WORLD RALLY IS BACK – MEGA 12-PAGE PREVIEW

THE VOICE OF BRITISH MOTORSPORT

MOTORSPORT NEWS

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THE VOICE OF BRITISH MOTORSPORT MOTORSPORT NEWS

Citroen star targets fresh approach for new campaign

MEEKE

NO PRESSURE FOR 2018 WRC BID



By David Evans

British rally star Kris Meeke has shunned any pre-season predictions of World Rally Championship glory, insisting he will take a very different approach to the series in 2018.

The Dungannon driver – who won two WRC rounds last season – is guarded on his hopes. "I don't want to talk about big opportunities," Meeke told *MN*. "I'm approaching this year differently. I'll take every event as it comes."

Full story p2-3



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Northern Irishman says this year will be

MEEKE:



Meeke is making no promises, but insists his team, and car, is stronger than last season

By David Evans

Citroen driver Kris Meeke starts this season with a clean slate and zero expectations in the World Rally Championship – and he vows he's learned the lessons from a difficult 2017 season.

Meeke has ducked the spotlight through the off-season, focusing his efforts and attention on working with the team to ready the C3 WRC for what could be the biggest season of his career.

The Northern Irishman says he's not interested in headlines this year, though.

"I don't want to talk about big opportunities," Meeke told *Motorsport News*. "We did that last year. Every year in this championship is a big opportunity.

"I feel good coming into the new season and we have a clean slate in front of us. I think we all learned a lot from 2017, but you learn more from the lows than the highs; it's easy to carry the highs, the wins, with you, but it's so important to understand where things weren't right. At times it was difficult to communicate what I was feeling with the car and the work we did didn't necessarily always translate into a fix for the issues.

"At the same time, PSA was taking about all of its motorsport [departments] under one roof, which caused a bit of upheaval. That's much more settled now."

Twelve months ago, after Citroen's year-long sabbatical to develop the C3 WRC, Meeke and his new car started the Monte Carlo Rally among the favourites to take the title. With the season just a couple of days old, flaws in the new car were being spotted and it was clear the French manufacturer's return had been somewhat overhyped.

"There was a huge amount of expectation when Citroen was coming back last year," said Meeke. "Everybody was putting us up there on a pedestal and it turns out we were very much underprepared. We hadn't been testing in a good place, we hadn't prepared well at all.

"I'm approaching this year in a very different mindset. This time I'm coming from the standpoint of not expecting anything from this season and I'll take every event as it comes. There were a lot of shortcomings last year and I openly admit my biggest fault was continuing to push even when things weren't comfortable. But we got off to a nightmare of a start and I got sucked into playing catch up. That won't happen this time."

Last year Citroen conducted its early Monte Carlo testing on roads around Sanremo, which are generally smoother and don't offer the sort of altitude needed to find the changeable weather conditions that typify the WRC's opening round. The test roads couldn't have been more different this time around.

"When we were testing before Christmas [2017] I had really difficult conditions, black top on a real bumpy bit of road," said Meeke. "That was just what we wanted, a real test for the car – it was about as far removed from what we had in late 2016 as you can imagine. I'm happy. The



Loeb did 2015 Monte Carlo

Photos: LAT, mcklein-imagedatabase.com, Conor Edwards

a more settled season

I WILL BUILD ON THE LESSONS FROM 2017



The C3 WRC has undergone significant development

experience we've taken from the test has left us in a lot, lot better shape. In all honesty, it couldn't have been much worse than it was last year. But before we get excited, we need to remember this is testing.

"We've turned it around, but have we turned it around enough? We'll see this week."

Meeke's pace carried him and co-driver Paul Nagle to wins in Mexico and Spain last year and that speed gives him confidence for the year ahead.

He added: "We showed last year that we can dominate events from start to finish when I have a car beneath me that's working well. Hopefully we can have a consistent package this year and I can improve and be a stronger driver."

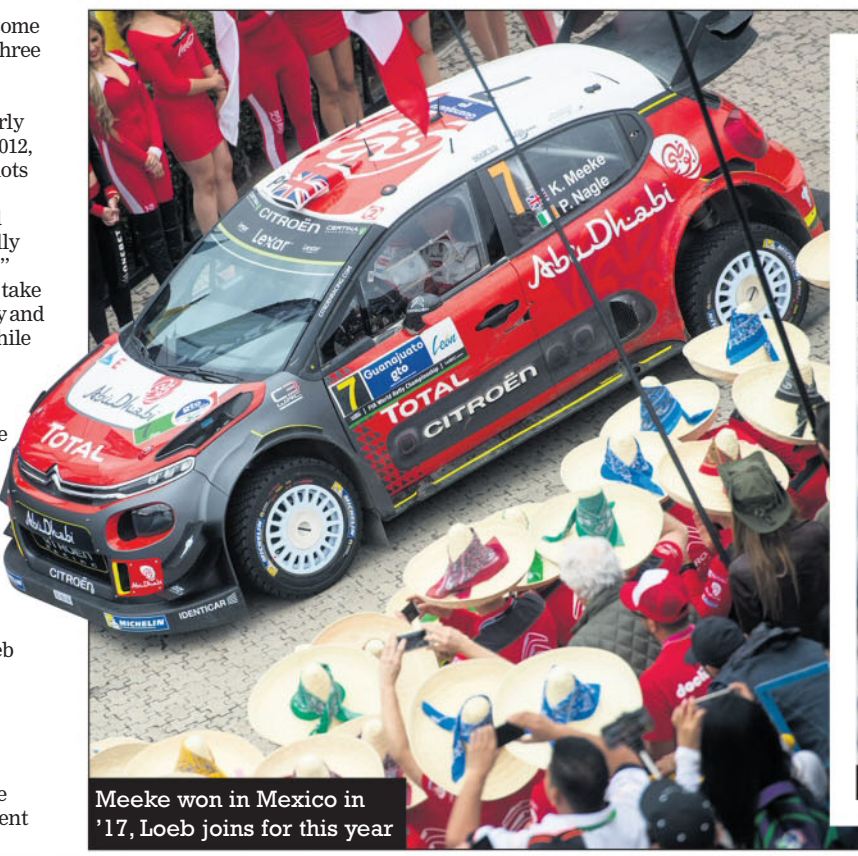
One of the things Meeke is most looking forward to in 2018 is Sebastien Loeb's return. The nine-time champion is contesting three events, Mexico, Corsica and Spain.

"It's going to be fascinating to see Seb back," said Meeke. "I was team-mate to him when he came back for the one-off event in 2015, when he did Monte that year and I learned plenty then. He is, shall I say, the God of our sport over the last 15 years and I would dearly have loved to have seen him come back for the full season. But three events? I'll take that."

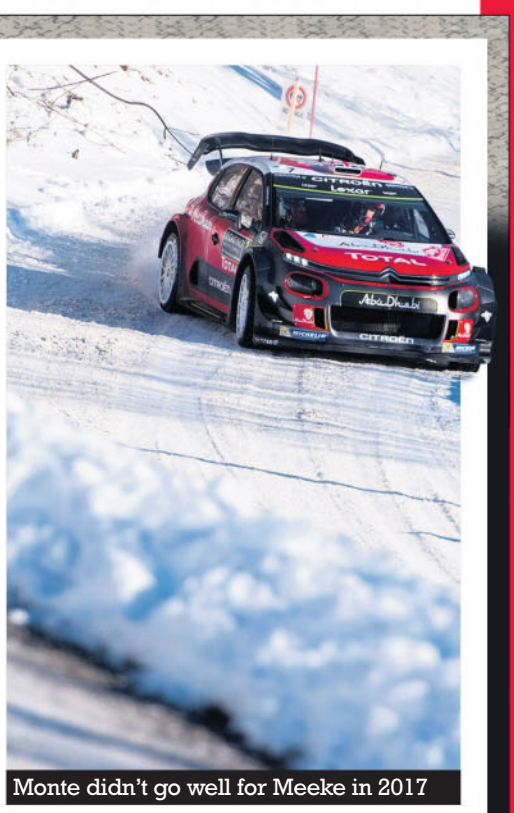
Even though Loeb hasn't competed in the WRC regularly since he took his last title in 2012, Meeke says he will still have lots to offer Citroen.

"A driver of his stature and standing in the sport can really bring something to the team," said Meeke. "Everybody will take experience from him, let's try and soak up as much as we can while we've got him on those three rallies. Let's face it, the guy's probably won more world rallies than I've actually done and he's coming back under some fairly nice circumstances where he will have a nice place on the road in Mexico – a rally he's won loads of times and a rally where the route really hasn't changed."

Asked what he thought Loeb might be capable of, Meeke replied: "Something special. OK, he's been out for five years, but there's always the potential for something special when he's around – he will really add to the excitement of the year."



Meeke won in Mexico in '17, Loeb joins for this year



Monte didn't go well for Meeke in 2017

WHO CAN STOP THIERRY NEUVILLE? PAGE 9

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WRC 2018: WELCOME

David Evans guides us through the World Rally Championship campaign to come

READY FOR AN ALL-OUT ATTACK



WRC was launched at Autosport Show

What's not to love about 2018? There's a World Cup and Commonwealth Games. Mars, we're told, will be closer to Earth this year. And tourists will be in space before the end of December.

But to us none of that, not even that whole Harry and Meghan thing, comes close to generating the sort of excitement this season's World Rally Championship will offer. Those who thought last year was rallying's pinnacle, think again and brace yourself for what's coming in the next 10 months.

All four teams should win one or more of the next 13 rallies and Britain and Ireland will hopefully be among those spraying the champagne on a WRC Sunday. But what about the title? It's wide open. Sebastien Ogier, Thierry Neuville, Jari-Matti Latvala, Kris Meeke, Ott Tanak, Elfyn Evans, Andreas Mikkelsen, they're all in there with a genuine shout in what's likely to be a closer-than-ever season. And, as revealed at the season launch, hosted at the Autosport International Show earlier this month, fans will have better access than ever before to the sport and the championship via WRC Promoter's All Live offering (*see p15 for more details*).

On the home front, Wales Rally GB has moved forward a couple of weeks to the first week in October. What do you think? On the plus side, there's the chance we'll be warmer, drier and spending less time in the dark – equally, there are no doubt plenty of you who see all of those as negatives. Either way, Deeside will be at the very heart of a furious fight for the 2018 honours.

And, let's not forget, the return of the king. Sebastien Loeb's back for three rallies this year. Have you read Meeke's thoughts on his team-mate in Mexico, Corsica and Spain? Flick back over to pages two and three and see just what the Northern Irishman thinks a nine-time champ is capable of five years after his departure from full-time World Rally Championship participation.

And enjoy *MN* and its 18 pages of rally coverage this week. We give special attention to this week's Monte Carlo Rally, trying to answer the question of how to win one of the world's most famous motorsport events. It's 50 years since Briton Vic Elford managed just that at the wheel of a Porsche 911. What better way to celebrate the golden anniversary of Quick Vic's win than to see the Union Flag (or the Irish tricolour) flying highest over the Prince's Palace on Sunday afternoon?

ROUND-BY-ROUND

1 MONTE CARLO RALLY



January 24-28
Based: Monaco/Gap **Surface:** asphalt/snow/ice
Remains the jewel in the WRC's crown. Starting among the glitz, glamour and Ferraris of Casino Square, the crews head straight for the hills and a brace of Thursday night tests, arriving in Gap shortly before midnight. The next three days are spent in the Hautes-Alpes before the infamous Col de Turini awaits on Sunday.

TIMETABLE
Monte Carlo Rally
Thursday, January 25

STAGE	LOCATION	TIME
SS1	Thoard-Sisteron (22.79 miles)	2143
SS2	Bayons-Breziers 1 (15.83 miles)	2251
Service	Gap	2346
Friday, January 26		
SS3	Vitrolles-Oze 1 (16.60 miles)	0851
SS4	Roussieux-Eygalayes 1 (18.97 miles)	1004
SS5	Vaumeilh-Claret 1 (9.43 miles)	1137
Service	Gap	1232
SS6	Vitrolles-Oze 2 (16.60 miles)	1358
SS7	Roussieux-Eygalayes 2 (18.97 miles)	1511
SS8	Vaumeilh-Claret 2 (9.43 miles)	1644
Service	Gap	1739
Saturday, January 27		
SS9	Agnieres en Devoluy-Corps 1 (18.12 miles)	0808
SS10	St Leger les Melezes-La Batie Neuve 1 (10.48 miles)	0916
Service	Gap	1016
SS11	Agnieres en Devoluy-Corps 2 (18.12 miles)	1157
SS12	St Leger les Melezes-La Batie Neuve 2 (10.48 miles)	1308
Service	Gap	1408
SS13	Bayons-Breziers 2 (15.83 miles)	1609
Service	Gap	1719
Parc Ferme	Monaco	2217
Sunday, January 28		
SS14	La Bollene Vesubie-Peira Cava 1 (11.43 miles)	0832
SS15	La Cabanette-Col de Braus 1 (8.43 miles)	0908
SS16	La Bollene Vesubie-Peira Cava 2 (11.43 miles)	1055
SS17	La Cabanette-Col de Braus 2 (8.43 miles)	1218
Parc Ferme	Monaco	1358

2 RALLY SWEDEN



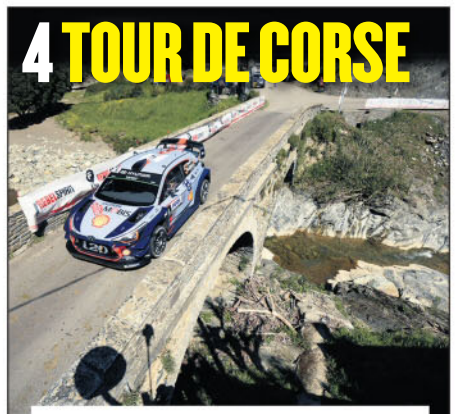
February 15-18
Based: Karlstad/Torsby
Surface: snow/ice
The WRC's winter rally continues with a dual-country format, with the opening day's action running through Norway – the Rojden stage starts and finishes in Sweden, but includes most of its mileage in Norway. Based out of Torsby again this year in the hope that being further north guarantees more snow.

3 RALLY MEXICO



March 8-11
Based: Leon **Surface:** gravel
Out of the snow and ice and into 30-degree heat of high-altitude Mexico for round three. The teams will employ specific engine maps to deal with the thinner air, which starves the World Rally Cars of power. The stunning subterranean Guanajuato street stage returns – in the absence of a Mexico City test – this year.

4 TOUR DE CORSE



April 5-8
Based: Bastia **Surface:** asphalt
Significantly overhauled route for this year, with much of the asphalt action based in the north of the island and including roads that haven't been used for more than 20 years. After two days in and around Bastia, the final day takes the crews south to Ajaccio for an agonisingly twisty 35-miler.

5 RALLY ARGENTINA



April 26-29
Based: Villa Carlos Paz **Surface:** gravel
With close to a million fans regularly lining the route for this South American classic, Rally Argentina is a seasonal highlight for the drivers. The roads are a mix of wide and fast and tight and technical and the vistas and backdrops are out of this world. As is the smell of beef cooking on asados.

6 RALLY PORTUGAL



May 17-20
Based: Matosinhos **Surface:** gravel
Incredibly demanding event in terms of the driver-co-driver relationship with so many deceptive corners over crests, but when you get it right the crowds are vast and appreciative. The event continues to flourish since returning north from the Algarve to its heartland around Porto. Running just inland from the Atlantic, it can be susceptible to changeable weather.

7 RALLY ITALY



June 7-10
Based: Alghero **Surface:** gravel
Sardinia in the summer is sunny and usually very, very, hot. Combine those conditions with some of the most abrasive roads of the season and tyre management becomes a key task. The good news for the winner is that it's become tradition to wash the dust off by jumping in the sea at the finish.

8 RALLY FINLAND



July 26-29
Based: Jyvaskyla **Surface:** gravel
The fastest rally of the season and the one they still all want to win. Finland requires absolute bravery and commitment to fly flat-chat for 50 metres between the trees. It's one of the season's biggest and best spectacles and the roads are backed up by a service park packed full of entertainment.

Photos: mcklein-imagedatabase.com

ON THE WRC

9 RALLY GERMANY



August 16-19
Based: Saarbrucken
Surface: asphalt
Last year's move south from Trier to Saarbrucken was largely well received, taking the event closer to the heart of the route. As usual, the rally will constitute three very different styles of road, with the vineyards, country lanes and military test tracks putting the crews through their paces.

10 RALLY TURKEY



September 13-16
Based: Marmaris
Surface: gravel
Back in the championship for the first time since 2010, Marmaris is the third location Turkey's round of the WRC has used, and is arguably the most attractive. The roads run around the Turquoise Coast and into the mountains inland, providing a variety of gravel roads in what are certain to be hot conditions.

11 RALLY GB



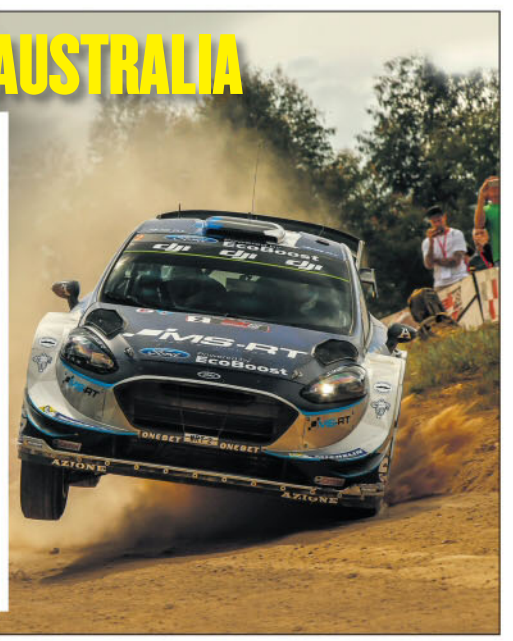
October 4-7
Based: Deeside **Surface:** gravel
Remains a hugely popular and significant round of the World Rally Championship. The crews love the challenging conditions and the classic gravel roads of mid- and North Wales. The shift to an early October date could rule out night stages, but the rain, mud, mist and sunshine should still be there.

12 RALLY SPAIN



October 25-28
Based: Salou
Surface: gravel/asphalt
Still the season's only mixed-format event, Spain provides teams with the challenge of converting their cars from gravel to asphalt specification in just 75 minutes on Friday night. Once onto the Tarmac, the stages are faster and smoother, providing a fantastic road race through Tarragona.

13 RALLY AUSTRALIA



November 15-18
Based: Coffs Harbour
Surface: gravel
The forests and banana plantations of northern New South Wales provide the backdrop to this year's finale. Run at the height of the southern hemisphere summer, Rally Australia brings the season to a dusty conclusion on entertaining gravel roads, which offer a significant advantage the further back you are in the running order.

COLIN CLARK



This time last year we were all looking forward to the Monte Carlo Rally with levels of fevered anticipation not witnessed in the sport since the advent of the Group B era.

We'd all watched endless hours of test videos on YouTube and debated *ad nauseam* the pros and cons of M-Sport's Ford Fiesta WRC versus the Citroen versus the Hyundai and versus the seemingly flawed (how wrong were we all?) Toyota. Last year didn't disappoint.

Astonishingly, last season over delivered, and in so many ways. So, has that over delivery created a bit of a problem for the WRC? How do you possibly build on what will almost certainly be remembered as one of the greatest years in the history of the championship?

Well it's not easy that's for sure. I have absolutely no doubt that, in a sporting sense, we can all look forward to a year that will be every bit as enthralling, every bit as competitive and every bit as tense as 2017 was. So what am I looking forward to in particular?

Well, I've always been an advocate of giving credit where credit's due… Conversely, down the years some folk have taken great entertainment from giving the WRC's promoter a bit of a kicking. I'd like to see them try this time. The current promoter took over the reigns of a failing championship five years ago and it's taken them all that time to steady the ship and relaunch her, fit for purpose in a changing sporting world where instant action, instant news, instant entertainment and instant sporting gratification rule.

"*WRC All Live* can launch the series"

Maybe you've worked out what I'm most looking forward to in the coming season? Revealed at Autosport International in Birmingham, *WRC All Live* has the potential to launch our sport, off the back of the springboard of a stunning 2017, right into the heart of the 21st century sports broadcasting revolution. It's the Holy Grail of rally coverage: *all* the top cars, on *all* the stages on *all* the rallies, direct to the internet. It's the kind of broadcasting our missing generation, i.e. the youth of today, demands.

Without this kind of coverage, it could be argued that the sport has no future. Connecting with the younger generations has been a problem for maybe a couple of decades and one the previous promoter failed miserably to address. As a consequence, the rally audience has grown older and, as far as manufacturers and sponsors are concerned, less relevant.

Well all that, with one stroke of genius, is set to change. We now have all the assets, the cars, the stars, the locations and the competitive intrigue to justify wall-to-wall internet coverage.

So how has all of this come about? If you're a regular reader of my column you'll know that I'm a very big fan of the chequebook calendar. In times of crisis and need, you do what is required to drag your series by the scruff of the neck back to where it belongs. Step forward Oliver Ciesla. He's not always been the most popular man among rally fans, but my goodness me, I do like a man with a plan. And in particular, a man who sticks to his plan.

Ciesla knew that, in order to put the WRC back where it belongs at the forefront of the sporting public's minds, he needed money to invest. And anyone who knows anything about previous WRC promoters will tell you that was considered an almost impossible task.

Hard and unpopular decisions were made. Many of the crown jewels were discarded: the Acropolis, the Safari, Sanremo and New Zealand all fell below the required standard. And what standard is that you might ask? Well the ability to invest long-term in their own safe, competitive, commercially astute and entertaining events, but more importantly, in the brand of the WRC.

With the financial ship well and truly steadied now, we're starting to see very real evidence of the promoter investing some of those funds back into the championship.

My understanding is that the finance required for WRC's *All Live* might well be coming from the investment made by Rally Turkey for its slot on the calendar. There were waves of indignation sweeping over Ciesla when it was announced Turkey was coming back, mainly because Turkey was seen to be taking a space on the calendar expected to be filled by fans' favourite New Zealand.

Tell me this, in all honesty, what would you rather have: Rally New Zealand back on the calendar, or blanket coverage of every rally beamed to your tablet?

It's a no-brainer as far as I'm concerned, but clearly it took a man with balls of steel to stand tall and make that decision. If Ciesla wants 16 two-day events with good geographical spread, that pay their money for him to further invest in the championship, then I'm right with him. Our future has to stack up; the sport has to wash its own face.

We are, once again, on the brink of greatness as far the WRC is concerned and the only thing that will determine whether we soar or plummet is the ability of the promoter to grasp and exploit the rapidly changing demands of the modern and youthful sporting consumer.

And only cold, hard cash will allow them to do that.

WRC All Live is a hugely exciting stride in the right direction for WRC coverage.And, knowing Ciesla, this is more than likely just the start. The WRC is now undoubtedly back in a good place. Looking forward to the season? Bet your boots I am.

WRC 2018: WINNING THE MONTE

David Evans unlocks the secrets of conquering the Monte Carlo Rally

HOW TO DEFEAT THE SEASON'S HARDEST



Ogier claimed an unlikely Monte win on Fiesta debut



Ogier says judging the grip is vital to success

What makes the Monte Carlo Rally so difficult to win? Before answering that, we have to rewind to a rather more straightforward question. It's the sort of question you feel stupid asking. Until you try to answer it.

What makes ice slippery? See… told you it felt stupid...

I asked a friend with a degree in chemistry, a working knowledge of physics and a genuine enthusiasm for said solid mass in her gin and tonic. Here's the thinking: it's slippery because ice *doesn't* form into a wholly solid state and instead retains a layer of semi-liquid molecules which are inherently unstable. It's those suckers that send you and I south when we least expect it. And the same suckers that will potentially decide the outcome of this week's World Rally Championship season-opener in the French Alps.

Victory in Monte Carlo this week is really a piece of cake. All you need is to know exactly what the weather's going to be doing in four hours' time on the far side of the second mountain to the left. But don't forget, it'll be getting dark soon and you need to factor in the drop in temperature. Oh, and there's a peak elevation of 1500 metres in the third stage, which could mean a drop of around 13.4 degrees celsius from sea level. Unless you're in cloud. If you are, the drop will only be around nine degrees. Somewhere between the two if you're in and out of the cloud.

Just before you go, don't forget the first stage is 79 per cent north-facing and that means you'd ideally take a softer tyre than for the remaining 21 per cent of the stage. And now it's snowing, presumably you're *au fait* with expected accumulation levels? And where the ice base starts and stops?

And that's just snow and ice. Chuck rain, sleet, fog and sunshine into the mix and you've got yourself the season's toughest rally to call.

Frankly speaking, it's a nightmare.

As we saw in Britain last week, Scotland's no stranger to winter, so throwing a Scotsman in at the deep end to work with Sebastien Ogier seemed like a good idea for M-Sport last year. Stuart Loudon came close to a nervous breakdown as he tried to second-guess some of the most changeable conditions in living memory on the 2017 Monte.

"I don't think I slept all week," says Loudon. "We had meteo [weather] crews in and about all the stages, we had Meteo France with us on the event and we had family and friends calling in with more advice. I was co-ordinating all that information and translating it into what it might mean for tyre choices. The problem is, you're in the mountains and a slight and unexpected change in something as simple as the wind direction can impact on all the other data. The sense of satisfaction when you called it right was immense, but that's constantly balanced by the trepidation when Seb [Ogier] and the boys bolt slicks on and head under a sky you'd swear was full of snow."

Loudon's main job in the sport is as a co-driver and he's seen those tyre decisions from the other side.

"I've done the Monte and been on slicks when you come around a corner onto sheet ice," he continues. "The first thing that happens is everything goes quiet when the car locks-up and stalls. It's horrible. You need a long lie down in a darkened room after this one."

Patently, you're never going to get the weather right every time and five-time Monte winner Ogier says the secret is to accept things will go wrong and make the best of it when they do.

The Frenchman says: "Yes, tyres are really important. It's such a difficult challenge to be 100 per cent right. You always face mixed conditions and getting the right choice will always play a key role in winning. We have the gravel crews [driving through the stages before us] and we have all the meteo information coming in, but these are the mountains and the truth is that you really need a bit of luck on your side as well. The weather can turn and it can turn for you or against you and this can make your rally or it can finish it."

These days the tyre permutations are considerably more simple than they once were. There's a soft racer, a very soft racer and a studded and un-studded winter tyre. That's it. Four to chose from. When Toyota's team principal Tommi Makinen was busy winning his four Montes, the tyre options were genuinely mind boggling. There was the full range of slick compounds and the same in intermediates and wets. Then there were the winter tyres with full studs or studs just on the shoulders, again in varying compounds, and then there was the full super-narrow snow tyre. And again, this came with and without studs. And again, the studs varied in length. It didn't end there. Tyre technicians could cut a new tread pattern and customise any of those tyres. Back before Tommi's time, the teams would have most of these options available for every stage – in Lancia's case, they even changed tyres mid-stage to cope with snow and ice on one side of the col and dry Tar on the other.

Tyre choice might have simplified, but car set-up remains similar on principle of terrain and temperature. It's still cold, it's still mountainous and the car still needs compromise.

"Rallying is always about compromise," says Ogier, "and that's really true on this event. When you come to the set-up for the car, you have to compromise some of the performance of the car to find the grip and the comfort in the car. Being comfortable in the car is so important here. It's not absolutely necessary to have the fastest racing car, it's better to have the car that gives you the confidence in all of the conditions.

"In Monte we have a very soft [engine management] map. If you have snow and slick tyres, and this happens from time-to-time in Monte, then you need a car which is not pushing; if the ALS (anti-lag system on the turbo) pushes you, this can be a good reason to go off. We have a setting on the ALS map where it's not completely off, but it's very close. There is very, very little grip with the slicks on ice."

It's about the percentages. As well as the weather.

If it's pre-dawn or the sun's gone down then the temperature will plummet and there's going to be more ice around. In these conditions, a softer car is vital. The drivers want subtlety and constant feedback through the chassis.

Undoubtedly, when the sun's out, the roads dry and the slicks are piping hot, precision and stiffness would be worth a whole heap of time, but that's a massive gamble when you crest the col and find ice everywhere heading downhill. Firstly, the physics of the thing mean you're way more likely to crash and secondly, if you don't crash, you'll come out of the stage with confidence shattered.

And winning this rally is all about confidence, feel for grip and anticipation of what's coming.

Ogier's point about comfort in the car was demonstrated graphically last season when he arrived short on testing time aboard M-Sport's Ford Fiesta WRC. He was still familiarising himself with the buttons and dash layout when he was on his way to the first stage.

It was that lack of knowledge of the Fiesta that dropped him into the ditch on the outside of an icier-than-expected hairpin right midway through Friday morning's opener.

"This corner was extremely slippery," says Ogier, "but it was also linked to my inexperience in the car: I didn't expect that pulling the handbrake would create the opposite effect I wanted in this moment. It created understeer and didn't rotate the rear like I wanted. I won the rally last year, even after I have done a couple of small mistakes – and everybody else has done the same. The Monte is an event where it's very difficult to stay away from the mistakes."

A big part of winning is about reducing the opportunity for mistakes and, at times, driving more defensively on a more conservative tyre package. The Monte offers huge rewards for those willing to gamble, but rolling the dice on the ice melting before you get there can end in disaster.



"The slightest change is huge"

Stuart Loudon

Photos: mcklein-imagedatabase.com

ODDS ON THE RALLY





Car set-up is crucial for confidence, as is the tyre choice

Fortunately for Ogier, he's had a year to get to know the Fiesta. He says: "This time I will have more knowledge of the car, but so will everybody else after driving them for the last year."

The one thing nobody else can hope to rival is Ogier's experience of the mountain environment. He was born and brought up just outside Gap. He learned to ski on the slopes high above the rally's host town. And he learned to drive on the roads he now attacks as a world champion.

"The feeling is special to drive some roads I know or some sections I drove with normal cars," he says. "But at WRC speed it's another road. To know the place is always going to help you, but the truth is that when you drive with normal cars it's very different. This [knowledge] only helps you in case of bad visibility – then you have more experience than the others. I feel more at home here in the same way that a Finn would feel more at home over the crests and jumps in Finland.

"Even though I don't live here anymore, I am still familiar with this environment and this can help to read the grip and the weather. But a big thing for me is the fans. I love being in Gap and seeing my home fans. I'm lucky to have this round of the world championship at home, it was the same for [Sebastien] Loeb when we were in Alsace or for Elfyn [Evans] in Wales. It brings pressure to be at home, but I find this is positive pressure – it helps, it gives me extra motivation."

Loeb knows all about the motivation of competing at home. And, while he hailed from some way north of the Alps in Alsace, Loeb was the Monte master. Had it not been for his participation in Dakar earlier this month he'd have been back chasing an eighth Monte Carlo Rally win this week. Ironically, Loeb's South American effort ended so early with Peugeot, he could have made the Monte start in the end.

Instead, he'll talk about a rally he made his own.

"It's the challenge," says Loeb, "I love the challenge of driving in this mountain environment. I have always the best memories of this rally. I won the rally on the stages in 2002, but lost it afterwards [when Citroen was penalised for changing tyres in the wrong place] – this one I think of as half a win! It's the weather that makes this event interesting. I remember sometimes we were in the Ardeche and there was nearly no snow, it was like a Sanremo Rally. You need the winter to come to make the challenge and to win, you have to understand how to drive just below the limit for the grip. It's so much about experience."

Few people know more about the Monte Carlo Rally than Francois Delecour. He's done it 20 times and won it once. For Delecour, everything was in the planning. And that included the organisation of his own task force.

Shortly before 2200hrs on Thursday the World Rally Championship will fire itself back into life just north-west of Digne.

The first stage of the year? It's a classic. It's Sisteron.

Missing from the route last year, this epic 22-miler runs from Thoard, so it's in the opposite direction from how the drivers have grown used to it. But the challenge is the same.

Immediately, tyre strategy and planning will come to the fore. There's been huge snowfalls in the Alps in recent weeks and it's reckoned the route up and over Col de Fontbelle is covered in around four miles of thick, thick ice.

In 1992, Delecour gambled on a slick for Sisteron, well aware that the hairpins close to the col are always covered in ice.

"I called some friends," says Delecour. "I got around 10 people and I told them to go to those two hairpin bends, very famous and very difficult. I told them to go there and wait to help me… but only me. They had to be ready to push, because on the slick I didn't know that I would make it to the top.

"In the hairpin, the key is not to go sideways. If you go sideways, you stop and you cannot move. I came to the corner very, very slowly. I was at 2kph or something like this. I was looking for the traction, but my friends were saying: 'What the hell is he doing?' They started to walk to the car, they were going to push, but we were climbing. I open the door and shouted: 'No! Don't touch the car!' I could find some small stones and little rocks which were giving us the traction we needed."

Did he win the stage? No, Armin Schwarz did on better-suited Pirellis. Did he win the rally? No, a blown turbo on Col de Saulce did for his chances – which were looking slim against Lancia's stunning Delta HF Integrale anyway.

But the Monte requires thought well and truly outside of the box and the deployment of any kind of advantage you can lay your hands on at any given time. But more than that, success on the Monte relies on the right kind of weather and a dollop of good fortune. ■

TOP 5 MONTES

1 1985



A mistake from co-driver Terry Harryman turned his and Ari Vatanen's three-minute lead into a five-minute deficit. The following 300 competitive miles became the stuff of legend as the Peugeot powered back to win it.

2 1965



Timo Makinen guides a Group 3 Mini 1275S to an incredible victory in some of the worst winter conditions ever. The Finn thrashes the nimble Mini and blows the opposition away through the mountains.

3 1968



The first Monte free from its ridiculous handicapping system aimed to help smaller engine cars. Vic Elford won in a Porsche 911, jumped on a plane, headed to Daytona and did the same over 24 hours in a 907.

4 1991



Frenchman Francois Delecour steps aboard a factory Ford for the first time and comes within an ace of winning the Monte. Damaged suspension on Turini – the final stage – breaks his heart.

5 1964



We couldn't compile this list without including Paddy Hopkirk and 33 EJB, the Northern Irishman's victorious Mini Cooper S. This win raised awareness of rallying beyond all recognition in Britain.

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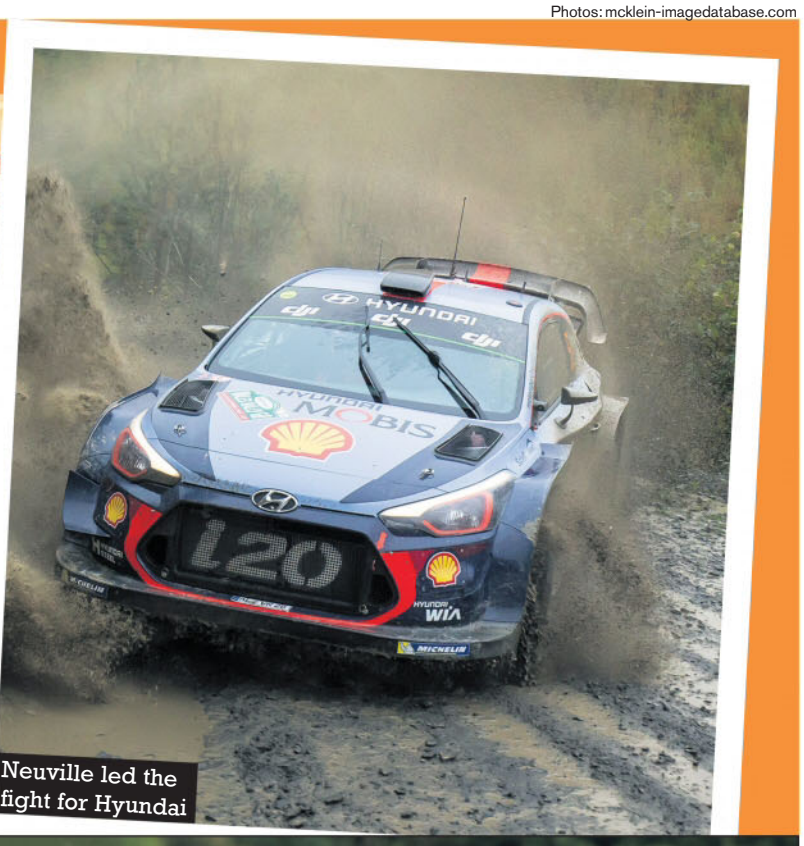
WRC 2018: HYUNDAI IN FRONT?

Photos: mcklein-imagedatabase.com

David Evans looks at Hyundai's fresh impetus and assesses its rivals



Hyundai has the team to win titles



Neuville led the fight for Hyundai

THE PERFECT SEASON OR THE PERFECT STORM?



Belgian has high hopes

The row of ducks has never looked quite so ordered. Everything, it seems, is ready for Hyundai Motorsport to step up to the top of the world. Three cars and four seasons have brought the South Korean manufacturer to the start of what's looking like the most exciting year yet. Who can beat them? What can beat them? Simple… themselves.

When Hyundai arrived in the world championship in 2014 with a car thrown together in next to no time, it stood no chance against the might of Volkswagen. The latter's methodical, painstaking build-up was the very antithesis of an Asian approach along the lines of: 'If we can do it tomorrow, let's do it today and if we can do it today, why didn't we do it yesterday?'. The original i20 WRC should never have seen the light of day; it was as underpowered as it was underdeveloped. It won, but it was lucky. But Seoul overruled Alzenau – Hyundai Motorsport's hometown – and it was launched.

The New Generation i20 WRC, which arrived two years later, was the one which really interested everybody. This was the car Michel Nandan and his team had been working towards. The 2016 car underpinned Hyundai's future in the world championship: it was the basis for the next generation of World Rally Car regulations and a testbed for what would become the fastest rally car of all time. So far.

Hyundai's i20 Coupe WRCs led from the first stage last season and went on to dominate, chalking up the sort of statistics Volkswagen enjoyed for the previous four years. Following the 2017 regulatory reset and VW's departure from rallying, we were assured the cars would be closer to than ever.

On the face of it, they were and it was M-Sport's Ford Fiesta WRC which was out front for longer than any other car and ultimately took both titles. There's a strong argument for Hyundai losing the title as well as M-Sport winning it.

The difference between the two teams was Thierry Neuville. As Hyundai's team manager Alain Penasse pointed out: "We had one Thierry and we needed two."

Neuville's team-mates, Hayden Paddon and Dani Sordo, were shockingly out of sorts last season and their failings – allied to technical glitches – cost Hyundai the title.

Neuville's typically forthright in his assessment of those driving alongside him in 2017.

"We were clearly missing a team-mate to help us in the fight for the championship," he says. "For 90 per cent of the year, I was alone fighting when [M-Sport had] two, three Fiestas always on the podium. Nobody really joined us in that fight except for on two rallies. That makes my fight for the drivers' title even harder and for the manufacturers' title, it makes it impossible."



M-Sport Ford will be quick

It's for that reason that Paddon and Sordo find themselves sharing a car this year. In the second full-time i20 is Hyundai's second Neuville: Andreas Mikkelsen – the Norwegian they stole from beneath the nose of Citroen towards the end of last season.

This partnership is the one which strikes most fear into the rest of the service park and offers the South Korean firm its first chance of global glory. Both will challenge and both are well capable of lifting this year's drivers' title. After spending much of last year on the sidelines, Mikkelsen's back and his time away has made him hungrier than ever.

"I feel really comfortable in the car," he says, "especially on the loose surfaces, it really reminds me of the Polo."

And what happened last time he was in a Polo? Oh yeah, he beat Sebastien Ogier in a fair, final-day fight on Volkswagen's last outing in Australia at the end of 2016.

Make no mistake, Mikkelsen is ready for this season.

Right now, Hyundai's chosen ones are talking the talk about the need for the manufacturers' title and the requirement to satisfy Seoul with a tangible year-long return on its WRC investment. And they will, no doubt, be helped out by Sordo and Paddon.

Sordo remains one of the fastest drivers around on asphalt and one of the most consistent points-scorers when it comes to the dirt. In his last three full seasons and 39 rallies with Hyundai, the Spaniard has only finished outside the points five times. He's the banker.

Paddon suffered the nightmare of nightmare seasons last year, but still, when he brought the car to the finish, he was never lower than eighth and on the podium twice. Again, the Kiwi's a strong option in the team's third car.

The good thing for Hyundai is that Sordo and Paddon are still feeling sufficiently aggrieved at their demotion that each is looking to demonstrate to the team's management just how badly they've been misjudged. Perfect. For different reasons, Hyundai arrives at the start of the season with four of the series' most motivated crews. And they arrive in a car which, we're told, has lost none of its speed, despite the inevitable requirement to trade some performance for the sort of reliability and durability Hyundai looks to have found over the closed season. Last year the thing was fast but fragile. On more than one occasion we'd see Hyundai's rivals bouncing off things and talking about it at the end of the stage, while the i20 Coupe WRC lay mortally wounded at the side of the road.

Hyundai revealed much of its 2018 car at the penultimate round in Wales last October when Neuville ran development parts in a last-gasp effort to wrestle the drivers' title from Ogier's grasp. Since then there's been more work and there will be more to come on the i20 in the first quarter of this year.

What will be tested most severely through 2018 will be Hyundai's ability to manage the season and bring the big prize home. Alzenau appears to favour something of a 'good cop-bad cop' approach to management with Penasse more than happy to take his drivers to task in the media – witness his acerbic assessment of Neuville's wayward focus on the star-rating of his hotel rather than his speed on the stages a few years ago. Or, more recently, his frank and forthright appraisal of Paddon's various problems last season.

Penasse's approach to the Thierry issue looked to have caused irreparable damage at the time. But ultimately you'd have to argue that it (along with him being dropped to Hyundai's B team late in 2015) did the trick. Three years ago, Neuville was a world champion without the world championship, increasingly high on his own supply and needed to be brought back down to earth.

Volatility is never far away at Hyundai and there's definitely the potential for this year to go absolutely perfectly.

Or absolutely pear-shaped.

As the season progresses, team orders will doubtless have to be deployed and it will be fascinating to see how that plays out against the backdrop of bonhomie between Andreas and Thierry.

Whichever way it falls, the perfect season or the perfect storm, it's got the makings of the perfect story.

The rivals: M-Sport Ford

For all that talk about Mikkelsen and Neuville having everything going for them this year, ask either of them who's the one to watch this year and they'll give you the same answer. Sebastien Ogier.

Last year the defending champion was up against it in a new car and a new team, but he rose to the challenge and ticked off title number five. In doing so, he demonstrated patience to match the pace we'd always known about.

Toyota's Jari-Matti Latvala has already made it plain he wants to ape Ogier's season this time around, while Citroen's Kris Meeke was similarly impressed.

Continued on page 11

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WRC 2018: HYUNDAI IN FRONT?

Photos: LAT



The WRC pecking order is very tough to predict

Continued from page 9

"He was incredible last year," says Meeke. "He was only fastest on 21 or 22 stages or something like that, but he still won. With four world titles before last season, he went into 2017 with nothing to prove – that helped."

Consistency was the key for Ogier last season and it's going to be the same again this time around.

"I wasn't driving in a different way last year," says Ogier, "I was still trying to win as much as in the years before. Maybe one of the reasons this wasn't possible is that I needed to have a bit more time in the car to make it the way I wanted it, but the other reason is that it's harder than ever to win a rally when you're first on the road [and you have to sweep the surface clean on gravel rallies].

"This year will be tough, but that's the way we like it – the competition is why we are here. Everybody is waiting for us and everybody has a strong car. We have to raise our game in terms of performance and speed, I was not always happy last year, but the key point is to be consistent again. Last year we won two rallies, the target for this year is to do more than that, but if you tell me I can win the championship again by winning only two rallies then I will sign for this straight away."

Ogier has started 123 rounds of the world championship, 59 short of Latvala, the most experienced driver in the field. But nobody starting the 2018 season has won half as many events as the champ: Sebastien's on 40, Latvala's next up on 17.

You simply can't discount a driver like Ogier. Like he says, last year was a toughie for him as he found his feet with the Fiesta, but he still won. Everybody will be a year wiser with these new cars this week, but it's likely to be the Frenchman who will put that knowledge to the best possible use.

So, Ogier can retain his title, but what about M-Sport? The loss of Ott Tanak will hit the Cumbrians hard, you don't say goodbye to a two-time world rally winner and not feel some pain in the points department. But Elfyn Evans is a more than satisfactory replacement and somebody who knows the team intimately. Evans' improvement through last year was quite remarkable and he starts the new season in the best possible position, with a car he knows and loves beneath him and the same Michelin tyres as his rivals – having run on DMACKs last term.

The Welshman's ability to keep stacking up points will definitely play him into a possible title fight this season. It's looking increasingly unlikely that one driver or team will run away with the championship in 2018 and wins will be shared out even more evenly than they were last year.

Being in and around the podium will be vital for anybody's title tilt. Evans is strong when it comes to letting a rally evolve and making the most of the opportunities that arise. He's got the speed he needs, but also a clear head to know when it's best to deploy that pace.

There's no change in the FIA's point structure for this season, it's the first two of a manufacturer's three registered-entry cars to finish that contribute to the score and Ogier and Evans were two of the most consistent last season. There's concern at the lack of a regular third car from M-Sport Ford, but the third driver is a safety net and recent history suggests the team might not even need one. That said, Bryan Bouffier in Monte and Corsica and Teemu Suninen on at least eight rounds offers peace of mind.



Citroen C3 has been overhauled

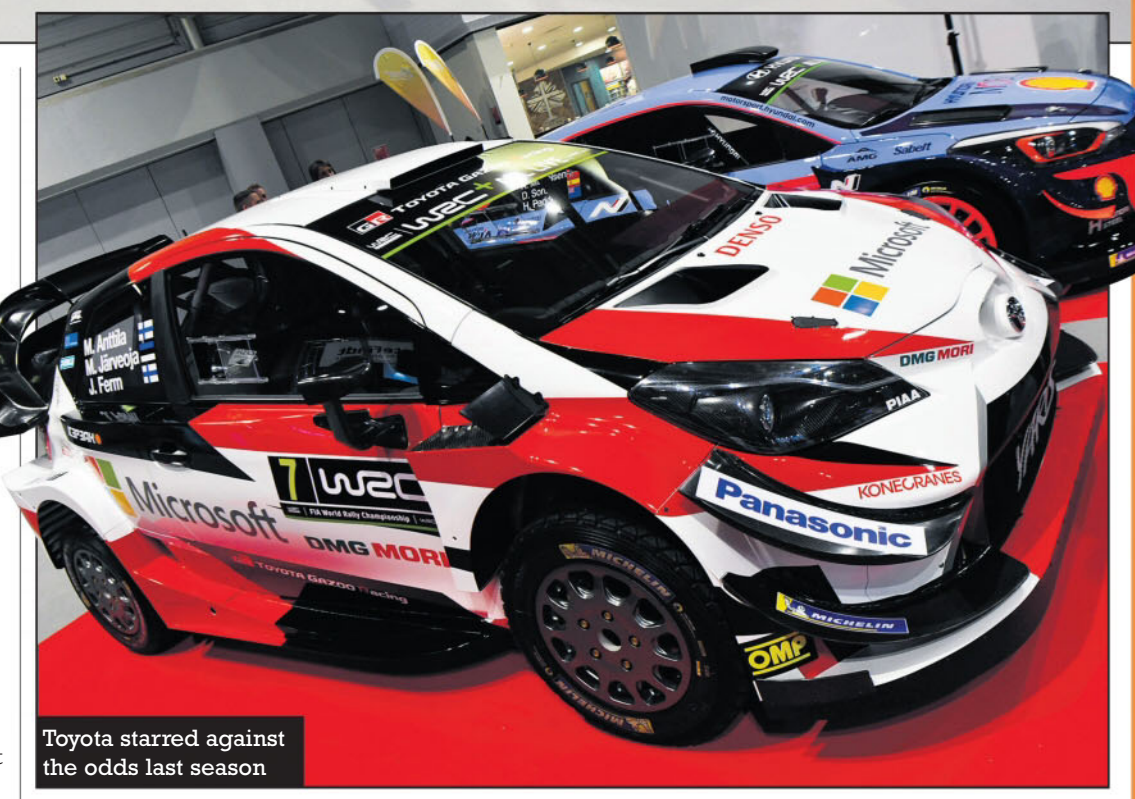
Toyota

This year's World Rally Championship is set to be an absolute thriller, of that there can be little doubt. But as the main theme plays out, keep an eye on some of the equally intriguing subplots feeding into this fascinating chapter.

Hyundai's efforts to squeeze four drivers into three cars is one and Toyota's ability to keep three charging drivers from either side of the Baltic Sea happy is another.

Last year, Toyota's order was well set: Latvala arrived late, but took the seat at the head of the table without any questions; 12 months ago Esapekka Lappi still hadn't started a world championship event in a World Rally Car and Juho Hanninen was more than happy to toe the party line in an effort to further illuminate the twilight of his career.

Now Lappi's a Rally Finland winner and Juho's been replaced by Tanak, a man who, with a bit more planning and event management early in 2017, could have been sticking the number ones on either side of his Yaris WRC this year.



Toyota starred against the odds last season

There will, of course, be rallies where Lappi will fade into the background: he has yet to start in Mexico and Argentina, he's only done Sweden once and Monte twice. But in places like Portugal, Sardinia and of course Finland – places he knows and he's comfortable at – he can be a real threat. Yes, he's young and sensible enough to heed Tommi Makinen's advice about when to throttle back and take the points, but his speed unnerved Latvala at times last season. This time Lappi will be looking to get fully under his countryman's skin.

Arguably, this is Latvala's best chance to win the championship. That might sound strange when you think this guy spent four years with Volkswagen and couldn't make it happen, but it's only since he departed Hanover bound for Puuppola that we've discovered just how much of a struggle he found life alongside Ogier. Latvala looks just as contented as he ever did at M-Sport (the mutual affection between the Finn and the Cumbrians is still talked about in Dovenby), but now he's got the experience and common sense to drive a champion's drive.

Late last year Latvala talked about the time it took him to settle at Volkswagen after such a long spell at M-Sport, adding he expected Tanak to experience some of the same at his new home at Toyota. Secretly J-ML will be hoping that's the case. It's vital for the Finn to steal the march on the Estonian. If Latvala can bag some early points and put some distance between him and his team-mates, he'll keep the team firmly behind him and this will likely sway any decisions regarding team orders later in the season. It will also help Latvala's frame of mind. If, and this is a definite possibility from what we've heard from Tanak's early tests of the Yaris, the ex-M-Sport star steps in and is straight up to speed, that could destabilise Latvala and bring about the sort of confused, tail-chasing meltdown we saw at the end of 2016.

Citroen

Talking of surprises, nothing shocked the service park more than Citroen's woeful showing at the dawn of the new era last year. Things have changed significantly since then.

Suspension expert Ohlins was brought in to help out on gravel while the team's own engineers came to terms with the conundrum that was the active centre differential. Finally, post-Poland – arguably the team's low point when Craig Breen and Andreas Mikkelsen could barely keep the car in a straight line – changes were made and some sort of consistency was found from the transmission helping the transfer and delivery of power and the car's general grip.

From the outside, this is the Citroen of old, but behind the scenes the budget's nothing like what it was a decade ago. The expertise is, however, still there and the comrades inside the red army are more than up for the fight. If the Versailles team can capture the sort of pace it showed on 2017's asphalt and the rougher, tighter, twistier gravel stages and transfer it to the wider, smoother dirt roads, then the C3 WRC becomes a genuine threat all around the world.

Meeke's a potential rally winner everywhere and Breen's certainly going to be in the mix on some of his favoured rallies. And then there's Sebastien Loeb. What can we expected from him? His first event of the year will be Mexico and, running at the back of the World Rally Car pack (because he won't pick up any points in Monte and Sweden) he will benefit from a much cleaner and quicker line. Don't be surprised to see Loeb out front on Friday in Leon. The bigger question will be whether he can sustain that lead once the entry is reversed and the playing field levels out over the weekend.

It's testament to the budget restrictions in place in Paris that Loeb comes in to replace Breen in Mexico, Corsica and Spain. Citroen will only run three cars when Mads Ostberg returns in Sweden or team partner Khalid Al Qassimi starts a handful of rallies later in the year. The upshot of this is a negligible challenge for the makes' crown, but genuine potential for wins and a shot at the drivers' championship. ■

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WRC 2018: THE TEAMS

David Evans runs us through the headline acts in the World Rally Championship

THE MEN AND MACHINES

CITROEN TOTAL ABU DHABI WORLD RALLY TEAM

BASED: VERSAILLES, FRANCE
CAR: CITROEN C3 WRC

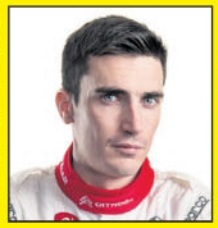


C3 WRC has the benefit of new suspension tech

Two things changed Citroen's fortunes last season, the use of Ohlins dampers and the arrival of new technical director Christophe Besse. Morale inside the Parisian squad was at rock bottom, but stronger results and Kris Meeke's win in Spain helped raise that in the final quarter of last year. The car's quick and getting quicker and Meeke's showing himself to be an increasingly dependable and undoubtedly fast leader. Expect Breen to push for a podium and possibly even a win on occasion this season and the return of a certain S. Loeb will likely clear up any lingering morale issues. A stronger season is definitely on the cards for the C3 WRC.



Kris Meeke (GBR)
Age: 38
WRC starts: 85
WRC wins: 5
WRC titles: 0
Co-driver: Paul Nagle (IRE)
When the car's there, Meeke's speed is always beyond question. Happily for the Northern Irishman's fans, we also saw an ability to temper his enthusiasm towards the end of last year. He knows what he's got to do and nobody wants the title more than him.



Craig Breen (IRE)
Age: 27
WRC starts: 48
WRC wins: 0
WRC titles: 0
Co-driver: Scott Martin (GBR)
Fifth six times last year, he now needs to step on and look to be challenging for podiums where he has the experience. Can he win? Absolutely. Like Meeke, his chances will definitely hinge on whether the car beneath him is offering the sort of consistency needed.



Sebastien Loeb (FRA)
Age: 43
WRC starts: 169
WRC wins: 78
WRC titles: 9
Co-driver: Daniel Elena (MCO)
The last time the master was back he stunned by leading Monte Carlo from the opening stage in 2015. He may take a bit longer to get going this year but never rule out the nine-time champ. His three rally programme includes Mexico, Corsica and Spain.

HYUNDAI SHELL MOBIS WORLD RALLY TEAM

BASED: ALZENAU, GERMANY
CAR: HYUNDAI i20 COUPE WRC

With Dani Sordo – still one of the fastest rally drivers around on asphalt – starting the Tarmac rounds and Hayden Paddon being deployed on the gravel to support Thierry Neuville and Andreas Mikkelsen, it's hard to look anywhere else for this year's manufacturers' championship. *On paper.*

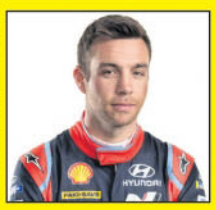
What's absolutely vital is that Hyundai turns out a trouble-free and strong car for this season. Too often last year the Korean firm's challenge was stymied by technical issues or by the i20 being unable to take the punishment its rivals survived. If Michel Nandan's team has got that right, we can expect Hyundai to be a dominant force.



Thierry Neuville (BEL)
Age: 29
WRC starts: 84
WRC wins: 6
WRC titles: 0
Co-driver: Nicolas Gilsoul (BEL)
The fastest and most victorious driver from last year. Nobody came close to the Belgian in terms of the number of fastest stage times or the length of time he spent in the lead of rallies. But he couldn't close the deal out. This year he needs a solid start and the ability to drive for a championship.



Andreas Mikkelsen (NOR)
Age: 28
WRC starts: 87
WRC wins: 3
WRC titles: 0
Co-driver: Anders Jaeger (NOR)
When he led two of the three rallies he started with Hyundai last season, it was quite clear that he's up to speed with the i20 WRC already. While he missed a few events last year, he still has enough experience, speed and consistency to count himself among the title favourites this year.



Hayden Paddon (NZL)
Age: 30
WRC starts: 72
WRC wins: 1
WRC titles: 0
Co-driver: Seb Marshall (GBR)
Practically and psychologically Paddon's on the back foot through missing seat time and not doing all the rallies, but now he needs to rely on his speed and natural ability. If he gets his head straight, he could really show what he's capable of against all the odds this season.



Dani Sordo (ESP)
Age: 34
WRC starts: 152
WRC wins: 1
WRC titles: 0
Co-driver: Carlos del Barrio (ESP)
A part programme for this year looks like the beginning of the end for the hugely likeable Sordo's lengthy world rallying career. That he won't be distracted by rallies he hasn't always enjoyed means he'll be even more focused when he is in the car. Sordo is always a threat on Tarmac, which is his specialist surface.



Could the i20 WRC go on to dominate in 2018?

Photos: mcklein-imagedatabase.com

THAT WILL STEAL THE SHOW

M-SPORT FORD WORLD RALLY TEAM

BASED: COCKERMOUTH, UK
CAR: FORD FIESTA WRC



Fiesta has improved in all areas over last year

How does M-Sport top last season? A podium on every event, double podium six times, five wins and both titles. It's fair to say the Cumbrians made the best out of the 2017 technical regulation change. This season it's going to be hunted by the teams that slipped up last season and won't be making the same mistakes again. Should it be worried? A little bit. But it should also take significant confidence and self-belief from those 2017 achievements – the Fiesta's evolved in terms of engine and aero over the winter, meaning the best has gotten better. And, don't forget, Ford's back in some capacity, and that can't be a bad thing.



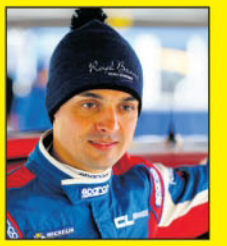
Sebastien Ogier (FRA)
Age: 34
WRC starts: 123
WRC wins: 40
WRC titles: 5
Co-driver: Julien Ingrassia (FRA)
Title number six coming up? I certainly wouldn't bet against it. It's likely the superstar Frenchman will face more competition – and closer competition – than in any of his previous title defences, but he still has the sustained speed, approach and brain power to take his second consecutive championship with M-Sport.



Elfyn Evans (GBR)
Age: 29
WRC starts: 63
WRC wins: 1
WRC titles: 0
Co-driver: Dan Barritt (GBR)
Eight top-six finishes and three podiums last year show Evans has great consistency – but it's the speed we're more interested in. And finishing second in Finland, just missing Argentina and then winning Wales shows he's got commitment in spades. Now with a full test programme and the same tyres as anybody, watch him go.



Teemu Suninen (FIN)
Age: 23
WRC starts: 28
WRC wins: 0
WRC titles: 0
Co-driver: Mikko Markkula (FIN)
Suninen showed exceptional pace when he drove the 2017 Fiesta WRC in both Poland and Finland last year, but he still needs more experience of certain types of rally. Mature beyond his years, Suninen will take a sensible approach to this season, but when the going gets quick he's definitely going to be a podium threat.



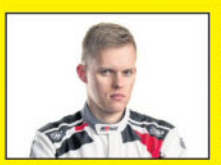
Bryan Bouffier (FRA)
Age: 39
WRC starts: 17
WRC wins: 0
WRC titles: 0
Co-driver: Jerome Degout (FRA)
Bouffier has huge experience – and is a former winner – of both the Monte Carlo Rally and the Tour de Corse, which is why he's driving M-Sport Ford's third car on both of those events this season. His ability to read the conditions and translate that to a workable tyre solution in the mountains will be invaluable to the team's chances of extra points.

TOYOTA GAZOO RACING WORLD RALLY TEAM

BASED: PUUPPOLA, FINLAND CAR: TOYOTA YARIS WRC



Jari-Matti Latvala (FIN)
Age: 32
WRC starts: 182
WRC wins: 17
WRC titles: 0
Co-driver: Miikka Anttila (FIN)
The Finn could finally be crowned world champion this year. Or he could be sunk without a trace. Mentally, Latvala's stronger than he's ever been and he'll have to be to facedown his new ice-cool team-mate Tanak. J-ML has the speed and the experience to be champion. Does he have the mindset?

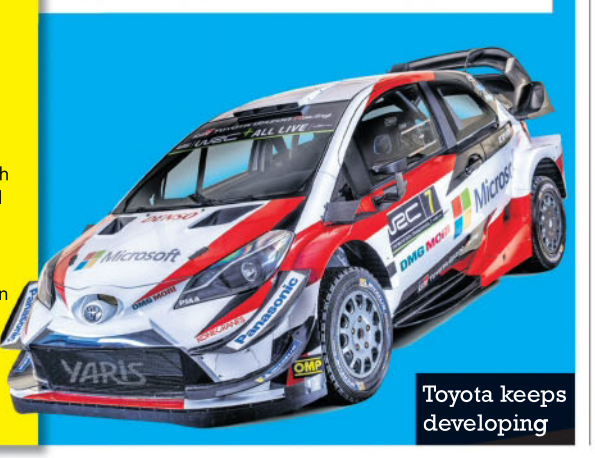


Ott Tanak (EST)
Age: 30
WRC starts: 79
WRC wins: 2
WRC titles: 0
Co-driver: Martin Jarveoja (EST)
After six years in an M-Sport-built Fiesta, Tanak has jumped ship. He has the full confidence of the Toyota Gazoo team – Tommi Makinen chose him over Sebastien Ogier – but now he needs to use this opportunity. Finding his feet quickly is vital, his rivals and this season won't wait for him.



Esapekka Lappi (FIN)
Age: 27
WRC starts: 29
WRC wins: 1
WRC titles: 0
Co-driver: Janne Ferm (FIN)
You could argue that his Rally Finland victory last season came just a touch too early for him. It raised unrealistic expectations of a driver short of experience. But he's a fast-learning and an even faster driver. Lappi will fight for wins when he knows where he's going and will learn lots where he doesn't.

Having stunned the service park with the pace of the Yaris WRC after such a short, and apparently troubled, test period in 2016, Toyota has to be considered a title threat this time around. The teething troubles which beset the car on occasion have, we're assured, been ironed out and a new aero package at the front end of the Yaris is just a small part of the myriad of tweaks and technical upgrades which have been an ongoing process since the second half of last year. The dependable Juho Hanninen has been replaced by two-time 2017 rally winner Ott Tanak, ensuring an even stronger attacking force.



Toyota keeps developing



Can Ogier start with a bang again?

ENTRIES

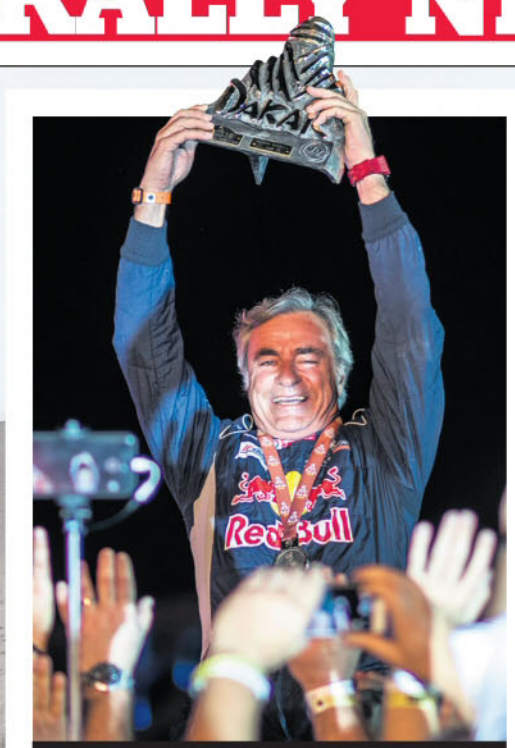
Monte Carlo Rally

NO.	DRIVER/CO-DRIVER	CAR
1	Sebastien Ogier (FRA)/Julien Ingrassia (FRA)	Ford Fiesta WRC
2	Elfyn Evans (GBR)/Dan Barritt (GBR)	Ford Fiesta WRC
3	Bryan Bouffier (FRA)/Jerome Degout (FRA)	Ford Fiesta WRC
4	Andreas Mikkelsen (NOR)/Anders Jaeger (NOR)	Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC
5	Thierry Neuville (BEL)/Nicolas Gilsoul (BEL)	Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC
6	Dani Sordo (ESP)/Carlos del Barrio (ESP)	Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC
7	Jari-Matti Latvala (FIN)/Miikka Anttila (FIN)	Toyota Yaris WRC
8	Ott Tanak (EST)/Martin Jarveoja (EST)	Toyota Yaris WRC
9	Esapekka Lappi (FIN)/Janne Ferm (FIN)	Toyota Yaris WRC
10	Kris Meeke (GBR)/Paul Nagle (IRL)	Citroen C3 WRC
11	Craig Breen (IRL)/Scott Martin (GBR)	Citroen C3 WRC
31	Eric Camilli (FRA)/Benjamin Veillas (FRA)	Ford Fiesta R5
32	Jan Kopecky (CZE)/Pavel Dresler (CZE)	Skoda Fabia R5
33	Teemu Suninen (FIN)/Mikko Markkula (FIN)	Ford Fiesta R5
34	Kevin Abbring (NLD)/Pieter Tsjoen (NLD)	Ford Fiesta R5
35	Guillaume de Mevius (BEL)/Louis Louka (BEL)	Peugeot 208 T16
61	Enrico Brazzoli (ITA)/Luca Beltrame (ITA)	Peugeot 208 R2
71	Ole Christian Veiby (NOR)/S.R. Skjaermoen(NOR)	Skoda Fabia R5
73	Kalle Rovanpera (FIN)/Jonne Halttunen (FIN)	Skoda Fabia R5
98	Gus Greensmith (GBR)/Craig Parry (GBR)	Ford Fiesta R2T

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RALLY NEWS

Photos: Red Bull Content Pool



In Peugeot's last Dakar Sainz sealed win



Dakar 2018 was one of the toughest yet

CARLOS JR HELPS SAINZ TO SECOND DAKAR RALLY WIN

Father and son spoke every day as Sainz Sr dominated

By David Evans

Carlos Sainz Jr has talked to *Motorsport News* about the emotions he felt as he watched his father take a second Dakar victory for Peugeot on Saturday.

Following the 55-year-old's win in Argentina, his son wrote to his father to let him know what his latest – and arguably greatest – win meant to the family who were waiting at home in Spain.

Sainz Sr dominated this year's South American marathon, bringing his Peugeot 3008 DKR home 43 minutes ahead of his former team-mate Nasser Al-Attiyah. Rated as one of the toughest Dakars in history, the Spaniard was delighted with his result.

Sainz Sr said: "I have never run a race like this. Every day there was a trap, you had to be lucky. It's difficult to win a race that lasts two weeks, so when you win with this advantage, you have done the job well."

The second week of Dakar was one of the most stressful ever in the Sainz's family home in Spain.

"It's been a tough week [watching him] in the lead," Sainz Jr told *MN*. "Normally when I follow the Dakar, I enjoy it; I can see dad attacking, that's what he likes: winning stages. But the second week was all about bringing the car home and not losing any big [amount of] time. I was not enjoying it! He was losing time every day on purpose to bring the car home. Normally it's such a motivation to see him winning or P2 on the stages, but this time he was P5 or six. It was a bit of a stressful situation, but he timed it perfectly."

The father and son spoke two or even three times during each day of competition as the event progressed into the second week. Sainz Jr added: "I don't know how much he listened to me or how much he needed to listen. We talked before every day to see how he was feeling and what kind of strategy [he planned], what kind of stages, were there dunes, rivers, dry rivers, were they WRC roads? We talked about that and after each stage we reviewed how he had done: where the time had come or gone. We looked specifically at the splits: where could he attack more or less? On some of the days when there were two stages, we spoke on the non-competitive liaison section between the stages."

Sainz Jr added that his dad's win put him in a strong place should he want to return to Dakar with another manufacturer now Peugeot's cross-country commitment has finished.

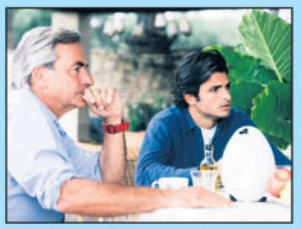
"He has worked so hard for this," said Sainz Jr. "He prepared himself so well and he won the event – dominating what has been one of the toughest Dakars. I'm sure he will get offers [from other manufacturers] and I know how much he's worth in terms of building and developing a new car for Dakar. He's gained the power to make his own decision, he will think carefully over the next few months, speak to mum and decide what's best for him and for the family."

In his letter, Sainz Jr told his father: "A couple of hours after having seen you win this Dakar and celebrate, I'd like to tell you how important and amazing it has been to see you work so hard to be, at 55 years of age, as eager, excited and motivated to face such a big challenge as trying to win your second Dakar.

"I could mention 1000 anecdotes, but right now I remember when I used to wake up at 0730hrs to train with the bike inside the sauna and you had already been there for an hour working out… You and I know that few expected to see you celebrate another win, but those who know you well knew that there is no challenge that you can't complete."

Go to motorsport-news.co.uk to read Sainz Jr's letter in full.

Sainz Jr drives zero car on the Monte



Sainz Jr (r) drives in Monte

Renault F1 driver Carlos Sainz Jr will make his rally debut at this week's Monte Carlo Rally and admits he will follow his dad into competitive rallying later in his career.

Sainz will drive a Renault Megane RS as a non-competitive course car on Sunday's Col de Braus powerstage. While Sainz has never competed on a rally, he's no stranger to rally cars and drives with his dad on a stage close to his home in Spain.

"I have done a lot of practice with my dad," Sainz told *MN*. "We have a rally car at home in the countryside so we do a lot of dirt stages with the car and I keep learning quite a lot.

"My weakest point is to believe in pacenotes – I'm a circuit driver, so I don't have this experience and, even if he teaches me, it's really hard to learn this. In terms of skill I learned a lot from him; we drove a lot in the snow and on the ice and some nice Tarmac stages. It's too early in my career to go for a rally, but in the future I will do something for a hobby."

On driving Col de Braus, Sainz added: "I'm really looking forward to experiencing Rally Monte Carlo for the first time. I've heard so much about it [Monte Carlo Rally] from my dad: how difficult the stages are, how the conditions can change in an instant from snow to rain or bright sunshine."

ELFYN EVANS IS READY TO PROVE THE DOUBTERS WRONG IN 2018 PAGE 20



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'Aaltonen back to Rally Sweden in a Mini'
Historics, p13



NEUVILLE PLOTS CORSA HISTORIC OUTING



Neuville to drive Corsa



Opel Corsa has 210bhp

Thierry Neuville will return to his rallying roots for next month's Legend Boucles de Bastogne, where he will drive the Opel Corsa he used to start his rallying career 11 years ago.

The Hyundai star and his brother Yannick rebuilt the car in their family workshop, south-east of Liege, and last year's World Rally Championship runner-up will use the Corsa for the first time at the popular Belgian historic event from February 2-4.

Winners of last year's event in a Porsche 911, Neuville and co-driver Nicolas Gilsoul have asked not to be included in the official classification due to the modified nature of their car.



Neuville goes back to the future on Belgian historic event

Speaking to *Motorsport News*, Neuville said: "We decided to put a more powerful engine in to have some more fun. It's a Corsa B kit-car engine, which is very rare, but we managed to source one. It's got about 210hp, so it should be interesting

"We made a few minor improvements [to the car]. Let's just say the car will be a bit of a hybrid. I don't want to drive the car as a 'demo' as I really want to compete and be able to register my times, but my name will not appear in the overall rankings. Our aim is first and foremost to be present in this great Belgian rally event and put on a show. I really love this rally. The course, the atmosphere and the general public in Bastogne are fantastic. We really enjoyed ourselves last year and I truly wanted to be back in 2018, but in a different way: purely for fun, for the fans and for Nicolas and myself."

Starting out as a 19-year-old rally driver, Neuville remembers the Corsa well.

"This is the Corsa with which I competed in my first event, the Cretes Rally in Luxembourg and at a hillclimb," he said.

There was class success on the hillclimb, while he scored a class podium – third – on his rally debut.

Every WRC stage to be live streamed

Rally fans will be able to watch every stage of this year's World Rally Championship live, starting from this week's Monte Carlo Rally, thanks to WRC Promoter's decision to stream the entire 2018 season.

The footage is available from the series' official website WRC.com and costs €8.99 (£7.95) per month.

Coverage will come from a variety of onboard cameras on all the leading cars along with stage-side footage as well. In addition to the competition, there will be live coverage of press conferences and expert analysis from the service park.

WRC All Live will be available on computer, smart TV, smartphone or tablet.

WRC Promoter's Oliver Ciesla said: "WRC All Live is the logical development of WRC+. A continuous live stream is the appropriate format for an endurance sport that runs for two-and-a-half days. WRC fans now have the choice and flexibility to join the live action at any time during a rally weekend. Fans can choose to watch the stages they like best and enjoy unprecedented live access to the service areas, whenever they want and from wherever they are."

For those wanting to watch WRC on television, *Motorsport News'* sister brand Motorsport.tv will show daily highlights, as will BT Sport. On terrestrial TV, Channel 5 will continue to run its hour-long highlights show at 1900 the Monday after each WRC round finishes, while Welsh language (with English subtitles) S4C will continue to broadcast via its Ralio show.



Makinen won Monte four times, lastly in 2002 with Subaru

Makinen: drivers must prepare for Monte

Toyota team principal Tommi Makinen has urged his drivers to prepare thoroughly ahead of this week's Monte Carlo Rally, something he claims he didn't do as well as he should as a driver.

The Finn won the opening round of the World Rally Championship four times as a driver – but he admits his preparation for the notoriously difficult French Alps event was never what it should have been. Or what he'd be looking for from Jari-Matti Latvala, Ott Tanak or Esapekka Lappi.

Makinen said: "The Monte Carlo Rally is always a tough event to start the season with. Although I won it four times during my career as a driver, I didn't prepare for it very well back then; I would not even think about rallying and just go skiing instead! Our three drivers have been doing much better preparation, with a lot of testing, and we hope for a good result."

Toyota scored a surprise second with Latvala in Monte Carlo last year, with that result followed by victories in Sweden and Finland (Lappi). There were, however, a number of technical issues which hit the team's chances of championship success. Makinen wants to get rid of those in 2018.

"I believe that we can be a lot more consistent," he said, "and that's really what we need in order to fight for the championship titles."

GROUP RALLYING EDITOR

DAVID EVANS

"This year's WRC will be better than 2017"



As I type, snow continues to fall outside the window serving merely to build further excitement toward this week's Monte Carlo Rally. I love this time of the season, with the opening round of the championship just days away and another full year's action stretching ahead of us.

A year ago this week was pretty special. For the previous 52 weeks I'd been writing seemingly non-stop about the onset of the fabled and apparently fearsome *2017 cars*. Group B, I reckoned every other week, was coming back. The championship, I insisted on a monthly basis, had never looked more exciting than it did in 2017.

I was wrong. This year's going to be even better. Last season is so… last season. It's the here and now that counts and I honestly believe there's more than ever to be looking forward to. What was is that convinced me of that?

It was a film of Teemu Suninen and Kevin Abbring getting some snow and wet Tar running in their respective Ford Fiesta R5s. The Finn in particular was exploring the outer limits of the friction circle through every corner. Yes, we have a fascinating fight for supremacy up front, but as well as that there's going to be entertainment throughout the field.

Abbring, for example, is back with a point to prove. Dropped by Volkswagen and Hyundai, the Dutchman – highly rated by plenty – has the perfect opportunity to show folk just how badly they've misjudged him. Suninen too is in for a very big year and one he can't afford to drop when he's got the next generation coming so quickly behind him.

And that leads me neatly on to Kalle Rovanpera, who makes his maiden WRC outing for the Skoda factory team this week. The 17-year-old cruised through New South Wales to pick up a lonely maiden WRC2 win in Australia the month before last, but he'll feel the full force of second-tier, world-level competition in Monte Carlo this week. Not to mention the extraordinary weight of expectation which now sits on such young shoulders.

And that's just round one. Looking further ahead to Sweden, there's a 14-strong Junior WRC field, Mads Ostberg back in a Citroen and Henning Solberg. It really doesn't matter what the second of those two Norwegian drives, he'll always be hugely entertaining – but the fact that he's driving Mads' 2017 Ford Fiesta WRC makes his series return even better. Solberg, by the way, put in a bit of match practice at Saturday's Sigdalsrally in Norway and beat his 21-year-old son Oscar to third place by seven seconds. Father was in a Mitsubishi Lancer, son was in a Skoda Fabia R5.

Twenty-year-old Russian Nikolay Gryazin's clearly going to be a name to look out for – he won the event in another Fabia R5 (Ostberg was also competing but retired his Fiesta WRC with brake trouble) by almost a minute from Anders Grondal.

Enjoy the year ahead.

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RALLY NEWS

IN BRIEF

Scots overseas
The Scottish Rally Championship will continue its bid to attract overseas competitors in 2018, offering £100 back to competitors using a ferry to attend SRC events. The scheme also ran in 2017. Drivers including Marty Gallagher and Paul McErlean took advantage of this last year.

John Horton Award
The Scottish Rally Championship's John Horton Award winner will receive a day of tuition with 1999 British champion Tapio Laukkanen. A driver from each round of the SRC, plus wildcards, are entered into the award and go to an assesment day to decide the winner. Keith Riddick won last year. The award is named after Horton, who helped many young drivers progress in rallying, while holding many positions, including Wales Rally GB press officer.

New Year Stages
This weekend's New Year Stages at Kirkistown boasts a number of interesting entries. Phillip Allen will steer a Ford Fiesta R5 instead of a Mini John Cooper Works WRC, while Kieron Graffin has entered in a similar car having competed in Citroen's DS 3 R5 variant last year. Paddy McVeigh returns after a year out in his Subaru Impreza S12B WRC.

Pierce enters STs
Brynmor Pierce will join the Fiesta ST Trophy supporting the BTRDA in 2018. Usually a co-driver, the Welshman drove a Subaru Impreza on Rally GB last year, his first event driving after many years navigating. He will be partnered by Alan Jones for the season.

BTRDA R2 Cup
The BTRDA R2 Cup, which will debut on the season-opening Cambrian Rally on February 3, has already received a number of potential entries. Although some may choose not to register, 10 eligible cars have entered the Llandudno event. A service at Surf Snowdonia at Dolgarrog is expected to reduce road mileage.

Newby to Brean
National rally frontrunner and defending event winner Arron Newby of the TEG Sport team headlines this weekend's Brean Stages entry list. The two-day event at Brean Leisure Park features 52-miles of sealed-surface roads within the leisure park. Starting at car number five, Pembrey rally winner Thomas Cooper makes his first start away from the Welsh circuit aboard his Mitsubishi Lancer E9.

Jack Frost missing
A number of high-profile entries withdrew from the Jack Frost Winter Stages at Croft thanks to extreme weather last weekend. Alan Kirkaldy – debuting in a Ford Fiesta R5 – Le Mans winner Guy Smith (also in a Fiesta R5) and his father Peter were among the noteable absentees. Barry Lindsay won ***(see Rally reports, page 19)*****.**

Photos: Jakob Ebrey, Roy Dempster

R-GT CLASS PLANNED TO BOOST RALLY ENTRIES

Competitors pitch class for cars over three-litres for British rally stages



Jemison's Boxster competed on the Trackrod last year



R-GT Porsches can rally under FIA rule

By Jack Benyon

A group of competitors have begun a campaign to allow cars with engine capacities of three-litres or over to compete in national rallying in the UK.

Currently, any car above three-litres is unable to compete in the UK, unless it is an FIA-homologated R-GT car.

The competitors in question believe the three-litre rule is outdated, and that falling rally entries could be addressed by the number of cost-effective cars that could be used. BMW M3s, Porsche Boxsters and Caymans and Nissan 350s are rallied regularly on the continent.

"I've spent a lot of time around Porsches recently and we see a lot of them competing in Europe, with that great sound and they look great," said Ryan Champion, the 2017 East African Safari winner and one of the competitors backing the change. "We don't see many competing here.

"I tested a Boxster, owned by Ian Jemison, and that's what made me think about it. His car was log-booked on the old system as a 3.4-litre Boxster, so he can use it. Now if someone else wants to build the same car and compete, they can't. You can get hold of a Cayman or a Boxster relatively cheaply and there's a lot of race cars out there that wouldn't take a lot of work to make rally ready.

"Ian's car is a good strong one based on a production model and was relatively cheap to make. In Europe they run championships for cars like the Nissan 350 and 370Zs, and there's many cars competing in Finland that are excluded in the UK by the three-litre rule."

As well as the fun factor for the relatively low-cost the cars could boast, Champion says an update to the rule is needed.

"Why do we have the three-litre rule? We allow 2.5-litre turbo engines, and they would be 4.25 litres by the rules of a 1.7 per cent multiplication factor [used by the MSA to establish which class a car goes in]. Even a two-litre car, multiplied by 1.7 per cent is over three-litres."

The proposal for a new, structured R-GT class in Britain is set to be put forward to the MSA Rallies Commission within the coming weeks.

Champion added that controlling the performance of the higher capacity-engined cars has its challenges, but it can be done.

"You have to manage it, but in R-GT it's simple, you use an air restrictor which limits performance no matter what you do to the engine," added Champion. "Just like we see with turbo cars, there's pop off valves and a restrictor in those."

Closed-road change close for Wales

A law change set to come into effect in Wales on February 2 has paved the way for motorsport events to use closed public roads in the country from 2018.

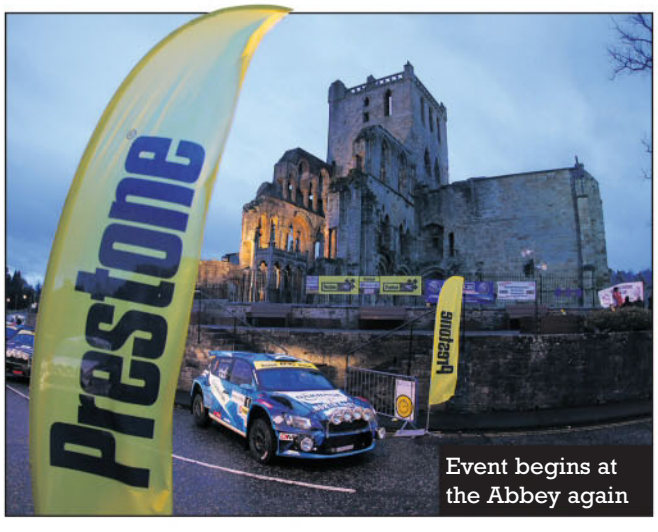
Previously, an Act of Parliament would be needed for every event that wanted to use closed roads for motorsport, which was time consuming and costly and effectively precluded such events taking place.

Now, the responsibility to grant a closed-road permit will be held by the Motor Sports Association, and be ratified by the local authority in the relevant area.

The new laws are due to come into effect on February 2. The move follows a similar law change that took place in England in April 2017.

The discipline most likely to use the changes is rallying. Organisers of Britain's Wales Rally GB, which is both backed by and takes place primarily within Wales, have already looked into how the event could use closed roads in the future, in anticipation of the law change.

Closed roads can be used as entire stages in themselves, and can be used to link groups of non-road stage sections, increasing mileage for crews and reducing the number of organisers needed for stages.



Event begins at the Abbey again

Border Counties switches to two days

The Border Counties Rally – the opening round of the British Rally Championship – will switch to a two-day format for 2018, with Kielder also added.

The event, based in Jedburgh, was included at short notice on last year's calendar after the original opener, the Mid Wales Stages, was cancelled for financial reasons.

Clerk of the course Clayton Lackenby was keen to do more with the event – which is also the second round of the Scottish Rally Championship – having been given more notice than in 2017.

"Last year we only had 10 weeks' notice to put an event on for the BRC," said Lackenby. "We put stages in on Friday night, which didn't affect the timetable much. This year we've had a lot more notice of our inclusion in the championship and we've been able to plan better. The event is around 81 miles. Saturday is nice, in the Tweed Valley, and then Sunday we head in to Kielder as we did years ago."

Only one stage from Saturday will be repeated on the Sunday, and while the start at Jedburgh Abbey remains the same, the BRC will finish at the Town Hall. The SRC concludes on Saturday evening, while a clubman rally will also run on the Sunday.

Creighton targets the Junior BRC title

Junior British Rally Championship frontrunner William Creighton will return in 2018 with his Peugeot 208 R2.

The 20-year-old 2017 JBRC runner-up is hoping to go one better this year, after perennial rival Callum Devine has graduated into the Junior World Rally Championship.

"There's not much else for us to do," said Creighton. "There's BRC and Junior WRC, but we'll do the BRC again and give it a good crack. JWRC wasn't an option for us this year but I look forward to seeing how Callum gets on and wish him well."

Creighton only has one event outside of the BRC confirmed, the Cambrian Rally in Llandudno on February 3, but could also do the Malcolm Wilson Rally, the second round of the BTRDA after the Cambrian.

"There's chat about doing the Malcolm Wilson," added Creighton, who will be joined by regular co-driver Liam Regan.

"We did it last year and being in the car the week before [the BRC opener] was important. We went out at the Border Counties and we were quickest, I was not expecting that, I was wondering how far off the pace we would be. It is a week before which can be a bit tricky."

● Regular Ford Fiesta R2T driver William Hill will compete a full campaign in the Junior BRC this year after confirming his intent. Hill won the Rockingham Stages in a Fiesta R5 car in December last year.



Creighton (r) and Regan (l)

'How Evans proved his doubters wrong'
Elfyn back with M-Sport, p20



Photos: Kevin Money, Richard Jordan



Avenger got Neuville's attention

NEW 'MODERN' AVENGER FOR BARRY JORDAN

Regular historic campaigner Barry Jordan will switch to a new modern-spec Den Motorsport-built Hillman Avenger for the 2018 BTRDA season.

Jordan is well known for his exploits in his Avenger BRM, but has decided to switch to a modern-spec car similar to some of the newer-build Ford Escort Mk2s.

"Even though it's not an Escort, it's similar to one underneath," said Jordan of the car, which has a two-litre Vauxhall engine and a paddleshift Tractive gearbox.

"We're hoping to use it on the BTRDA. We were going to use it in Ireland [on asphalt] but we're going to change it to gravel set-up. It'll be interesting…"

The car was one of the most popular rally cars featured at the Autosport International Show earlier this month, attracting huge crowds all weekend.

"I was surprised," said Den Motorsport boss Barry McKenna. "I wasn't sure whether people would be laughing at me for bringing it [to the show] as it's just so different to anything else. But the reaction was mind blowing."

Jordan knew very little about the car's build and only saw it for the first time at the Autosport show.

"I've known Barry a long time and I was at the Autosport show two years ago and was admiring one of his Escorts," said Jordan. "I asked him 'do you reckon you could build something like that from an Avenger?' and he said 'yeah I'll do that mate'.

"That was the end of the conversation until I saw it last Thursday. It's been a standing joke in the workshop that Barry has been worried if I would like it or not."

Jordan's road surfacing business concern recently announced that it would replace Ravenol as the main BTRDA sponsor.

Friend gets R2 opportunity in Mid Wales

British Historic Rally Championship frontrunner Ben Friend will get a chance in a Ford Fiesta R2 on the Mid Wales Rally.

Friend, who has a reputation for giant-killing in his two-litre Pinto Escort, has been loaned the car by Peter Smith of Swift Caravans. Smith has given a number of drivers an opportunity to drive an R2 and is set to continue to do so on future events this year.

"I'll have a go and see how we get on and maybe I can progress later in the year," said Friend.

"I've never driven a left-hand-drive car before so that will be interesting. There's four others in the class so far so hopefully we'll stand a good chance of winning the class."

Friend, 23, will continue in the BHRC in his Escort, while the R2 opportunity gives him the chance to evaluate a possible switch to more modern machinery.

The Mid Wales Stages Rally returns for the first time since 2016, and the 45-mile stage single-day event in Newtown is now open for entries.

Herospec rallysprint debut at Mondello Park

Pat O'Connell won the inaugural Herospec rallysprint at Mondello Park, as the event drew praise from competitors.

The brainchild of John McCay and Sean Hassett, Saturday comprised of a traditional rallysprint utilising a mixture of sealed and loose surfaces combined into a brand-new layout. Sunday featured head-to-head battles on a superspecial course.

Late withdrawals meant that some big names were missing from the starters list including Gary Jennings. Organisational headaches, coupled with some last-minute track alterations, meant that the action began a few hours later than originally planned.

When things did get underway, competitors were almost unanimous in their approval for the course.

Padraig Egan put in a stunning drive in his Group N Subaru Impreza to emerge victorious at the end of the battle, with live streaming on social media also proving popular.

Incredible Rally North Wales entry for R2WD

In the space of two days, Rally North Wales has exceeded its 2017 start list, after a strong reaction to the new Rally2WD programme.

The event is the first in the Rally2WD championship, where two-wheel-drive cars run first on the road, without contravening MSA regulations. The four-wheel-drive cars effectively run as a separate event. It has been launched to help declining historic and two-wheel-drive entries, as the current performance seeding has those cars running further back, often on rough and rutted roads.

As *MN* closed for press, the Dolgellau event had 100 entries, after starting 88 cars last year. Only seven of the entries are for four-wheel-drive cars.

"We set out to attract some of the beginners and newcomers," said Rally 2WD co-ordinator Matt Cotton. "We were hoping to get 10 registered entries on Rally North Wales, and that would have been fantastic.

"While we don't know how many will register for the championship at the event, but if everybody on the entry did register, we'd be heading towards 20 already. I think it's inspired people to come out for a play."

After Rally Mid Wales, the championship visits the Pirelli (April 28), Carlisle Stages (June 8/9), Red Kite Stages (June 24) and Trackrod (September 29/30).


Rally2WD popular in Wales



After winning at Croft last year, de Banke will tackle gravel

De Banke sets sights on BTRDA with Mills

Christmas Stages winner Simon de Banke and former world champion co-driver Phil Mills will tackle this year's BTRDA Rally Series in a Ford Fiesta R5.

The pair won the Christmas Stages Rally at Croft in December last year, prompting a proposed season-long assault on the BTRDA title.

"Malcolm [Wilson, M-Sport] did me a deal to hire an R5 for our staff summer party, so I could show my team what rallying was all about," said de Banke. "As soon as I drove it, I realised why he'd been so helpful; he knew I'd have to buy one! It's utterly incredible, especially compared to the rust buckets I used to try and compete in 20 odd years ago!

"The Christmas Stages was great fun. It's the last event I did 15 years ago. I never expected to win, but I'm delighted. I'd imagine it's the pinnacle of Phil's career as well!

"I always wanted to do the BTRDA when I was younger but just couldn't afford to."

De Banke has entered the Cambrian Rally, the BTRDA opener, which will be his second in the car on gravel.

GROUP NATIONAL EDITOR

JACK BENYON

"New rule could boost entries and variety"



In the true spirit of taking on more input from stakeholders within motorsport, as per David Richards' speech at the Watkins Lecture, it took less than a week for a proposal to come out from under the woodwork from competitors. And it's a good one.

Since 2009, three-litre cars have been unable to compete in multi-venue stage rallying, apart from the Tuthill Porsche 996 GT3, which is homologated with the FIA and therefore able to compete.

This column isn't intended to stick the boot into the law-makers, as I don't think they've done anything wrong here, but the case for the rule change appears strong and could help in multiple areas of national rallying.

As Ryan Champion points out *(see story, left)*, if the over three-litre rule is safety related, we already have two-litre turbocharged cars competing in the UK. When you apply the 1.7 per cent multiplier used to ascertain what class a turbo car should run in, you're over four-litres in equivalent – never mind three.

And another thing to add – this isn't to bring back home-built specials.

This is to introduce cost-effective cars like the BMW M3 and the Nissan 350Z, which can be proper little pocket-rockets built and run for a relatively low cost.

Of course, how the cars are policed must be watched carefully, and the air restrictor suggested by Champion seems sensible. But in times where the MSA is often effectively held hostage over safety regulations and what it must do to ensure outside parties believe our sport to be safe, the proposal and what to do next must be examined carefully.

The counter argument there would be that many current national-level cars are heavily modified, and at least the cars being proposed – take the Cayman for example – is based on an up-to-date road car with modern safety features. There's a lot to be said for that in current times.

The reason I became interested in rallying, apart from the usual influence of a parent, is because of the variety between the trees. This change would help that massively.

I love the Escort Mk2 as much as any, I'm from a 'Ford family', but even I believe there to be too many out competing. The perfect example of this being the reaction Barry Jordan got to his Hillman Avenger at the recent Autosport International Show. Even Thierry Neuville stopped to look.

As long as the proposed new class(es) are safe, then it's a no-brainer.

Some great sounding cars and a greater variety of them on the stages, and more entries for the event. It's hard to see how you could oppose it.

The proposal should be with the MSA Rallies Committee soon, and I hope they can find a safe way to introduce some of these brilliant cars for competition. The Escorts need some rivalry for rally fans' hearts.

AGREE/DISAGREE?
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MN CIRCUIT RALLY

Photos: Gary Hawkins

CLASS ROUND-UP



Points haul for McMullan/Elston

Vauxhall Nova man David McMullan and co-driver Jamie Elston set a blistering pace from the word go in difficult conditions to claim a dominant victory over Aaron Rix/Rob Cook (Ford Ka) in **Class A** of the MN Circuit Rally Championship, his second maximum score of the season.

Having missed the previous round at Knockhill, McMullan drove hard from the opening test, and built a significant lead by SS4. This gave them the springboard to set fastest time on every subsequent stage and win by 2m49s. Rix took the steady approach, rebuilding confidence after his roll at Cadwell Park in November, despite a class win at Knockhill. Late-day battery problems meant their service crew had to push-start the Ka, but they stayed ahead of third-placed Dale and Andrew Lawson. Their first rally in a new MG ZR was plagued by incorrect gear ratios due to a standard road 'box.

Paul Sheard/Steve Dolman (Mazda MX-5) continued their strong form and led all day in **Class B**, but they rode their luck to do it. A plug lead came loose on SS2 and they lost sufficient time to be pressured by Chris Platt/Mick Robinson (Vauxhall Tigra). Unfortunately, the Tigra's clutch broke on SS5, putting them on the trailer home. This moved Matt Maxted/Nick Starkey (Peugeot 106) into second, and with MSN championship points in mind they drove steadily to stay ahead of forest rallying regulars Vince Bristow/Tim Sayer (Ford Escort Mk1).

Class C produced a tough all-Escort Mk2 battle between Roger and Sam Cox, Stephen Beck/Paul Brown and Tim Mewett/Liz Jordan. Early leader Beck overcame understeer and clutch problems but admitted his car worked better in dry weather. Mewett, using second-hand tyres that had sat in his service van for six years, mounted a mid-rally charge to challenge Beck but third-placed Cox eyed victory himself. His mechanics had worked hard to repair bodywork damage from the recent Loco Two Stages and he rewarded their efforts by storming through the final stage to overhaul Beck by two seconds, with Mewett one second in arrears. Beck took maximum MN series points while sixth in class secured Cathy Sewart (Talbot Sunbeam Lotus) second-placed driver's points.

Rally winners Mark Kelly/Andy Baker (Escort Mk2) won **Class D** (labelled Class D1 for the MN series) from Chris West/Keith Hounslow (Peugeot 306 Maxi) with Ian Woodhouse/Jason Leaf (Escort Mk2) third. A close scrap for **Class E** (Class D2 for the MN series) went to John Stone/Jack Morton (Ford Fiesta S2500) by seven seconds from John Marshall/Scott Crawford (Subaru Impreza).

Ian Harden



Sheard: strong again in Class B

KELLY WINS AND JOINS MN TITLE FIGHT

MOTORSPORT NEWS CIRCUIT RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP IN ASSOCIATION WITH MSVR

Series leader West turns an off day into points haul. By Elliot Wood



Kelly secured his first series victory

Stone holds second in MN points

The fourth round of the Motorsport News Circuit Rally Championship was all about tyres, and who could get them working at a sodden Brands Hatch circuit.

In the Pirelli corner were championship leaders Chris West and Keith Hounslow, in their Peugeot 306 Maxi Kit Car, with used tyres on all four corners.

Leading the opposition was Mark Kelly and Andy Baker, in a Ford Escort Mk2 with new Michelin wets.

The first stage was wet, after the first of several showers, with oil also down on the circuit. Grip was at a premium.

West ran first, and he powered his Peugeot through the chicanes and hairpins in five minutes 59 seconds. Kelly ran three cars later, and he went 22 seconds faster than West, whose chances of repeating his 2016 Brands Hatch Winter Stages victory looked decidedly small down in fourth place.

"Tyre choice was up the creek, I was struggling for grip," said Peugeot driver West.

"Someone's dropped some oil in there. I've not got the budget [for new tyres] so I'll have to get to the end on what we've got."

Owning a new set of covers was no magic bullet though, as inconsistencies in grip from corner to corner meant that tyre choice was also allied to driver confidence in deciding the timesheet at stage end.

Kelly and West matched each other on the second run, with West rising to third on the leaderboard behind Ian Woodhouse/Jason Leaf's Escort Mk2.

Woodhouse loved the slippery conditions, and his wet tyres, but had dropped six seconds to the leader.

He maintained that gap by matching Kelly on SS3, in which the rain had returned, with West dropping a solitary second.

West finally took an outright stage win on SS4, and brought the gap at the front down to 11 seconds after the use of a tyre cutter to clean up his worn treads, and benefited from mistakes from both Kelly and Woodhouse.

A patch of oil had distracted Kelly, leading to him missing his braking point and making contact with the barriers. Woodhouse meanwhile spun his Escort into the tyres at Graham Hill Bend, run in reverse on this stage.

"That spin cost me 17 seconds, I would've been fighting for the lead," said reigning champion Woodhouse afterwards, whose estimate was proven correct when the timing screens showed him 17 seconds off the top spot.

The front trio shared the fastest times on SS5, as the first cars to hit the stage were fortunate to avoid the torrential rain that followed.

After ambulance attention was required for a crash involving Tim Self/Colin Mitchell in their Subaru Impreza S10 WRC, a car which was formerly driven by Petter Solberg, it was decided that SS6 would be scrapped from the results.

With no times released for the cars that ran uninterrupted, it was unclear how the positions at the top would've changed, although West and Woodhouse were confident they had beaten Kelly.

Three seconds disappeared from Kelly's lead on SS7, and he could've afforded to have given away an even greater margin on the final run, with his eight-second lead.

West could only eradicate another two seconds in SS8 though, as his old tyres were now "shot".

Kelly therefore took his first MN championship victory, and rose to third in the overall points.

"[Victory feels] fantastic," said Kelly. "We've worked hard for it. It was tight, not a lot in it in the end, so I'm just delighted to get over the line and bring it home."

With Kelly being a registered entrant in the D1 Class, it meant West's championship lead over D2 driver John Stone decreased to 18 points.

Stone, co-driven by Jack Morton, won the event's E Class in his Ford Fiesta S2500, and also finished the rally in fourth overall, his best result of the season.

Lee Jones/Thomas Grogan's Ferrari 308 Michelotto Group 4, seeded on estimated pace at number 41, almost beat him to it though. Tenth fastest in SS1, a surprise in itself, was followed by two top-four times, and their sixth-place finish was down to charging issues and a misfire.

John Marshall/Scott Crawford's 400-mile road trip from Scotland resulted in another fifth place finish in their Subaru Impreza, a position that helped consolidate fifth in the standings.

Escorts filled five of the positions between seventh and 12th, headed by Roger and Sam Cox. The only non-Escort was James Slaughter's Ford Fiesta R5 in 10th, co-driven by Jack Hanley, a charity raffle winner.



Clever drive from West banked points

RESULTS

Brands Hatch Stages, MN Circuit Rally Championship, round 4/8, Jan 20

POS	DRIVER/CO-DRIVER	CAR	TIME
1	Mark Kelly/Andy Baker	Ford Escort Mk2	39m43s
2	Chris West/Keith Hounslow	Peugeot 306 Maxi Kit Car	+6s
3	Ian Woodhouse/Jason Leaf	Ford Escort Mk2	+23s
4	John Stone/Jack Morton	Ford Fiesta S2500	+1m49s
5	John Marshall/Scott Crawford	Subaru Impreza	+1m56s
6	Lee Jones/Thomas Grogan	Ferrari 308 Michelotto Gp4	+2m03s
7	Roger Cox/Sam Cox	Ford Escort Mk2	+2m23s
8	Stephen Beck/Paul Brown	Ford Escort Mk2	+2m25s
9	Tim Mewett/Liz Jordan	Ford Escort Mk2	+2m26s
10	James Slaughter/Jack Hanley	Ford Fiesta R5	+2m48s

Class winners: Kelly/Baker; Stone/Morton; Cox/Cox; Paul Sheard/Steve Dolman (Mazda MX-5); David McMullan/Jamie Elston (Vauxhall Nova). **Points:** 1 West 213; 2 Stone 195; 3 Kelly 192; 4 Woodhouse 187; 5 Marshall 179; 6 Dane Walker 154.

RALLY REPORTS



Photo: Kevin Money

Prize drive resulted in Lindsay victory

LINDSAY WINS IN SPECIAL PRIZE DRIVE AT CROFT

Jack Frost Stages Rally

By Larry Carter

Organiser: Darlington & District MC **When:** January 21 **Where:** Croft Circuit, North Yorkshire **Championships:** North of England Tarmacadam Rally Championship, ANECCC SG Petch Stage Rally Championship, ANCC **Starters:** 76 **Stages:** 6

For the second rally at Croft Circuit within three weeks, the wintry conditions once again arrived just in time for the aptly named Jack Frost Stages Rally, in which Barry Lindsay/Caroline Lodge took a sensational victory.

The pair were using Steve Petch's Ford Fiesta S2000 Turbo as part of their reward for their results last year in the SG Petch ANECCC Championship, after the prize had been deferred from Steve Bannister to give another driver a chance. Lindsay starred from the off, defying the packed ice and overnight frost to stop the clocks nine seconds ahead of Croft specialist Kevin Procter/Derrick Fawcett (Ford Fiesta WRC) on the first test.

A number of crews had decided against competing on the event because of the weather and one who wished he'd probably done likewise was four-time event winner Paul Bird, whose rally lasted 400m on SS1 before stopping with clutch problems.

Lindsay increased his lead by a further three seconds on SS2, but Procter hit back on SS3 to take 14 seconds back off Lindsay and snatch the advantage. Snow started to fall as the crews went into SS4 but once again Lindsay was fastest ahead of Procter and he repeated the feat on SS5 to hold a 13-second advantage over Procter before the weather intervened again.

With conditions deteriorating, the organisers canned the final two stages, meaning SS6 was to be the last and although Procter set fastest time by a mere second, it wasn't enough to overhaul Lindsay, whose winning advantage was 12 seconds at the finish.

Third, and over two minutes adrift, were Alex Taylor/Mark Swallow (Subaru Forester) with Peter Stephenson/Ian Windress (Subaru), Paul Swift/Cat Lund (Ford Escort) and Matthew Hirst/Steve McNulty (Mitsubishi Lancer E9) completing the top six.

Class wins went to Joe Cunningham/Marc Fowler (Vauxhall Corsa), Stevie Irwin/Ian Middleton (Vauxhall Nova), Kev/Harry Tennick (Peugeot 306), Pete/Emma Slights (Ford Escort) as well as Swift and Stephenson. Amazingly, there were only seven retirements, all with mechanical problems, but the real heroes were the organisers and the marshals who braved the elements all day, and Steve Petch for supplying a wonderful prize.

Results

1 Barry Lindsay/Caroline Lodge (Ford Fiesta S2000 Turbo) 40m04s; 2 Kevin Procter/Derrick Fawcett (Fiesta S200 Turbo) +12s; 3 Alex Taylor/Mark Swallow (Subaru Forester); 4 Peter Stephenson/Ian Windress (Subaru P2000 WRC); 5 Paul Swift/Cat Lund (Ford Escort Mk2); 6 Matthew Hirst/Steve McNulty (Mitsubishi Lancer E9); 7 Pete Slights/Emma Slights (Escort Mk2); 8 Dave Hornbrook/Phil Hewson (Lancer E4); 9 Joe Cunningham/Marc Fowler (Vauxhall Corsa); 10 Michael Umbrich/Marion Stead (Nissan Pulsar GTi-R).
Class winners: Lindsay/Lodge; Swift/Lund; Cunningham/Fowler; Stevie Irwin/Ian Middleton (Vaxhall Nova); Kev Tennick/Harry Tennick (Peugeot 306 GTi).

ROAD RALLY

Having finished fourth on the previous weekend's Bagger, Bevan Blacker/Niall Frost moved to the top spot on the **Ryemoor Trophy Rally**, and claimed their maiden rally victory.

The event used a revised format for 2018 and the event included six tests, including some at Driffield, as well as 190 miles of road sections. Conditions were treacherous throughout with ice and snow being a constant menace.

The winners were fastest through the six tests and held on to take first place by just over two minutes. Stan Featherstone/Sasha Heriot had been delayed on the first test, but fought back strongly to secure the runner-up spot, while the top novice crew, Neil Paylor/James Greenhough, put in an impressive performance to take third position.

The top three seeds, Richard Hemmingway/Sam Collis, Ade Green/Ian Gibbins and Richard Hunter/Gary Evans all retired, the latter after becoming stuck at a control on a triangle.

Ian Mills

Results

Organiser: Malton MC **When:** January 20/21 **Where:** North Yorkshire **Championships:** ANCC, ANEMMC & SD34 **Route:** 190 miles and six tests **Starters:** 26.
1 Bevan Blacker/Niall Frost (Peugeot 106) 51m04s; 2 Stan Featherstone/Sasha Heriot (Peugeot 205 GTi) +2m03s; 3 Neil Paylor/James Greenhough (Ford Focus ST); 4 Stuart Newby/Russell Waller (Citroen Saxo); 5 Gavin Smith/Mike Petch (Proton Satria); 6 Matt Flynn/Rob Bryn Jones (Satria); 7 Charlie Corner/Kevin Bardon (Proton Coupe); 8 Dan Sedgwick/Sam Ambler (Peugeot 106 Rallye); 9 James Taylor/Ian Graham (Satria); 10 Tony Harrison/Matthew Broadbent (Proton Compact).
Class winners: Corner/Bardon; Paylor/Greenhough.

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HOW ELFYN EVANS HAS CONVINC HIS DOUBTERS THAT HE HAS THE PA

David Evans explores the rehabilitation of the rising Welsh World Rally Champions



Evans was second on the tough Rally Finland

Photos: mcklein-imagedatabase.com

CED ACE

ship star





Tour de Corse was the only highlight from '15

Evans was close to win in Argentina last year

The question drew some polite laughter, but the realisation that an answer was actually expected brought a moment's uneasy pause. The question was the one rallying folk had been considering throughout last season: did Elfyn Evans' storming 2017 season vindicate Malcolm Wilson's decision to drop him, or had the Welshman proved his boss wrong?

That question went to…Evans and Wilson. Who were sitting next to each other.

Much as I'd like to, I can't take the credit for that question. It was my colleague Edd Straw who took route one right to the heart of the matter. And it brought to an end one of the most entertaining and enlightening interviews I've ever worked through.

What did they say? I'll get to that.

But it's true. Evans' demotion from Wilson's squad at the end of 2015 polarised opinion among *Motorsport News* readers and the rallying public at large. Some saw little progression and felt the time had come, others saw it as a desertion of support just as things were starting to come good.

One thing is true, before this point, this interview around this table, the two hadn't talked in-depth about what really went on and the reasons why Evans' World Rally Championship dream went south.

"It's true," says Wilson. "It's interesting because we have genuinely never really talked about it."

It's probably fair to say that, at the time, Evans didn't have much capacity to talk rationally about it. He'd been dumped. Didn't matter how you dressed it up, he was out. Looking back, there's part of him now that wonders if he was really ready for the step up to a full world championship seat.

The 29-year-old reasons: "I'd gone from winning the WRC Academy in an R2 Fiesta in 2011 through to doing some events in a four-wheel-drive car in 2013, to being Mikko Hirvonen's team-mate in the main M-Sport World Rally Team in 2014. The transition was really fast. I wanted to make sure I finished a lot of rallies [in 2014] and I did that, but you could argue that I fell into the rut of being too consistent.

"Having said that, I did get the hammer down at the start of 2015 and we were fourth in the championship early on. We got one or two podiums, but the results were average and that's not good enough to be in one of the leading seats in the World Rally Championship.

"Corsica was a boost [when he led, then finished second], but one rally doesn't change the outcome of eight. It was a strange year in 2015, certainly the situation wasn't down to a lack of effort or anything like that; probably I pushed too hard on a lot of rallies and my approach was all very intense. I don't think I was taking the breaks I needed to and I wasn't able to relax. I think I burned myself out rather than let it slip away.

"Anyway, it went downhill from the middle of the year, we had a difficult second half and ultimately we ended up being sacked."

What made it even tougher for Evans was that he was being replaced by relatively unknown WRC2 driver Eric Camilli. Wilson consistently denied the Camilli deal was commercially driven, instead he pointed to the sort of fire in the eyes of the Frenchman he hadn't seen enough of with Elfyn.

"Corsica was an exceptional drive from Elfyn," says Wilson. "But I was frustrated and disappointed. I always felt it was there – that was why we'd made the investment in the first place. I needed to do something at the end of that season, but I didn't want to lose him. I knew how well he could drive and I just wondered if I'd given him too much pressure too early. I didn't know."

Evans was called to Dovenby Hall and told what was on offer for 2016.

"I remember being up with Malcolm at the end of '15," says Evans, now able to smile at the memory and the man sitting next to him. "Malcolm said: 'We can give you two rounds of the world championship and the chance to do a full British Rally Championship.' I was sitting there listening to this having come off the back of a full WRC programme and saying: 'Oooo, this is going to be a bit cr*p'. But I went home and thought about it. I evaluated everything that had gone on and I still had an opportunity."

That opportunity did, however, involve a very public step down from the frontline and stepping back to his national championship was fraught with risk.

"I was there to be shot down," says Evans. "I knew I had to perform at WRC2 and BRC level or that would be the end. Before then I'd worked a lot on trying tactics for rallies and seeing how we fared here and there. I put an end to that and I said: 'Right, we're going to be fastest on every stage until we have to manage the rally'. That's what I did.

"If you can't go to the national championship and absolutely wipe the floor [with the opposition] then you've no hope in the WRC. The level is so high. I knew most people expected me to win, but in my mind, unless I could dominate, there was no point in looking at the WRC again."

It wasn't all plain sailing, however. Evans suffered punctures and mechanical problems early in the season and that left him level-pegging in a championship he was supposed to be walking away with.

"To be honest," he says, "one of the most annoying things at the time was the press saying things like: 'Elfyn's having a really good run for his money…' But deep down I knew there were things which were amiss. That really annoyed me, but it also fired me up even more."

That BRC season was Evans' first of two with the DMACK team. Regardless of the situation or the reasons for the situation, he's quick to point out that he enjoyed working with the Dick Cormack and the British tyre firm.

"I was able to piggy-back on the development work Ott was doing in the world championship," he says. "I was testing new tyres, different compounds and constructions and seeing them evolve in a short space of time. When I joined them, I think DMACK had only been in the WRC for five years and to see Ott winning stages in the world championship and us winning convincingly in the BRC was really good. The guys put a lot of effort in with only a very small resource compared with Michelin. It was a very satisfying time and to top it all off, it was a great British success story when we won Rally GB in a British car with a British crew on British tyres."

In years to come, the BRC title will be the one that looks like the key to Evans' re-entry to world level rallying. Wilson was pleased with that, but it was his performance in WRC2 that told MW he was right to maintain his alliance with Evans.

"The 2016 Monte was a really difficult event," he says, "but Elfyn was straight into the car and he dominated. He really helped us with the R5 car that year and that's something we are very grateful for. He really bounced back in 2016 and then it was always our intention to put him back in a World Rally Car."

> "My thinking was to put pressure on him"
>
> Malcolm Wilson



Having been through peaks and troughs in his own driving career, Wilson relied on that instinct to show him the right path for Evans.

"This does relate back to when I was driving," he says. "Part of my thinking was to put pressure on him to go and dominate the BRC and WRC2, because there's nothing like winning for a driver – you can see the whole body language changes. I have seen it over the years, time and time and time again, and I know from my own driving, when you are relaxed you always drive better than when you're putting yourself under pressure."

While Evans just missed the WRC2 title (and the 2016 Rally GB, which looked to serve as the final bit of penance before the hair shirt could be removed) he dominated the BRC and had done enough to return himself to the top table. Sitting next to him at that table would be co-driver Dan Barritt. The pair had split at the end of 2015, feeling the time had come for a break. Now though, they were back. Refreshed and ready to go.

Barritt says: "Coming back with Elfyn for last season, it really was the old slippers thing. We were straight back into it, like we'd never been apart. But he'd changed, matured a bit. He was more decisive and really knew what he wanted at the start of last year. The driving had changed as well, he was more confident and quicker."

Last season was packed with promise. There were eight top six results, three podiums, one of which was that win at home in Wales. But above the results, as Barritt says, it was the change in attitude which was most marked. When he missed out on victory in Argentina by just seven-tenths of a second, he was able to pretty much shrug it off and look forward. Such a blow would have floored him before that. And finishing second in Finland – the event the drivers had universally labelled as the one they were most concerned about driving in the new-generation World Rally Cars – was testament to the exceptional turn of pace he'd honed in his gap year.

But what about now and what about the season ahead?

Such is his confidence in Evans these days, Wilson talks of Sebastien Ogier's number two being worth a bet for this year's title.

"It's massively exciting for me to think I've got the same package as Sebastien Ogier this year," Evans says. "Yes, it brings more pressure, but I'm not thinking of it that way, I'm thinking of it as the biggest opportunity to benchmark myself against the best driver, who is right by my side. I intent to keep on learning from Seb and, yes, I'm going to be trying to beat him at the same time – it's a lot easier to say that than actually do it though!"

And the title?

"I'm going to take each rally as it comes," he says, unwilling to be caught in a headline, "and do the best I can in every stage and on every event."

Now, with this piece drawing to a close, what better way to conclude than by heading back to Straw's question? Edd said: "Has last year vindicated great management by Malcolm or have you proved him wrong, Elfyn?"

The pause. Malcolm leans in, smiles and goes for it.

"Look," he says, "dropping a driver to a lower level is the last thing you want to do. I didn't enjoy doing it and I took no pleasure from doing it. Look at football management and that's one of the most difficult aspects of it. I've had difficult decisions in the past, when we've had drivers running first and second on a rally and I've had to implement team orders, but that was nothing – in fact that was fantastic – compared with this. It was not a nice decision to have to take with Elfyn, but the one thing I will say is that I never lost faith with him. I always felt he could get back here and boy has he done that. It was hard for him to take, but look where he is now and what his future holds. He might not have liked it, but it worked."

Another pause. Evans digests that, and offers…

"You're never going to like to hear that news [being dropped]," he says. "If I look from a purely personal perspective then I might say it wasn't the best to miss the experience from all of the rounds in 2016. But it was a decision Malcolm had to make. The WRC waits for nobody and it wasn't going to wait for me. I had to perform, I had to get back. I'm not bitter, I've had – and I continue to have – some fantastic opportunities from Malcolm through the years and I've only got thanks and respect.

"He didn't have to throw me a lifeline in 2016. I was hanging on by a thread, but it was Malcolm who gave me that thread."

The mutual respect between Evans and Wilson is absolute and that's reflected in the ease with which they've both come through the last hour of what would once have been toe-curling questions.

History's done. It's the bright future they're looking at now. ■

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HISTORICS

'Legacy will go under the hammer'

Subaru to be sold, below



Photos: mcklein-imagedatabase.com, Paul Lawrence

DOWN THE PUB WITH

IAN ROBERTSON

Age: 53 **Lives:** Great Yarmouth
Rallying an Avenger Tiger

He started three decades ago

"I moved down from Scotland about 10 years ago. I've been competing for about 30 years. Andy Scott navigates for me: he and I swap seats and I navigate for him in his Ford Escort and he navigates for me in my Hillman Avenger."

He has a thing for Avengers

"I've done a bit of racing in the 2CV 24-hour, but I've mainly done rallying. Anything that makes you smile. This is purely for fun. We did a lot of time servicing for people in the British Rally Championship. The Avenger story goes back to the first car I can remember that my dad used. We started off with an Avenger and then spotted the current Avenger Tiger on eBay about six years ago."

The car is competitive

"It was the homologation special made by Hillman to prove that the Avenger was a match for a Ford Escort RS1600 or a Triumph Dolomite Sprint. eBay and two bottles of wine on a Friday night made my buy it!"

It is just for fun

"Since then we've run it on a bog standard 1600cc engine I bought for £400. We look after it ourselves and just have some fun. We stick to asphalt as the car would need too much work to go in the forests. Choosing the right events is key. Running with the guys we are, everyone laughs together and everybody smiles. I'm too old to spend every night in the garage rebuilding the thing and I want to do it for fun rather than as a mission."

He loved Jersey

"We went to Jersey for the first time last October as a bit of a last minute thought. The Jersey Rally was very much like doing old school rallies. The people wanted you there, the organisation was fantastic and incredibly helpful. Of all the events in the year, it is the one I would recommend. It was the special event of the year."

There is another one in build at the moment

"The three events we've got confirmed for this year are Bovington, the Isle of Man and Jersey. We'll have another year with the Avenger and we're building another one as well. I've got four more shells and so many bits! The bits are easily available."



Robertson: Avenger fan



Aaltonen won the 1965 RAC in a Mini

AALTONEN TO DRIVE ON RALLY SWEDEN

Finnish legend to tackle historic section of WRC round

By Paul Lawrence

Flying Finn Rauno Aaltonen will drive on a World Rally Championship event for the first time in 31 years when he tackles Rally Sweden Historic next month.

Aaltonen, who turned 80 this month, will celebrate entering his ninth decade by starting the Torsby-based event in a Mini Cooper S similar to the one he scored many of his successes in through the 1960s – including his only RAC Rally victory in 1965.

Aaltonen starts as part of a two-car team with regular Swedish privateer Cooper S driver Hans-Ake Soderqvist.

While Aaltonen, who won the 1965 European Rally Championship title after a plethora of wins in a Cooper S, hasn't competed at the top level since finishing ninth in a factory Opel Kadett on the 1987 Safari Rally, he has driven historic cars at events like Goodwood's Festival of Speed as recently as 2017.

Even with his undoubted skills in left-foot braking – an art at which he was seen as a pioneer earlier in his career – Aaltonen will struggle to win the two-day event, which includes 85 stage miles.

The pre-event favourite will be local hero Mats Jonsson, who returns to the event 12 months from winning it in his Mazda 323.

Jonsson is, of course, no stranger to success on the full WRC event having taken back-to-back victories in a Toyota Celica in 1992 (GT-4) and 1993 (Turbo 4WD).

The entry list for Rally Sweden Historic, which starts on Friday, February 16 and finishes a day later, is once again packed out with classic rally machinery ranging from Volvo 240s and Saab Sonnets all the way to Audi quattros – with plenty of Ford Escort RS1800s in there as well.



Belgian Escort party time

Ford Escorts assembled for special celebration event in Belgium

British crews are gearing up to contest a special Ford Escort-only rally in Belgium this September to celebrate 50 years of the model.

The Escort Rally Special will run on Sunday, September 16 and will be based in the town of Couvin near the French border. The closed-road special stage event has the support of Ford Belgium and is expected to draw rally cars from across Europe.

The rally will feature a 25km [15-mile] stage which will be run four times, with visits to the service area after each stage.

"This is a one-off event," said a spokesman. "The main goal is to celebrate the 50th birthday of the Escort in a friendly atmosphere."

Tributes paid to Georgie Shaw

Motorsport News **is sad to report that Georgie Shaw, one of the leading forces in the British Women Racing Drivers Club, died on Sunday, January 14 after an illness.**

Shaw raced through the 1970s before moving into a career as an F1 journalist, pundit and TV producer. She served the BWRDC for 40 years as chairman, PR officer and president.

Lorraine Gathercole, chair of the BWRDC, said: "Georgie was a massive part of the BWRDC for many decades and leaves a huge hole in the club and our hearts. Georgie will be sorely missed, but leaves us a legacy that we can build upon."



Formula Junior is ready for jubilee celebrations

Silverstone special planned for Junior

Four world champions will be honoured when the three-year Formula Junior Diamond Jubilee World Tour concludes at the Silverstone Classic in July.

Four races, two each for the front and rear-engined grids, will be dedicated to Jim Clark, John Surtees, Denny Hulme and Jochen Rindt, who all raced in the category in their formative years.

The target is to have more than 110 cars racing, which would be a Formula Junior record to end the remarkable 10-country 100-race tour.

Duncan Rabagliati of the FJHRA said: "We are going to have four fantastic races with full grids and some notable period drivers like Richard Attwood and our patron Howard Ganley as part of the celebrations."

IN BRIEF

F1 trio in the UK

The HGPCA calendar of races for pre-'66 Grand Prix cars will take in three UK dates in nine events across Europe. Silverstone National (April 21/22), Brands Hatch GP (June 30/July 1) and Silverstone GP (July 20-22) are the domestic dates, while Clermont-Ferrand and Copenhagen are notable additions to the European schedule.

Rally North Wales

A surge of historic entries has boosted Rally North Wales after entries opened last Friday for the March 24 event. Over 50 historics committed during the first day of entries for the inaugural Rally 2WD event, the opening round of the British Historic Rally Championship.

Sleeman's back

More than 20 years after he first won the Historic Formula Ford title, Paul Sleeman is to return to the category this season in a Macon MR8 tended by category expert Peter Alexander. Sleeman won the HFF title four times in five years in the late 1990s, twice in a Macon. Only Neil Fowler, with five, has more HFF titles to his credit.

Moon for AGBO

Yorkshire Ford Escort Mk2 driver Darren Moon has entered the Historic AGBO Stages at Weston Park in March. It will be Moon's first rally since the middle of 2017 after being struck by a back injury. He is hoping his back will cope with a relatively short asphalt event before considering a return to forest rallying.

Legacy for sale

A 1993 Subaru Legacy Group A rally car is expected to sell for up to £140,000 during the Silverstone Auctions sale at Race Retro. Driven in period by both Ari Vatanen and Richard Burns, the ex-Prodrive car is registered K555 BAT.

CTCRC regs wider

The tyre regulations for the CTCRC Pre-1966 Touring Car Championship have been opened up to include the use of MSA List 1A approved tyres, with a minimum of 70 profile. The move allows some potentially cheaper and longer lasting road legal tyres into the series, alongside the existing Dunlop CR65 historic race tyre.

Brooklands revamp

The restored Finishing Straight of the Brooklands Race Track will be the setting for the VSCC's annual New Year Driving Tests on Sunday January 28. Tests will be laid out on the Straight, the Members' Banking and other parts of the site. Notable entries include Katie Forrest's Rolls-Royce.

Trials get going

The first event of the season for the Historic Sporting Trials Association will be the Sywell Trial on February 4. Fifty entries are expected. It willl be followed by a trials car on display at Race Retro at the end of February.



Historic Trials are back...

YOU WERE THERE: READERS PHOTOGRAPHS PAGE 30

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RACING NEWS

F1 ROUND-UP

Body changes

F1 teams have agreed to make bodywork changes for 2019 to create more sponsor-friendly space on the cars. In recent seasons sponsorship placement has become a large factor in bodywork design. From 2019 the bargeboards will have to be lower, allowing better visibility to the side of the chassis near the driver's legs. Secondly, a flat space at the top of the rear wing endplates will be mandated, with no louvres allowed. Simplifying front wings to mandate less elements has also been discussed.

Weight wait

The FIA is finalising plans for the introduction of a minimum driver weight limit for 2019, ensuring heavier drivers do not get penalised. A minimum of 80kg will be established for the driver and his seat, including specially marked ballast that will sit under it, while overall car/driver weight will rise an extra 6kg to 740kg.

Bourdais' blast

The Haas vs American drivers row rumbled on last week when former F1 racer and IndyCar star Sebastien Bourdais weighed in. Haas courted controversy recently when team boss Gunther Steiner suggested no American drivers were ready for F1. Bourdais – a four-time IndyCar champion who made 27 F1 starts for Toro Rosso – said: "Clearly, there is just no consideration. They [F1] are in their little bubble on their own island. Either you play the game and are rated on their game or you are just not rated at all. I completely understand that American drivers take it personal because it's not fair, but since when has F1 been fair? It's never been fair."

Fair bulls

Daniel Ricciardo says Red Bull Racing team boss Christian Horner reassured him that he will have a fair fight with wonderkid Max Verstappen this year, and that the team would not favour either driver. Verstappen signed a contract extension until 2020, and also received an upgraded engine earlier than Ricciardo at the end of last season. The Australian star said: "That is not what you want to hear [about the engine upgrade], but Christian came to me to clear it up. He said 'please I don't want you to think anything like that [favouritism]. We're fighting for both of you.' But I don't have concern over it. If I did I would have spoken up about it already."

Photos: LAT

SIROTKIN SIGNS A MULTI-YEAR F1 DEAL

Williams opts for Russian over Kubica after performance tests



Sirotkin will race with Williams this year

By Rob Ladbrook

Williams expects to have a long association with new race driver Sergey Sirotkin, after signing the Russian to a multi-year deal last week.

Sirotkin, 22, was confirmed as the British team's second driver alongside Lance Stroll last week, having staved off competition from multiple drivers – including Robert Kubica (*see sidebar*) – to secure the final vacant berth in F1.

Sirotkin impressed Williams with his performance in the post-season Pirelli tyre test in Abu Dhabi last November, leading the team to decide that he was the better performance option over Kubica, who has landed the team's test and reserve driver role.

While Sirotkin, who is backed by Russian bank SMP, is reportedly bringing a financial package worth around £15m to Williams, team bosses insist he has secured the seat on talent alone.

Williams CEO Mike O'Driscoll said: "What we have with Sergey is a multi-year contract. We have a lot of confidence in him. We never talk about specific terms for any driver at any point, but we can say it's a multi-year contract, so expect to see Sergey, in years to come, wearing the Williams uniform."

Speaking of his impressive testing performance, O'Driscoll described Sirotkin's day as "flawless", adding: "What was obvious was how calm Sergey was, when he knew he really needed to perform.

"From the first few laps in the car, you could feel the atmosphere in the garage [among his backers], with the engineers, how immediately they were impressed with his times, his feedback, with his precision. He made no mistakes, so the feeling that he was a great driver was there early on, and it really was a universal feeling amongst the engineers that this was the guy we needed in the car."

The team's chief technical officer, Paddy Lowe, added: "We're very excited to see what Sergey can do this year, and in the years ahead. We're very impressed with what SMP are doing, it shows an example to the rest of the world, a process by which young drivers can be promoted and supported.

"What we really want in motorsport is the very best talent coming to the top, and not the talent that's driven there by opportunity, good luck, or money."

WHAT IS A SERGEY SIROTKIN?

Age: 22 **From:** Moscow, Russia
2017: Renault Sport F1 reserve driver; Le Mans 24 Hours with SMP Racing in LMP2 class; two FIA Formula 2 outings
2016: GP2 Series, third with two wins
2015: GP2 Series, third with one win
2014: Formula Renault 3.5, fifth with one win
2013: Formula Renault 3.5, ninth
2012: AutoGP World Series, third; Italian F3, fifth
2011: Formula Abarth European Series, champion



Robert Kubica: testing role

Kubica pleased with Williams reserve role

Robert Kubica insists that his deal to be Williams' reserve driver is a step towards his dream F1 comeback.

The Polish star, who has recovered from life-threatening injuries sustained in a rally accident back in 2011, will work with both Sergey Sirotkin and Lance Stroll this year, who will be the least experienced partnership on the F1 grid.

Kubica's deal includes the proviso for him to take part in "a number of race weekend practice sessions."

Williams also added that Kubica's knowledge would "prove invaluable to our technical group in the development of the FW41's performance" and that he would "assist the race drivers and engineers to deliver better qualifying and race performance."

Kubica said of the deal: "I'm extremely happy to be joining Williams. I feel I'm in the best physical shape I've been and it's taken a lot of work to get here.

"I'd like to thank Williams for putting their faith in me and I look forward to working with the technical team both at the track and the factory.

"My ultimate goal remains to race again in F1 and this is another important step in that direction."



Moss will concentrate on his health

Legend Sir Stirling Moss calls time on his public life after spate of serious illness

Sir Stirling Moss has announced his retirement from public life at the age of 88 after the serious illness he suffered last year.

Moss was admitted to hospital with a serious chest infection late in 2016, and spent 134 days being cared for in Singapore before being flown back to the UK. He has now chosen to spend time away from the public eye to concentrate on his health.

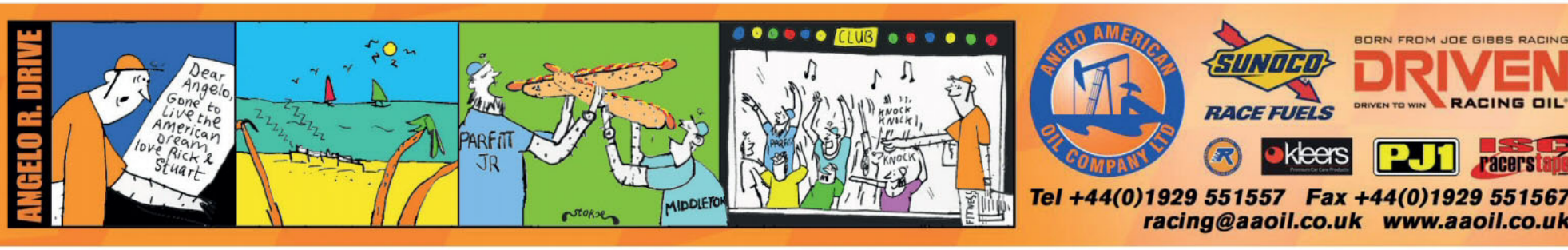
A statement posted on his site by his son, Elliott, read: "My father would like to announce that he is closing the site down. Following his severe infections at the end of 2016 and his subsequent slow and arduous recovery, the decision has been made that, at the age of 88, the indefatigable man will finally retire, so that he and my mother can have some much-deserved rest and spend more time with each other and the rest of the family.

"The entire and extended Moss clan thank everyone for all their love and support over the years."

Moss – widely regarded as the best driver never to win an F1 title – had made several high-key public appearances per year after his retirement from the sport in 1962.

He also survived a fall down a lift shaft in March 2010. He suffered two broken ankles and feet, but still returned to drive at events by the summer.

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'IndyCar stars to try rallycross on ice'

Sporting Scene, p29



Photos: Jakob Ebrey, LAT

SHEDDEN SPLITS WITH TEAM DYNAMICS



Shedden has won 48 times with Honda



Shedden could run in WTCR series



Three-time champ

Three-time champion Gordon Shedden has parted ways with Team Dynamics and will not contest this year's British Touring Car Championship.

The 38-year-old Scot has spent all but one of his 12 seasons in the category's top flight with the West Midlands team, which runs the factory backed Hondas in the series. He has won 48 races over that period.

Although no details have been revealed of Shedden's plans for 2018, rumours suggest that he could dovetail GT outings alongside a campaign in the World TCR Cup with the WRT team, which runs VW Golf machines. Shedden was drafted in to the final round of the TCR International Series in 2017 by WRT and was asked to assist his title-chasing team-mate Jean-Karl Vernay. Vernay went on to win the title, while Shedden, who had secured pole, finished second in the weekend's opening race.

Team Dynamics has yet to reveal who will partner Matt Neal in the new-shaped Honda Civic Type Rs in the BTCC this term. A team statement said it would announce Shedden's replacement "in due course".

Shedden, who clinched the BTCC silverware in 2012, 2015 and 2016, said: "[This] is really difficult and emotional for me. I will not be racing with Honda and Team Dynamics: they have been part of my life for the last 11 years and I have been made to feel a part of the family. Steve and Matt Neal gave me a chance [to join the team] in 2006 and we haven't looked back since. From a Ford Fiesta racer to a triple British Touring Car champion, I could not have dreamed of the success we have achieved together. That success, along with Matt's three championships, is a testament to the hard work, determination and passion that is intrinsic in the team."

Shedden's on-track team-mate and Dynamics team owner Matt Neal said: "Gordon is a part of our family and success story. He's got a new and exciting opportunity and we would never hold him back from that."

Proctor to stay with Vauxhall in BTCC

Senna Proctor will remain with the Power Maxed Racing British Touring Car Championship team for his second season in the category at the wheel of the team's Vauxhall Astra.

Proctor, 19, won the Jack Sears Trophy (JST) for rookies last season, and was the top novice in half of the 30 rounds. He will once again be eligible for the JST this year as the rules have been tweaked and it will now be gifted to the top driver who has yet to score an outright podium finish.

Proctor could become the first back-to-back JST holder.

The 19-year-old will be team-mate to Power Maxed Racing's Josh Cook, who signed for the team at the recent Autosport International Show.

Proctor said: "It's great to be staying with PMR. We've been working hard together through the winter to strike the right deal, and you can't put a price on having confidence in both the car and the team behind it. Last year was fantastic for all of us, and with the work [team manager] Martin Broadhurst and the team have been putting in, and having Josh Cook as a team- mate, I'm confident."



Proctor won Jack Sears Trophy

Russell and Aitken to be ART team-mates in F2

After being confirmed at ART for Formula 2 in 2018, Mercedes junior driver George Russell will join European F3 champion Lando Norris and Renault junior Jack Aitken as three talented Brits fighting for the attention of the F1 grid.

Russell, the reigning GP3 champion, and Norris, driving with the new-to-F2 Carlin, are likely to be two of the main candidates to succeed Charles Leclerc as F2 champion.

Aitken showed strong pace in GP3 last year finishing second to Russell in the championship, and rejoins his fellow Brit at ART as his team-mate.

"With the introduction of a new Formula 2 car [complete with halo], it will be challenging for all the teams to optimise the set-up from the start of the season, but I have every confidence in ART Grand Prix to get there and to be competitive as quickly as possible," said 2014 McLaren Autosport BRDC Award winner Russell.

"I cannot wait to take part in the first race and fight against some of the best drivers and teams at the pinnacle of junior motorsport."

● Another Brit driving for ART in an F1 support series this year will be Jake Hughes who will return to GP3 after a season away in European F3. "The team's performances in the series, over the last few years especially, have been extremely impressive," said Hughes, 23. "So, when the opportunity came about to be able to be jump in one of their cars for 2018 it was impossible to say no."

THE FASTEST NEWS ROUND-UP



Formula E has decided not to replace its Montreal double-header finale this season. The Canadian event was cancelled last month after a new mayor was elected, forcing the series to look at alternative options. One possible replacement was a race on the streets of Birmingham – as well as adding another race to the Rome round or going to the Norisring – but in the end it was decided there was insufficient time to properly organise a replacement round so the season will end with the New York double-header… An 11th team will enter Formula E next season, a year before Mercedes and Porsche join the series in 2019. Mercedes specialist HWA has been rumoured to be the new team… **Formula Renault Eurocup champion Sacha Fenestraz will tackle a full season of European Formula 3 with Carlin this year. The 18-year-old Frenchman contested the final round of the 2017 season, as well as the Macau Grand Prix, with the team…** Ex-Formula 1 driver Giedo van der Garde will contest a full season of the World Endurance Championship this season after making sporadic appearances in 2016. The 2016 European Le Mans Series champion will compete in the LMP2 class in a Racing Team Netherlands Dallara-Gibson P217… **The first drivers to compete in the FIA's new World Touring Car Cup – the series created by the merger of the WTCC and TCR International – have been confirmed. Belgian driver Denis Dupont and Aurelien Panis – the son of one-time F1 winner Olivier – will both drive an Audi RS3 LMS with the Comtoyou Racing squad…**



Formula E has decided not to replace its Montreal round



Ingram will drive Speedworks Toyota Avensis for a fifth season

Ingram targets overall BTCC title as he remains at Speedworks

British Touring Car Championship Independents Trophy winner Tom Ingram says he only has one target for this season after remaining with the Speedworks Motorsport team – to claim the outright title.

The Toyota Avensis driver finished third in the overall points last year after four race wins over the 30 events, but he is determined to push on in his fifth season with the Cheshire-based team. He is aiming to follow last year's title winner Ash Sutton, who claimed the crown aged 23 at the wheel of his Team BMR Subaru Levorg.

Ingram, 24, said: "I've shown that I can race against and regularly beat the Jason Platos, Colin Turkingtons and Matt Neals of this world, and I think 2017 demonstrated that the tide is turning in the BTCC and that the old guard that have ruled the roost for so long are being replaced by the new generation. And I want to be the standard-bearer of that new generation for many years to come."

Speedworks Motorsport will field a single entry for Ingram this season, and team boss Christian Dick said he has every faith in Ingram to perform at his best.

"Considering the updates we have planned, we expect the Toyota Avensis to be even more of a potent proposition this year," said Dick. "With the renowned strength-in-depth of the BTCC, we're under no illusions that a massive dogfight lies ahead – but we're ready to come out punching."

Advertising enquiries: 0203 405 8110

RACING NEWS

IN BRIEF

Carlin's new Sun

Renault Sport Academy member Sun Yue Yang has been revealed as Carlin's first driver for BRDC British Formula 3 this year. The 17-year-old Chinese competed in the Formula Renault Eurocup – and occasional NEC rounds – last year in his first season out of karts.

New Trucks chief

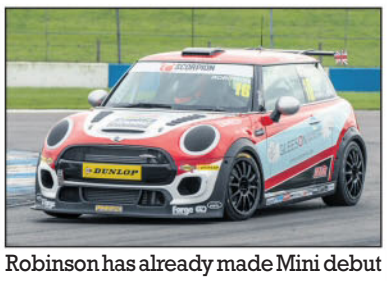
After last week's announcement that the British Truck Racing Association Championship would be promoted in-house by the British Automobile Racing Club, the club has now appointed a new championship director. Former Time Attack chief Glen Horncastle will take responsibility for the series with immediate effect.

No Spa 25 hours

This year's Fun Cup calendar will not include the popular 25 hours of Spa-Francorchamps. The race has been a key fixture on the series' calendar for many years, but will not feature in 2018. The coming season will consist of nine rounds, although JPR group director Paul Rose hopes to complete plans to hold a race at Portimao in Portugal. He said: "It would be eight hours going from day into night, which we're excited about."

Funds for Winslow

An online funding campaign has raised more than $27,000 (£19,400) for British driver James Winslow, who suffered multiple injuries when the Ligier JSP3 he was driving had a sudden brake failure during the Gulf 12 Hours at the Yas Marina circuit. The money will go towards medical costs and Winslow's rehabilitation. To make a donation visit gofundme.com/jameswinslowrecovery.



Robinson has already made Mini debut

Caterham champ Robinson switches to JCW Minis

Multiple Caterham champion David Robinson will join the Mini Challenge JCW Championship to contest his first full season of racing for two years.

Robinson, 29, from High Wycombe, has joined up with Excelr8 Motorsport to handle one of the 265bhp hatchbacks, having made a one-off appearance in the series finale at Donington Park last season, qualifying in an impressive fifth place before hitting technical trouble.

Robinson began car racing in the Caterham Academy in 2011, and has since lifted the Tracksport (2012), Supersport (2013) and Superlight R300 (2015) titles. He has also been a class winner in the Barcelona 24 Hours.

"It's great to be back for a full year of racing, and the Mini JCWs are the perfect fit," he said. "I had the pace for the top three at Donington and really wanted a podium, but it gave me the hunger to do the full season this year.

"The JCWs are very different to Caterhams. It's the first front-wheel-drive car that I've raced and also I've not done much on slick tyres before either, so everything is very reactive with the extra power and grip.

"I want the title this year. It's a big aim, but I've been lucky enough to be very successful in racing so far and fingers crossed that can continue."

Photos: Dave Young Photographics, Jakob Ebrey



Balfe Motorsport will run McLaren 650S GT3



Drivers: Rob Bell (l) and Shaun Balfe will race McLaren

McLAREN GT3 CAR RETURNS TO BRITISH GT WITH BALFE

McLaren 650S GT3 and 570S GT4 will be run by family squad

By Rob Ladbrook

A McLaren will return to the GT3 division of the British GT Championship this season as part of a new multi-class attack from the Balfe Motorsport team.

The family-run squad has entered a McLaren 650S GT3 for team owner and racer Shaun Balfe and McLaren factory man Rob Bell. It marks the first time a GT3 McLaren has run in the series since the final round of the 2016 season and Balfe's first British GT entry since 2013.

In addition to the GT3 entry, Balfe will also expand to run the 570S GT4 car of former category champions Graham Johnson and Mike Robinson following the pair's split from Optimum Motorsport.

Drivers Balfe and Bell raced together in the International GT Open last season, where they won the Pro-Am drivers' championship.

"We've had a couple of great seasons in Europe, winning the Pro-Am title and finishing second overall, but now it's time for a new challenge and British GT most definitely provides that," said Balfe.

"Rob and I have been racing the 650S for the last year-and-a-half and we enjoy a great relationship, but there's a lot of unknowns this season and we expect to start on the back foot.

"We've never raced on the Pirelli tyres and the circuit temperatures will be very different to what we're used to in Europe. Plus British GT's race formats, with one, two and three-hour durations, add variety and place more emphasis on the team as a whole. Then there's the competition: the Ams are so competitive and know the championship inside out, while this year's GT3 Pro driver roster is incredible. The established teams will have the upper hand so we're just aiming for a clean opening weekend before building on what we've learnt."

Johnson and Robinson won the outright GT4 drivers' title in 2016 before switching from a Ginetta to their McLaren last term. They finished second last season after some teething troubles with the new car. Their race engineer, Geoff Kingston, will follow the pair to Balfe.

"McLaren introduced us to Balfe and we were really impressed by their facilities in Grantham, and having Rob [Bell] in the team is also hugely valuable," said Johnson.

"We're very grateful to Optimum Motorsport for their efforts over the last three years, but in joining Balfe, we're joining a team with more experience working with McLaren and that has ambition to not only compete for both British GT class titles, but also at legendary races such as Le Mans. Mike and I share those same goals."

Barwell signs Mitchell for Blancpain GT campaign

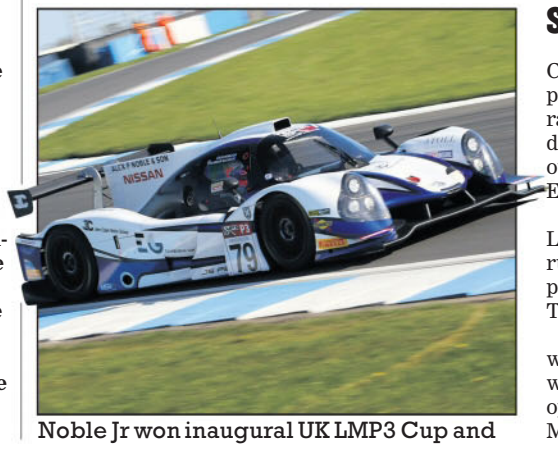
Rising British GT star Sandy Mitchell will graduate into the Blancpain GT Series this year after signing with Barwell Motorsport.

Mitchell has been one of the stand-out drivers in British GT4 in recent seasons at the wheel of a Black Bull-backed McLaren 570S GT4. He will now move into European competition sharing a Lamborghini Huracan GT3 with Martin Kodric and Michele Beretta. The car will run in Blancpain's Silver Cup class for semi-professional drivers. "I am extremely excited to make the step up to the Blancpain GT Series Endurance Cup in the Huracan GT3," said Mitchell. "It will be a very competitive championship and I am looking forward to the challenge.

"I'm new to the Lamborghini, and to GT3, but with the experience of Barwell and my team-mates I'm sure I will learn quickly. This is a fantastic opportunity."



Mitchell, Kodric and Beretta will share Lamborghini Huracan GT3



Noble Jr won inaugural UK LMP3 Cup and

Sportscar racer Noble Jr aims for LMP3 hat-trick in 2018 with Nielsen Racing

Colin Noble Jr is planning a three-pronged campaign in sportscar racing this year, combining his title defence in the UK LMP3 Cup with outings in both the Le Mans Cup and European Le Mans Series.

Noble won last year's inaugural UK LMP3 Cup sharing a Nielsen Racing-run Ligier with Alasdair McCaig. The pairing beat United Autosports duo Tony Wells and Matt Bell by 20 points.

For this season, Scotsman Noble will return to the British category with the team, as well as taking up the option of funded entries into the Le Mans Cup, which he won via his UK success. His team-mates have yet to be announced.

"This will be a big year, but a really exciting one," said Noble. "I've never done a championship twice so there will be some pressure I'm sure now that I have the experience. I had no reason to move from Nielsen as they did a great job last year. Whatever experience I gain in Britain I can take into Europe the next weekend."

The team's cross-championship plans are helped by the UK LMP3 Cup's move to Michelin tyres for this year, bringing the series in-line with other LMP3 contests. Last year the championship used Pirellis not specifically designed for LMP3 machinery.

● The UK LMP3 Cup Championship has launched an eSports Championship for 2018. Run by The Online Racing Association (TORA), the series will be contested on Slightly Mad Studios' Project Cars 2 title with six rounds and 12 races. A mandatory pitstop will be included in races, while the events will be formed of two 40-minute contests. There will be awards for teams – which can consist of up to three members – drivers and independents.

Photos: Jakob Ebrey, Jim Moir, Mick Walker



Crocker will race TCR

Crocker makes it three for TCR

Former Clio Cup racer Finlay Crocker will compete in the inaugural season of TCR UK in 2018.

Crocker, who raced in selected rounds of ADAC TCR Germany and TCR Italia over the past two years, will drive one of two Team Pyro-run Honda Civics in the championship's debut season, which gets underway at Silverstone in April.

"We've ordered a new Civic TCR – a Chassis 7 – for a full-season of TCR UK in 2018," said Crocker. "I actually considered stopping racing at the end of last year. I'd sort of ticked off all the circuits I wanted to race on and was ready to stop. Then TCR UK came around and it convinced me to give it a try."

Crocker, who also raced in the Scottish Sports & Saloons series last year in his older TCR Civic, added that he thinks how TCR UK performs this year will be crucial to its future success.

Despite a lot of interest from teams initially, Crocker is one of only three confirmed drivers to take part this year alongside Carl Swift and Lewis Kent.

HOST OF TALENTS SIGN UP FOR GINETTA GT5



GT5 attracts big grids

Dyrdal will switch to Ginettas

A number of successful junior drivers and top Ginetta team HHC Motorsport have signed up to compete in the Ginetta GT5 Challenge this year.

The series – which is for the Ginetta G40 and features on British GT and British Touring Car support bills – traditionally gets large grids and for 2018 has attracted a number of top drivers out of junior categories.

Junior Saloon Car champion Will Dyrdal and race winner Gordie Mutch, along with Ginetta Junior frontrunner Scott McKenna will all take part.

Dyrdal, who will compete as a privateer, said: "It's a very exciting championship – we always wanted to do a single-make championship because it's a lot closer racing. We also considered the possibility of Clios – both Michelin and TOCA – and Minis but they are quite expensive. We thought it would be good to learn rear-wheel-drive and getting into that quite early on as British GT is where I want to be in the future."

McKenna, who was forced to withdraw from Ginetta Junior after two rounds last year with funding trouble, impressed by qualifying second at Donington Park. He will now race in the GT5 Challenge with HHC – which makes its first appearance in the category since 2012.

"We are going to be running three cars in the series," said team boss Charlie Kemp. "It sits very well with the GT4 programme – it's the perfect step from GT5 into GT4. It's nice to have Scott back – he showed good promise early on last season it was just a shame the sponsorship waned and he had to stop. I think he will be a frontrunning driver.

"Charlie Digby has been with us for a number of years and I think he should go well. And then we've got Gus Bowers, who is a new driver to racing."

Mutch was fourth in the JSCC last year and will rekindle his rivalry with Dyrdal. He will compete with Fox Motorsport.

"Ginetta Junior was on the radar, but the costs were very high and we have got quite a small budget," he said. "We needed to progress to something that was a bit more high profile.

"The GT5s are of a higher standard and, as well as having five rounds alongside British GT this year, they have two alongside the BTCC."

Other drivers already signed up to the series include 2016 JSCC champion Katie Milner – who made her debut last year – former JSCC and Britcar racer Oli Willmott and Josh Hislop, who was fifth in Fiesta Junior in 2017 in his maiden season of car racing.

Multiple title-winning team HHC withdraws from Ginetta Junior to focus on GT4

Leading Ginetta Junior team HHC Motorsport has confirmed that it will not take part in the series this year.

The team's drivers have won the title four times in the past six seasons, but with the squad's expansion into GT4 racing it has now decided to pull out of Ginetta Junior.

HHC did not enter the Junior Winter Series in November last year as it was evaluating its future in the category.

"We've got a European GT4 programme, a British GT4 programme and GT5 and you can only do so much," explained team boss Charlie Kemp. "The main thing is European GT4 – it's a big step and we want to make sure we can do a good job.

"It's still a fantastic championship and we're not ruling out doing it again in the future. I'm not going to be selling the cars and will still do driver training in them."

Jamie Caroline, Will Tregurtha, Charlie Robertson and Harry Woodhead have all won the title with HHC since 2010.



Caroline won with HHC



HHC may be out (see above), but WDE will enter the Ginetta Junior Championship

Clio Cup squad WDE expands to run in Ginetta Junior Championship

Frontrunning Renault UK Clio Cup squad WDE Motorsport will expand into the Ginetta Junior Championship this season.

The team originally began competing in the British Racing and Sports Car Club's Fiesta Championship in 2010, before joining the Clio grid in 2014 and has since grown to become one of the largest teams in the series.

Now team boss Wayne Eason wants to repeat that success in Ginetta Junior and will field Jamie Osborne – the younger brother of WDE Clio racer Sam – in the category this year.

"Jamie wanted to do it so it was a natural progression for him to have a chat with us," said Eason, who would ideally like to add a second-year driver to his line-up. "I think at the moment there's a huge market for teams like us in the Ginetta paddock [following the departure of frontrunning teams HHC and JHR]. There's potential for a team of our calibre to get into that field. We will start small and build on it.

"It's a nice challenge for the guys to get their teeth into. We've got some guys who have Ginetta experience and I'm really excited about it."

● Dan Zelos will remain with WDE in the Clio Cup this year, joining the elder Osborne brother, Sam, and Luke Reade, with the team set to run at least six cars in the series. "Breaking my [win] duck has to be the first aim, and I want to be pushing for a top three championship finish come season's end," said Zelos.

Young gun Bradley Burns signs up for full Renault Clio Cup challenge with Team Pyro

Former Fiesta Junior runner-up Bradley Burns will tackle a full season of the Renault UK Clio Cup this year with Team Pyro.

The 16-year-old had planned to contest Clio Cup Junior last year but when that series was postponed he decided to join the senior series for the final three rounds instead.

He made an instant impression in that time, qualifying second on the grid for the opening race at Brands Hatch when up against far more experienced opposition – only for him to stall and be collected by Jade Edwards, thereby ending his weekend.

Pyro boss Mark Hunt was impressed with Burns' speed last year and is looking forward to seeing what he can achieve this year.

"He's got a lot of pace but he just needs to turn that into results," said Hunt. "It's a matter of schooling him. It's rare for someone to come in and be on the pace like he was."

Burns is the first driver confirmed so far with Team Pyro for this year, but the team is in talks with a number of its other racers from last season.



Burns impressed with his pace during limited runs in senior Clios

RACING NEWS



Two-time F1 champion Jim Clark

Clark celebrated on 50th anniversary

The 50th anniversary of Jim Clark's death will be commemorated with a special programme of events to remember the double Formula 1 world champion.

The Scot, who was killed during a Formula 2 race at Hockenheim on April 7, 1968, is regarded as one of the greatest drivers to race in F1, scoring his two world titles and 25 wins with Lotus.

A programme of events will take place on April 7/8, including a commemorative church service in Chirnside and a ceremony for the new Jim Clark Museum in Duns.

There will also be an anniversary dinner at Carfraemill Hotel and an open exhibition at Chirnside Village Hall for people to showcase their Clark memorabilia.

Some of Clark's famous race cars will also be exhibited by Classic Team Lotus during the weekend, which has been organised by The Jim Clark Trust, Club Lotus, Live Borders and Chirnside Common Good Association.

Doug Niven, cousin of Jim Clark and trustee for The Jim Clark Trust said: "We feel honoured that so many people have shown interest and we want this weekend to be both a commemoration and celebration to inspire future generations."



New management ends new series

SsangYong axes Pickup series after a single year

The SsangYong Musso Pickup Racing Challenge will not continue in 2018 as the company behind the series has decided to focus its business efforts elsewhere.

The series, which was introduced last year and operated by Jonathan Palmer's MotorSport Vision, featured 2.2-litre turbo-diesel powered Korando Sports pickup trucks.

Six events were held in 2017, including at Snetterton, Silverstone, Knockhill, Oulton Park, Cadwell Park and Brands Hatch.

A spokesman for SsangYong Motor UK said: "SsangYong Motor UK went through a management change at the end of last year, and following a thorough review of the whole business and its activities, the decision has been taken to focus on other areas, and not continue with the Musso Racing Challenge."

Photos: Gary Hawkins, LAT

VIEWING RESTRICTED ON BRANDS GP LOOP

Spectator areas and fencing part of circuit safety shake-up



GP track will get catch fencing





Francisco Carvalho rolled on the GP loop in a SEAT in 2010

By Jack Benyon

Areas of the Brands Hatch Grand Prix circuit will not be accessible to the public due to changes planned for this season.

In a bid to improve safety, certain as-yet unspecified areas of the loop will no longer be open to the public, and there are also plans to erect catch fencing around parts of the circuit.

The catch fencing will not be put up around the whole GP loop. It will be in selected yet-to-be-confirmed areas as part of a safety review by circuit owner MotorSport Vision. Part of the impetus for the review was the return of the German-based DTM championship, which will race at Brands for the first time since 2013, and for the first time on the GP loop, this season.

An MSV statement read: "The changes to spectator access within the Grand Prix loop coincided with discussions with [DTM promoter] ITR about the return of DTM to Brands Hatch, but are primarily part of an ongoing review of spectator protection.

"The changes do not involve debris fencing being erected around the whole loop; instead they involve certain areas being designated as viewing areas, some without debris fencing, some with where required, and other areas designated as not for public access. This set up will operate for all race events on the Grand Prix circuit and is not particular to DTM.

"The works to the inside of the GP loop will be finished in advance of the first race event on the Grand Prix circuit in May. Updated maps of spectator routes and viewing locations will be published in due course to clarify the changes."

It is not yet clear how much of the GP loop will be inaccessible to spectators.

Similar changes were discussed as recently as 2010, when a car driven by Francisco Carvalho vaulted the barriers in a SEAT Leon Eurocup race on the GP loop in July. A group of marshals were narrowly missed by the rolling car.


NEWS

Fans could be banned from Brands GP loop

Circuit launches inquiry after car flies into spectator area

Fans' safety discussed in 2010

British GT champ James Gornall loses Compact Cup title after engine fails post-season scrutineering

Former British GT champion James Gornall has been stripped of last season's BMW Compact Cup crown after his car failed post-season scrutineering.

After the season, the top three cars were examined and it was at this point that scrutineers found his engine had been modified. Gornall appealed the decision to the National Court but was unsuccessful and has therefore been excluded.

Chair of the National Court panel, David Munro, said in his report: "The examination revealed clear evidence that the crankshaft had been ground to the front web and accordingly Mr Kennedy [scrutineer] concluded that it had been modified and was therefore not compliant with championship regulations.

"The National Court concludes that the examination was conducted in accordance with the regulations and that the crankshaft did not comply. Accordingly this Appeal must fail."

Championship manager Greg Graham explained that the scrutineering took place two weeks after the end of the season.

"We, unlike most club championships, have our own post-season scrutineering process," he said. "We take the top three cars and specifically with the engines, we give them a really good investigation.

"If we find anything untoward, which happened last year, that gets reported by the scrutineer to the MSA and then there's the appeal process and sorting all that has taken this time which is frustrating for all parties."

Graham added that he didn't believe Gornall had deliberately cheated. "In my opinion there's been no intent for James Gornall to cheat and I believe it's been an oversight," he said.

The points are now being adjusted before a new champion will be formally declared. Steven Dailly finished second in the points, but isn't guaranteed to be awarded the championship as the organisers adjust the points to remove Gornall from each race.

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SPORTING SCENE



Sayer will make his race debut

Teenager Sayer joins Junior Rallycross

Fourteen-year old Ben Sayer will race in the MSA Junior Rallycross Championship this season, driving a Suzuki Swift built by Sayers Tankers.

Sayer's previous motorsport experience is centred around karting at his local Teesside Autodrome circuit in a Honda Cadet, driving at the Chris Birkbeck Rally School and some outings in motocross.

"I've been to watch rallycross at Croft and it's really exciting," he said. The rallycross newcomer will conduct pre-season testing in the new car at Teesside and Blyton Park, the latter holding a rallycross test day in February, where he will be given guidance by 2014 Junior RX champion Charlie Bean. "I'm really looking forward to racing this season, I think racing in the wet and learning the tracks will be a big challenge."

A new Junior RX champion will be crowned this year, with 2017 title holder Tom Llewellin graduating to the Swift Sport category this season.

Photos: LAT, Hal Ridge

INDYCAR STARS SET FOR RALLYX ON ICE

Newgarden and Castroneves will race in Norwegian events



Newgarden (below) will make ice racing debut

By Hal Ridge

IndyCar stars Josef Newgarden and Helio Castroneves will join experienced rallycross drivers to compete in the Scandinavian RallyX on Ice winter series in the next few weeks.

Racing in the headline single-make Supercar Lites category, reigning IndyCar champion Newgarden will compete in the third round at Al in Norway, while three-time Indy 500 winner Castroneves will race in the season finale at Gol.

"I'm really excited and anxious to participate in the RallyX on Ice series," said Newgarden. "I've had the opportunity to drive a lot of different types of race cars on a lot of different types of tracks all around the world, but I've never done anything quite like this. I've seen some videos and pictures and it looks like a lot of fun, but also quite challenging. It will help to bring out our pure driving skills, for sure. I look forward to the challenge."

Like Newgarden, Castroneves will make his rallycross debut in the series.

He said: "When the opportunity was presented to me to race a rallycross car on ice, I jumped at it. I've never raced a rallycross car like this and I've never raced on ice, so it will be a learning experience for me. It blows me away to think about racing a car with spikes in the tyres. I'm looking forward to just taking it all in and going out there and doing the best I can. This will help me to complete my motorsport CV one day."

World Rallycross Championship event winners Robin Larsson and Kevin Eriksson will compete in the series, while reigning RX2 champion Cyril Raymond will also contest the four-round campaign that begins at Ostersund on February 3 before moving to Holjes in Sweden. GRC drivers Austin Cindric and Oliver Eriksson also form part of the line-up, which includes RX2 race-winner Sondre Evjen and European TouringCar champion Ben-Philip Gundersen. World RX drivers Timmy Hansen, Kevin Hansen and Niclas Gronholm have signed up to compete in the Speedcar Xtreme crosskart support category.



New electric Andros racer hits the ice

The Andros Trophy's four-wheel-drive electric car that is set to replace the conventional V6 internal combustion powered machines in the French series' top category was tested on ice for the first time last weekend.

It will make its competition debut in the penultimate round this weekend at Lans en Vercors, in the hands of Formula E driver Nicolas Prost. The new car, which has been built by Exagon Engineering, has the equivalent of 340 horsepower, comparable to the existing internal combustion-engine machines, while it also boasts four-wheel steering.

One driver from each of the existing Andros teams drove the new car for two laps at the test. "This is supersonic, it's highly powerful and totally amazing," said Prost, who raced for the DA Racing team in the latest Andros event. "The type of driving is almost the same but feelings are very different. The power comes straight away and remains constant. It's very powerful, you have to be very careful that you don't use too much. I'm looking forward to racing in the middle of the combustion-engined cars next weekend."



Nico Prost will race the all-electric Andros car in this weekend's event



Double Andros Trophy champion Jean-Baptiste Dubourg claimed his first double weekend victories at Serre Chevalier in France last weekend in DA Racing's Renault Captur. It extended his championship lead to 51 points with just two weekends of the 2017-2018 series remaining.

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MN SAYS...

Facing up to the most open WRC yet



You'd be brave to wager money on the outcome of the Monte Carlo Rally in 2018

Well, the waiting has now finished: we are on the eve (literally) of a new World Rally Championship season and what a belter it promises to be. After decades of dominance from first Citroen and then Volkswagen, last year's WRC delivered seven different winners in four different types of car. The question is: can it ratchet up the competition even further in 2018?

The pre-season opinion is yes, it can. There are rising stars in new cars and there is an as-yet unproved star desperate to make a mark. There is an old master aiming to hang on to top slot and even a couple of drivers who are probably facing the last chance saloon. All the ingredients are there to write another compelling chapter in the history of the World Rally Championship.

There really is no favourite heading into this weekend's event, and that is something that will excite every WRC enthusiast. Of course, you can read all about it through the pages of Motorsport News throughout the season.

Matt James, Editor (Twitter: @MattJMNews)

YOUR PICS

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

ART EDITOR MIKE STOKOE'S FAVOURITE OF THE WEEK!



It's a Rover at Brands Hatch last weekend: Gary Hill has made Mike Stokoe very happy



Adam Hall's Autosport International pic



Neil Ormston went to the Dubai 24 hour



Chris Collier was also at Brands Hatch



Nick Murphy's BTCC Mini pic from ASI



Robert Clayson's pic from the NEC



Happy BTCC champs, by Harry Adams



Ogier's motor, taken by Gareth Williams

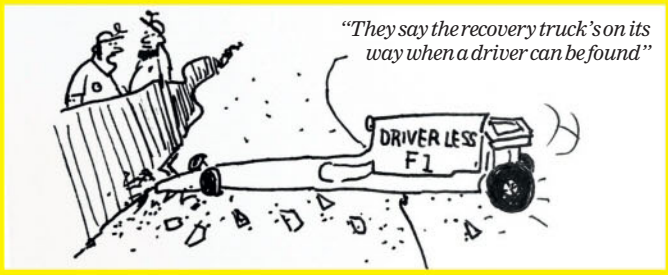


An Onroak Ligier, by Adrian Durnell

CARTOON CAPTION COMPETITION

And the winner is...
Graham Lomax from Manchester

Congratulations Graham, the framed original cartoon with your caption is on its way to you!



GET MN ON THE GO

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TV GUIDE

motorsport.tv



Super Formula action from race two at Okayama

After a long, hard week at work why not sit down with your favourite beverage and take in the best that *Motorsport.tv* has to offer? There's a season review of the 2017 **Michelin Le Mans Cup** (Friday, 1930-2000hrs), where GT3 and LMP3 machinery from some of Europe's top teams battled it out for a place in the 2018 Le Mans 24 Hours.

From the Land of the Rising Sun there is 2017 **Super Formula** action with highlights from the second race at Okayama (Saturday, 1630-1800hrs).

Three-time Le Mans winner Andre Lotterer won the opening race from the weekend but can he take another against tough opposition, including two-time Macau Grand Prix winner Felix Rosenqvist and current Formula 1 driver Pierre Gasly?

And finally begin the new week with the best bits from the 2017 **World Endurance Championship** (Monday, 0900-1000hrs). With Audi pulling out of the series in 2016, Porsche and Toyota were left to battle it out for LMP1 honours in what turned out to be the German marque's swansong.

While in the GTE Pro class the battle between Porsche, Ferrari and Ford went down to the final round.

LIVE WRC TV

Rally Monte Carlo, BT Sport

Friday
- **End of day 1 review:** 2200-2230hrs, BT Sport 2

Saturday
- **SS12:** 1200-1300hrs, BT Sport 1
- **End of day 2 review:** 2330-0000hrs, BT Sport 3

Sunday
- **SS17:** 1100-1230hrs, BT Sport 2
- **End of day 3 review:** 1900-1930hrs, BT Sport 1

Red Bull TV
- **End of day 1 review:** Friday, 2100-2130hrs
- **SS12:** Saturday, 1145hrs
- **End of day 2 review:** Saturday, 2100-2130hrs
- **End of day 3 review:** Sunday, 2100-2130hrs

Motorsport.tv (end of day reviews)
- **Day 1:** Friday, 2230-2300hrs
- **Day 2:** Saturday, 2230-2300hrs
- **Day 3:** Sunday, 2230-2300hrs

Channel 5 (highlights)
- Tuesday, 1900-2000hrs

LISTINGS

RALLYING

SATURDAY
- **Kirkistown, County Down**

New Year Stages Rally
Starts 0930hrs
Admission TBC
Web ulsterautomobileclub.com

SATURDAY/ SUNDAY
- **Brean Leisure Park, Burnham-on-Sea**

Brean Stages Rally
Starts 1000hrs
Admission £10
Web crswrallies.co.uk

Details correct at time of press.

BOOK REVIEW ADRIAN NEWEY: HOW TO BUILD A CAR

With 10 constructors' titles in a 22-season period, it's no exaggeration to say that Adrian Newey is one of Formula 1's finest technical brains, and his recently published book, *How to Build a Car*, does him full justice.

The title is a tad misleading, suggesting a Haynes manual-esque approach, but this is primarily a memoir. Newey's personality shines through the pages – colourful, energetic, artistic, fun-loving – and it's clear he always tries to think in unorthodox ways. But, above all, it's clear that he is very driven and demonstrates that there's more to him than just the aero prowess he is mostly associated with.

The prose is sharp, punchy and lively. The book never drags, and Newey doesn't dwell on things unnecessarily, but dusts the story with amusing anecdotes. He almost never pulls punches or shirks scrutiny, nor gives the impression he is settling scores or deluding himself.

The passages are always searingly honest, including his thoughts on his own role and methods, those who have helped him, as well as, sometimes, his shortcomings and conflicts. We understand that Ayrton Senna's death in a machine Newey designed still weighs upon him: "Even now I struggle to talk about it without my voice wavering."

The book includes Newey's early days at Fittipaldi, his career in America, at March, Haas, Williams, McLaren and then Red Bull. We learn about how things fell apart at March, how Newey found it working with Sir Frank Williams and Patrick Head, and about his relationship with Ron Dennis at McLaren.

There are also the circumstances of his move to Red Bull and what he did to build the team's sustained success in the first half of this decade. Newey's in-depth style is also applied to his childhood, as well as his personal life, while his exploits as an amateur racer are also along for the ride.

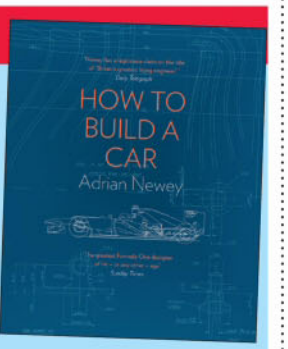
There's plenty in *How to Build a Car* a reader may not have known, including things that feel current. For example, Newey writes that just three years ago both Mercedes and an LMP1 squad sought to tempt him away from Red Bull.

He is candid for good and ill on drivers, rival teams – including Benetton's exploits in 1994 – and on the FIA, which he suspects at points somewhat lived up to what he cites as the "Ferrari International Aid" moniker.

The 59-year-old is also frank on the current state of F1, to which he attributes his decision to partially step away. His gripes include restrictive chassis and proscriptive engine regulations.

"Why not go further and say, 'Okay, here's 100 litres of fuel, you build whatever you want?'" he asks. Good question.

Technical details on Newey's works are unavoidable – and



Newey's book: a must-read

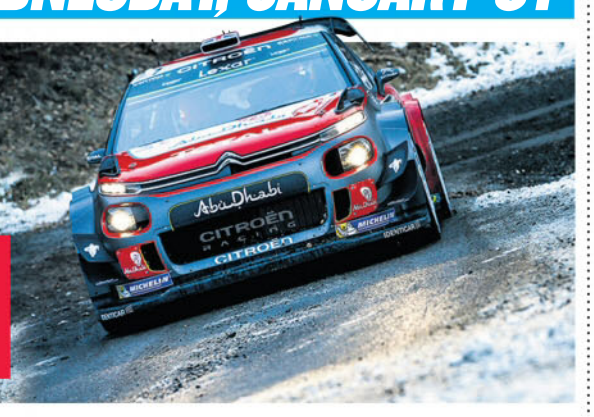
How to Build a Car is therefore part textbook. If this makes it sound heavy-going for the non-technically minded, fear not, as the accessible prose and sketches ensure that everything is seamless – you learn almost without realising.

Graham Keilloh

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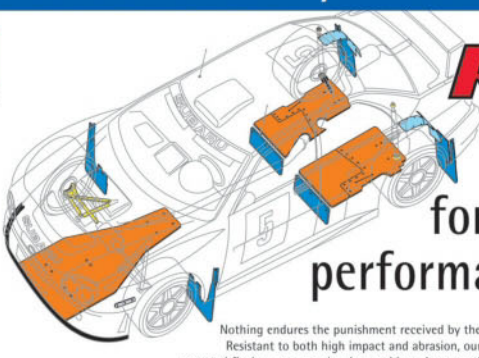
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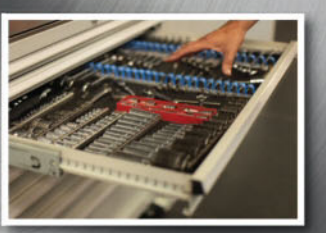
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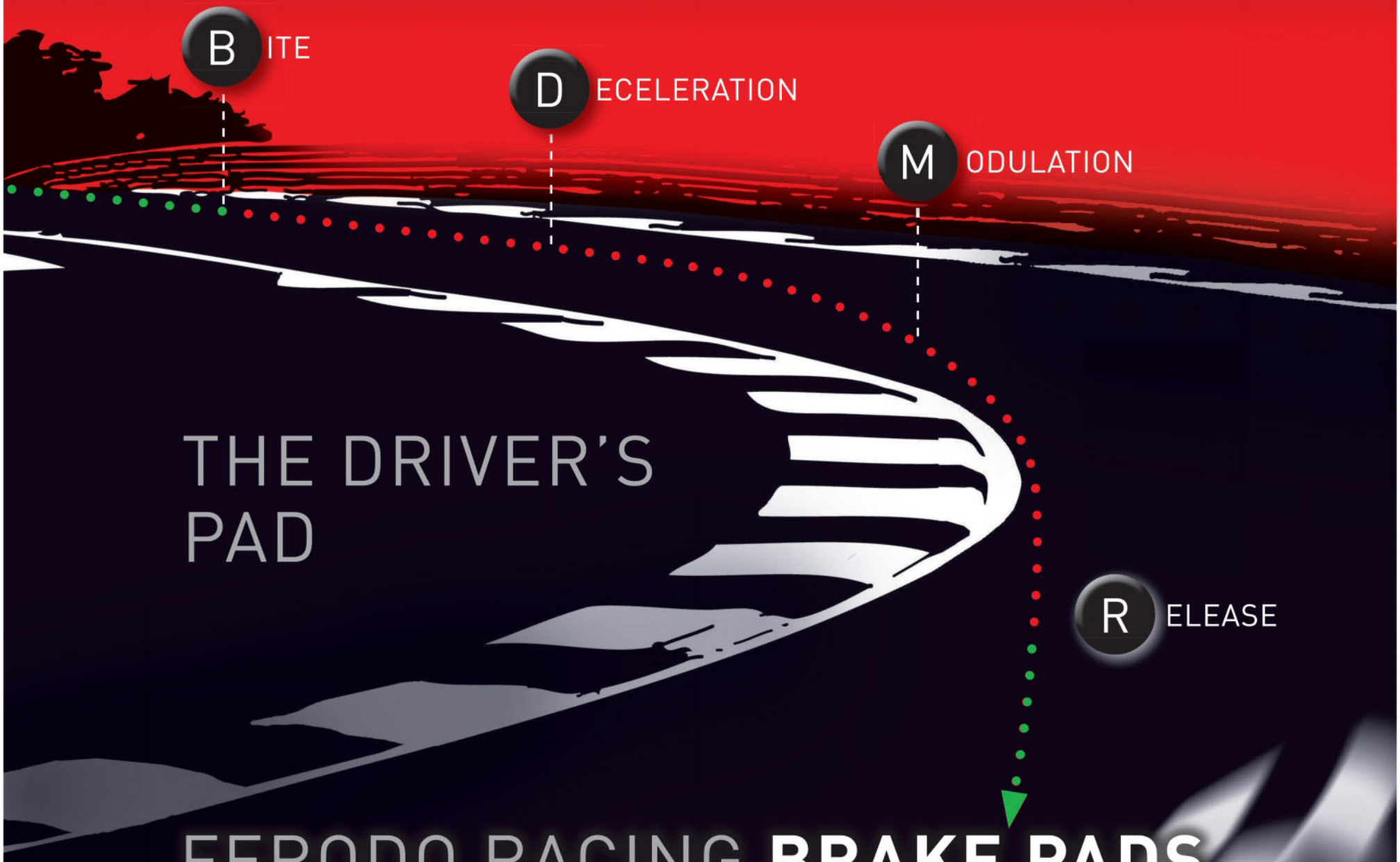
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