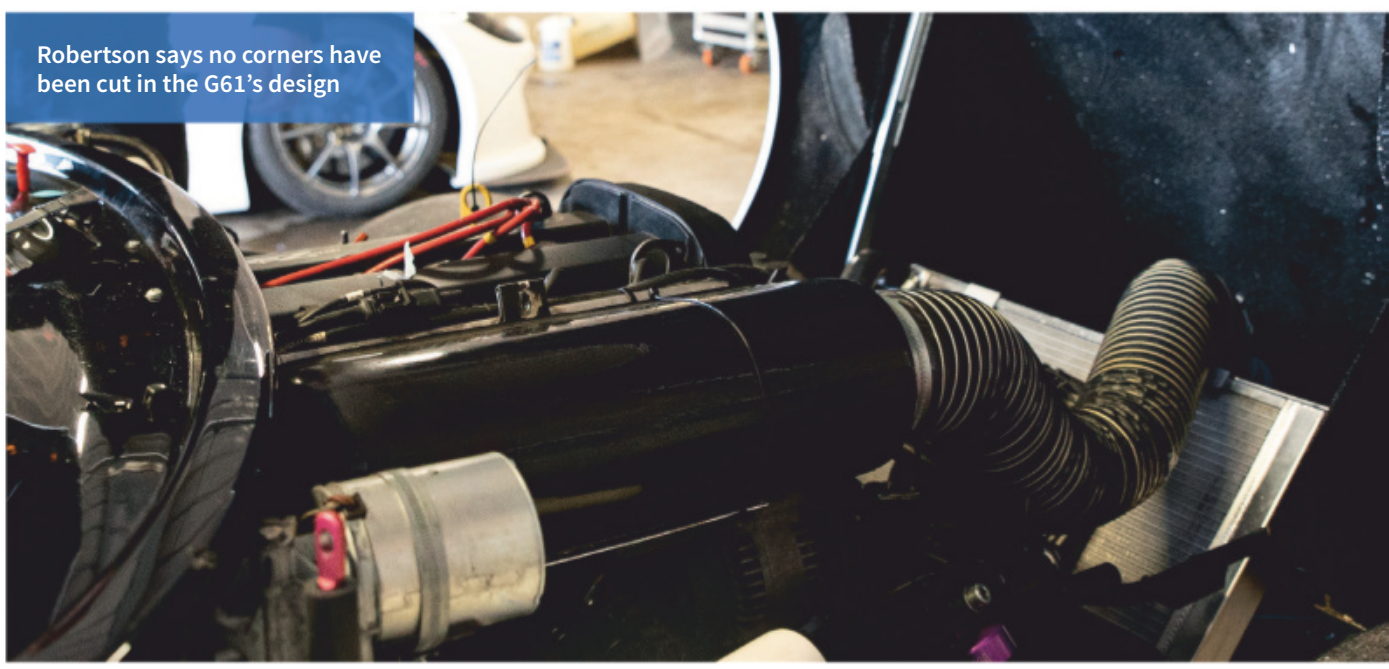
Now the five-year homologation period is up for renewal, so Ginetta has spotted the chance to re-enter the fray and develop a fresh frontrunning package. Crucially, Ginetta has drawn on its experience of designing a promising LMP1 prototype, employing lessons learned from that project and using the talents of the same design team to hit the ground running.

"We spent all of last year developing this car and the last part of 2018," explains Robertson. "It's the same chassis. It's a different engine – the engine [an uprated Nissan VK56 V8 with ORECA-controlled drivetrain] is spec across the whole category. You basically get the engine and gearbox as a package and you build your car around it. It's a slightly more powerful motor than the previous one, about 35-40bhp so not huge. And there's a little bit more allowed on the downforce side: you're allowed a twin-plane rear wing instead of a single, which makes a bit of a difference. And a few differences in the floor.

"We kind of moved away from P3 for a few years, and we're really focused on getting this car as perfect as we can, so no corners have been cut. It's literally like anything the engineers have wanted they've got. It's a nice build, and I think it will be a really strong car. We've learned a lot from LMP1, using all the same people and a lot of the same tools to make this car, so in theory it's LMP1 tech passed down to LMP3 regs. I'm really excited about it."

This is a new experience for me. My sportscar seat-time is limited to driving a VdeV Ligier (in the distant past of 2008) plus various outings in Radical sportscars, so I'm genuinely excited to try LMP3 out. The Renault Sport Trophy car I raced in Austria in 2016 was capable of similar lap times around the Red Bull Ring, just achieved in a different way, and those GT/Formula Renault 3.5 fusion cars were extremely rapid...

"The P3 is quite a different sort of prototype," adds Robertson. "LMP2 has carbon brakes and it's got a bit more downforce, so that's pretty much like a nailed-on single-seater. The initial P3 was a bit more GT-ish in terms of the way it handled – quite soft – but I thought it was quite a nice mix of downforce and what I'd learned from Supercup, so I felt



Robertson says no corners have been cut in the G61's design



Heading off on another lap: sub-minute not possible on this day

like it was quite a nice step. I thought the car suited my driving style."

I'm hoping I'll get two runs in the car, but a sequence of earlier red flags coupled with those G40 delays scupper that plan. I get about half a dozen laps or so to familiarise myself with the car just before the lunch break. From the moment I lever myself into the cockpit and the swing doors are shut to enclose me, I'm struck by how well laid out everything is. Dare I say it, I actually feel *comfortable*. Usually, prototype racing cars require some sort of design compromise that basically screws the driver over – a chassis rail that bruises the side of the leg; a bolt that juts out and digs into the flesh. Not the case here. There's even a TV display connected to a camera that replaces the rear-view mirror!

Once out onto the circuit I'm lapping in 1m07s without effort. Robertson did 1m04s in his warm-up run and says the car is capable of 1m08s in the wet! It's just amazing. I feel like I'm in a Space Invaders game as I dart between the other cars occupying *my* circuit.

The biggest compliment I can pay this car is that it is effortlessly quick, right up there with the best I've tried. For €239,000 worth of kit (the price is fixed under regulation) perhaps that's what you'd expect, but even so this is a truly impressive piece of engineering. No wonder Ginetta feels it can be up there with anything produced by rivals Ligier, Duqueine (which has replaced Norma) and German manufacturer ADESS.

"It's crazy around here – it's like your eyes are on stalks!" enthuses Robertson when we discuss my brief experience. "Obviously compared to a single-seater it's heavy, but it's got the power to pull it through and it's probably got a similar level of downforce when on full chat. The thing with downforce is being able to come off the brake and go, 'Yeah, that's going to stick through there'. It's just building up to that.

"Round here, on a sort of semi-wet day, it's quite a hard way to feel it. But good thing you got out in the dry. Sub-minute would be fast if we could get it with this car. It's possible, I think. We've been close in other cars we've done."

That's a reference to the unhomologated G58, for which Ginetta unleashed its former LMP3 design with a 575bhp V8 engine developed in-house. That car weighed less than 950kg and was capable of almost 200mph.

"We're going to do the same with this – obviously not on the same scale as a Porsche 919 tribute, but something unlimited in aero, lots of power," Robertson adds. "It's cool being part of a company that has plans to race in categories such as LMP3, GT4, has one-make stuff, and it also wants to create stuff that's interesting – genuinely, that [new] car will be awesome. We've got that new supercar we're making, the Akula, which is pretty mad.

"Lawrence really has a lot of plans for the company. No day is ever the same. It's an interesting place to work. We want to build a prestigious motorsport brand. Doing the World Endurance Championship, that gives us that sort of foundation to build something really cool. That gives you a lot of respect from all racing backgrounds. If you can build a car that can be at the sharp end at Le Mans, then you know you're doing something right."

Just when Ginetta was perhaps in danger of fading into the background, it's coming back with a bang. ■



LMP3 features a higher-spec Nissan engine around which car is based



NEW DECADE, NEW START FOR THE BRSCC

It hasn't all been smooth sailing for the British Racing & Sports Car Club in recent seasons but, with a new management team in place and a number of fresh ideas in the pipeline, the club is positive about the future

BY STEPHEN LICKORISH

Fifty-seven cars. As an average number of entries for a championship across a season, that's a very impressive figure. And out of all 177 English categories, the 57-car average for the British Racing & Sports Car Club's Mazda MX-5 Championship (for the Mk1 model of the popular Japanese sportscar) was the highest last year. But the BRSCC also featured at the bottom of those tables as the five-car average for its Fiesta Junior championship was the lowest. In all, six of its classes featured grid numbers in single digits at times during 2019, and that contrast between great successes and disappointing struggles has typified the club in recent seasons.

There was the arrival of the TCR UK category two years ago to much fanfare, but that inaugural season proved to be somewhat of a flop. The club has also lost a couple of long-running championships to rival organisers as coordinators sought to find new homes. And it has even suffered public criticism about a lack of support from the boss of one of its series that collapsed over the winter.

It therefore certainly has not been plain sailing for one of the UK's largest race meeting organisers. And it's incredibly refreshing for the BRSCC's chairman Peter Daly to candidly admit as much.

"As a club, people may think we've had a disaster — we've not had the best of rides over the last 12 to 18 months, but the important outcome for us is we've reacted to it," he says.

Now the new decade marks a new start for the club — a wealth of changes in personnel, attitudes and practices have been implemented. In terms of people, there is a new management structure in place as former Compact Cup coordinator Paul McErlean has been appointed race operations and general manager. He has been joined by the club's popular and successful MX-5 coordinator Mandy Andrew and Compact Cup and Clubsport Trophy (more on that later) chief Greg Graham as part of a team that is concentrating on making sure all of the club's categories are performing as well as they can be.

"One of the things I really wanted to focus on was the domestic market and the clubman product," says McErlean. "And that's where the new team came from.

"Mandy has been very successful in developing and managing the Mazda product within the club scene and has done a very good job. She's going to play a fairly significant role in working much more closely with the coordinators. Greg Graham has motorsport in his blood and worked with tyre companies and developed their racing scene. They were coordinators for four or five of the largest clubman championships in the country last year. ▶



MX-5 champion Langridge (5) believes the category's popularity is due to costs being kept under control

HAWKINS

NOTABLE CHAMPIONSHIPS AND SERIES



HAWKINS

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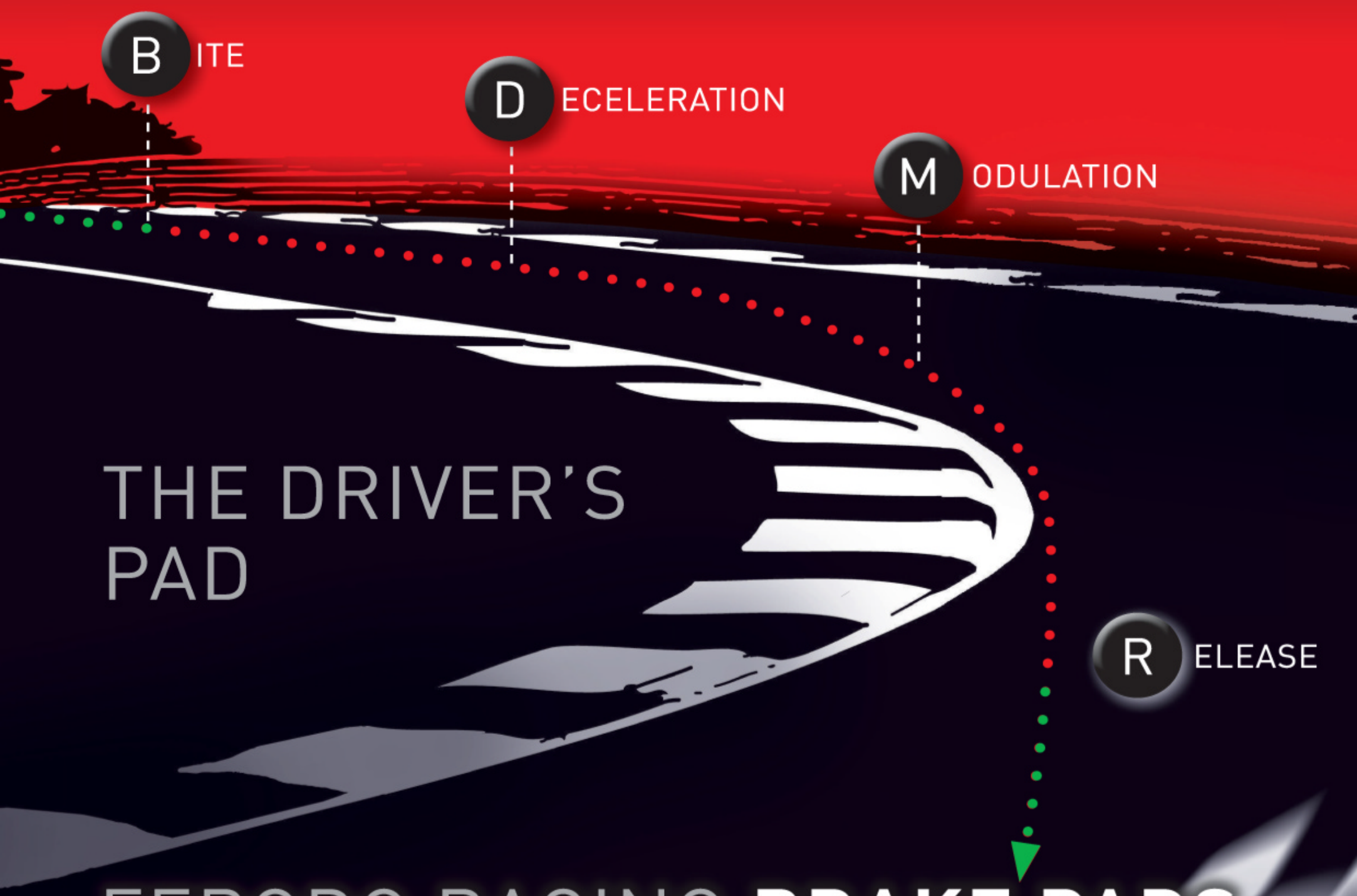
Since joining the BRSCC from the 750 Motor Club for the start of the 2016 season, the Compact Cup has gone from strength to strength. Featuring 1.9-litre BMW E36 318ti Compact three-door machines, it was the club's second most popular series last year – grids featured an average of 40 cars – and always provides close racing. It's a good springboard too, as new British Touring Car driver James Gornall raced in the category for several years, winning the 2016 title, ahead of progressing back up the motorsport ladder. Demand is such that it features split grids at most meetings.

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MAZDA MX-5 CHAMPIONSHIP

The Mazda MX-5 is one of the most popular cars in club motorsport and there is no shortage of different places to race them. But the BRSCC's MX-5 Championship for Mk1 models is the clear leader, averaging 57 entries last year as it runs two grids at each of its rounds, using a relegation and promotion system between them. The BRSCC has also brought its separate MX-5 SuperCup and MX-5 Super Series classes for the Mk3s back together for this season, so expect larger entries there too. And the club is also looking to the future with its new-for-2020 category for Mk4 cars.

"So there will be myself heading that team, Mandy is going to be hands on with the coordinators and Greg working with the development stuff [new concepts]. It's a team that understands the products and understands club motorsport – it's a strong and energetic team."

Daly, whose own enthusiasm for club motorsport is infectious, believes he has the right team in place to change attitudes and drive the club forward. "The BRSCC has got more people involved in management now that have experienced racing than previously," he says. "If you look at Paul McErlean, Greg Graham and myself, we all have race licences and all are very passionate about it.

"We are in a very competitive environment and in an environment where there are not as many international meetings as there used to be in the UK. There's not as many events to run and organise, and we as a club find it difficult to compete against some organisations. The BRSCC's plan is to try and grow our own championships and have new opportunities to attract people into motorsport – our grids need to be filled."

That plan for growth includes a thorough assessment of the 23 series that currently make up the BRSCC's portfolio, and Daly says the club has "only just scratched the surface" of this.

McErlean explains that the various series are divided into three strands, each requiring different action. "There are some series that need some work and support and that's what the new team is here to do," he says. "There are the products that are working well and we need to keep that momentum and conveyor belt going. There's stuff in the middle that on an event-by-event basis can be either side of a good grid. And then there's the stuff that's struggling and in some cases struggling for some time.

> "You have to be brave, look at a series and ask, 'Is it recoverable?' We've had to make that decision"

"Sometimes you've got to be brave with that and look at it and ask, 'Is it recoverable?' I've been looking at this quite closely. It's not doing anybody any good as how can a series with a handful of cars be an attractive proposition? We've had to make that decision with a few of them."

It is plain to see that the BRSCC's offering has been streamlined for this year. Alongside the series that have departed for pastures new, such as the Alfa Romeo Championship and Ferrari Challenge UK, the club's struggling Porsche category has merged with the CALM All Porsche Trophy, and OSS will not continue.

But growing grids is not the only challenge the club is facing – it also needs to change perceptions. This includes a view of its entry fees being too expensive and also of it being unwilling to change, factors that contributed to the Alfa Romeo series moving to the 750 Motor Club for this year.

"One of the biggest things we've been faced with over the last three years has been the challenge of responding and acting on the perception of some competitors," admits Daly. "There used to be a phrase that, 'We don't do it like that', and we've got rid of that now. We lost some competitors because they were not being looked after.

"We feel we had an image of our entry fees being too high, but they weren't. People have a perception that Co-op will be cheaper than Marks & Spencer and Tesco, but you go along and find it might actually be more expensive what you're buying. The value of what we give to our customers was better than others."

And entry fees is one of the areas where the BRSCC has taken action for this season. It's no surprise that the club plans to run fewer meetings this year when it has fewer championships, but the 30% reduction goes far beyond just losing a couple of series here and there. The timetables at each meeting have been maximised to give better value, and tweaks have been made to race distances. ▶

NOTABLE CHAMPIONSHIPS AND SERIES



CATERHAM ACADEMY

Alongside the MX-5s, Caterhams also play a huge part in the BRSCC's offering. There are four manufacturer-backed series creating a clear pathway for drivers to progress from novices to top-level club racers – and the highest 420R championship has just achieved Motorsport UK national status. The most significant category, though, is the Caterham Academy. Last year, 46 drivers were part of another sell-out season and were given the ideal platform to begin their motorsport journey, benefiting from a range of support, advice and coaching as they headed out on track for the first time.

"A lot of programmes have a fixed model of a 15-minute qualifying and two 20-minute races," says McErlean. "We've looked at some of that and reduced programme time to reduce the costs.

"When you're comparing a championship doing seven meetings against eight meetings, the numbers are substantially different. When you've got four sessions not three, and 20-minute not 15-minute races – a simple adjustment can make an enormous difference. You can cut the costs by 20% to 30%."

Reigning MX-5 champion John Langridge – who has previously won in the club's Fiesta series and is stepping up to the MX-5 SuperCup for Mk3 models this season – has noticed the difference. "They're trying to get bigger meetings together because you've got more people there and more competition, and other championships [at the meetings] are more attractive to watch," he says. "The challenge that provides is timetabling issues, like races cut short if there are red flags, and Friday testing gets booked up very quickly. But, as long as it doesn't affect the experience of the people involved, I'm all for it.

"They're making these big changes – there's always work to be done with any club and when we were at the awards Peter Daly spoke very well about his ambitions for the club."

Amid all the challenges the club has faced in the past few years, including overcoming ever-increasing circuit-hire costs, it is important to remember that there have been some notable successes. And that 57-car average for the MX-5 Championship is one that stands out. Despite there being a plethora of different categories existing for the cars, Langridge believes the BRSCC has got the formula just right for its series.

"We were attracted to it because of the size of the grids and the cars looked great and they're pretty simple," he recalls. "Once you get in, you meet people and it's very sociable and, because there's so many people, there's always someone to race.

"It's a very attractive combination because they're real-wheel-drive cars and they're proper little sportscars. In terms of motor racing, they're very accessible and you can get bits for them everywhere. They're [BRSCC organisers] good at keeping a cap on costs."

It's not just MX-5s that have proved successful either. One of the newest additions to the BRSCC's stable has also been very popular. Last year the club ran two trial races for its new Clubsport Trophy series, and they attracted 34 and 41 entries respectively. The format of a 45-minute race for one or two drivers and with classes based around power-to-weight ratio has been a hit from the start.

McErlean was involved in the development of that series with Graham, and says its creation was in response to the way the club motorsport scene was heading, as multi-driver endurance races have consistently attracted good grids in recent times. "The domestic market tells you what it wants," says McErlean. "I personally did three cost-share races in the last few years – I did the 24-hour race in a Citroen C1 and did some Trackday Trophy. The grids were full and it reduces the cost of racing to the market.

"We put some questions out to our members saying, 'If this was in our portfolio is it something you would subscribe to?', and it was just an overwhelming yes. Greg Graham went off and we did some fairly basic lap analysis using TSL. We took a Compact Cup car and took its lap time and looked at everything that was two seconds slower and two seconds quicker."

By using that operating window, McErlean estimates there are around 600 different cars that are eligible for the series and that has helped to contribute to the good grids. He is also encouraged by the diversity of the entries it has attracted for its season opener this year, still due to take place at Silverstone this weekend at the time of writing. "At Silverstone, 70% of the entries are from non-BRSCC members – that's really good," he adds. "We've got Mazdas, Compact Cup and Fiestas [championships racing] there, and I think there's a couple of Mazdas


ROBERTS

Clubsport Trophy's introduction last year proved to be a success


BOURNE

Daly (left) and McErlean have new vision for BRSCC

but no Compacts and no Fiestas entered [into Clubsport Trophy]."

Langridge is one of the drivers due to be racing in the series this year, and believes it is important that the club is not just focusing on one-make categories. "Sometimes you can go to a meeting and everything is one-make, which is fine for those involved, but it's good to have a bit of variety," he says.

Another area where the BRSCC has achieved success is in trying to turn around the fortunes of its struggling Fiesta Junior category. A lot of effort and promotion was put into the series last year, and a number of taster days were held in a bid to build interest and boost grids from their unacceptably low numbers. Entry levels are on course to double, and possibly even triple, in 2020 and Daly is keen to replicate that progress elsewhere.

"We're really pleased to have listened to our Fiesta Junior championship organisers and put together a platform they can use to promote and grow that championship," he says. "But we're not resting on our laurels – we've got to do the same with Formula Ford now."

Formula Ford racer Daly believes the market has become diluted, and the interest is no longer there to support the number of championships that continue to exist. "One of the main barriers [to larger grids] is getting people to experience the cars," he adds, believing it is vital to get more novice racers to consider Formula Ford as an option. "We are looking to get the teams to make the cars available to go and do taster days. Trackdays are so popular and you can get out of trackdays into saloon car racing fairly easily, but not into formula cars."

> "We've got to look at how we can attract new competitors and make it less intimidating"

That is just another example of how the new-look BRSCC is proactively trying to boost its categories. And the club is very much looking to the future too. Daly says the club is already planning its 2021 strategy, and a number of initiatives are being developed to encourage new drivers to enter the sport with the club.

"We've got to evolve some of the portfolio into a new version of itself," adds McErlean. "We've got to look at how we can attract new competitors and make it less intimidating. If I went to a circuit and watched a low-cost entry-level series and saw 35 cars going across the startline all bumper to bumper I probably wouldn't get involved.

"We've got new proposals we're working on at the moment. We've got an all-electric product we're working on too – we're tapping into the detail and that's something we will show at the end of the year."

Daly says that kind of future-thinking is vital for survival: "You can't go back to how motor racing used to be. Socially it may become more and more unattractive because of the environment. We have to focus on progress and how we can take the sport forward."

Whether it's electric motorsport or a plan to boost the fortunes of decades-old Formula Ford 1600, it's clear that the club's new management is already working to expand for the future and restore the BRSCC to former glories. By the end of the season, we will know if that new approach has paid off, and the proof will be if there are more of the overflowing MX-5 Championship-style grids and fewer of the single-digit ones. ■

A SPECIAL MEETING DURING BRANDS' HEYDAY

While Maradona may have halted England's World Cup hopes, the national racing scene was buoyant and there was no shortage of action at Brands Hatch in July 1986

BY MARCUS SIMMONS

PHOTOGRAPHY **ANDY MASON**

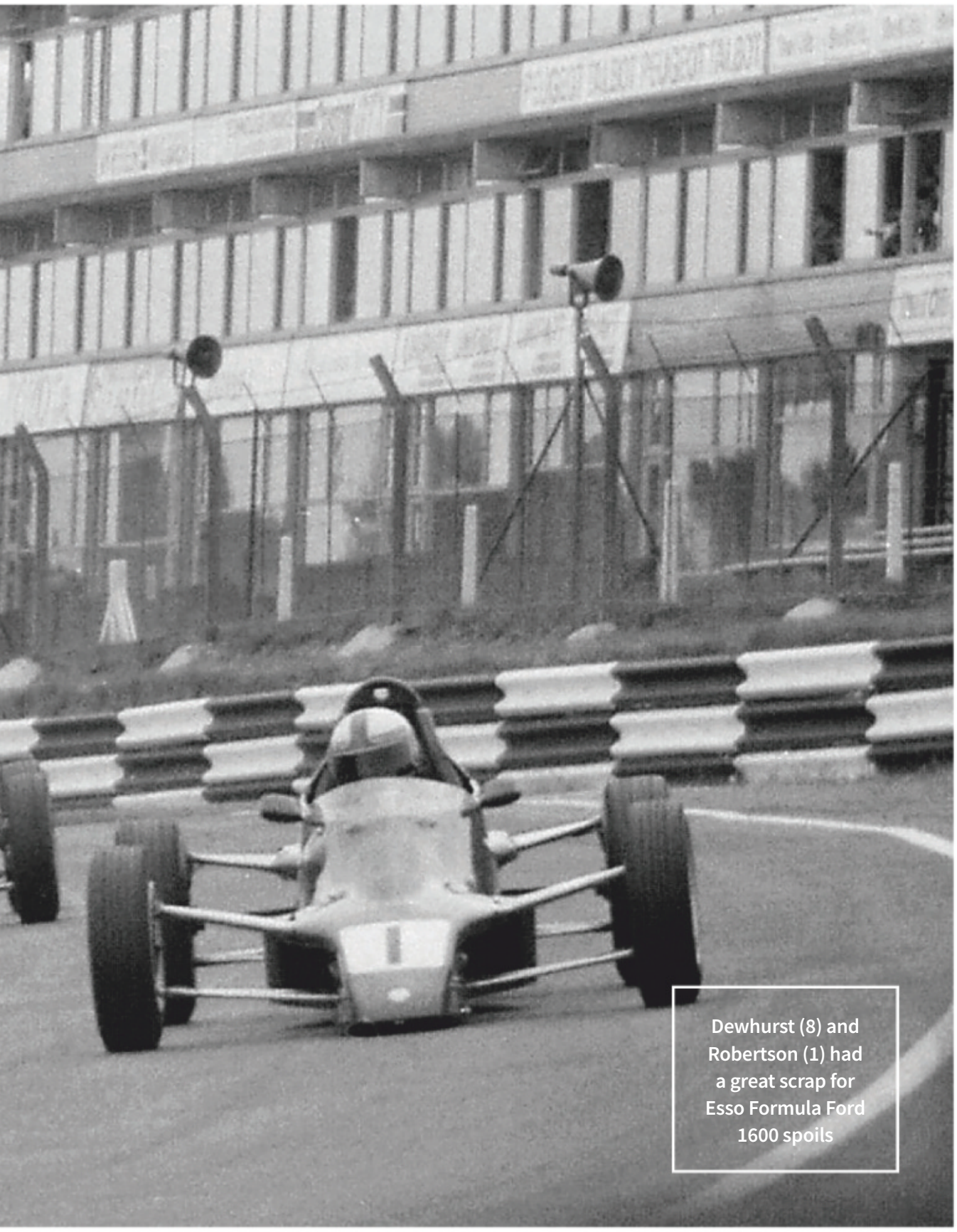


For me, the summer of 1986 was an exciting time. Aged 19, I'd just completed my A-levels (disinterest in the subjects had held me back a year) and was waiting to hear whether my results would get me in to Plymouth Polytechnic for a degree course — they did, just... While I was pretending to study for the exams, the distraction of the World Cup in Mexico proved too much to resist. Maradona's 'Hand of God' helped England onto an early flight home, but who could not fail to be moved by his feet of angels that carried Argentina to victory in the final? In June, I had also made my debut as a motorsport writer, my account of the Aston Martin Owners Club meeting at Silverstone appearing in the pages of *Motoring News* — and kick-starting my career.

That wasn't my first involvement 'on the inside' of motorsport. My dad had noticed my proficiency with the split-timing function on my wristwatch, and in 1984 encouraged me to write to the UK motorsport governing body to enquire about becoming a licensed official timekeeper. From the age of 17, I was getting a small fee plus dad's fuel expenses to trek around the country most weekends doing something I loved — watching racing and actually being involved. And that coincided with the beginning of a golden age of UK national racing.

At the forefront of this was Formula Ford 1600. From 1985 onwards, the four national championships for 'senior' FF1600 had been downsized to two. The RAC, British Racing & Sports Car Club-run Townsend Thoresen and the British Automobile Racing Club's moribund P&O series merged into one, while the Silverstone-based British Racing Drivers' Club continued to run its own Esso-backed championship, with most rounds at its home circuit and a few trips further afield. One such happened in July 1985 on the Brands Hatch Indy Circuit, where I was on the timekeeping team — the timers' 'box' in those days overlooked the start-finish line, and had a trapdoor through its ceiling through which the ever-charming 'Voice of Brands' Brian Jones would scale a ladder to get to his commentary box. Up and down he would go all day, wrapping up each race before heading to the podium via our timekeepers' room, radiating bonhomie all the while.

At that meeting, Rowan Dewhurst spun towards the tail of the field at Graham Hill Bend on the opening lap of the Esso round. As the field barrelled around on the second lap, the stricken car caused mayhem, and an enormous pile-up resulted in Dewhurst, John Village and Ruairi O'Coileain being carted off to the medical centre, luckily



Dewhurst (8) and Robertson (1) had a great scrap for Esso Formula Ford 1600 spoils

Racing began with a rare circuit round of the rally-based Astra Challenge, won by the late Kieth O'dor, whose cousin Jason Plato I would get to know well when my career as a *Motoring News* staff member began four years later. Then came what excited dad and me the most: the Esso FF1600 Championship round. Now with the works Quest team, the Eddie Jordan-managed Dewhurst had come on a long way since his pile-up-triggering spin 12 months earlier, and qualified on pole, with future Kimi Raikkonen manager Steve Robertson alongside.

The two had a frantic battle in the race, with Robertson rebuffing a spectacular last-lap attempt by Dewhurst to retake the lead at Paddock Hill Bend, and Roland Ratzenberger, Herbert (back in FF1600 after starting the season in FF2000), the underfinanced Jeremy Packer, and Phil Andrews all within 1.2 seconds at the finish. The photo illustrating the Autosport report by Bruce Jones, who described the clean race as "a tribute to these dashing young men", shows the top 14 squeezed into the frame between the exit of Druids and entry to Graham Hill Bend — and that was the *last* lap!

Somehow, works Van Diemen pilot Jason Elliott, who would go on to win not only the Esso title but the RAC/TT crown, was down in a lacklustre 11th. Robertson extended his points lead over Elliott,

"There was a frantic lead battle, with Robertson rebuffing a spectacular last-lap attempt by Dewhurst"

without serious injury. Mark Blundell led home 10 survivors from the 26 starters, with Damon Hill and Johnny Herbert also crashing out later on. On the way home, dad and I swung by Battersea Park to meet up with my sister and mum, who had gone to see 1980s punk-folk maestros The Pogues play an open-air gig. As we walked across the park, the lilting accordion intro to their debut album closer *Kitty* wafted across the warm summer breeze — a perfect coda to a terrific day.

Anyway, enough of such digression. The Esso FF1600 Championship was back at Brands on 6 July 1986. I wasn't on the timekeeping team for that one, and had no commitments elsewhere. It was one week before the British Grand Prix, and dad and I had nothing else to do, so we headed off to Brands for what was titled the GM Dealer Sport Trophy Meeting. We lived on the Berkshire/Surrey border, and in those days before the M25 had been completed it was nowhere near as easy to get to Brands. We'd join the Not Quite London Orbital at Chertsey, but the section between the A3 and Reigate was still under construction, so we'd have to dive on to the A-roads at Cobham and make our way across the countryside in my 1971 Volkswagen Beetle, before rejoining the motorway.

Organised by the BRSCC, the meeting was headlined by Thundersaloons, and the potent Vauxhall Senator V8 of John Cleland and Vince Woodman adorned the programme cover. Apart from Thundersaloons, for which the races always seemed to go on too long, the day was one of those classic old-school Brands Indy events that began with practice at 10am, then a series of short, sharp races after lunch. This was the heyday of Brands with inspired promoter John Webb at the helm, and every meeting seemed special.

Village (way down the field) and future Manor F1 supremo John 'Butcher' Booth (12th) that day, but the Essex lad with the Wham!-inspired mane of hair would be overhauled later in the season by tousle-topped Derbyshire ace Elliott.

More FF1600 action came in the ever-popular Champion of Brands series, with a bumper field requiring a qualification race to weed out the slower competitors before the final. The local heroes were considerably older than the Esso starlets, but no less rapid — indeed, Rick Shortle's race-winning time in the Champion of Brands 10-lapper was one second quicker than that of Robertson earlier in the day.

At this point, Shortle held a comfortable Champion of Brands points lead in his Reynard 84FF run by the team of ace engineer Rob Creswell, whose younger brother Chris would soon become a frontrunner in the series and later ▶

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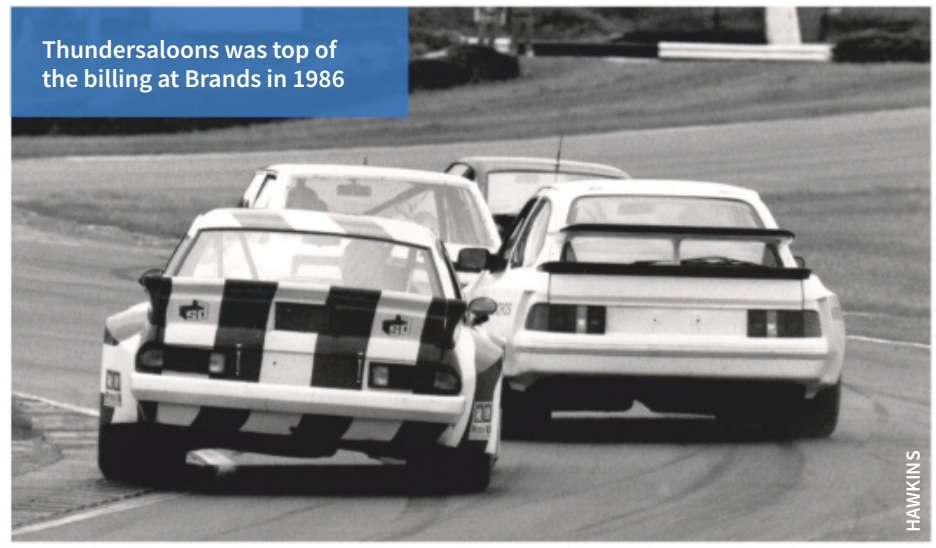






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Sands rolled his Escort at Paddock in Production Saloons


Thundersaloons was top of the billing at Brands in 1986

HAWKINS


Blower was the driver to beat in Production Saloons


Road Saloons was entertaining to watch as Dodwell (c) won

run this writer in Formula First in 1991... On this July day, Shortle had his hands full fending off the unique OX-2 of John Oxborrow. Third was the man previously known as Tim 'East Grinstead' Jones, to avoid confusion with former rival Tim A Jones (son of Brian). Having moved house, this Brands stalwart had now become Tim 'Tunbridge Wells' Jones, and gave his new Ray 86F a podium-grabbing debut.

Not long afterwards, Shortle wrote off his Reynard and, now armed with a Van Diemen RF86, would only grab one more win that season. He was overhauled by Surrey architect Len Bull — a below-the-radar seventh at this event — for the title, while ever-popular dispatch rider Chris Hall (fifth) went on to place third in the overall points in his Jamun.

Cleland and Woodman were the apples of the event sponsor's eyes, and took a 'home' win in the Thundersaloon race, but not before Andy Rouse had scampered away from the pack in Rod Birley's V6-engined Ford Sierra. Rouse found his rear tyres offering less and less grip, allowing Woodman into the lead before his handover to Cleland. With Birley now installed, the Sierra fell to third behind the Ford GA-engined Capri of Terry Nicholls and Holman Blackburn. Pete Stevens and Neil Facey used John Webb's private plane to fly from Brands after practice to Foxhall Heath stadium in Ipswich to take part in the World Hot Rod final, before returning to Brands for the race. They won the 2.5-litre class in their Ford Escort, but only after a botched driver change cost the

> "We laughed as oversteering Rovers and Capris were pushed sideways to the point of no return"

Vauxhall Chevette of Mike Smith (not the racing TV celeb) after Divina Galica's charging opening stint.

Buried among the hugely eclectic field were the sixth-placed Lister Jaguar XJS of Iain Exeter and Roger Mac and, incredibly, the Jaguar Mk1 3.8 of Jim Lowry and Robin Rudderham. Remarkable variety, but I never thought the racing was that good.

Better tin-top action came from the Uniroyal Production Saloons. This era was the height of Colt Starion Turbo supremacy, with Colin Blower dominating, but he was beaten to pole by the controversial Mercedes 190/16 — with 'self-levelling suspension', as Autosport wrote at the time — of Ian Taylor. The race was halted when Bob Sands barrel-rolled his Ford Escort RS Turbo at Paddock, and Blower fended off Taylor from the restart to the finish. Third was a young Tim Harvey, who'd run midfield in the Esso FF1600 race earlier in the day and was now in a meaty Rover Vitesse. Harvey's future team boss Vic Lee had won the race for smaller capacity classes earlier in the day in his Volkswagen Golf GTI, the decisive moment coming when the chasing Sean Brown missed a gear in his Toyota Corolla.

Blower went on to win the title, but an exclusion from the September Silverstone round for failing a legality test on his Starion's fuel led to a points deduction and handed the overall crown to Taylor.

Around this there were two races for the popular Budget Road Saloons. Dad and I had wandered over to Clearways to watch practice, and fell about laughing as oversteering Rovers and Capris were pushed sideways to the point of no return — and frequently beyond — by their intrepid drivers. Series founder Tim Dodwell won the race for smaller cars in his VW Scirocco, but the lurid bigger machines promised to be a fine curtain closer. As anticipated, the Rovers and Capris provided the lairy highlights, but up front it was Richard Waller in his Opel Commodore, while Alfa Romeo GTV6 pedaller Jeff Orford overcame the BMW CSL of Alex Elliott for second.

Such was a summer day at Brands in the 1980s. Maradona had lifted the World Cup in the Estadio Azteca in June; Robertson, Shortle, Blower, Lee, Cleland, Woodman, Waller and Dodwell lifted prizes in the Kentagon after the racing had finished at Brands; Brian Jones, Gerry Marshall and Tony Lanfranchi (both of whom raced in Production Saloons) no doubt lifted pints. We'd be back five days later for the first day of the British Grand Prix weekend but, on such a day as 6 July 1986, nothing mattered more than combative and no-nonsense national racing. ■



FROM THE ARCHIVE

Tiff Needell pushes on into Paddock Hill Bend in the Thundersports race supporting the 1984 British Grand Prix at Brands Hatch. Needell was a regular – but not constant – co-driver of Richard Piper, owner of the Chevron-Hart B26. They finished a class-winning second overall behind the Lola-Mazda of Pete Lovett and Ian Taylor, despite a grassy excursion on the final lap of his stint for Needell, who had applied big pressure to Lovett. The race was notable for the massive shunt suffered by Ray Mallock in the leading Ecosse, which caught fire as the lanky Mallock tried to wriggle out of the confined cockpit. Andrew Gilbert-Scott heroically led briefly in Jim Wallis's ancient Chevron B19 before spinning, but they recovered to third.



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