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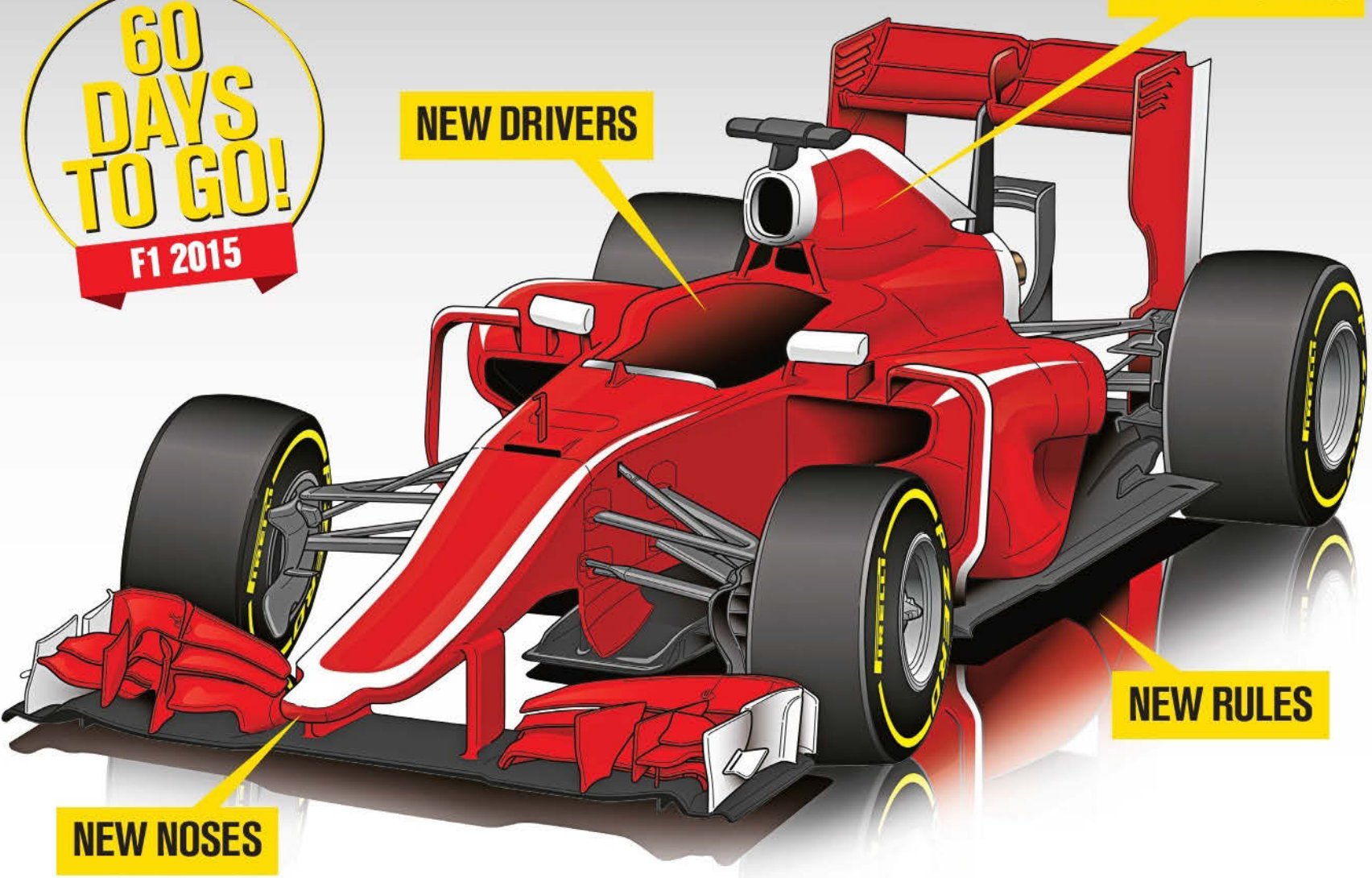
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F1 2015

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NEW DRIVERS

NEW RULES

NEW NOSES



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POLE POSITION

Even when rules are tight, F1 finds a way

THE FORMULA 1 REGULATIONS HAVE A STIFLING EFFECT on creativity. The only obvious visual changes to the 2015 Formula 1 cars that will be unveiled in the coming weeks will be to the nose, and that's thanks to a rule tweak rather than new ideas. And yet Gary Anderson reckons that even with a change that compromises the ability to produce downforce, overall the cars will produce more of it.

Given that the performance of the power units will also be improved – in the case of Mercedes, word is that the improvements will be worth a second per lap – that means the 2015 crop of cars will be significantly quicker than their predecessors. The machinery was seriously undercooked in last year's season-opening Australian Grand Prix, so expect to be surprised by the lap times that are turned when we get there in March.

The excitement is certainly building. AUTOSPORT International had its share of F1 personalities. While it's a cliché, it certainly felt like the season got under way in Birmingham last week.

And that means the stopwatch is counting down and teams will be pushing harder than ever to get their cars ready for the first test at Jerez at the start of next month.



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COVER STORY

“This year’s cars should start with all downforce lost from the nose change regained and more”

Gary Anderson, p12



COATES/JAT

FIND US ON



Cover illustration: Alan Eldridge

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THE BIG PICTURE

Day 8 of the Dakar Rally and it's the mineral-rich Salar de Uyuni in Bolivia, the world's largest salt flat. Yazeed Al Rajhi (325) will set the fastest time. Dakar Rally feature, p26

MOJIBARPOHLLDS/GETTY





This week in F1

F1 CHIEFS IN 1000BHP PUSH

Formula 1 chiefs are pushing on with plans for cars to produce at least 1000 horsepower by 2017.

Amid unease that the current generation of F1 machinery is too easy for drivers, the sport's chiefs have set up a working group to evaluate potential changes.

Engine bosses gathered in Geneva last week to consider

ways of ramping up power. AUTOSPORT understands it was agreed that, through a mixture of increasing F1's fuel-flow rate, minor design tweaks and lifting the fuel limit above 100kg, it would be possible for the current V6 turbos to produce 1000bhp.

The matter is now due to be discussed by F1 technical figures and the Strategy Group over the next few weeks.

The idea of ramping up engine power has been backed by former grand prix driver Allan McNish.

Speaking at the AUTOSPORT International Show last weekend, McNish said: "[F1 needs] more horsepower and to be a little bit more tricky; something that requires the driver to work physically as well."



2:03

LAP 0

- 1 RÖS
- 2 HAM
- 3 BÖT
- 4 MAS
- 5 RIC
- 6 ALO
- 7 MAG
- 8 RAI
- 9 SÜT
- 10 MAL

Fly Emirates Fly Emirates

REMEMBER WHEN

1986



F1 PRODUCED MORE THAN 1000BHP

F1 hopes to be back above the magic 1000bhp power figure in 2017 – something that has not happened since 1986, when engine power was unrestricted by rules. In that year, the BMW M12/13 engine in qualifying trim was estimated to have produced around 1400bhp. Teo Fabi (above) took two poles for Benetton while team-mate Gerhard Berger won in Mexico.



Austria joins Spain on in-season testing roster

The Red Bull Ring has been picked as one of the venues that will host in-season testing during 2015.

As part of a drive to reduce costs, Formula 1 teams have agreed to hold just two in-season tests this year, half the number of last year. The first test will take place at the Circuit de Catalunya on the Tuesday and Wednesday after the Spanish Grand Prix, with the Austrian F1 venue holding its test after its race on June 21.

255

BIG NUMBER

The number of days of testing held in 2005, when F1 testing reached its peak. Ten years on there will be just 16 days of running allowed.



For all the breaking news, visit **AUTOSPORT.COM**

Palmer still working on F1

GP2 champion Jolyon Palmer is still working on landing an F1 testing role this year, having missed out on a race seat.

"As GP2 champion, I am not ready to give up on the F1 dream just yet," said Palmer, who tested for Force India in Abu Dhabi last year.

"I think there is going to be some opportunity in the future. For this year it's not going to happen because there are 18 cars and 18 drivers already in them.

"So now we have to focus on the next best thing, and that is working with an F1 team to prepare myself for 2016."



S. BLOXHAM/LAT

British GP has new boss

Silverstone has a new management team after the track's owner, the British Racing Drivers' Club, completed a major personnel restructure.

Patrick Allen has taken over the role of managing director of Silverstone Circuits Limited, after his predecessor Richard Phillips and fellow executive directors Ed Brookes and David Thompson left the company.



STALEY/LAT

PRE-SEASON BUILD UP THE DATES SO FAR

21 JAN	Force India livery launch in Mexico	29 JAN	McLaren launch	30 JAN	Ferrari launch	1 FEB	2 FEB	3 FEB	4 FEB	Pre-season testing at Jerez	19 FEB	20 FEB	21 FEB	22 FEB	Pre-season testing at Barcelona	26 FEB	27 FEB	28 FEB	1 MAR	Pre-season testing at Barcelona
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TEAMS BEGIN TO NAME 2015 LAUNCH DATES

Formula 1 teams have begun finalising their plans to launch their 2015 cars, with McLaren and Ferrari both opting for online reveals.

McLaren is currently scheduled to be the first team to go public with its new design, having said it will publish images of its car on January 29. The following day, Ferrari will

release images of its new F1 car. Most teams are expected to unveil their cars shortly before the first official pre-season test begins at Jerez in Spain on February 1.

DUNBAR/WILLIAMS



Sky/BBC confirm 2015 plans

British television broadcasters Sky and BBC have worked out how they will share live coverage of F1 races this year.

As part of a race-share deal that was agreed back in 2011, Sky shows all the

races live, while BBC will broadcast roughly half of them as they happen.

The races that the BBC does not show live will be replayed as edited highlights later in the day.

WHO IS SHOWING WHAT LIVE IN 2015

DATE	RACE	SKY	SKY+BBC
MAR 15	Australian GP	SKY	
MAR 29	Malaysian GP	SKY	SKY BBC
APR 12	Chinese GP	SKY	
APR 19	Bahrain GP		SKY BBC
MAY 10	Spanish GP	SKY	
MAY 24	Monaco GP	SKY	
JUNE 7	Canadian GP		SKY BBC
JUNE 21	Austrian GP	SKY	
JULY 5	British GP		SKY BBC
JULY 19	German GP	SKY	
JULY 26	Hungarian GP		SKY BBC
AUG 23	Belgian GP		SKY BBC
SEPT 6	Italian GP	SKY	
SEPT 20	Singapore GP	SKY	
SEPT 27	Japanese GP		SKY BBC
OCT 11	Russian GP		SKY BBC
OCT 25	US GP	SKY	
NOV 1	Mexican GP	SKY	
NOV 15	Brazilian GP		SKY BBC
NOV 29	Abu Dhabi GP		SKY BBC

QATAR EYES F1 STREET RACE

Qatar has given the green light for ambitious plans to hold a Formula 1 grand prix on a new street circuit in the city of Lusail.

Following weeks of speculation that Qatar was evaluating a bid to become the third Middle East country to hold an F1 event, the Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani has thrown

his official support behind a push to secure a grand prix.

But rather than previous suggestions of an F1 race at the Losail circuit that has hosted MotoGP since 2004, the plan is for the race to take place on a street circuit in the new city of Lusail, which has already been named as the venue for the final of the 2022 football World Cup.



Losail circuit will be eschewed in favour of street race

MASON/GETTY

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Jonathan Noble

F1's newshound

Trying to get a grip on pre-season form is an exercise in educated guesswork. But if there's one team likely to make progress, it's Williams

As F1 launch season approaches, the inevitable demand for teams to nail their colours to the mast and declare their ambitious targets for the season ahead begins.

For them to do so with any sense of certainty is nigh on impossible, though, for a team's form is always as much about what its rivals do as what it achieves itself.

You can deliver a new car that's one second a lap quicker than its predecessor, but if your opposition have all found two seconds over the winter then you are going backwards.

Likewise, if you find just half a second but your rivals have failed to unlock any more speed, then you've actually made progress.

It's the same story on the engine front. Renault and Ferrari may well feel that the winter is a triumph if they can unlock around 70hp, but it will count for nothing if Mercedes has managed to unleash even more than that.

This is why the build-up to the first test is simply a time for guessing. Teams will have some idea about the things they can control themselves, but will have very little knowledge about where it leaves them in the overall pecking order.

What you can plot at this time of year, however, are trends, for F1 is very much a sport where success is a long game. There is an inevitable cycle of progress and decline. Some teams achieve higher peaks than

Bob Bell and Jock Clear.

On the technical front, things also look promising. There is no change of engine partner like McLaren is going through, and nothing to suggest that its Mercedes advantage won't remain.

Having the same power unit as the world champion team is a great thing, for Williams has no reason to worry about any major progress that comes out of the Mercedes engine headquarters at Brixworth.

Indeed, while some insiders have said Mercedes' rivals should brace themselves for a shock about just how much of a step forward its 2015 power unit will deliver, Williams' response will be different. Bring it on, it will say.

But perhaps best of all for Williams, when we look for trends, is the fact that it showed clear progress last season; it became stronger – more confident in its own abilities – as the campaign wore on.

Nothing is guaranteed in F1, and the big budgets of Red Bull, Ferrari and McLaren will all help fast-track their recovery. But Grove has solid grounds for optimism in 2015.

Williams chief technical officer Pat Symonds certainly carried with him a sense of ease about the work being done when I spoke to him last weekend, although he was well aware that success this year is not just down to his team's efforts.

"We were probably fortunate that some of our

"Williams showed clear progress, became stronger, more confident in its own abilities"

others, and some are unable to maintain their best form for very long. The aim, of course, is to ensure that your peak lasts as long as possible.

This ebb and flow of progress and decay is influenced by multiple factors, be it personnel joining or departing, a technical advantage, or simply staff that gel perfectly.

Minimising the negative factors and maximising the positives is, of course, the best way to ensure that you keep moving forward. And if you wanted to single out any team that's done just that over the past few months, then it's Williams.

It is one of the few teams that has enjoyed a winter of pretty good stability, and any major staff changes have happened for positive reasons to bolster the organisation rather than as a response to failures.

This is in stark contrast to what's happened elsewhere. Red Bull is without Adrian Newey's full attention; Ferrari is undergoing a major restructure; and even Mercedes has lost some key figures like

rivals had problems last year, but let's not take anything away from what we achieved as well," he said.

"Yes we had a great power unit. But equally in 2013 we had the same power unit as the guys that won the constructors' championship, so I think we have moved on a lot.

"We are fighting with the big boys now though. We are fighting with the guys who are spending twice as much money as us – and that makes it very, very difficult to go forward.

"But if we fully acknowledge all the things that brought us success in 2014, if we make sure we consolidate those, make sure we fully understand and incrementally move forward in all of those areas, then we can at least maintain if not improve where we are."

And maybe, just maybe, Williams could do even better than that. Challenge Mercedes outright, perhaps?

Just don't expect any firm answers on what is possible just yet. ❧

This week in motorsport

Young Brits?
2015 deals



LYNN JOINS GASLY AT DAMS GP2

Reigning GP3 champion Alex Lynn will step up to the GP2 Series this season alongside leading Formula Renault 3.5 contender Pierre Gasly at top team DAMS.

DAMS, which has run three of the past four GP2 champions, therefore has a strong line-up to take on title favourite Stoffel Vandoorne – the Belgian is expected to remain with ART Grand Prix.

Gasly, who contested late-season GP2 races last year with Caterham Racing, set the pace in the

November test in Abu Dhabi with DAMS (right), while Essex-based Lynn (above) ran with Carlin and ART.

“It’s a long time since anybody won GP2 in their first year, but if we can get off to a solid start there’s no reason why we shouldn’t be able to fight for wins and podiums straight away,” said Lynn.

Formula 3 European champion and Lotus Formula 1 protege Esteban Ocon was expected to race for DAMS, but speculation has now linked him to a one-year Mercedes DTM deal.



Harvey's name back in Lights

Indy Lights runner-up Jack Harvey will remain in the series for a second season with Schmidt Peterson Motorsports.

The 21-year-old from Lincolnshire missed out on the 2014 title to Gabby Chaves on countback of second places, and Graham Sharp, founder of the Racing Steps Foundation that backs Harvey's career, expects him to be title favourite as the series enters its next era with a new Dallara-built car.

“It’s definitely the right place to be racing,” said ex-British F3 champion Harvey. It’ll be tougher this year, but rest assured I’m up for the challenge.”



Russell gets Carlin F3 seat

McLaren AUTOSPORT BRDC Award winner George Russell will graduate to European Formula 3 with Carlin.

The 16-year-old from Norfolk, the reigning BRDC Formula 4 champion, had offers from Volkswagen-powered Carlin and Mercedes-engined Mücke Motorsport. “My aim is to win races and championships and Carlin have plenty of experience in doing exactly that,” said Russell.

Another leading team, Van Amersfoort Racing, has signed a highly rated 16-year-old too: Italian Alessio Lorandi starred in tests with the team and makes his car-racing debut in the F3 opener at Silverstone.



Riley to build LMP3 machine

US constructor Riley Technologies is entering into a joint venture with Trans-Am specialist Ave Motorsports to produce a new LMP3 prototype.

The design for the Automobile Club de l'Ouest's new entry-level prototype category, completed at Riley in North Carolina, will be built by Tony Ave's nearby organisation, which already produces a Trans-Am car to the company's plans. Construction will start in the “coming weeks”, according to a statement.

The first of the Riley-Nissan AR-2s will be owned by Ave and is expected to run for the first time in the summer.

BRC goes total-traction for '16

Four-wheel-drive cars will return for the British Rally Championship's 2016 revival, with series chief Ben Taylor determined to formalise links with the BRC to the Junior World Rally contest.

The R5 category, along with Group N cars including the Mitsubishi Lancer and Subaru Impreza – which stay courtesy of an extension to their homologation – means a four-wheel-drive fight for overall honours for the first time since 2011. Taylor will reveal a calendar for the relaunched BRC before June.

There's still a lot of speed left in me and the BTCC is a chance to prove that. I hope to have a big problem halfway through the season when it comes to having a clash!



BMW's multi-WTCC champ Andy Priaulx joins WSR

► P56 INTERVIEW

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Ford tipped for Le Mans return

Ford has unveiled the car that could take the marque back to the Le Mans 24 Hours as early as 2016.

The new Ford GT mid-engined supercar was revealed at the Detroit Motor Show on Monday. No reference to any racing plans for the car was made in the course of the announcement, but Ford is

known to have been evaluating an entry into the GTE division with the car together with the Multimatic organisation for more than a year.

Ford vice-president and chief technical officer Raj Nair was evasive on the likelihood of a racing future for the car at the launch.

"We're always evaluating what's

appropriate; we're always evaluating whether a race series fits with the technology, vehicles and the brand," he said.

Should Ford return to Le Mans in the 50th anniversary year of its first triumph in the 24 Hours, it would be its first overt factory campaign there since the C100 in 1982.

Ghio, Celis fill GP3 berths

Italian Luca Ghio, who took a shock pole on his GP3 debut at Spa last August with Trident Racing (right), has joined the team for a full campaign in 2015.

Ghio therefore moves over from Formula Renault 3.5, in which he

contested a full season with International Draco Racing last year.

Leading team ART Grand Prix has also confirmed a driver, with Mexican Alfonso Celis Jr switching over from Status GP to join the French squad.



Buhk in factory Bentley line-up

Maximilian Buhk has become a Bentley factory driver and will attempt to regain the Blancpain Endurance Series title he won in 2013.

The 22-year-old German is one of three new signings for the second works M-Sport Bentley Continental GT3 in the BES along with ex-Formula 2 champion Andy Soucek and Belgian Maxime Soulet. UK trio Steven Kane, Guy Smith and Andy Meyrick have been retained to drive the lead car.

Buhk will continue to race with the German HTP team, which has switched from Mercedes to Bentley machinery for 2015, in the Blancpain Sprint Series.



Paras unveil Infiniti warpaint

Infiniti's new factory-backed British Touring Car Championship challenger was on display in race trim for the first time at AUTOSPORT International last week. The Support our Paras-affiliated Q50 will be driven by Derek Palmer Jr and Richard Hawken.

In brief

FOSTER QUITS BTCC

British Touring Car Championship podium finisher Nick Foster has retired. The former rally driver stepped into the BTCC in 2011 after a spell in British GT and in four years driving WSR-prepared BMWs scored a best finish of second, at Croft in 2011.

M-SPORT APPROVAL

M-Sport has been given the go-ahead for a planned £19 million development of its Dovenby Hall site. Completion of the revised facility, including a 108,000 square-metre evaluation centre, test track and hotel, is targeted for the middle of next season.

DASH FOR NASH

Briton James Nash will swap from the Blancpain Endurance Series to its sister Sprint Series in 2015. The 29-year-old will remain with the Belgian WRT Audi squad and share his R8 LMS ultra with Frank Stippler, one of his BES team-mates last season.

ABBRING AT HYUNDAI

Dutch rallying up-and-comer Kevin Abbring will contest selected World Rally Championship rounds this season with Hyundai. Abbring completed shake down testing with the South Korean manufacturer's factory team last year.

Sorensen for 'Danish' Aston

Lotus Formula 1 junior Marco Sorensen will join an all-Danish factory Aston Martin line-up for an attack on the GTE Pro class of this year's World Endurance Championship.

The 24-year-old will share a Vantage GTE with Nicki Thiim and Christoffer Nygaard in the eight WEC races, including the Le Mans 24 Hours, in a deal put together by the Danish Young Driver organisation. It is moving up to GTE Pro after winning the Am title last year.

Aston Martin Racing boss John Gaw said: "This is a natural evolution for the Danish car."



F1 2015

With the first of the 2015 Formula 1 season launches just around the corner, **GARY ANDERSON, CRAIG**

12

Gary Anderson: After last year's major upheaval, the regulations dictating car design remain relatively stable for 2015. But we will see changes because the teams have had the chance to recognise problems.

Last year, one of the main challenges was achieving stability under braking for two reasons: the ERS harvesting/brake-by-wire system and the loss of rear downforce. It won't be easy to see, but once the cars are on track we will know who has tackled the weaknesses most effectively.

Transient aerodynamics are very important, so you need to achieve mechanical and aero stability to allow the driver to get the best out of the car.

The teams also have a year's experience of cooling the new power units, but I doubt the overall packaging will be dramatically tighter in terms of radiators. It will all be about making it more efficient.

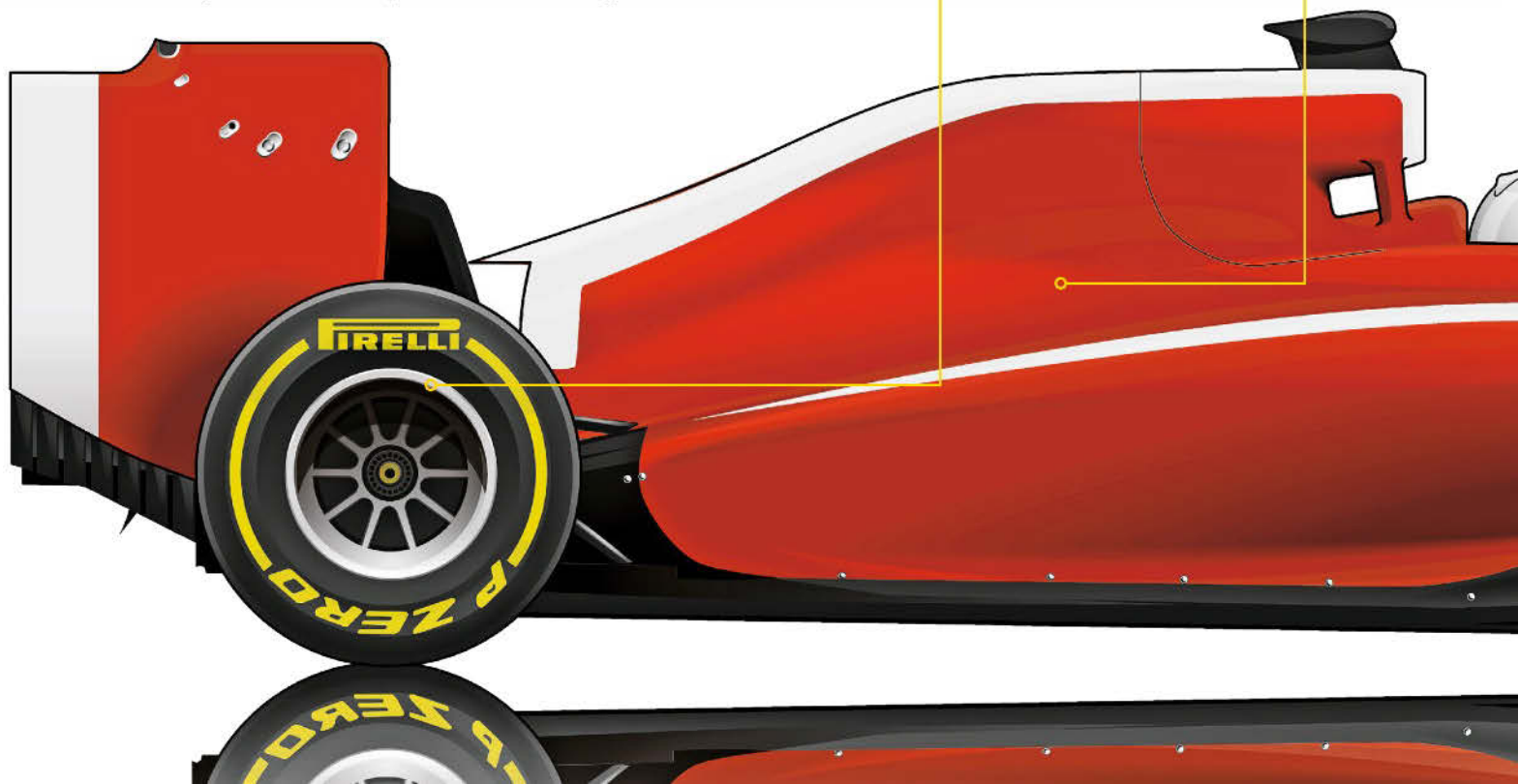
The nose is the most obvious visual change. We will see differences from last year thanks to rule changes, and we will again see variation in design.

GEARBOX

Once again, eight fixed forward gear ratios must be nominated for the season. This year, there is no allowance for a 'joker' change of the ratios during the year.

ENGINES

A regulation loophole means that engine modifications can now be made during the season by Mercedes, Renault and Ferrari. Honda, in its first season, will not be able to.



0115

REVEALED

SCARBOROUGH & EDD STRAW evaluate the shape of things to come for the racing machinery

COCKPIT SAFETY

Zylon panels on the side of the cockpit have been extended vertically to the edge of the cockpit opening to better protect the head of the driver.

MINIMUM WEIGHT

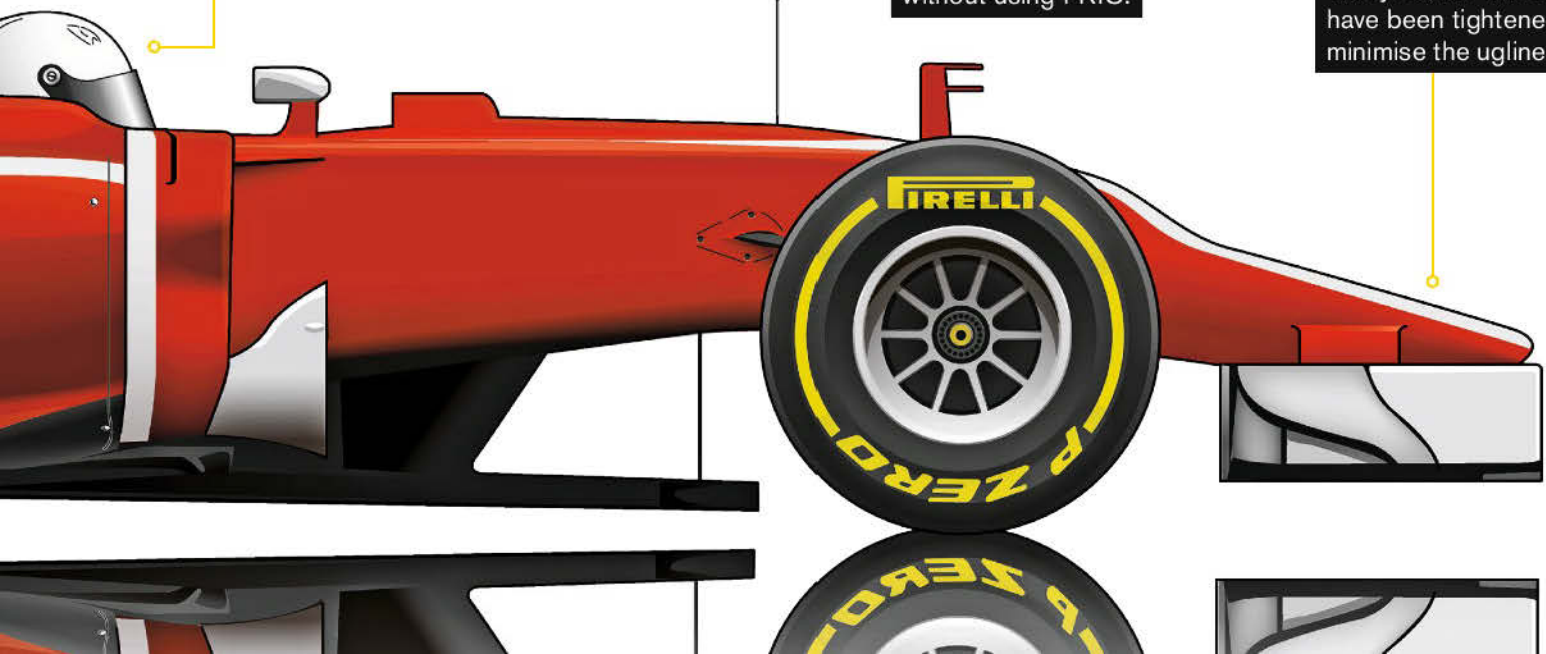
Following last year's controversy over larger drivers having to slim to potentially dangerously low weights, the minimum weight of car and driver rises by 10kg to 702kg.

SUSPENSION

In mid-2014, front-rear interconnected suspension systems (FRIC) were banned. This year, the rules formally state that suspension can only respond to direct load on the appropriate corner of the car. Unlike last year, the new cars will be designed to work without using FRIC.

NOSE

Last year, rules lowering the noses for safety reasons were introduced. The desire to maximise the height and get as much airflow under the car as possible for aerodynamic reasons led to some weird and wonderful designs. This year, the rules have been tightened to minimise the ugliness.



NOSES

THE REGULATIONS IN DETAIL

There are two key rule changes that affect the aesthetics this year. Firstly, a change to the slope from the top of the chassis to the tip of the nose; and secondly, the requirement for an increased cross-section near the nose tip.

SLOPE REQUIREMENT

In 2014, the top of the chassis was permitted to be at a maximum height of 625mm. Most teams exploited all of this height, but the top of the front bulkhead needed to be 100mm lower. So teams ran with a high chassis that sloped downwards near the bulkhead.

For 2015, to prevent the sudden-droop front section of chassis, there is a mandatory slope to the top of the chassis.

Starting 375mm behind it, there must be a straight line in side elevation down to the front bulkhead. This represents about 40 per cent of the length between the bulkhead and the cockpit opening. Teams can smooth over this area with a vanity panel.

NOSE TIP

Last year, the nose tip was required to have a cross-sectional area of 9000mm² centred on a height of no less than 185mm with the lowest part of it no lower than 135mm. This led to the anteater noses we saw on most cars.

This year, the distinctive Lotus twin-tusk and Mercedes-style noses are both banned by specific regulations. Now the nose tip has different regulations dictating its height and cross-section, but the effect is that the nose tip is placed in about the same position.

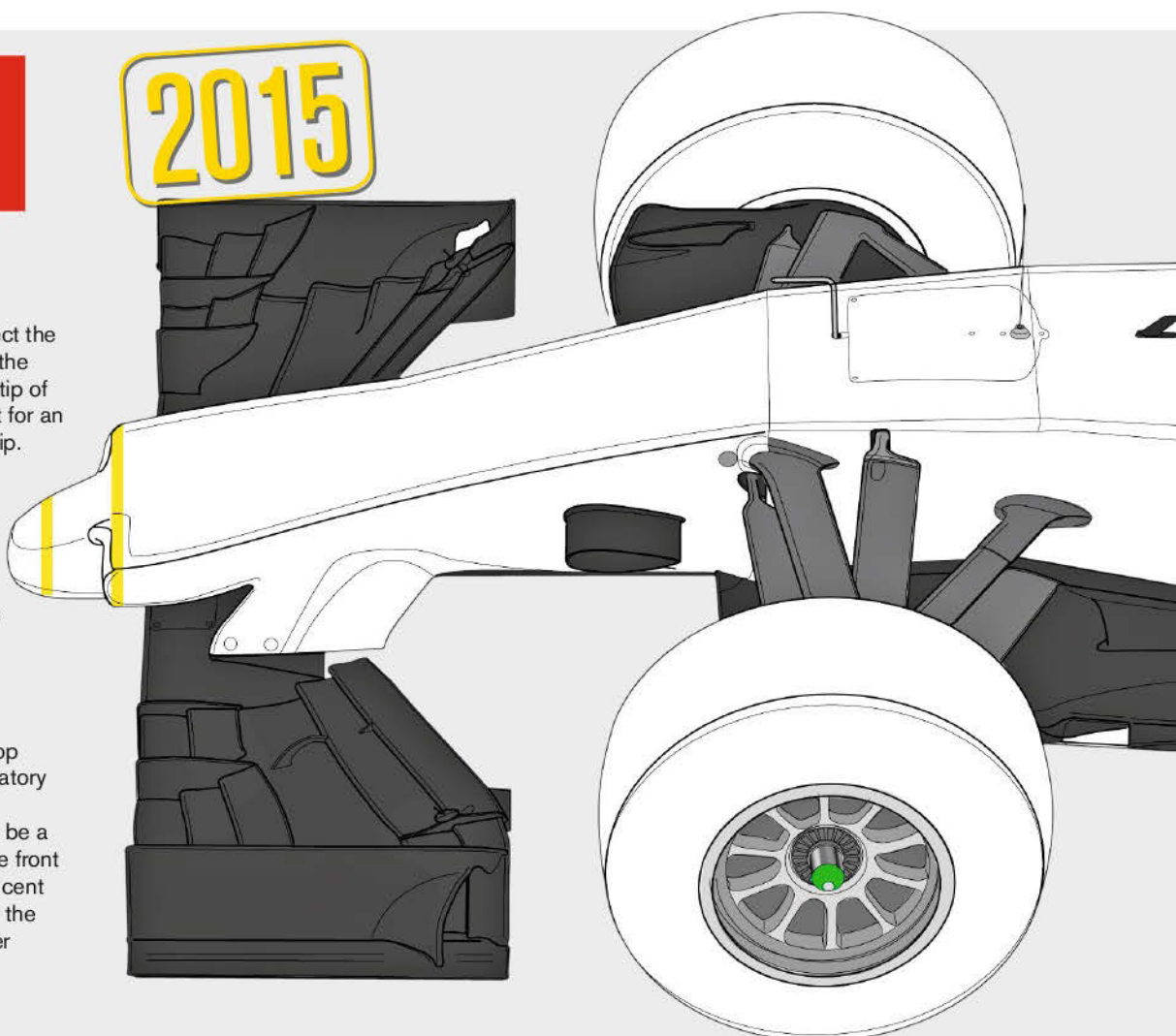
However, there must now be a second cross-sectional area of 20,000mm², 100mm behind the other section. So for a cross-section as wide as the front bulkhead/chassis (300mm), this would be about 66mm deep.

The nose must also sit below a line passing from the nose tip up to the top of the front bulkhead and taper evenly rearwards. So we will see wedge-shaped noses, with a distinct thumb tip 94mm x 94mm emerging from the end. In cross-section, this will form a T-shaped profile.

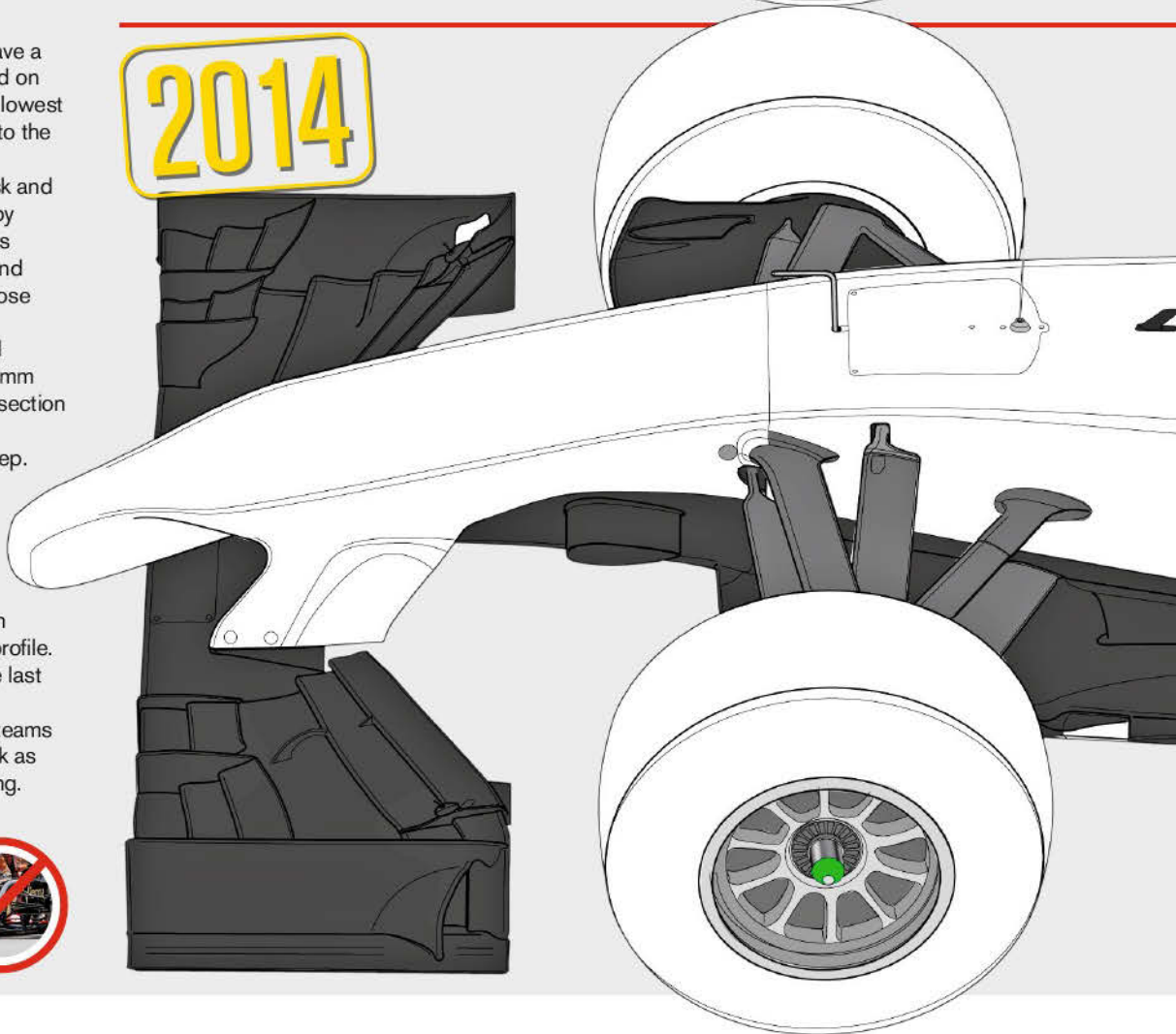
Unlike on the Lotus we saw tested late last year, the noses are expected to be long, extending beyond the front wing. But all teams will place the mounting pylons as far back as possible, right at the back of the front wing.

Craig Scarborough

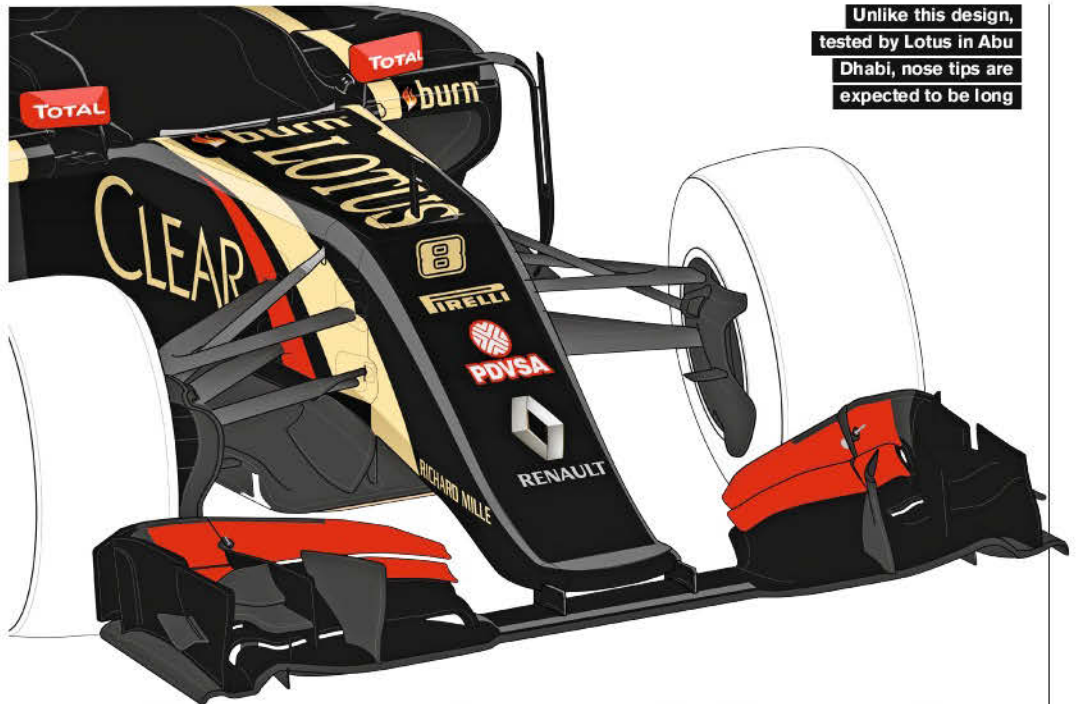
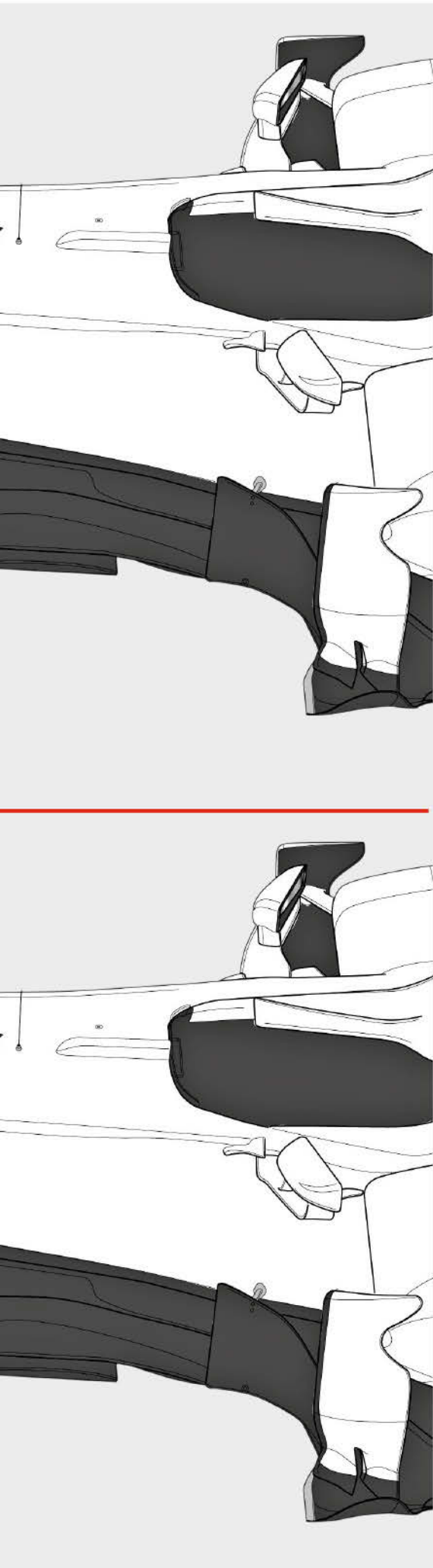
2015



2014



Unlike this design, tested by Lotus in Abu Dhabi, nose tips are expected to be long



F1'S LATEST NOSE JOB

Gary Anderson: There are two approaches that you can take with the nose design within the stipulated width and height limitations. Some may take an approach that is something like a smaller version of the anteater, but you will have to widen it pretty quickly to meet the regulations and I'm not sure that changing of cross-section so quickly would be a good thing aerodynamically. The new mandatory cross-sectional area behind the tip of the nose for 2015 is actually quite big, so it's now impossible to produce a nose like the slender Red Bull one of 2014. The rules inevitably mean it will be fairly bulbous.

The difference that the variation in designs will make to the cars will be minimal because any loss of downforce brought on by this change in regulations will be offset by the understanding the teams have gained during 2014 and the development time they have had. This year's cars should start with all that downforce regained and more. Teams have had several months since their previous front-wing package so

I'm sure they will have been able to find the 10-15kg downforce lost through this change.

We will see some obvious differences between the noses, but they will not be as dramatic as we witnessed last year, when different designs had a reasonable impact. This year the window you can work in is so small that there will be much less difference in downforce potential between the designs. Whether you should go for the minimum area vertically or horizontally isn't clear, but as long as you choose one of them and optimise it you should be in good shape. Both designs can be made to pass the crash test relatively easily as the regulations require a longer nose than in 2014.

I imagine most teams will go down a similar route to Mercedes' from last year, making the nose as short as they can within the regulations and minimising the cross-section area at that point. Having it as wide as the regulations required worked for Mercedes in 2014, so it makes sense to commit to that style of solution.

15

Engine homologation rules changed

Following almost a year of argument, the rules now allow changes to be made to the power-unit designs during the season. Not a rule change, this is instead based upon a loophole in the regulations, which do not specifically stipulate when the 2015 engines have to be homologated.

It will allow Mercedes, Ferrari and Renault to make changes to their engines over the course of the season whereas previously this was not allowed.

The framework of the extent of the changes remains in place, whereby only a total of 48 per cent of the engine can be changed. But instead of this being locked by the start of the season, upgrades can be drip-fed throughout.

Because Honda's engine is new this season, its power unit will be locked for the year. But this is offset by the fact that it is free to change its engine designs up to the cut-off date at the start of the season. Inevitably, McLaren and Honda are



Renault and Ferrari pointed out loophole in the engine rules

lobbying to be allowed leeway.

While this potentially allows Renault and Ferrari to close up over the course of the season, Mercedes can also improve. So the chasing pack will be gunning for a moving target.

WHAT ELSE IS NEW IN 2015...

After an eventful off-season, there are plenty of very visible changes beyond the new nose design and engine homologation regulations



ALONSO TO McLAREN...

Friends reunited?

VETTEL TO FERRARI

There has been a major changearound in the driver line-up for 2015. Fernando Alonso's return to McLaren and Sebastian Vettel's switch to Ferrari are among the highest-profile moves in recent history.

Daniil Kvyat moves to Red Bull to take Vettel's place, and Toro Rosso is fielding an all-rookie line-up of Formula Renault 3.5 champion Carlos Sainz Jr and 17-year-old Formula 3 sensation Max Verstappen.

Sauber has also made a major change, with ex-Caterham racer Marcus Ericsson partnering GP2 graduate Felipe Nasr, who appeared as a Friday driver with Williams last year.

Vettel has already tested an old Ferrari chassis at Fiorano



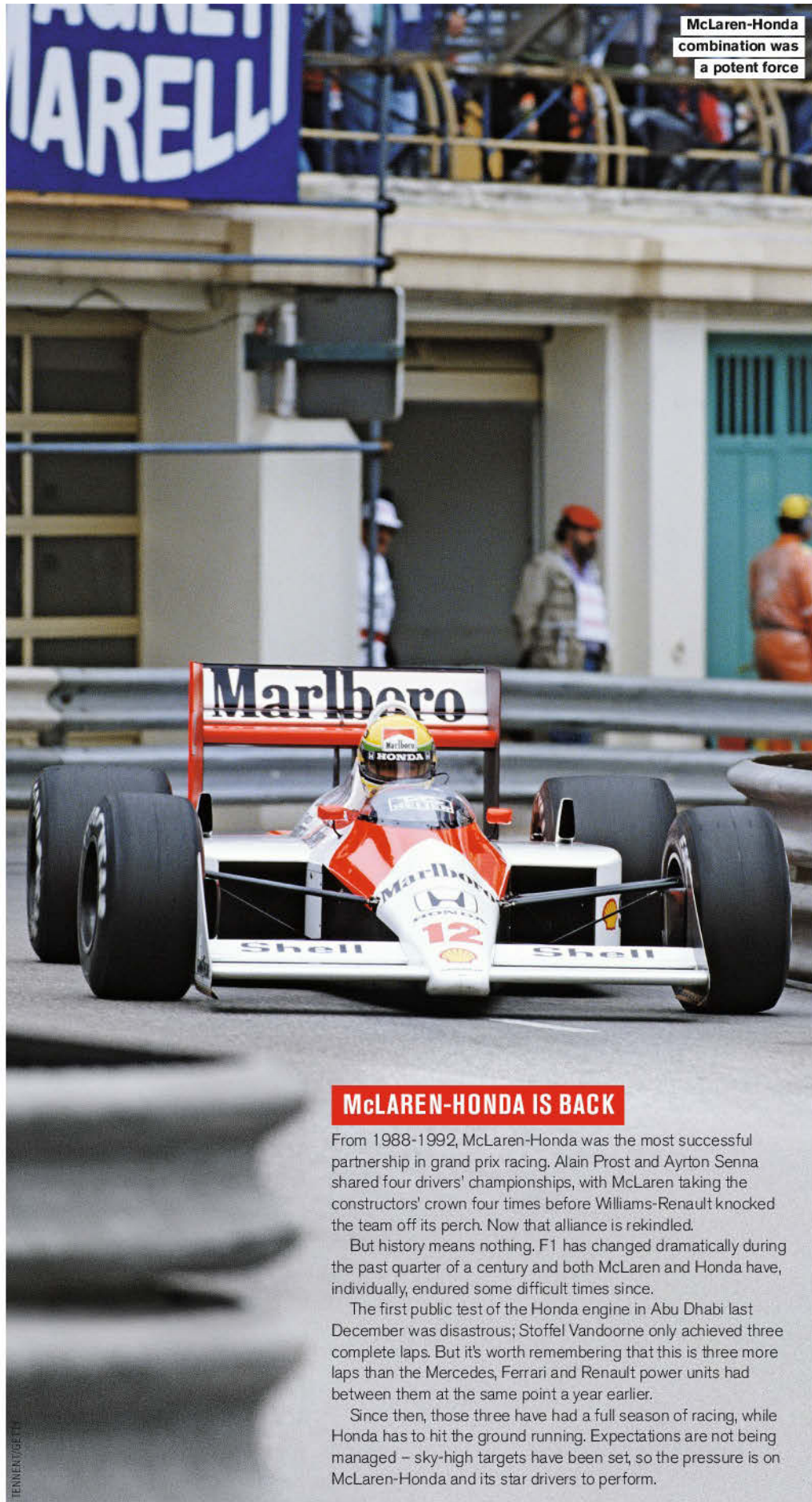
VIRTUAL SAFETY CAR

As a result of Jules Bianchi's horrific crash in last year's Japanese Grand Prix, the FIA has introduced a virtual safety car (VSC) system. This is designed to drastically reduce car speeds without having to go through a time-consuming safety-car deployment, which is now reserved for more serious problems.

The VSC will be used in situations where double-waved yellows are required for a section of the track but track conditions elsewhere do not warrant a traditional safety car. A strict speed limit will be enforced through the part of the track covered by the VSC, with stewards penalising any drivers exceeding it.



Virtual safety car will control speeds



McLaren-Honda combination was a potent force

McLAREN-HONDA IS BACK

From 1988-1992, McLaren-Honda was the most successful partnership in grand prix racing. Alain Prost and Ayrton Senna shared four drivers' championships, with McLaren taking the constructors' crown four times before Williams-Renault knocked the team off its perch. Now that alliance is rekindled.

But history means nothing. F1 has changed dramatically during the past quarter of a century and both McLaren and Honda have, individually, endured some difficult times since.

The first public test of the Honda engine in Abu Dhabi last December was disastrous; Stoffel Vandoorne only achieved three complete laps. But it's worth remembering that this is three more laps than the Mercedes, Ferrari and Renault power units had between them at the same point a year earlier.

Since then, those three have had a full season of racing, while Honda has to hit the ground running. Expectations are not being managed – sky-high targets have been set, so the pressure is on McLaren-Honda and its star drivers to perform.

TEE/LAT



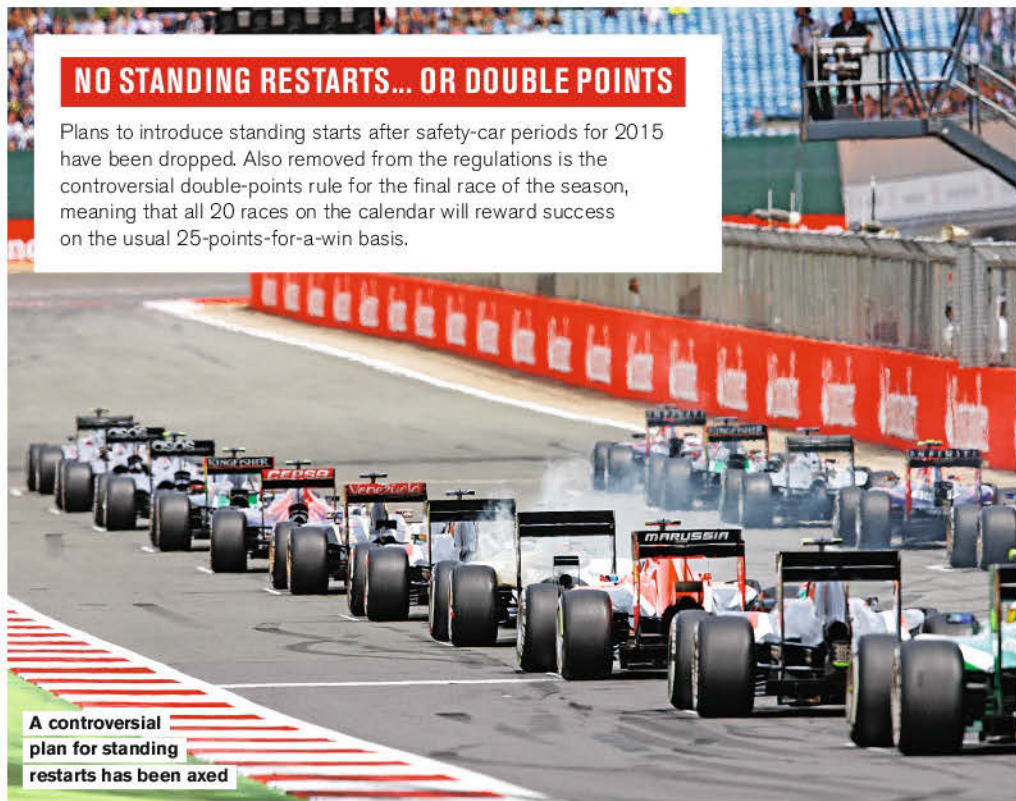
Lotus had a woeful 2014

LOTUS JOINS WITH MERCEDES

Last year the Enstone-based Lotus squad endured one of the worst seasons in its long and illustrious history. While not quite at the level of its first year as Toleman (1981), when qualifying was a rarity, the haul of nine points and eighth in the championship was disastrous for a team that had won a race in each of the previous two seasons.

The Renault power unit was one weakness, but its shortcomings only served to compound the weaknesses of a car that was wildly inconsistent in its behaviour from corner to corner. When even Romain Grosjean, one of the best in the field, struggles to haul respectable lap times out of a car, you know you've produced a dog.

The switch to Mercedes is a major boost and Lotus will improve this year. While the downsized team can realistically target Williams levels of performance in the medium term, it could be difficult to get back into contention for podiums. Consistent points-scoring would represent a good step for the team.



NO STANDING RESTARTS... OR DOUBLE POINTS

Plans to introduce standing starts after safety-car periods for 2015 have been dropped. Also removed from the regulations is the controversial double-points rule for the final race of the season, meaning that all 20 races on the calendar will reward success on the usual 25-points-for-a-win basis.

A controversial plan for standing restarts has been axed

GIBSON/LAT

TESTING SCHEDULE

DATE	LOCATION
FEB 1-4	Jerez
FEB 19-22	Barcelona
FEB 26-MAR 1	Barcelona
MAY 10-11	Barcelona
JUNE 21-22	Red Bull Ring



Pre-season testing will be in Spain

TESTING CUTBACK

The number of in-season tests has been halved from four to two. Two-day tests will be held on the Tuesday and Wednesday after the Spanish and Austrian GPs.

To ensure that there are opportunities for developing up-and-coming drivers, teams must run rookie drivers on two of the four days of running. This is defined as a driver with fewer than two grand prix starts.

Pre-season testing will be held over 12 days, all staged at Spanish circuits.

FERRARI'S NEW LOOK

The upheaval at Ferrari extends beyond losing Alonso and gaining Vettel. With Maurizio Arrivabene taking over as team principal and Ferrari chairman Sergio Marchionne in overall charge, it will be fascinating to see whether the patience is there to see if the technical upheavals at Maranello will bear fruit.

In the short term, two wins are the target. Frankly, that seems optimistic given Ferrari managed just two podiums last year.

Arrivabene: uphill struggle



COATES/LAT



MEXICAN GRAND PRIX RETURNS

The last time there was a Mexican GP, in 1992, Nigel Mansell, Ayrton Senna and Riccardo Patrese were on the grid and Sergio Perez was only two

years old. The much-upgraded Autodromo Hermanos Rodriguez is once again the venue for the race, which takes place on November 1.

Peraltada corner will be changed before GP



Each driver has one engine fewer for the season

DOWN TO FOUR POWER UNITS

For the first season of the new-for-2014 1.6-litre turbocharged V6 engine packages, each driver was allocated five complete power units for the season. With the technology now well established, this drops to just four for 2015.

Penalties will be applied on the same basis as last year, with grid drops for using power-unit elements beyond the permitted four. Unlike last year, grid drops not completed in one hit will not be carried over for a second race. Instead, a sliding scale of penalties will be imposed that weekend depending on how extensive the infringement has been.

Is 17-year-old

VERSTAPPEN

really ready
for **F1?**

The teenaged Formula 3 graduate enters only his second season in car racing at the very top level. **BEN ANDERSON** investigates whether the Dutchman is up to it



How young is too young to be a Formula 1 driver? Every time a new teenager joins the grid there is outcry from those F1 fans who feel the sport should be reserved for men and not boys (or women and not girls!).

Max Verstappen has been dealing with this righteous indignation ever since Red Bull signed the then-16-year-old single-seater rookie last summer and granted him an almost instantaneous promotion to F1. Many feel a 17-year-old (his birthday is in September) who cannot yet drive on the road legally has no place racing at the top level of motorsport. Governing body the FIA seems to retrospectively agree, having since decided to change F1's superlicence rules for 2016 – to prevent another Verstappen breaking through.

The critics (whose ranks include ex-Red Bull F1 racer Mark Webber) feel Verstappen's arrival at such a tender age – and with so little racing experience – undermines the sport. But surely ability counts for more. Pele is now widely regarded as one of the greatest professional footballers who ever lived. He was just 17 when his goals helped Brazil lift the 1958 World Cup.

Fears that Verstappen won't be able to cut it at the top level after just a single season in European Formula 3 (itself arguably the most fiercely competitive junior single-seater series on the planet right now) – or worse that he will pose a danger to his new rivals because of his relative inexperience – are grossly misplaced.

He already has 48 starts in single-seater racing under his belt (thanks to taking part in Ferrari's pre-season Florida Winter Series ahead of his F3 campaign) – that's more than both Kimi Raikkonen and Fernando Alonso amassed before they graduated to F1...

Similar criticism was levelled at Red Bull when it promoted the then-19-year-old GP3 champion Daniil Kvyat. Such was his seamless progress as an F1 rookie in 2014, this year the Russian will replace four-time world champion Sebastian Vettel in the Red Bull A-Team.

Verstappen's own assured performances during three Friday-practice runs at last year's Japanese, US and Brazilian Grands Prix should also reassure those with doubting minds. Still not convinced? Well, how about some testimony from a respected team boss who has witnessed Verstappen's skills first hand. Trevor Carlin's



Verstappen's third Friday-practice run for Toro Rosso came in Brazil last year

“He’s 17 on paper, but if you talk to him and look at how he drives a car, he’s much more mature” FRANZ TOST



Verstappen Sr went straight from F3 to F1 in 1994...



...with his son Max doing the same for 2015

eponymous squad has run many of the world's best drivers on their way through the junior ranks of the sport – including a certain ex-Red Bull four-time world champion. Carlin believes Verstappen has everything it takes to succeed at the highest level.

“He’s been bred to be a Formula 1 driver,” Carlin told AUTOSPORT after Red Bull announced Verstappen's deal. “He may be a teenager, but he’s got probably 12 or 13 years of racing experience at the top level. He’s a once-in-a-generation talent.”

The “12 or 13 years of racing experience at the top level” Carlin mentions are in reference to Verstappen's extensive karting background. The Dutchman is a World and European karting champion, and it is vital not to underestimate the value of that pedigree. Many questioned his father Jos for deciding to pluck his son out of karts and place him straight into F3 in 2014, but Verstappen Jr silenced the doubters by winning races and challenging for the title with an unfancied team.

Verstappen Jr himself argues the jump from karting to F3 was more difficult to make than that from F3 to F1 – because of the need to adopt a completely different driving style for cars – and says his top-level karting background is the main reason he feels ready to take on the top tier of single-seater racing so soon in his career.

“Karting is really competitive,” he tells AUTOSPORT. “Seven days a week you are busy working on it, trying to improve the engines on the dyno. I had so much experience before I even got into a racing car, because of my dad and how he explained everything so well, so I think for me it’s a different story than another 17-year-old.”

Mention of his father Jos is quite apt, for readers of a certain age will well remember the story of Verstappen Sr

– how he burst onto the scene in a test for Arrows in 1993, then earned a drive as Michael Schumacher's Benetton team-mate in 1994, before sliding down the grid into obscurity.

Jos admits now that his own career was “too much, too soon”. Many will argue the same is true of Max, but he feels the expertise of Red Bull and Toro Rosso with young drivers will save him from a fate worse than his father's.

“I think I’m in a good environment here,” he says of Toro Rosso. “It’s more of a junior team so they are really there to prepare young drivers. I think it’s much better than how my dad started.”

Toro Rosso team principal Franz Tost already has no doubts his new charge can make the grade in Formula 1. Again, Tost points to that karting pedigree. “I don’t see any risk with this driver because he won in karting everything,” Tost argues. “He came into Formula 3 and he immediately was a frontrunner. He is 17 on a piece of paper, but if you talk to him, if you look how he is driving a car, he is much more mature, and therefore I am not worried.”

“It’s not the age, it’s the performance the driver shows. I know a lot of drivers who are 24 but they are simply too slow to do F1. And there are very young drivers who are very fast and will show good performance, and I’m convinced Max will do this if we provide him with a proper car.”

The FIA's 2016 rule-change means Verstappen may permanently remain the youngest driver ever to start a grand prix after the 2015 grid forms up for the first time in Australia in March. Those lining up alongside him will have no worries about his competence. Those watching shouldn't either. In this context, age is merely a number. Just ask Pele. ☼

FIA rethinks criteria for

Motorsport's governing body has revamped the way in which drivers can qualify for a superlicence,

THE CURRENT F1 GRID: WHO'S IN AND WHO'S OUT

Eligible for superlicence at time of F1 debut

1
NICO
HULKENBERG

110



3
PASTOR
MALDONADO

68



5
ROMAIN
GROSJEAN

60



7
VALTTERI
BOTTAS

50



9=
SERGIO
PEREZ

42



We've had to modify the rules to apply to different eras. The F3 Euro Series of 2003-11 (from which six current F1 drivers 'qualify') is regarded as having the same value as the FIA F3 European Championship of 2012 to date. Formula BMW (Vettel) and Formula Ford (Button) are given national F4 ratings. Euro 3000 (Massa) is given the same as Super Formula. FIA F3000 (Alonso) equals GP2, with the old two-litre Formula Nissan (Alonso again) level with national F3.

2
LEWIS
HAMILTON

98



4
NICO
ROSBERG

63



6
FELIPE
NASR

52



8
SEBASTIAN
VETTEL

48



9=
DANIIL
KVYAT

42



Max Verstappen may not have raced in Formula 1 yet, but his imminent arrival on the grid has already proved a catalyst for change.

The recent controversial overhaul of F1's mandatory superlicence system – with much stricter qualifying criteria – can be traced back to the shock of Toro Rosso's decision to sign him.

While Verstappen's arrival helped to fast-track the arrival of a new licence system, it had been clear for some time that F1's old requirements were no longer a fit for modern economic realities or the junior single-seater racing ladder.

In effect, under the old system drivers could buy their way in to F1 by paying for a test with a team rather than actually needing to have

been well schooled and quick.

As McLaren racing director Eric Boullier said about the old superlicence system: "There are different problems. One is economic, in that some teams are selling Friday-morning seats and are looking for some drivers who don't comply with the superlicence rules."

"The other issue is that we have known for a few years that many,

many series have appeared and there is not a clear path to F1."

But while a tightening of the superlicence rules was widely accepted as essential, the new system put in place has caused a storm, especially because of the way that youngsters must now qualify through a points system. There are fears that it could skew the value of junior single-seater

superlicence system

the 'passport' needed to race in F1. **JONATHAN NOBLE** explains how the new system will work

Nico Hulkenberg is the most qualified, thanks to title success in Formula 3 and GP2. But the system applied retrospectively would have precluded world champions Fernando Alonso, Kimi Raikkonen and Jenson Button from racing in F1.

Not eligible for superlicence at time of F1 debut

11=
DANIEL
RICCIARDO

38



COATES/LAT

13=
FELIPE
MASSA

30



DUNBAR/LAT

15
MAX
VERSTAPPEN

20



COATES/LAT

17
MARCUS
ERICSSON

14



COATES/LAT

11=
CARLOS
SAINZ JR

38



DUNBAR/LAT

13=
FERNANDO
ALONSO

30



STALEY/LAT

16
JENSON
BUTTON

15



TEE/LAT

18
KIMI
RAIKKONEN

5



STALEY/LAT

THE CONTENDERS

Who are the drivers outside F1 who would qualify for a superlicence if the system was in place for 2015?



TEE/LAT

WEC

Andre Lotterer (above)	132
Marcel Fassler	100
Benoit Treliuyer	100
Tom Kristensen	80
Loic Duval	70
Allan McNish	70
Anthony Davidson	60
Sebastien Buemi	60
Kazuki Nakajima	50

INDYCAR

Will Power	80
Scott Dixon	80
Helio Castroneves	70
Ryan Hunter-Reay	50

JUNIOR SINGLE-SEATERS

Raffaele Marciello	74
Stoffel Vandoorne	65
Jolyon Palmer	56
Fabio Leimer	56
Sam Bird	55
Felix Rosenqvist	53
Felipe Nasr	52
Alex Lynn	52
Mitch Evans	50
Davide Valsecchi	50
Esteban Ocon	41
James Calado	40
Luiz Razia	40
Daniel Juncadella	40
Antonio Felix da Costa	40

AND THOSE WHO JUST MISS OUT..

Not eligible for superlicence:

Tom Blomqvist	39
Carlos Sainz Jr	38
Alexander Wurz	38
Nicolas Lapierre	36
Simon Pagenaud	36
Neel Jani	30
Robin Frijns	30
Stephane Sarrazin	28
Lucas Auer	27
Romain Dumas	26

categories, as well as hold back highly talented drivers.

Here, AUTOSPORT looks at the debate and analyses the implications.

WAS AN OVERHAUL REALLY NEEDED?

Although the change to the superlicence criteria was not directly related to Verstappen's promotion, there is little doubt that his step up

to F1 played a part in fuelling the debate that resulted in the overhaul.

It was at a Strategy Group meeting at Monza in September – just a fortnight after Toro Rosso had signed Verstappen – that the subject of changing the superlicence rules first came up.

There was already some concern that F1's image was taking a hit amid a perception that the new generation

of cars was too easy to drive. Teams felt that this view was further being embellished by the fact that young drivers were able to jump straight in to F1 and be successful.

That Verstappen was signed to F1 when just 16, and in his debut season of car racing, set alarm bells ringing. Not because there were doubts about whether he was good enough – because his form in F3 showed ▶

Q&A



ANTHONY DAVIDSON WORLD ENDURANCE CHAMPION

What do you make of the superlicence changes?

It locks you into doing it the FIA way, rightly or wrongly. It needed to be tightened up but we have seen some great talents get fast-tracked into Formula 1, like Kimi Raikkonen for instance. But like anything, it can get to the point of being ridiculous and I think the Max Verstappen scenario is probably the thing that has tipped it.

Does it need more flexibility in terms of the criteria?

It feels a bit rigorous. I'm not sure how it has been calculated but I'm sure there is a reason. It's like any set of regulations – it will need tweaking, I'm sure, at some stage. But it's right that something has been done. I'm happier that something has been done than I'm picking at the faults of the system.

Do you think the knock-on effect in terms of stopping third-rate pay drivers is positive?

In theory it's great – yes, we should have the 20 or 24 best in the world in each one of those seats on the grid. But in reality F1 has rarely been that way and you need the paying driver to keep teams afloat sometimes. That's one of my only concerns; if it's too rigorous in its approach to filtering only the best drivers into F1 then it could be, for the bigger picture, a bad thing. You could see more teams fold as a result or fewer new teams establish themselves. So there is that to consider as well.

How do you evaluate the weighting? You could win Formula Renault 2.0 Eurocup then 3.5 and not have enough points...

Yes, that's harsh. Felipe Massa came from a similar route, he did Formula Renault then Euro F3000. It was clear he had the talent to deserve a drive. I don't have the answer for it but there are always going to be anomalies.



► how exceptional he was – but because of the precedent that his arrival in F1 had set. His leap to the top meant that there would be no justification for the FIA to restrict similarly young and inexperienced drivers – who perhaps were not as good as Verstappen – in securing a superlicence in the future.

There were also mounting concerns that drivers were able to get around the old qualifying criteria of being successful in major championships by simply buying 300km of testing with teams.

Just days after the Monza meeting, the World Motor Sport Council issued a mandate to the FIA to

“Let's say if there was someone exceptional and the sport gets behind that person. We shouldn't restrict it to points alone”

David Coulthard

review the qualification and conditions that drivers needed to fulfil to secure a superlicence. Following discussions between various parties, the new rules were finally rubber-stamped by the WMSC in December.

A CONTROVERSIAL SYSTEM

The superlicence system decided upon by the FIA (see panel, far right) has caused intense debate. But not

RENAULT SET FOR TALKS WITH THE FIA

Renault is set to discuss the FIA's new superlicence system with the governing body, after the French marque's series were graded relatively low under the new scheme.

AUTOSPORT understands that Renault was surprised to see the FIA reveal a new points system to grade the junior categories, as it had been told in December that discussions would take place during 2015 to work something out.

With Formula Renault 3.5 ranked lower than the Formula 3 European

championship, and FR2.0 at the bottom of the list below FIA F4 series, the manufacturer wrote to its teams last week promising to “take all opportunities to defend our championships with the FIA”.

In a copy of the note sent to Renault's teams, which has been seen by AUTOSPORT, the manufacturer confirms that in its communication to the FIA it stated that its two categories “should be rated much higher”.

The FIA is understood to have



Renault 3.5 has been graded lower than F3

VAN DER LAAN/LAT

because its minimum age of 18, its driving-licence requirement and the need for drivers to have completed at least two years in junior categories of racing would have excluded Verstappen on three counts.

Instead, the imposition of points criteria – with drivers needing to have scored 40 points over a maximum of three seasons before their application – has prompted unease. (Incidentally, Verstappen

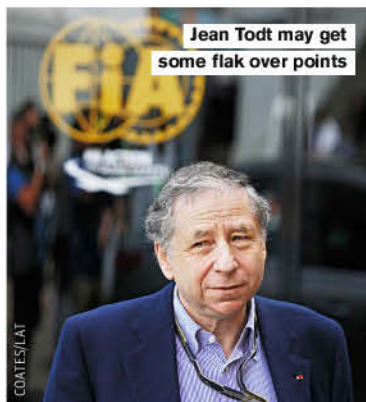
would only have scored 20).

Not only does the highest scoring category – FIA Formula 2 – not even exist yet, but the weighting has meant that the champion of the high-level Formula Renault 3.5 category no longer automatically qualifies for a superlicence. This weighting has prompted a letter of complaint from Renault, which has vowed to do all it can to protect its interests (see panel above).

Verstappen's F3 mileage would not be enough for him to race in F1...



...but he's in at Toro Rosso under the old system



Jean Todt may get some flak over points



F1 grid may look different when new system comes in

WHAT IT NOW TAKES TO QUALIFY FOR A SUPERLICENCE

NEW REQUIREMENTS

- A driver must hold a valid driving licence.
- A driver must be at least 18 years old at the start of first F1 race weekend.
- A driver must have completed a test on FIA's International Sporting Code and F1 Sporting Regulations.
- A driver must have completed at least 80% of two full seasons of qualifying championships. *The championships are: Formula Renault 1.6 national and international series, Formula 3 national championships, Formula Renault 2.0 international series (Eurocup, ALPS or NEC), Formula 4 national championships certified by FIA, Indy Lights, Japanese Super Formula, GP3*

Series, Formula Renault 3.5, IndyCar, FIA WEC (LMP1 only), FIA F3 European Championship, GP2 Series, Future FIA F2 Championship

- A driver must have completed at least 300km in a representative F1 car at racing speeds over maximum period of two days.

PLUS

- A driver must have at least five F1 race starts the previous year or at least 15 starts over a period of three years.

OR

- A driver must have accumulated at least 40 qualifying points from below categories during three-year period preceding his application.

agreed to a meeting with Renault, although it is not yet clear if the points system is still up for review.

One senior figure at a team that competes in multiple single-seater categories called the FIA's decision "a political move to try to restrict the number of championships", while the reaction from teams was mixed.

FR3.5 teams suggested that the FIA's ranking could make it tougher to get drivers. DAMS boss Jean-Paul Driot, whose team is a title winner in GP2 and FR3.5, called for all series to get together to talk with the FIA. Arden Motorsport, which also runs teams in both series, welcomed the FIA's efforts to streamline the system, although its sporting manager Julian Rouse admitted to "a few surprises" on the list.

Formula E was not included by the FIA, but championship boss Alejandro Agag backed that decision as he does not see the electric series as a feeder to F1.

two counts: he hadn't done any F1 races in the previous three seasons; and he hadn't come back to race in another category that could qualify him for a superlicence.

FLEXIBILITY THE KEY

Although the points system has prompted plenty of debate in motorsport circles at all levels, the fact that the FIA has moved to tighten up a superlicence system that was previously open to abuse has been welcomed.

At a time when F1 has faced criticisms for teams chasing pay drivers and their sponsorship millions rather than those with the most talent, any move that helps boost the credentials of genuine championship frontrunners should be applauded. As 2014 GP2 champion Jolyon Palmer said: "Previously you could get a superlicence with enough F1 testing mileage and you could get enough testing mileage by basically buying it."

The fact that drivers must complete at least two years in junior categories also means there will no longer be a desire to rush drivers up the ladder to F1, which should allow drivers to develop better.

But there seems to be a consensus that the FIA would be wise to introduce a degree of flexibility to ensure that drivers who are more than qualified are not blocked simply because they fell through the cracks of a system that has deliberately favoured certain championships.

Former world championship

Fitting the system retrospectively has also thrown up some quirks that would have forced several leading F1 stars – including Kimi Raikkonen, Fernando Alonso and Jenson Button – to have delayed their grand prix debuts because they would not have scored enough qualifying points.

Furthermore, when Michael Schumacher made his F1 comeback in 2010, he would in theory have not qualified for a superlicence on

runner-up David Coulthard was one of those who suggested that the governing body should be open to a degree of flexibility. "It shouldn't be locked down and, that's it, we never adjust it," said Coulthard recently. "Let's say if there was someone who seemed to be exceptional and the sport as a whole gets behind that person, we shouldn't just restrict it to points alone. "Maybe some

guys can't do the whole championship so can't win it, yet they have more talent than the one who does win it."

There will be one other lasting legacy of the new superlicence system too: F1's new minimum-age requirement means that Verstappen, at 17, should hold on to his record as the youngest driver to start a race, as no-one will be allowed to beat his milestone. ❧

THE POINTS TABLE

Championship position	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th
Future FIA F2 Championship	60	50	40	30	20	10	8	6	4	3
GP2 Series	50	40	30	20	10	8	6	4	3	2
FIA F3 European Championship	40	30	20	10	8	6	4	3	2	1
FIA WEC (LMP1 only)	40	30	20	10	8	6	4	3	2	1
IndyCar	40	30	20	10	8	6	4	3	2	1
GP3 Series	30	20	15	10	7	5	3	2	1	0
Formula Renault 3.5	30	20	15	10	7	5	3	2	1	0
Japanese Super Formula	20	7	10	7	5	3	2	1	0	0
National F4 championships (FIA)	10	7	5	2	1	0	0	0	0	0
National F3 championships	10	7	5	2	1	0	0	0	0	0
Formula Renault (EuroCup, ALPS, NEC)	5	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Tight test promises close Daytona 24 Hours

With the top cars separated by just a few tenths in the 'Roar Before the 24' pre-event test, this year's running of the race could be a classic. By **JEREMY SHAW**



24

Six different cars topped at least one of the eight sessions, while the fastest six overall included representatives of five different chassis manufacturers during the three-day 'Roar Before the 24' test ahead of the Daytona 24 Hours. With just over three tenths covering the top six overall, the prospects for the 53rd running of the famous endurance race are encouraging.

Much discussion focused on the Adjustment of Performance parameters, which, according to IMSA officials, may be tweaked

slightly as a result of intense scrutiny of the lap times set during the test, as well as a wind-tunnel analysis that will be held later this week. Surprisingly, the general consensus suggested that not much needed to be changed.

"We were told that anybody [found to be] sandbagging was going to be severely dealt with," said Wayne Taylor, whose eponymous team posted the fastest time of the Daytona test when his younger son Jordan Taylor set a time of 1m39.181s in cool conditions on Saturday morning aboard the

Dallara-Chevrolet Corvette DP. "So went as fast as we could."

Taylor Sr's sentiments were echoed by leaders of the other leading prototype teams.

"I can't speculate on the other teams but with us, what you see is what you get," said Iain Watt, technical director of reigning champion team Action Express Racing, for which Sebastien Bourdais posted a best lap of 1m39.310s, second fastest overall, on Saturday evening in the #5 Coyote-Chevrolet Corvette DP.

The Honda-engined Ligier JSP2 ran in the hands of Michael Shank Racing for the first time and was fast. Oswaldo Negri Jr and AJ Allmendinger were regularly among the fastest contenders in the French-built coupe they will share with John Pew and Matt McMurry.

Chip Ganassi Racing's pair of Ford EcoBoost turbo-powered Riley DPs also showed good speed. Kiwi Scott Dixon was fastest of all in the opening session on Friday at 1m39.406s in the #02 car he will share with fellow IndyCar star Tony Kanaan and NASCAR standard bearers Kyle Larson and Jamie McMurray.

Joey Hand, who won the race in 2011 for Ganassi and has been



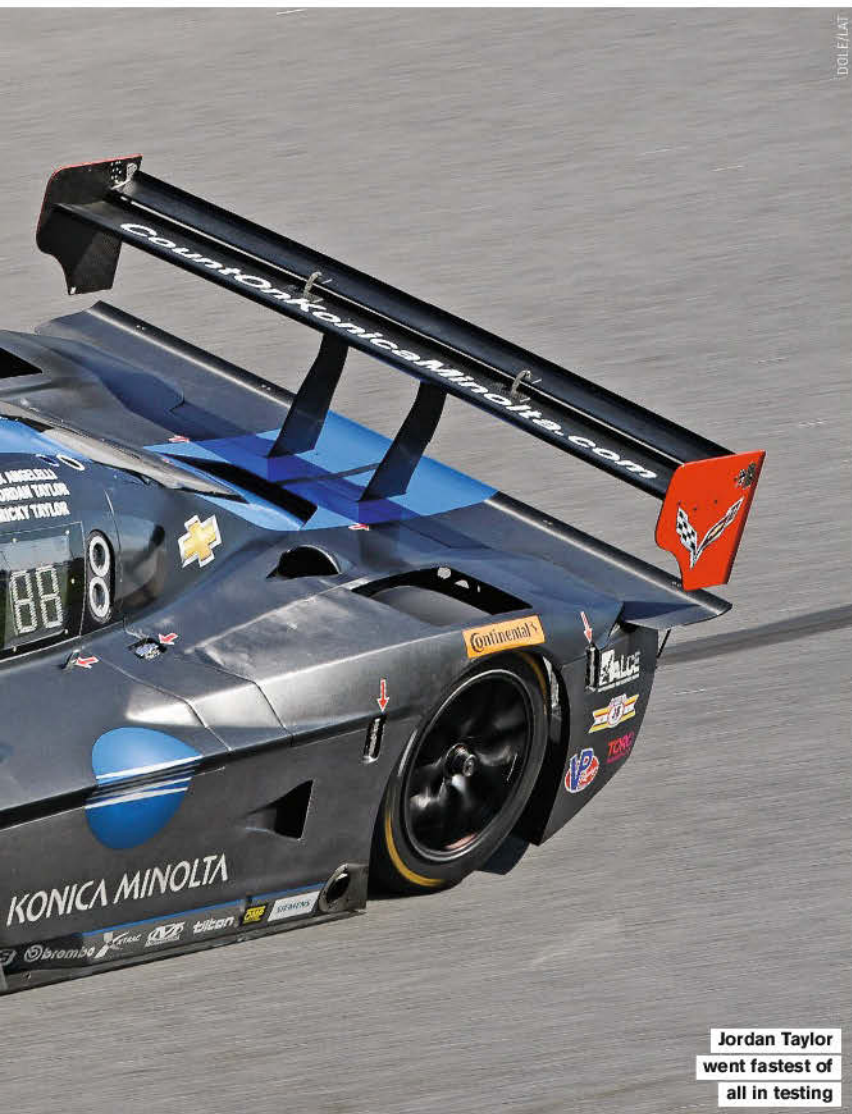
Watt: Action Express is not holding back

selected as the season-long partner for five-time series champion Scott Pruett, topped the times on Friday afternoon, a hair quicker at 1m39.397s. Interestingly, neither car came within a half-second of those lap times thereafter as the team concentrated on race preparations, but both are sure to be in the mix.

After Jordan Taylor set the pace on Saturday morning in the car he will share with brother Ricky and Italian veteran Max Angelelli, Allmendinger narrowly headed the times in the next session. Action Express, remarkably, became the fifth different session topper a little later on Saturday afternoon. Bourdais and



Low-downforce set-up boosted DeltaWing's times



Jordan Taylor went fastest of all in testing



PORSCHE ON TOP IN GTLM

While the prototype ranks will grab the headlines, the competition will be no less intense among Aston Martin, BMW, Chevrolet, Ferrari and Porsche in GT Le Mans.

Porsche's newest factory driver, Supercup champion Earl Bamber, set the class's fastest time of all on Saturday afternoon in the 911 RSR he will share with Jorg Bergmeister and Frederic Makowiecki. Briton Nick Tandy will be aboard the sister car with Frenchman Patrick Pilet and German Marc Lieb.

Perhaps the lone Aston Martin Vantage GTE of Darren Turner, Pedro Lamy, Mathias Lauda and Paul Dalla Lana has the most potential, but the two factory Corvette C7.Rs of Jan Magnussen/Antonio Garcia/Ryan Briscoe and

Oliver Gavin/Tommy Milner/Simon Pagnaud have a point to prove following a disappointing end to the car's debut campaign in 2014.

The Ferrari challenge during the 'Roar' test was blunted when non-pro Francois Perrodo crashed the AF Corse 458 Italia he is to share with Toni Vilander and Emmanuel Collard, but Pierre Kaffer and Davide Rigon upheld Italian honour aboard Giuseppe Risi's Ferrari of Houston entry and will be joined by Giancarlo Fisichella come race weekend. BMW Team RLL fielded a pair of new Z4 GTEs for an all-star line-up of John Edwards/Lucas Luhr/Jens Klingmann/Graham Rahal and Bill Auberlen/Dirk Werner/Augusto Farfus/Bruno Spengler, but continued to lag by just a crucial few tenths.

CORE Autosport once again emerged fastest of the eight Prototype Challenge contenders, while the two Riley Motorsports Dodge Viper SRTs were comfortably quicker than the phalanx of Porsches, Ferraris and Audis in GT Daytona.



GT LE MANS FASTEST TIMES

1 Earl Bamber	CORE Porsche 911 RSR	1m44.316s
2 Pedro Lamy	Aston Martin Vantage GTE	+0.098s
3 Nick Tandy	CORE Porsche 911 RSR	+0.170s
4 Jan Magnussen	Corvette Racing Chevrolet Corvette C7.R	+0.184s



reigning United SportsCar champions Joao Barbosa and Christian Fittipaldi all ran well in its Coyote-Chevrolet Corvette DP. But the team did express some concern about the all-new Chevrolet electronics package, which included a new paddle-shift system.

The rival Spirit of Daytona team of Richard Westbrook, Michael Valiante and Mike Rockenfeller failed to get to grips with the new system, especially the traction-control element, on its similar Coyote-Chevrolet Corvette DP.

The DeltaWing DWC13 also was fast, especially after switching to a low-downforce aerodynamic package

following problems on Friday. Katherine Legge turned the car's fastest lap on Saturday morning, while Indy Lights champion Gabby Chaves and newly recruited three-time Daytona 24 winner Memo Rojas also set some quick times – and especially good speed-trap figures – before Rojas crashed on Saturday.

A second new Ligier JSP2, using Judd/BMW power, and in which Alex Brundle and Olivier Pla will join Krohn Racing regulars Tracy Krohn and Nic Jonsson, lacked a little speed and could benefit from a technical adjustment prior to the race.

But Peter Baron's Starworks Motorsport Dinan/BMW-powered

Riley wasn't too far off the pace, especially in the capable hands of defending Indy 500 champion Ryan Hunter-Reay and Formula 1 veteran Rubens Barrichello, who comfortably eclipsed the other few contenders that ventured out in drying conditions on Sunday afternoon.

After such a close spread of times

in testing, the Daytona 24 Hours seems set to provide another intriguing contest.

"I think [the technical officials have] done a good job," said Wayne Taylor, "and it shows on the lap times with how close everyone is. There's nobody who you can say really has an advantage." ❧

PROTOTYPE FASTEST TIMES

1 Jordan Taylor	Wayne Taylor Dallara-Chevrolet Corvette DP	1m39.181s
2 Sebastien Bourdais	Action Express Coyote-Chevrolet Corvette DP	+0.129s
3 Oswaldo Negri Jr	Michael Shank Ligier-Honda JSP2	+0.161s
4 Joey Hand	Chip Ganassi Riley-Ford DP	+0.216s
5 Scott Dixon	Chip Ganassi Riley-Ford DP	+0.225s
6 Katherine Legge	DeltaWing-Elan/Mazda DWC13	+0.303s

5 days on the Dakar

With unrivalled access to the team during the first week, **JAMES BOLTON** reports on the highs and lows of Peugeot's return to the famous event



T

he Dakar Rally is one of the most gruelling sporting events on earth. It's taking place right now in South America and is due to finish in Argentina on Saturday (17th).

Peugeot returned to the marathon race this year, and AUTOSPORT was a part of the French manufacturer's team

through the opening week as the all-new 2008 DKR desert fighter made its debut.

The car is driven by the rear wheels only and is powered by a three-litre turbodiesel engine. Shunning four-wheel drive is an unusual decision, but the team is developing the car on this year's event and is intent on winning the Dakar within the next three years.

The 2008 DKR was only completed at the end of last year, and so the challenge faced by drivers Stephane Peterhansel, Carlos Sainz and Cyril Despres was heightened as they lacked familiarity with the machine.

But before the event proper started, the first hurdle to clear was to pass scrutineering.

DAY 1 FRIDAY JANUARY 2 SCRUTINEERING, BUENOS AIRES

Getting the 414 vehicles that will compete on the 2015 Dakar through scrutineering is a three-day effort. The cars, motorbikes, quadbikes and trucks converge on the Tecnopolis exhibition centre in the heart of Buenos Aires.

On Friday the three Peugeot 2008 DKRs arrive in turn. It's a significant moment, marking the first time Peugeot has entered a major international motorsport event since it quit sportscar racing before the start of the 2012 season. Since then Peugeot has taken the Pikes Peak Hill Climb record with multiple World Rally champion Sebastien Loeb. The Frenchman's drive up the famous Colorado mountain in 2013 was blistering, but the 14-day Dakar Rally couldn't be



One of the 2008 DKRs goes through the scrutineering motions

“To win Dakar you have to have no problems, good logistics and you need luck all the time” PEUGEOT'S BRUNO FAMIN

more different.

In the evening we travel with the 70-strong team to the Peugeot Lounge in downtown Buenos Aires. The bar is the venue for a final opportunity for the press to speak to the drivers and team personnel before the rally begins.

The Dakar is gruelling like no other event. Mechanics routinely struggle to sleep for more than three hours a night as they work on the cars.



All smiles among drivers and team before the start

“The Dakar is one of the most difficult events to finish in the world,” says team principal Bruno Famin. “It is a human adventure. To win Dakar you have to have no problems, good logistics and you need luck all the time.”

“It's been an incredible journey to get here. We know that we will have problems during the race, but we are at a good level technically. The team worked a lot in the last weeks. We don't only have three cars ready, but three very good, very well-finished cars.”

Yet with the rally approaching there is still a question mark over the performance of the French machines. “Yeah, it's a problem,” agrees Famin. “We would have preferred double the number of kilometres in testing. But a test is only a test; you always have new problems in a race.”

Two-time World Rally champion and 2010 Dakar winner Carlos Sainz is relaxed as he is surrounded by a throng of Spanish journalists.

“I think it's great news these days that a manufacturer is going back to competition,” says Sainz, 52. “This is not a simple thing, and this is a great challenge. We will do our best.”



The ceremonial start takes place in front of Casa Rosada palace

DAY 2 SATURDAY JANUARY 3 CEREMONIAL START, BUENOS AIRES

It's a short drive from Tecnopolis to the city centre, where the start ramp is placed in front of the Casa Rosada, the Argentinian president's palace. Thousands of fans cheer the crews, with strong representation from most of Europe.

Yet the drivers' minds are occupied by the challenge ahead. Five-time car-class winner Peterhansel is refreshingly honest when he discusses his chances of winning: “It's not a fight between Carlos and me. We need to fight with the other competitors and work with Carlos to



Drivers must fix cars themselves after a marathon stage

MARATHON STAGES

While common in the motorbike section of the Dakar Rally, marathon stages haven't been included in the car class since the event moved to South America in 2009.

A marathon stage is the ultimate expression of the Dakar. The drivers halt overnight away from their mechanics – and away from the bivouac.

The one marathon stage of this year's Dakar ran on Saturday. It followed the usual Dakar format of a road section, a timed special stage, and a final road section. The opening road section was 243 miles, during which the crews crossed the Andes and went from Chile into Bolivia. The special stage was 199 miles and then there was a very short 2.5 mile cruise to the end of the day's mileage in Uyuni.

Once there, they had to service the car entirely by themselves. "The drivers have spent a lot of time learning how the car fits together," says Peugeot Sport director Bruno Famin. "They have to know the mechanical detail of the car so they are prepared to fix anything that needs to be done. Everything they will need has to be carried in the car, and we have tents from a French sports shop called Decathlon... It adds to the challenge of Dakar."

Meanwhile the mechanics had a bonus rest day. On Sunday the cars went back to the bivouac at Iquique in Chile.



Welcome sustenance comes from anywhere it can be found

develop the car. The main problem is not the performance, it's more the durability. I think with the performance it's feeling good, but we don't know if we are fast or not. The team has great tradition, but [the car] is completely new; they have wide eyes because this is the Dakar."

DAY 3 SUNDAY JANUARY 4 STAGE ONE: BUENOS AIRES-VILLA CARLOS PAZ, 517.6 MILES

The first stage of the 2015 Dakar Rally starts at 0742 with an 80.8-mile road section. Locals line the route to a rallycross track on the outskirts of Rosario. The atmosphere is electric, and echoes ▶



The monstrous 2008 DKR has caused quite a stir on its debut



► the village area of Le Mans. The temperature reaches 30C in the dry and dusty landscape, but beer tents keep the fans 'hydrated'. The crews are happy to wander through the crowd in search of a loo as they await the start. At 0750 the 105.6-mile special stage, the timed section of the day, begins.

Helicopters rattle overhead as the top drivers thread around the tight opening corners, before they disappear from view.

The next time the Peugeot team sees its cars is at 1800 when they've completed the special stage and the 322.49-mile road section to the bivouac.

Sainz is eighth, and says he's happy: "We were able to judge our pace and it was good even though today's stage was not suited to two-wheel-drive cars."

The Spaniard is 1m44s behind rally leader and Mini driver Orlando Terranova. Peterhansel is 10th and Despres 33rd.

The pride everyone in the team feels at reaching the end of the first day diminishes as news filters through of a brain injury to motorcycle rider Humphrey Sennvanbasel.

For hours on end competitors return to the bivouac one by one. This is the beating heart of



James Bolton downloads Peugeot team boss Bruno Famin



The Peugeot team works long into the night to ready cars

the Dakar. The rally covers hundreds of miles each day and the goal of each competitor is to make it to the next bivouac.

There are two identical versions of this giant campsite and they leapfrog each other along the route. While one set of tents and mobile homes is being used by the 3000 organisers and team members, the other is on the road or being erected.

The teams have heavy-duty lorries that drive their equipment to each bivouac, and the schedule is punishing. The team arrives about three hours before the first car. They set up the

awnings and prepare tyres and fuel. The cars arrive any time between 1700 and 2300 and as soon as they park the mechanics pounce.

"They change nearly everything," says Famin. "All the filters are changed, the sand is removed from all over the car. They change the set-up based on the comments from the drivers."

Often the mechanics will work all night. Not that they're missing out on much sleep – getting proper rest in the bivouac isn't easy. The temperature drops to 20C during the night, still enough to keep the tent uncomfortably hot.



Bikers can get caught by cars...

CAR VERSUS MOTORCYCLE

On some legs of the Dakar Rally the cars and motorbikes run different special stages. Or the two groups may split off and rejoin a hundred miles later during the stage.

They always end up at the same bivouac, but this flexible format allows the organisers to tailor the route to offer specific challenges to bike and car competitors.

The bikes always start the day first, usually as early as 0500. But with such long days, where 600 miles may be completed, it's frequently the case that cars will catch bikes in the stage. To make this scenario safer, car competitors are able to warn motorbike riders that they are approaching by using clever Global Positioning System technology.

"The navigator in the car pushes a button and it makes a big sound from a microphone mounted on the front of the bike," says KTM motorcycle rider Jurgen van den Goorbergh. "It's a triple beep and we always hear it. They



... but technology helps let the rider know the car's there

can make the beep go off when they're 250 metres behind us but the cars approach so fast. And with our dust we can hardly see them. But it's the best system we have and usually it works."

The fear is communicating to the approaching car just how and where the rider intends to let it through. It's as much of a challenge as lapping a GT car at the wheel of an LMP1 during the night at Le Mans.

DAY 5 TUESDAY JANUARY 6 STAGE THREE: SAN JUAN-CHILECITO, 337.8 MILES

The alarm goes off at 0430 as the punishing Dakar schedule takes hold. Rather than follow the Peugeot trucks to the next bivouac, 311.6 miles north in Chilecito, we opt to stop half way and watch some of the rally's third stage.

Less than three miles from the bivouac a quadbiker rider's Dakar comes to an end when he collides with a car on the road section. The accident happens just metres from our pick-up truck, and the rider's leg is broken.

The perils of the Dakar are well known. Yet competitors cannot know when danger will rear its head. From leaving one bivouac at the crack of dawn until arriving at the next as night falls, being alert is essential. Whether it's a car in a road section or a hidden crater on the apex of a corner, the drivers and riders must maintain their focus. That's the challenge they face. Later that day motorcycle rider Michal Hernik, 39, loses his



The crew awaits the car driven by Cyril Despres



Facts and figures for all four classes tell the story of the rally



Quad-biker dents only pride this time

“With GPS you can track the car, but today was difficult, there was no information. Disaster” BRUNO FAMIN

There's the constant rattle of air guns, and then the bikes prepare to leave from 0500.

Most mornings the team is up at 0500, if it went to bed at all. They strip the awnings, pack them into the huge all-terrain lorries and set off to the next bivouac. Usually the cars and drivers are simply left on their own awaiting the start.

DAY 4 MONDAY JANUARY 5 STAGE TWO: VILLA CARLOS PAZ-SAN JUAN, 389.5 MILES

The crews have no idea of the route they will take until they are handed the road book at 1800 each evening. The drivers are given a briefing at 2100 and some of this is intricately detailed. “From kilometre 198 it is rocky for 10km,” the organiser's head of competitions, Xavier Gavory, tells the assembled co-drivers. “And at kilometre 209 it is very bendy, you'll need a lot of tricks...”

It continues for half an hour and then, for the drivers in the larger teams, it's time for bed. For those in the smaller teams it's likely that they will be up much of the night poring over their cars to be ready for the following day's stage.

For the Peugeot crews, this night's sleep is

particularly sweet. The second day of the rally includes the longest stage of all, at 322.8 miles. It ends in the west of Argentina, at San Juan, and to get there the drivers cross the dry, dusty and hot Argentinian Pampas. The cockpit temperature of the 2008 DKRs reaches 55C, and there is no air conditioning. All three drivers suffer dehydration. With the air temperature reaching 45C, it's the hottest stage in a Dakar since the event moved to South America in 2009.

The day has an added horror for Sainz. A collision with 45-year-old motorcycle rider Laurent Moulin was a shock. While the bikes start the stages around two hours before the cars, if one has to stop then the cars can catch up. Overtaking, with the dust billowing from the rear of the bike, is perilous. Sainz stops for six minutes to help the rider, but is credited the time back and moves to seventh overall.

Meanwhile, Peterhansel loses time when he strikes a tree stump that's obscured by the dust of another competitor. The impact snaps a steering arm, and then he struggles to get the car restarted, losing an hour as a result. Despres fares better, and moves up to 24th.

life on the stage. The exact circumstances of the Pole's death are as yet unknown.

After driving over rocks and clumps of dry desert foliage for an hour we reach the stage. The Peugeot look like they belong on Mars. The effect is amplified by the hot wind and the plumes of dust that billow from the cars. The speed is a shock at first; the traction impressive. The 2008 DKRs have a longer suspension travel than the four-wheel-drive cars and as a result they roll fiercely through the bends. But the trajectory doesn't waver.

Later, at the bivouac, Sainz says he is enjoying driving the 2008 DKR. “I was able to find a good rhythm in the car,” he says. “I enjoyed it and we're still in a good position.”

Despite the intense heat he ends the day fourth in the standings, while Peterhansel is seventh fastest and climbs to 16th overall. Despres continues to learn his new craft, and drops around 5.5s per mile to Sainz to sit 20th overall.

Discussing the various accidents on the rally, Famin says it's part of the challenge of the Dakar. “What makes these incidents harder is that often the team has no idea what is happening,” he says. “I ride in the assistance car, I'm moving with the team. When you get GPS you can track the car, but today was difficult, there was no information at all. The internet was not working properly, there was no phone. Disaster.”

As we leave the team to continue the epic adventure that is the Dakar, Famin is upbeat. “The three crews are here after the most difficult stages of the rally,” he said. “There is no major problem on the car. Small problems maybe, but these are more to do with the race rather than technical problems. We have to keep going to build more experience. For now the pace is not an issue, I don't worry about it.”

His relaxed demeanour changes in stage five when Sainz crashes his 2008 DKR. Chasing a quad, he hits an unsighted rock in the dust and rolls five times. Sainz and co-driver Lucas Cruz are uninjured but the car's going no further.

The experience of this year will make the Peugeot Sport package an ever-stronger prospect. Maybe the team's rivals will be worrying about the 2008 DKRs pace a year from now. ☘



Sainz's rally is over after a barrel roll during stage five



"Racing is my passion and my life"

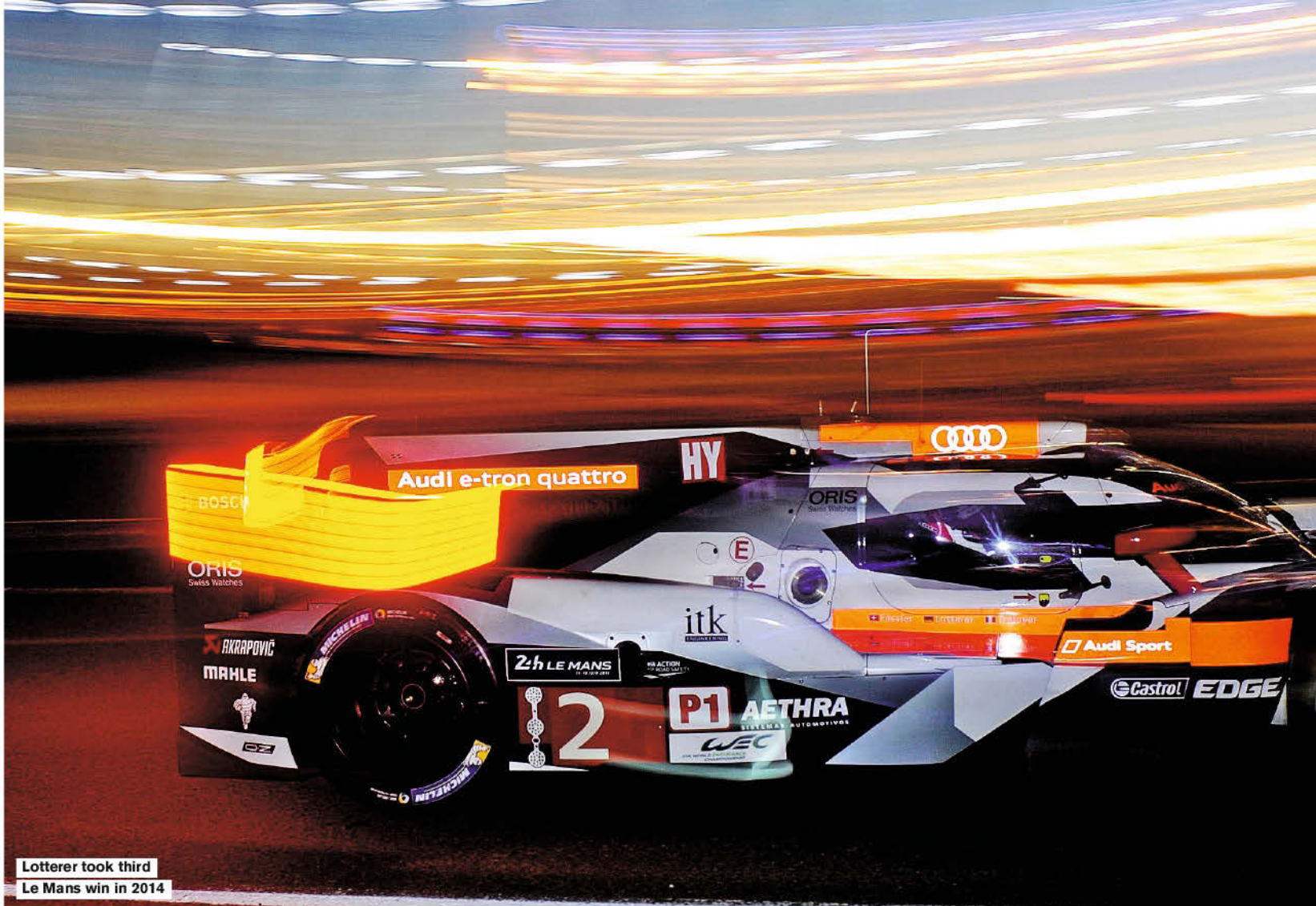
Audi's superstar is a three-time Le Mans winner and still races in Japan.

GARY WATKINS finds out how he does it, and why he doesn't really need F1

Andre Lotterer looks like a man comfortable in his own skin. Happy enough to tick the Formula 1 box at Spa last year, say thank you very much and go back to his successful dual career racing for Audi in the World Endurance Championship and for TOM'S in Super Formula in Japan. And that contentment might go some way to explaining why he has been consistently rated among the world's best sportscar drivers almost since the day he joined the German manufacturer back in 2010.

The multiple Le Mans 24 Hours winner and 2012 World Endurance champion is totally in love with motor racing and entirely fulfilled by the position he's reached in his career. And it shines through every time he climbs behind the wheel of a racing car, whether it's the Audi R18 e-tron quattro or his Super Formula Dallara-Toyota SF14. Or for that matter a Caterham-Renault CT05, an Audi R8 LMS ultra or even an historic Audi Coupe Group 2 touring car built by the team for which his late father, Henri, worked more than 30 years ago.

"You get the feeling that he gets so much pure joy out of driving," says Ralf Juttner, who as technical director and now managing



Lotterer took third
Le Mans win in 2014

► director of Audi Sport Team Joest Racing has overseen Lotterer's Audi career. "I think that is a big part of his success.

"After the race at Interlagos [the WEC finale in November], we had a party and we were chatting over a couple of caipirinhas. He started raving about driving the car. He was explaining what he was doing in the car with a child-like enthusiasm. He's so happy with what he does that it makes it easy to perform and to use his undoubted talents to the maximum every time he's in the cockpit."

Lotterer describes motorsport as his "passion and his life". It may sound like a cliché, but with him you really believe it. He loves doing it and he loves talking about it. Mention to him that you

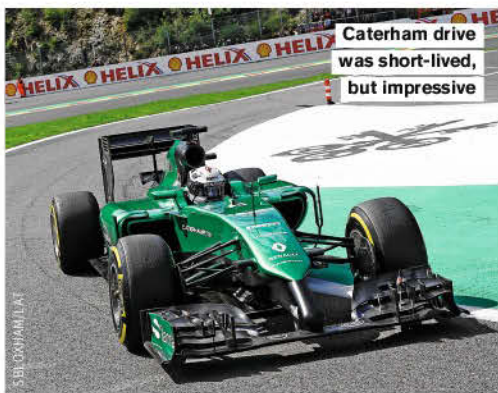
love this track or have always wanted to visit that track, and the conversation will be followed by an email with some on-board footage of him at that circuit. He's an avid AUTOSPORT reader and was chuffed to bits to be named in the magazine's *Top 50 Drivers who never raced in F1* story in the summer of 2013 – and equally thrilled to put that right when he made his one-off appearance with Caterham at the 2014 Belgian Grand Prix after a late call from team 'advisor' Colin Kolles.

Lotterer admits that he was "ticking a box" when he accepted the offer to race for Caterham at Spa last August. And it wasn't as straightforward as it might have looked. Audi gave him permission to do the race, but TOM'S in Japan didn't want him



Formula 1 offer was irresistible, but one race was enough

"You get the feeling that he gets so much pure joy out of driving. I think that is a big part of his success. It makes it easy for him to use his talents" RALF JUTTNER, AUDI



Caterham drive was short-lived, but impressive

to miss the clashing Motegi Super Formula round. "TOM'S wasn't happy, but I kind of took the decision myself," he explains. "It was something I wanted to do, because I knew that at my age [he was 33 at the time] that kind of chance wasn't going to come around again. It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that I couldn't refuse."

Not that Lotterer had any thoughts about trying to build on his belated F1 debut 12 years on from a stint as Jaguar test driver and seek a full-time ride.

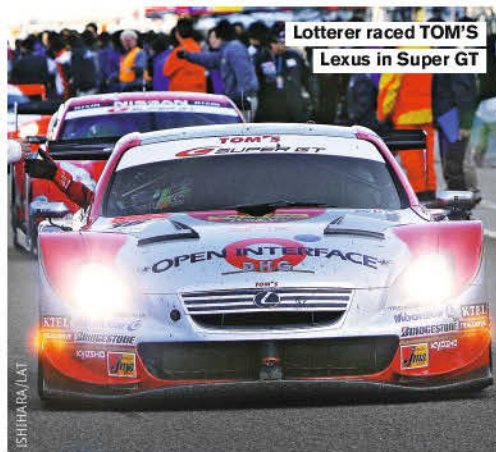
"I have a great thing with Audi and also get the chance to race formula cars in Japan," he says. "I'm really happy where I am, so I wasn't going to give that up for F1, and there probably isn't a drive out there for me anyway."

And nor did he want "to be the guy driving around at the back". That, and the fact that Roberto Merhi would have done Free Practice 1, explains why he didn't remain with Caterham for Monza (which Audi would have been happy with) and why he didn't even contemplate doing the F1 finale in Abu Dhabi (which Audi probably wouldn't have been so keen on) when Caterham came calling for a second time.

"The whole F1 thing would have lost its effect if I'd done more races and been stuck at the back of the grid," he says. "A one-off was the best thing for me: Audi was happy with it and I gained a lot of respect in what I achieved [in outqualifying team-mate Marcus Ericsson]. I've always targeted



First Japanese title came in GT in 2006



Lotterer raced TOM'S Lexus in Super GT

ANDRE LOTTERER ON...

The multi-talented racer muses on times past, present and future



THE FORMULA 1 CHANCES THAT SLIPPED AWAY

"I had quite a few opportunities that could have taken me to F1. I could have been backed by BMW and remember being so nervous on the phone with Gerhard Berger [BMW Motorsport boss at the time] at the age of 17. I wasn't sure where it would lead and thought I might end up in GT racing or something. I had the opportunity to stay with Red Bull [who sponsored his maiden Formula 3 season in 2000 in Germany], but I decided to go with Jaguar [to race in British F3]. It was a bit early for Red Bull and no one knew what their plans were. The Jaguar route was the most straightforward, but a new wind came through the team when Niki Lauda replaced Bobby Rahal as team boss and he was more in favour of Antonio Pizzonia."



RACING IN JAPAN

"The racing out there is so pure. It is all about performance, not so much about politics. You have a tyre war and do a lot of development in Super GT and you can drive a formula car at amazing circuits. Japan has some of the best racing in the world."



GROWING UP INVOLVED IN RACING

"We moved to Germany when RAS was set up and my dad, being the main man, could bring my mum and me to events. I basically grew up at the races and hanging about in the workshop. My first memory is my dad coming home with a rally car and driving me to kindergarten in it. It was a Porsche 911 SC RS rallied by Robert Droogmans in Belga colours. It was probably 1984, when I was four."



2006 Motegi win was first of many with TOM'S in FNippon

racing in series where I can win — it's winning and being competitive that satisfies me."

That same ethos explains why Lotterer was happy to ply his trade almost exclusively in Japan between 2003 and 2009 after his deal with Jaguar Racing came to an end.

"I was really happy racing in both categories [Formula Nippon, the forerunner of Super Formula, and Super GT]," explains Lotterer, who won the GT title in 2006 and '09 and Nippon in '11. "I did have opportunities to do something else in Europe, but it was never something great. In the back of my mind, I had decided that it had to be something really big to persuade me to leave Japan."

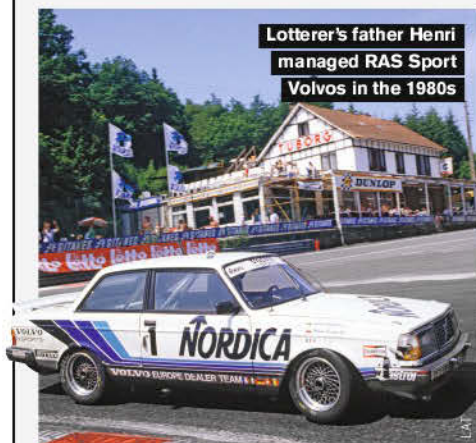
He tested DTM machinery for both Opel and Mercedes early on after leaving Europe and for Audi as late as 2007, but wasn't convinced to give up on Japan for the German-based series.

"I could probably have done DTM with any of the three manufacturers, but I didn't find it particularly attractive and nor did I think it was the right thing to do. I didn't feel I had to be back in Europe to be in the spotlight."

Le Mans was always on Lotterer's radar, but it remained a distant bleep on the screen for much of his time in Japan.

"I looked around, but teams always needed me to bring budget and I never really wanted to do it unless I was in a decent car. I always looked up ▶

ANDRE LOTTERER ON...



Lotterer's father Henri managed RAS Sport Volvos in the 1980s

STARTING RACING

"All I remember as a kid was wanting to be a racing driver, not an engineer like my father. I wanted to have a go at karting and my father, coming from the world of racing, had the vision to turn me into a racing driver. I always wanted to win and put pressure on myself, so I felt sick and couldn't eat before the races. My mother provided the balance. I think if she had been as pushy as my father, I would have thrown the towel in."



THE PARTNERSHIP WITH BENOIT TRELUYER AND MARCEL FASSLER

"Our relationship is one of our big strengths. If something doesn't go right, we are there for each other. I don't have the feeling that I have to be quicker than them, and they don't feel they have to be quicker than me. We enjoy what we do and we have a good laugh. I couldn't imagine being with anyone else, but they are five years older than me, so I guess one day there will have to be a change."



FINALLY REACHING F1

"I had nothing to lose really, but I did feel pressure. I felt like I had the weight of the WEC grid on my back; a lot of people think that F1 has all the best drivers and the rest of us are nothing. I wanted to show that they are wrong. I was there to fulfil a dream, but I wanted to do well. Colin [Kolles] didn't bring me in just so I could go and have some fun. When I got there I realised that taking part in a grand prix without testing the car was the biggest challenge I've ever faced."



Privateer Audi drive in 2009 opened doors

► to Tom Kristensen [another alumnus of the Japanese racing scene] and what he has achieved with Audi, but it seemed so far away that I thought it would be impossible to reach." The perfect opportunity to showcase his talents in front of the German manufacturer finally came during his seventh season in Japan. Kolles was running a pair of ex-works Audi R10 TDIs at the 2009 24 Hours, but he too required funds. Lotterer was happy to go out and find the money, and even top up his budget with some family funds, because he knew it was a gilt-edged chance.

"I'd spoken to Colin at the start of the season and he told me that I needed a certain amount of money," recalls Lotterer. "I've been paid to race since I was 18 and thought, 'Do I really want to start bringing money?' But then I said to myself that it really was a great opportunity."

"I had a friend who sponsored me with a small amount, but we got confused with the exchange rate between euros and dollars, so we were 15 per cent short. We had to top it up with some money from my uncle's company. It's the only time I have paid to drive since I was a kid, but I guess I hit the jackpot."

Lotterer clicked with LMP1 and the Circuit de la Sarthe straight away, and reckons that the years spent racing in Japan were the perfect preparation for the move to the pinnacle of sportscar racing.

"Japan is the best school for this kind of racing," he explains. "You are driving some really quick cars out there: Nippon or Super Formula is all about pure driving and in Super GT you learn how to handle traffic because there are two classes. That



Lotterer still wins in Super Formula in Japan with TOM'S

meant I wasn't really shocked when I went to Le Mans for the first time. It wasn't such a steep learning curve: I had all the ingredients; I just had to learn how to put everything together."

Lotterer ended up seventh on his Le Mans debut as part of a duo with Charles Zwolsman Jr after team-mate Narain Karthikeyan, who was due to start the race, famously dislocated his shoulder after falling from the pitwall as he left the grid to go and relieve himself.

"That definitely put more focus on us," he recalls. "Everyone was asking who were the kids in their first Le Mans doing quadruple stints with little rest in between."

"It added value to what I achieved, but at the same time I was able to do some really good lap times during the night. Maybe Narain hurtingting himself was part of my destiny."



Memorable first Le Mans win was a close call in 2011



Fassler, Lotterer and Treluyer: "we are there for each other"

The Le Mans performance led to a short programme with Audi based around Le Mans in 2010 without any kind of evaluation test. "I'd tested the DTM car in 2007, so they knew all about me," he says. His first season with Audi, while he continued racing both single-seaters and GTs in Japan, didn't give an obvious indication of the successes that were to follow. He made mistakes in each of the three races he contested (the Spa 1000Km, Le Mans and Petit Le Mans at Road Atlanta) at the wheel of the R15+ TDI, most

him that there were no clashes with Super Formula and explained that from a personal and sporting perspective it would be a benefit for me to continue racing in Japan. He is a very human person and understood that it would work for everyone, and it has been like that ever since."

Lotterer added further Le Mans triumphs to his CV in his world championship-winning season in 2012 and again last season, but it is the first that remains his favourite.

"It's hard to pick one out, but 2011 was special

The importance he attaches to Le Mans is why you don't see him out in an Audi R8 at the Nurburgring 24 Hours, whereas he is happy and keen to race his employer's GT3 machine in the Spa 24 Hours later in the summer.

"Audi has asked me, but if I do it, I want to do it properly, not just as something on the side," explains Lotterer, who has done the race without aspirations of victory aboard a Lexus. "The two months before Le Mans are very important to me; I am very strict on how I handle my free time and

"The two months before Le Mans are important; I'm strict on how I handle my time. It's so important to me; I don't want to use energy for other things" ANDRE LOTTERER

famously spinning and damaging the car on the formation lap in Belgium.

"I remember sitting in the office of Dr Wolfgang Ullrich [head of Audi Sport] at the end of the season without much confidence," says Lotterer. "He told me that they were not going to judge me on what happened in the races because I hadn't made any mistakes in testing. When the R18 came out for the following year, I felt comfortable and confident straight away. Spa went well, and I thought, 'Now I am ready.'"

A first Le Mans triumph together with Benoit Treluyer and Marcel Fassler in 2011 was followed by a full-time ride with Audi on the advent of the new WEC the following season, but Lotterer wasn't ready to give up racing in Japan.

"I spent a month preparing to leave. I thought it wasn't going to work, because I would miss it too much," recalls Lotterer. "I called Dr Ullrich and told

because it was my first and the battle with Peugeot was so intense. At the last pitstop we were six seconds apart and the final margin was 13s. It was drizzling and keeping it together in those conditions was mentally very tough.

"At one point, I was leading, but I thought I was second. The number on the pitboard was getting bigger, so I believed I was losing time to the Peugeot. I was taking some amazing risks out there because I thought I was in the process of losing the race."

Le Mans is the highlight of Lotterer's season. He still views it as a bigger prize than the WEC crown, which is why he regards 2014 as a successful season despite Audi's failure to win any world championship titles.

"Le Mans is still the place where you make history," he says, "but the good thing about our championship is there are two parts to the cake."

do my training. Le Mans is so important to me that I don't want to use energy for other things.

"Spa is a race close to my heart because I grew up with that event with my father [who ran the RAS Sport team famous for masterminding Volvo's European Touring Car campaigns in the 1980s]. I love driving different cars and proving my versatility, and doing Spa gives me that."

That probably explains why Lotterer is such a content individual. He gets to drive and win aboard two distinct types of racing car that are, he says, "both more fun to drive than F1". He points out that he braked later in his R18 than the Caterham and describes the current breed of Super Formula one-make racers as "big Formula 3 cars".

"I'm really happy with what I have achieved and attach a lot of value to getting where I have," he says. "I don't think in any way that I haven't made it as a driver because I didn't really do F1." ❧

AN OVERLOOKED BRITISH TALENT

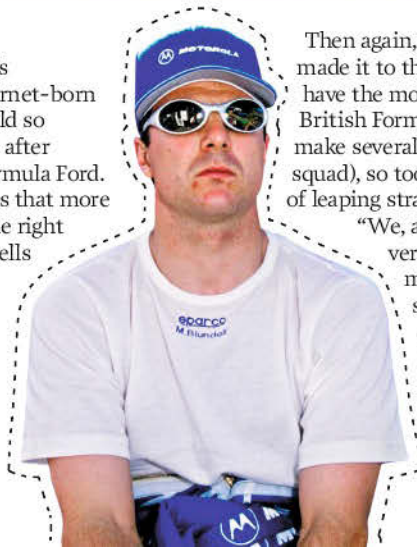
Mark Blundell isn't often mentioned when the British stars of the past 30 years are discussed.

EDD STRAW talks to a driver who tasted success on both sides of the Atlantic

Name the most successful British racing drivers of the past three decades. Nigel Mansell, Lewis Hamilton, Dario Franchitti, Damon Hill, Jenson Button, Martin Brundle, Dan Wheldon and Derek Warwick probably spring to mind. But one that might not is Mark Blundell. You can argue that, unlike those named, he never won an international championship, but his CV still includes victory in the Le Mans 24 Hours (backed up by podium finishes in two of sportscar racing's other blue-riband events, Sebring and Daytona), three Indycar wins at a time when CART was in its pomp and three

Formula 1 podium finishes.

By anyone's standards, that's impressive. Doubly so for a Barnet-born motocrosser whose career could so easily have sunk without trace after prodigious early success in Formula Ford. And yet, Blundell's career hints that more was possible had he been in the right place at the right moment. It tells a story that the four F1 teams he drove for – Brabham, Ligier, Tyrrell and McLaren – could have provided him with race-winning machinery had he been with them at a different time.



Then again, it was a surprise that Blundell made it to the top level at all. He didn't have the money to drive for a serious British Formula 3 outfit (although he did make several appearances for the TOM'S squad), so took the extraordinary gamble of leaping straight into F3000.

"We, and I say we because it was very much a collective decision-making process between myself, several family members and a couple of friends, didn't come from a motorsport family so

**"Village boy" done good:
Barnet's finest won in US**

Hockenheim '93
one of three
F1 podiums



Sensational race
in year-old F3000
car at Spa in '87



Ex-motocrosser was
instant success on
four wheels in FF1600

maybe looked at things a bit differently," says Blundell. "Even when we did FF1600, we could never get our heads around why everyone would turn up and do just one race when there were three races on that day, hence why I did a gazillion races and had a gazillion wins."

"After the success in FF2000, we didn't have the budget to go to Dick Bennetts or someone like that in F3, but we felt that I could drive a racing car. So the thinking was, what's to stop us going to the next step and learning the trade in a more powerful car and try to make an impression?"

The result was acquiring a year-old ex-works Lola equipped with a Ford Cosworth engine running mechanical fuel injection rather than the more advanced electronic set-up. Run initially under the Fletray Racing banner – effectively a family team – Blundell took an unexpected fifth second time out at Vallelunga. Then came Spa, where he made his mark internationally. In a race that started wet, but drying, he passed Andy

"We'd punched above our weight in F3000 and that got me a chance to go into world sportscars"

Wallace, Stefano Modena and Roberto Moreno to lead early on and, after being passed by Michel Trolle, regained the lead when the Frenchman pitted for slicks. Unfortunately, Maurizio Sandro Sala and Alfonso de Vinuesa had clashed and caused a red flag, meaning that Blundell finished second to Trolle on countback. Even so, it was a sensational performance.

"If it hadn't been for that accident, I would possibly have been the outright winner," says Blundell. "But we'd punched above our weight in a little car and it got me some opportunities – and it definitely got me a chance to go into

world sportscars with a major manufacturer and into the Williams F1 team as one of the first generation of test drivers."

Blundell stayed in F3000 for three seasons, finishing sixth overall for the works Lola team in 1988 with three podium finishes, then dovetailing his final campaign with Middlebridge for his Nissan Group C commitments. He credits the support of David Price, who had tried to run Blundell in F3, and Lola team boss Jean-Francois Mosnier for endorsing his credentials as a driver for the Lola-built Nissan project, and his outings in 1989 and '90 yielded pole at Le Mans (see ▶

Williams test stint gave taste of F1



► panel, right) and a best finish of second, behind a certain Michael Schumacher, in Mexico.

But F1 was the target. After testing regularly for Williams in 1990, Blundell accepted an offer to race for the Brabham team alongside Martin Brundle in '91. Hopes were high for the squad, then run by Price, but things didn't work out as planned. That season taught Blundell a valuable lesson.

"When you get an offer, and only a few years before you've been sitting in a little 1600cc car and F1 is the dream, you take it," says Blundell. "In hindsight it was the wrong decision. I did think it would offer me more, but I didn't really understand back in the day that, at that level, there were going to be budget constraints. You just thought F1 would be full of money."

Twice Blundell's retainer cheques bounced that season and Brabham struggled. The Yamaha-engined car was at its most competitive on high-speed circuits, but Blundell managed only five finishes, the best of them a point for sixth in the Belgian Grand Prix. It was Yamaha's first F1 point, but being given a motorbike in recognition of his achievement didn't make up for such a difficult season, even though he compared well to the experienced Brundle.

"I was invited back to Williams to test on two occasions," he says. "It gave me an insight into the mistake I'd made. I went round Imola some 2.2s quicker on race tyres than I did on qualifying tyres in the Brabham."

That informed Blundell's decision to step back from racing and test for McLaren in 1992. Aside from a one-off outing for Peugeot at Le Mans, sharing the winning 905 with Derek Warwick and Yannick Dalmas, it was a year of learning in support of race drivers Ayrton Senna and Gerhard Berger. As well as completing plenty of miles, that made him an obvious candidate to drive for Ligier in '93. The French squad had achieved little for the previous half-decade but, with

Only five finishes in '91, but first F1 point netted at Spa



the all-conquering Renault engine and a Williams gearbox, the potential was clearly there. A podium first time out at Kyalami, behind Alain Prost and Senna, underlined that. But while the French team showed flashes of form, it still disappointed.

"It was a good opportunity and again I was teamed up with one of my best buds in Martin Brundle," says Blundell. "He had an advantage because he had an education and he spoke French, so was one up on me already! But we had some good results, standing on the podium with the likes of Senna and Prost. There was a huge amount that could have been extracted, but in the background there was politics brewing up. Ligier was pretty much funded by the French government and they had two

British drivers behind the wheel..."

A second podium, at Hockenheim after a spectacular battle with Berger's Ferrari, was backed up by a fifth place in Brazil. But the team struggled to extract that maximum from the car, the potential of which was underlined by the 'Brundell Brothers' locking out the second row at Magny-Cours.

At the end of the year, both were out of a drive and, to nobody's surprise, when the blue equipe took to the track the following season it was with two French drivers, Olivier Panis and Eric Bernard. Blundell was hoping to stay on at Ligier but, although he was still in contention for the McLaren-Peugeot seat that eventually went to Brundle, Blundell opted to sign for Tyrrell.

While team-mate Ukyo Katayama caught the eye with some impressive qualifying performances, the heavier Blundell was the real force on Sundays, finishing third in Spain and picking up fifth places in Hungary and Belgium. But, once again, what was hoped to be a long-term deal ended after one year. Blundell, who was on a retainer with Tyrrell, was dropped to allow a funded driver to take his place.

He again opted to return to testing with McLaren, even though there was interest from what he described as a team that "wasn't capable of getting the job done". But then came a twist. After filling in for Nigel Mansell in the first two races of 1995, Blundell took the seat full-time after the former world champion walked away following just two outings.

"Back then, we were running off thousands and thousands of kilometres of testing, so I would build up huge amounts of data and experience," says Blundell. "I didn't know there was the chance to get into the race car. If I had, I would have made sure that my contract had a bit more remuneration built into it! But I'm sure Ron Dennis knew



'Brundell Brothers' flank tester Bernard in '93 Ligier line-up

“When you get an offer, and F1 is the dream, you take it. But in hindsight it was the wrong decision”

BLUNDELL REFLECTS ON BRABHAM DEAL



INGHAM/GETTY

RIDING A HAND GRENADE

Mark Blundell describes the Nissan R90 CK that he hustled to a famous pole position at Le Mans in 1990 as “a hand grenade”. Then a 24-year-old in his second season with Nissan’s Group C squad, he had 1100bhp under his right foot and was heading into the unknown.

“We had never run that car for a whole lap on full power and had no understanding of it whatsoever,” says Blundell. “That was very much the last run, and we couldn’t even risk putting on a soft set of tyres; we only had the possibility of running a hard set. It wasn’t until I got on the throttle out of the last corner that I knew what I had underneath me.”

Just watch the onboard footage on YouTube to see what Blundell means by hand grenade. Lairy opposite-lock moments both at the Dunlop Chicane and Tertre Rouge set the tone for a lap during which Blundell laid it on the line. But there was a problem as the wastegate was stuck open and he was told to abandon the lap. After difficulties through practice, Blundell had no interest in giving up.

“When I got the call over the radio to tell me to abort the lap because the engine was overboosting, I was slightly frustrated,” he admits. “So I pulled the radio out!”

“Still, to this day, I look at it now and again and remember getting opposite lock at the first chicane and coming out of Tertre Rouge while spinning the wheels in fourth gear. I would say there was probably easily another couple of seconds left on the table with that car on that lap.”

The result was pole by six and a half seconds. Even though the car, which Blundell shared with Julian Bailey and Gianfranco Brancatelli, retired in the early hours with a gearbox problem, that qualifying performance marked him down as a Le Mans ace, laying the foundations for his 1992 win for Peugeot sharing with Derek Warwick and Yannick Dalmas.



...laid ground for '92 Peugeot Le Mans win

INGHAM/GETTY



Blundell lucky to survive 122g shunt on Rio oval

exactly what he was up to at the time.

“But it was the right team at the wrong time. The 1995 McLaren was possibly one of the worst cars produced in its history. We did what we could and held our own, but it wasn’t the easiest thing to do. I was on a race-by-race contract, which was felt to be the right situation by the team. I didn’t agree with that at the time, and I still don’t.”

While Blundell’s qualifying performances didn’t match up to team-mate Mika Hakkinen’s, in the races he showed well. In total, he scored 13 points to Hakkinen’s 17 and rates his charge from 23rd on the grid to seventh after a crash ruled him out of qualifying at Suzuka – a race where Hakkinen finished second – as one of the best drives of his career. But Blundell also hints obliquely that things went on at McLaren that year that put him on the back foot. Certainly, the implication is that he was very much the number-two driver.

Blundell’s final outing for McLaren, finishing fourth at Adelaide, would be his F1 swansong.

“I’d come to an agreement with Sauber and

that’s where I was going in 1996,” says Blundell. “But late on, a new shareholder came in and if you look back, you can work out who it was [Red Bull’s Dietrich Mateschitz] and they wanted a grand prix winner in the car. The only guy knocking around who had won a grand prix was Johnny [Herbert]. I wasn’t the right guy at the right time and didn’t fit in.”

“At that point, I got a little disillusioned with F1 and the politics and decided to investigate the States. I was lucky that Mercedes-Benz gave me the support of an engine deal to take there, so that’s where I headed.”

The deal was with PacWest Racing, initially running Cosworth engines in 1996, but switching to Mercedes the following year. It started disastrously, with a brake failure pitching Blundell into the wall at the Rio oval. The sickening 122g impact could have killed him.

“When you lose your brakes at 200mph and you are facing a concrete wall, it’s never going to be a good outcome,” says Blundell. “That did put me ▶

BLUNDELL'S RACING CAREER

LE MANS 24 HOURS

SEASONS 1989-90, '92, '95, 2001-03

TEAMS Nissan, Peugeot, Gulf McLaren, MG Lola, Bentley

STARTS 7

WINS 1

BEST QUALIFYING 1st

FORMULA 1

SEASONS 1991, 1993-95

TEAMS Brabham, Ligier, Tyrrell, McLaren

STARTS 61

BEST FINISH 3rd (3 times)

BEST QUALIFYING 4th

POINTS 32

BEST CHAMPIONSHIP 10th ('93, '95)

INDYCARS

SEASONS 1996-2000

TEAM PacWest Racing

STARTS 81

WINS 3

BEST QUALIFYING 2nd

POINTS 219

BEST CHAMPIONSHIP 6th ('97)



BELLANCA/LAT

► back, and later on in my Champ Car career I had another technical failure that led to a fractured neck. It wasn't easy in terms of the physical downsides. But the upside was that when we could compete it was some of the best racing I've done, like Formula Ford at 200mph! I won on a street circuit [Toronto], a road course [Portland] and a 500-mile race [Fontana]. They were all highly rewarding."

The PacWest team was nowhere when Blundell joined. But in 1997, during the second half of the season, he was the main challenger to the all-conquering Alex Zanardi. Those three wins, including the famous victory by 0.027s over Gil de Ferran at Portland, lifted him to sixth in the championship. But thereafter the team dropped off and Blundell's final three years in Indycars were a struggle, a real frustration for a driver who had shown himself to be potentially of title-winning calibre.

"On our day, we were as strong as anybody and punching above our weight," says Blundell. "But the team wanted to expand and as it went into Indy Lights, with ambitions of doing bigger and better things, the team got diluted. It wasn't working and it didn't come together again."

Blundell did lead his final race at Fontana briefly before an engine failure, but that was it.

"I get as much enjoyment out of the guys that I manage getting results. That's where the buzz is for me now"

There were possibilities with other teams, but sponsor clashes meant nothing came together.

After occasional outings at the start of the century, showing particularly well for MG at Le Mans in its rapid, lightweight LMP675 machine, and then Bentley in 2003, his attention switched to other things.

"I walked through the door when the TV opportunity was there," he says of switching his focus to broadcasting with ITV's F1 coverage. "If I hadn't, someone else would have done. If I was going to race, it had to be with a manufacturer-linked programme. The media side was one platform, so I looked at sports cars to keep my hand in."

"I still get the mickey taken out of me with 'DI Blundell' [in reference to irreverent website Sniff Petrol's characterisation of him], but I'm OK with that. I always tried to deliver in a way that people could understand, in layman's



XPB/LAT

terms, as that's what I could relate to. But TV did give me a profile in the UK so I can't moan too much about that!"

He also moved into management, first in partnership with Brundle and then with current outfit MB Partners. And while he's dabbled in sports cars in recent years, this is his main focus.

"I can give them some guidance, support and wisdom because I've been there and done that and did make the wrong calls at the wrong time," he says. "I get as much enjoyment out of my guys that I manage getting results – like Tom Blomqvist and Nick Yelloly. That's where the buzz is for me now."

"I'm not one of those guys who looks back on stuff," says Blundell. "If you went to my house today, I'm pretty sure you would have no idea of me having ever been a racing driver as there's not much reflection of it. The reason for that is when I went home, I went home and I was a dad."

"At the same time, do I look back and say I made some good choices? Yes. Do I say I made some bad choices? Also yes. But I'm not going to dwell on it. Considering I'm just a village boy, I didn't do too bad!" ❧



ROSE/GETTY

Latest from the Roar Before the Rolex 24



Sunoco Whelen Challenge Winner Phil Keen got his first taste of the Rolex 24 when he took the wheel of the Action Express run no.31 Whelen Corvette Daytona Prototype at the Roar Before the Rolex 24 last weekend. The talented British Racer set consistent lap times, just a fraction off of 2014 Champions and partner team, Action Express. Keen built on his varied experience ahead of the big race, but the real test comes when he is back for the Rolex 24 At Daytona on 24th January...the Challenge continues!



www.sunocochallenge.com

Sunoco 200 Challenge Winner Oskar Krüger visited Daytona for the first time at the weekend taking the wheel of the muscle-powered Sunoco liveried Chevrolet Camaro in practice sessions of the Continental Tire Sports Car Challenge. Oskar experienced a good start, getting up to speed with the differences of the car, a stark change from what he is used to in Radicals, however, the young Swedish racer was only able to pack in a handful of laps before mechanical issues with the car stopped testing for the team. Despite the limited track time, Oskar is looking forward to the final practice sessions ahead of qualifying and the CTSC 200 race on 23rd January.



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INFORMATION

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ROOM	THEATRE	CLASSROOM	BOARDROOM	CABARET	U-SHAPE	DINING	RECEPTION
Drivers Suite	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	200	350
Ayrton Senna	200	80	40	120	30	130	200
Piers Courage	100	60	40	80	30	120	140
Alan Jones	50	15	12	24	12	40	60

CIRCUIT GALLERIES

Circuit Gallery A

Silverstone	30	n/a	22	n/a	n/a	20	30
Monaco	50	28	26	32	28	40	50
Hockenheim	12	10	10	n/a	12	10	14
Monza	28	14	14	14	12	20	28

Circuit Gallery B

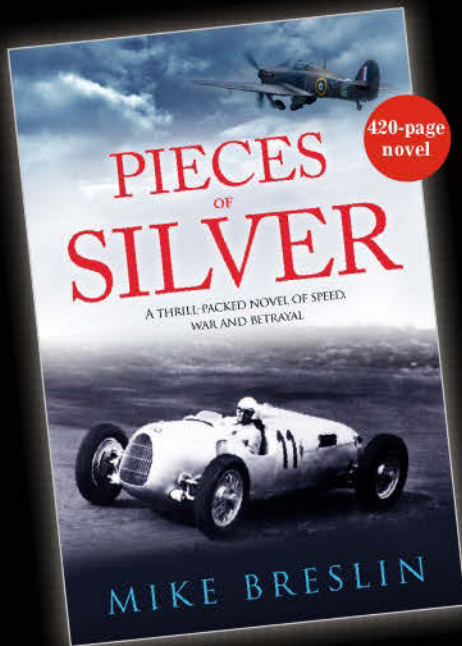
Estoril	50	32	26	32	24	50	50
Jerez	40	24	26	32	24	40	50
Barcelona	50	32	26	32	26	40	50
Trophy Room (hospitality room only)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	70	100



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Great exhibition kicks off the 2015 season

Racing greats including Petter Solberg, David Coulthard and Allan McNish joined a host of new talent at the NEC in a celebration of all that's great in our sport

Tens of thousands of fans, enthusiasts, drivers and motorsport professionals descended on the Birmingham NEC for four days last week.

AUTOSPORT International traditionally marks the start of the racing season, and the 2015 edition featured a star-studded cast including David Coulthard, Petter Solberg, Anthony Davidson and Allan McNish. There were

also plenty of big announcements, including the return of one of Britain's top drivers, Andy Priaulx, to the British Touring Car Championship after 12 years away.

Over the following pages we offer a taste of the sights, sounds and stories of another classic AUTOSPORT International. So if you made it to Birmingham, we hope you enjoy our reflections on the event. And if you didn't, there are plenty of reasons to mark the date of AUTOSPORT International 2016 down in your diary. It's on January 14-17, so we'll see you there! ▶



Solberg the Showman thrilled the Live Action crowds



GRIFITHS/LAT

Petter Solberg: chatting and charging his way around Birmingham

Every now and then, the stars align and something special happens. Live Action last weekend was one such moment. Last year Petter Solberg came to the NEC, threw some caps around and promised to be back... to throw his car around.

He delivered.

Backing his Citroen Xsara WRC into corners, the inaugural FIA World Rallycross champion held spectators spellbound as he brushed car against concrete in a fury

of tyre smoke and flame spitting.

And just when the whole thing couldn't get any more mental, he did it all over again, this time hanging out of the open door and waving to the crowd. We've seen it all before, but watching it up close was as intensely exciting as ever.

And, much as thousands upon thousands of fans enjoyed it, Solberg enjoyed it just that little bit more. Stepping out of the Citroen, the 40-year-old

Norwegian couldn't stop grinning.

"I love it," he said. "I just absolutely love it. Driving for me is a passion and when I have the chance to share that with people, I can't help myself. But I don't want to come here and do an ordinary show: I come here to push myself, to take myself closer to the wall and to challenge myself. That's when the show gets good."

And, of course, a challenged Solberg is a spectacular Solberg.

It didn't stop when he got out of the car. Interviewed on both the AUTOSPORT and *Motorsport News* stages, the 2003 World Rally champion drew a big crowd. Having walked the walk, he talked the talk.

"Talking with Henry [Hope-Frost] and the guys at *MN* was fantastic," he said. "These few days have been unbelievable."

Same time next year?

"Definitely. Bigger, louder and faster!" The mind boggles.

Q&A



Coulthard signed autographs for fans all weekend

GRIFITHS/LAT

DAVID COULTHARD 13-TIME GRAND PRIX WINNER

You're an AUTOSPORT International regular. What do you enjoy so much about it?

I've always felt that I'm a fan of motorsport who somehow managed to get to race in Formula 1 as well! At heart, I was happy hanging around racetracks, watching cars and talking to engineers and mechanics. I feel comfortable in that environment. AUTOSPORT International feels like the kick-off for a new season. And with AUTOSPORT, there is the connection with the journalists who came up through the lower formulas with you. Some of those continue higher up on the magazine, or work elsewhere, and it's a tight-knit community. This show brings all of that together.

In your BBC role you're arguably as famous with British fans behind the microphone as behind the wheel...

Having grown up waiting for AUTOSPORT to arrive – it sometimes didn't come until Friday in the north – then watching the grand prix on Sunday, to end up working with the BBC feels like the perfect fan's journey. You get to race the cars and then go and commentate on it!

Is it easier to relate to the fans now than when you were in the bubble of being a grand prix driver?

Absolutely. I'm not the centre of focus, which you are as a driver. When you're no longer a driver you have freedom of movement. And there's no pressure... as long as I don't swear live on air!

'I felt like a lucky marshal at the best corner'

YEAR 10 AS COMPERE, question master and general factotum on the main stage again provided the usual cocktail of chat with as wide a range of motorsport personalities as it's possible to assemble under one roof. And I again felt like the lucky marshal posted at the best corner on the lap. Am I really supposed to have this good a view?

Perched above M-Sport's 2015-liveried Ford Fiesta RS WRC (replaced at the weekend by the McLaren 650S GT3), Porsche's 919 Hybrid WEC batmobile, BTCC returnee Andy Priaulx's WSR BMW 1-series and an FIA Formula E challenger was an exciting vantage point to hear drivers' reflections on 2014 and plans for the coming season. If it has wheels, makes a noise and can be raced, I'm all ears, so the combination of F1, GP2, FR3.5, WEC, WRC, BTCC and club racing was perfect. Add in series bosses, circuit owners, team chiefs and technical boffins and all bases were covered.

But for sheer stage presence Petter Solberg trumped the lot of them. The former WRC king, who added the World Rallycross title to his CV in 2014, was on typically effervescent form, and on each of the eight occasions he appeared on stage with me was bouncing off the energy limiter. He enjoyed every second of his trip to Birmingham, but the pleasure was all ours.

● Henry Hope-Frost

HHF hosted the stage action



COULTHARD DRAWS A CROWD
Multiple GP winner-turned-BBC F1 pundit and ASI veteran David Coulthard reflected on the 2014 season from behind the mic and fielded questions from fans

GRIFFITHS/LAT

BRABHAM BOYS
Ex-F1 racer and Le Mans winner David Brabham and son Sam chatted about the return of the famous name to racing via the exciting Project Brabham initiative



GRIFFITHS/LAT

LE MANS STARS OLD AND NEW
Retired sportscar ace Allan McNish appeared with his young charge Harry Tincknell, who's already won the LMP2 class in the great race. What next?



GRIFFITHS/LAT



BEST OF BRITISH
Will Stevens, who raced a Caterham in the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, and GP3 champion Alex Lynn talked about their 2014 seasons and their plans for the year ahead

MAUGER/LAT

MOTORSPORT NEWS 60TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION



INTO THE STRATOS-PHERE
Lancia's Stratos was built with rallying in mind, and this example of the iconic car proved a crowd-puller along with the Alan Mann Mustang



'It was hard not to admire an array that included an ex-Jim Clark D-type'

WE'VE GOT SOME exciting plans to celebrate *Motorsport News's* 60th anniversary in 2015 and the first of those came into play at AUTOSPORT International.

I'm biased of course, but I reckon our display of seven cars, along with selected photographs and *MN* covers from the last six decades, was one of the highlights.

It was hard not to admire an array that included an ex-Jim Clark Jaguar D-type, Alan Mann-liveried Ford Mustang, an ex-Tom Kristensen Honda Accord Super Tourer and the cars you can see pictured to the left of these words.

And in the middle of it all was Petter Solberg's Citroen DS3 Supercar. The man himself is always a big draw, happy to mix with (and talk to) the fans, and was one of several stars interviewed on the intimate stage by *MN's* very own Matt James. As well as Solberg, World Endurance title winners Allan McNish and Anthony Davidson both appeared, sharing some recollections of their illustrious careers.

The BTCC was also well represented, with title winners Jason Plato, Matt Neal, Gordon Shedden, Andrew Jordan and Colin Turkington seeming pretty relaxed ahead of what should be another fine season.

It all bodes well for a very special year for *MN*.

● Kevin Turner



WILLIAMS FEVER
FW07C competed in 1981, the result of a redesign as the governing body tried to legislate against 'ground-effect' aerodynamics. Williams won the constructors' title

RALLYCROSS STAR

This Citroen's no lemon: Petter Solberg's spectacular World Rallycross title winner rightfully took centre stage and the man himself also paid several visits



SCOOBY DONE

The late, great Colin McRae was a *Motorsport News* favourite and helped make the Subaru Impreza a motoring icon. He drove this very car in his winning 1995 WRC year





AJ, Turks, Sheds and Neal indulge in BTCC repartee

BTCC news takes centre stage

A seismic week for British Touring Car news – Andrew Jordan’s MG move, Andy Priaulx’s return, their implications for Jason Plato and Colin Turkington, plus confirmation of the Honda Civic Tourer’s farewell – added a topical edge to BTCC stage banter.

Both Priaulx’s deal and his WSR BMW colours were revealed on stage, one of many 2015 BTCC livery unveilings around the hall, and Henry Hope-Frost’s domain was often as packed as modern BTCC grids, squeezing record numbers

of racers on at once. Priaulx’s new rivals made emphatically clear what the returning hero was letting himself in for, promising that his BMW would not stay very shiny for long.

If points were awarded for repartee, Andrew Jordan would’ve won a close title fight. The quick-witted interjections rattled out with an impish grin from beneath the giant glasses and Red Bull hat as he regularly wrong-footed his rivals. MG’s new signing has matured into quite a star off-track too.



The Performance Car show, presented in association with Autocar and PistonHeads.com, offered the chance for visitors to feast their eyes on some stunning road-car machinery.

A Lamborghini Huracan, Ferrari 458 Speciale and Vuhl 05 were among the cars to draw big crowds. There was also the chance (of sorts) to get behind the wheel yourself, thanks to the simulator that was on hand for those who reckoned they were up to the task of hustling exotic machinery around the track.

Its popularity is a reminder that, while AUTOSPORT International is mostly about competitive machinery, there is still plenty on offer for the fan of vehicles you could buy when your lottery numbers finally come up.



HOLYER/REVELAT

Q&A



MAUGER/LAT

PAT SYMONDS WILLIAMS CHIEF TECHNICAL OFFICER

It was a wonderful season for Williams..

It was certainly a good-news story all the way from our partnership with Martini, bringing back those iconic colours, Felipe Massa joining the team, and then, as we progressed through the season, results. Third in the championship is something everyone at Grove is extremely proud of.

What was the magic bullet?

There isn't a magic bullet – there never is. It really is getting everything working together and that's not just in a technical sense, it's in an operational sense. As a race team we improved immeasurably over the winter and the course of the year.

You've entered into a project with AUTOSPORT to find engineers of the future. Can you tell us about the AUTOSPORT Williams Engineer of the Future award?

This is something very close to my heart. Williams and AUTOSPORT have got together to find the engineers of the future. This is going to be a tough competition, very much a knockout competition. We are asking eight of the top universities in the UK to give their recommendations of their best students every year and we are going to grill them and really put them through their paces and select a student who will win this award – which includes a couple of years working at Williams – and, I hope, one day, take my job!



Ex-Piquet BT49 is raced now by Joaquin Folch

HSCC's Brabham bonanza

The Historic Sports Car Club's stand was one of the most popular at the show thanks to a fantastic exhibit of authentic Brabham single-seaters. One of the stars of the show was an ex-Nelson Piquet Brabham BT49. A recreation of a 1967 Brabham-Repco BT24 also caught the eye.

HOLYER/REVELAT

KEY STAT

25,490

The number of words committed to the digital space by our roving wordsmiths in Autosport.com's live blog covering the event

NUMBER

76

Over four days no fewer than 76 individuals submitted themselves to the Henry Hope-Frost interview treatment on the AUTOSPORT stage



MAUGER/LAT

“Fan-friendly Merc deserves a nod here”

EVERY YEAR THE F1 RACING stage aims to present a grid of Formula 1 cars as close as possible to what you've seen on track. That depends, of course, on how willing the teams are to let the cars be seen up close...

The famously fan-friendly Mercedes team deserves more than a nod here for letting people get within touching distance of a W05 Hybrid, albeit a specially built show car with early-2014 aero. As the team with potentially the most to lose for giving away their hard-earned secrets, they could reasonably have been expected to be less open.

Other cars on stage had seen a bit more action: the Red Bull's chassis plate revealed it to be RB6-3, also known as 'Luscious Liz', driven to victory in 2010 in the Malaysian GP by Sebastian Vettel and at Silverstone by Mark Webber.

And the Lotus was E22-2, driven by Pastor Maldonado in the last six grands prix of 2014. It even had the engine and gearbox in, and was riding on marked race rubber rather than show tyres.

The stage also hosted a unique portrait of Ayrton Senna made by artist Ian Berry from denim clothing worn by members of the Senna family. Many of my guests – including David Coulthard, Allan McNish, David Brabham and Maurice Hamilton – knew Senna well, were delighted by the likeness, and were moved to share memories of him with the rapt audience.

● Stuart Codling



Will Stevens (l) and Jann Mardenborough starred

F1 RACING ROYALTY

Nine Formula 1 teams – Mercedes, Red Bull, Williams, Ferrari, McLaren, Force India, Toro Rosso, Lotus and Sauber – supplied race cars for F1 Racing to display on its stand



MAUGER/LAT

CHAMP ON SHOW

The double title-winning Mercedes W05 was at the NEC, albeit wearing very old aerodynamics. You never know where the spies might be hiding with cameras



MAUGER/LAT

SENNAARTWORK

Ian Berry's portrait of Ayrton Senna, made from pieces of denim worn by members of his family, caused quite a stir, especially among the drivers who worked with him



MAUGER/LAT



DC DOES A BIT OF STAND-UP

Former Williams, McLaren and Red Bull racer David Coulthard, who won 13 GPs, looked back over the 2014 season with F1 Racing's Stuart Codling

GRIFFITHS/LAT



BriSCA hot rods
blew the roof off
the indoor arena

Live Action Arena again provides an aural assault on the senses

Petter Solberg driving his Citroen Xsara WRC while standing on top of it, a full grid of Hackney Carriages (plus a couple of mini-cabs) dicing for victory, Terry Grant's monster-truck doughnuts, roaring BriSCA F1 and F2 cars and a lot of noise and burning rubber. What's not to love about the Live Action Arena, which was one

again one of the highlights of this year's AUTOSPORT International?

It had some other well known names, kicking off with Sky F1 commentator David Croft interviewing one of his opposite numbers from the BBC, David Coulthard, who then handed over presenting duties to David Richardson. There was also an appearance from the six McLaren AUTOSPORT BRDC Award finalists, as well as a formation motorcycle display that acted as the grand finale.

If you have never visited the Live Action Arena, you'll have no idea of just how impressive it is to hear a full grid of race-prepared cars – be it any of the above or the autograss machinery that put on a



great display – in an enclosed space. For those who had grown accustomed to the gentle rumble of modern F1 cars, or the quiet whirr of Formula E cars, this was a much more visceral experience.

Needless to say, Solberg was the real showman, the star who couldn't resist being the centre of attention. Each and every show, the greatest ovation was saved for the Norwegian.



GRIFFITHS/LAT

Croft with McNish
and Davidson

Q&A



GRIFFITHS/LAT

KRIS MEEKE CITROEN WRC DRIVER

Citroen kept the faith last year and you delivered, didn't you?

As Yves Matton, the team boss, said himself: he took a gamble on me in 2014. He gave me a couple of opportunities in 2013, I showed pace but I hadn't the stamina then to get to the end with that speed. But I knew 2014 was a big opportunity. I'd singled out that the first half of the season was going to be difficult because there were a lot of events that I hadn't done before, but I was looking to the second half of the year where I could get settled in and show good consistent speed.

Did your Monte Carlo podium last year give you a huge amount of confidence?
It was probably one of the more difficult Monte Carlo rallies in recent

history. The conditions were just incredible – the black-top shiny asphalt is probably the most difficult to drive because the grip just disappears. We had all the snow, slush, ice, dirty roads, dry roads and 80 per cent of the time you're on the wrong tyre! I put the blinkers on, didn't worry about stage times and concentrated on not making a mistake.

The expectation then goes up?
I've been around WRC circles for 10 years, but 2014 was my first full season and it's very hard to manage that expectation. When Sebastien Ogier had his first world championship season in 2009 he finished eighth and his results weren't that fascinating. I have to keep remembering where I am in terms of experience.

AUTOSPORT main stage Thank you

We would like to thank all the drivers, team bosses, designers and industry specialists who gave us their time, plus all the behind-the-scenes staff who made the 2015 AUTOSPORT main stage a great success. In particular, thanks to WSR, M-Sport, Formula E, Porsche and McLaren for supplying cars for the spectacular display in front of the stage that drew huge crowds throughout the four-day event.





WRC stars Kris Meeke and Paul Nagle joined in

AUTOSPORT International on YouTube

For the first time, the AUTOSPORT central stage was broadcast live via the internet.

AUTOSPORT's website carried complete coverage of all 136 separate interviewees, including multiple appearances by Petter Solberg, with the footage now available on YouTube. Search for AUTOSPORT International 2015, and you will find hours of interviews with big names including David Coulthard, Pat Symonds, Andy Priaulx and Anthony Davidson.

The interviews were conducted over four days, meaning that there was plenty of time to reflect on the racing season to come. Among the highlights were four British Touring Car champions gathered together in one place (and not colliding with each other), as well as regular appearances from the McLaren AUTOSPORT BRDC Award finalists from 2014, including winner George Russell.

Check out YouTube now for all the best big-name interviews.



The Show is a hotbed of engineering talent...

Engineered to perfection

AUTOSPORT Engineering is its own self-contained show within a show, and those of you who attended on the public days, Saturday and Sunday, will have missed out on what is always one of the most fascinating facets of AUTOSPORT International.

Around 200 exhibitors gathered in Birmingham to show off their wares, which collectively formed a majestic tribute to the ongoing ingenuity of the British motorsport engineering industry. It's testament to the combination of the entrepreneurial spirit and technical brilliance that every year more new products are on show.

It's also an event at which plenty of business is done every year. AUTOSPORT International attracts huge

footfall from the trade, with drivers, team owners, competitors and car builders milling around the halls of the NEC. That's what makes AUTOSPORT Engineering a key part of the year for these companies, which contribute to a motorsport industry that is worth not far short of £10 billion to the British economy.



...and does a roaring trade

Q&A



ANTHONY DAVIDSON WORLD ENDURANCE CHAMPION

How has AUTOSPORT International been for you?

It's great to be here and nice to kick the motorsport year off by coming here. You get to see all your mates again from the paddocks and to meet people competing in different disciplines as well.

Is there more excitement surrounding you now you're a world champion?

I would say I'm known fifty-fifty for TV work and for driving achievements. Working on TV definitely puts your face out there for the fans watching F1, so you are recognisable. But there is lots of interest in the WEC and a lot of knowledgeable fans here at the AUTOSPORT show. It's nice to see we have such clued-up fans in the UK and

a show like this is exactly what they need. It whets the appetite for the year to come.

Do you feel this title moves you into the top echelon of drivers?

I haven't thought about it that way and I don't see myself any differently at all. People might see me in a different way as I didn't have the best of F1 careers but I certainly think I'm on my way to becoming one of the best sportscar drivers in the world, with a lot of achievements in that category. Hopefully it's going to be a nice, long, prosperous career. I have the 12 Hours of Sebring and the world championship and now I want to win Le Mans. But I'm not going to put myself under huge pressure to win it because it's such a fickle race.

'It's fascinating to be in the halls and feel the buzz the show generates'

SHORT OF LIGHTING fires at every British track, there's no better signal that a new national motorsport season is upon us than AUTOSPORT International.

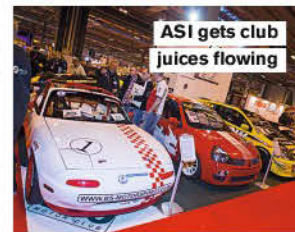
In recent years the effort put in by the clubs, racers and championships has increased exponentially at the NEC. More people than ever recognise the huge contribution that national racing makes towards the four-day event.

With clubs like the British Racing and Sports Car Club and the 750 Motor Club out in force with vibrant displays, or manufacturers such as Porsche and Ginetta touting their wares and signing up new drivers, it's impossible to escape the feeling that the new year is gaining proper traction for the first time.

There are announcements aplenty at ASI, from new-car unveilings to unexpected career changes from exciting young racers. We cover that in detail in the news pages (from p75) but it's also fascinating to be in the halls of the NEC and feel the buzz it generates first hand.

Club racing is a vast landscape, with incredible commitment from everyone. The Show is more than just a reflection of that, it's a celebration of it. That's why almost everybody who matters in national racing attends, and why it's rightly referred to as the curtain-raiser for the coming season.

● Scott Mitchell



ASI gets club juices flowing

GRIFITHS/LAT

“I’m coming home”

56

Fourteen years ago Andy Priaulx made his tin-top debut in the British Touring Car Championship. Now, he’s back for more. The three-time world champion tells SCOTT MITCHELL why he’s come full circle



Talk to Andy Priaulx about his time in the British Touring Car Championship and there is one date that stands out in his mind: August 25, 2001.

Making a stand-in appearance for Phil Bennett in a Vauxhall at Oulton Park, while in the middle of his race-winning British Formula 3 season, the Guernseyman stunned BTCC regulars with a debut brace of pole positions.

The following day Yvan Muller beat him to victory in the opener, but Priaulx fought off eventual champion Jason Plato to claim second. In the following day’s feature race Priaulx was hounding Plato for the lead when a piece of debris holed the Astra’s sump. Retirement was unavoidable, but he had made a statement.

Priaulx’s third season in British F3 was by far his most competitive. He won twice and bagged four more podiums en route to sixth in the points, but it was not a launchpad to greater things in single-seaters. In one weekend in Cheshire though, Priaulx had set one of the

greatest touring car careers in motion.

“If I hadn’t have done that it would have been very different,” Priaulx asserts about the Oulton outing in place of the suspended Bennett.

“I was always looking at touring cars and considering my next move. It came about with Triple Eight and Vauxhall; [team co-founder] Derek Warwick really helped me out, and I got double pole first time out. That was pretty much the beginning of my touring car career.”

The Guernseyman’s professional motorsport career is, in a manner of speaking, coming full circle in 2015 with last week’s announcement that he will race a WSR-run BMW 125i M Sport in the BTCC. Priaulx’s desire to return has been a key component of the deal, which BMW has given its blessing to alongside his commitments to its factory European Le Mans Series campaign and Priaulx’s sporadic United SportsCar Championship outings.

Priaulx’s move to BMW in 2003 was the beginning of a stellar partnership that won the

European Touring Car Championship crown in 2004 and three consecutive world titles from 2005-07, but it could not have happened without the catalyst the BTCC provided.

His first factory deal was his debut season in touring cars. After departing F3 at the end of 2001, and with his super-sub appearance at Oulton Park marking him out as a potential touring car frontrunner, Priaulx was chosen to spearhead the returning Honda’s Arena Motorsport-run BTCC effort in 2002 alongside Alan Morrison.

The Civic Type-R, while eventually a race-winning car, took time to catch up with the Triple Eight-prepared Astra Coupes. Having come so close on his debut with Vauxhall the previous year, Priaulx didn’t achieve his first victory until the eighth round at Knockhill.

A run of four podiums (including that win) in the last 10 races meant Priaulx finished fifth in the drivers’ championship, with almost double the points of team-mate Morrison and ahead

GRIFFITHS/LAT



European Touring Car title led to world championships when the series was upgraded in 2005

WESTON/LAT



Stand-in role for Phil Bennett at Vauxhall in 2001 opened door for 2002 BTCC campaign



Priaulx will combine BTCC drive with ELMS in 2014, also racing with BMW

“I’ve had a fantastic racing experience with BMW all over the world, but I miss my touring car racing”

of works drivers Warren Hughes (MG), David Leslie (Proton) and Paul O’Neill (Vauxhall). It was a solid first year that left Priaulx convinced a title challenge was on the cards for 2003 – before his future was pitched into uncertainty.

“It was a tough start with Honda,” he recalls. “It wasn’t a lot of fun there, but everything was already better than F3 because I was getting paid!”

“The Honda was a brand new car and going into the first race the power steering didn’t work after the first lap. It didn’t start really becoming a strong package until mid-season. Then there was an upward trend.

“In the last half of the season I won at Knockhill and had pole position here and there, and it was looking like the following year was going to be big. Unfortunately Honda reduced the commitment and Arena couldn’t afford to have me. I was disappointed and there were some tough times.”

Priaulx’s salvation came after a starring role at the end-of-season Bathurst 1000km, though he

ultimately retired alongside Yvan Muller, which led to his first BMW role in the RBM’s team European Touring Car Championship programme in 2003. His alliance with the Belgian team would prove hugely successful.

Priaulx is right not to have regrets over his career – “I got a phone call from BMW after Bathurst and never looked back” – but his competitive nature means he is well aware that the move cost him a shot at the British title.

His Honda successor Matt Neal proved that the following year, winning six races and finishing as best-of-the-rest behind the all-conquering Vauxhalls. That’s why, even though it’s 12-and-a-half years since his first BTCC season ended and he has achieved world titles in the meantime, Priaulx is delighted to get the chance to win the championship he never got.

“I’m coming home,” he says. “I’ve been racing away for 12 years now with BMW and I’ve had a fantastic experience racing all over the world, but I miss my touring car racing.

“I said the Civic was a championship-winning car at the end of 2002. I remember it being loaded into the trailer before I went off to Bathurst and thinking, ‘I hope I drive that car again’, but unfortunately it never happened.

“I’m a touring car driver. I’ve had a fantastic career – and won GT races, and I don’t want to take the focus away from that – but I’m a touring car champion and I love it. It really excites me.”

Priaulx is not really in the business of looking back. So, while he concedes an element of frustration over how his original BTCC foray ended, he knows that the opportunity created as that door closed has been more valuable than a second season with Honda might have been.

PRIAULX IN NUMBERS

BTCC RECORD

20 STARTS | **4** PODIUMS | **1** WIN

5 POLES

TOURING CAR RECORD

220 STARTS | **27** WINS

(BTCC, ETCC, WTCC, DTM, V8 SUPERCARS) | **4** TITLES

43 PODIUMS

It also means that, having had a difficult two-season stint in the DTM and been out of the spotlight with an American programme in 2014, Priaulx only has enthusiasm for his BTCC comeback. A clash with the ELMS Paul Ricard round will make a title challenge difficult, but his excitement is born from the desire to turn this into a multi-year deal – and the opportunity to prove his best tin-top days are not behind him.

“I still feel there’s a championship or two left in me,” he insists. “I have to be realistic, coming back having not driven UK circuits for years and the cars have changed. There’s going to be a bit of finding my way, but I’ve got a great team and the right car. I’ll be disappointed if I don’t get performances pretty soon.

“I think I’m in a very strong position mentally, arguably even better than when I was winning in the WTCC. I’m coming back not to end my career but to maintain it. I think I can be here and be a potential player for quite a few years to come and it’s very exciting for me. I love it.”

ALLAN McNISH

A LESSON IN SAFETY

On Friday at AUTOSPORT International, sportscar legend Allan McNish shared his thoughts on racing safety. **EDD STRAW** was in the audience

One of the annual highlights of AUTOSPORT International over the years has been the Sid Watkins Lecture. Put on by the Motorsport Safety Fund, this year's guest lecturer was three-times Le Mans 24 Hours winner and 2012 World Endurance champion Allan McNish, ably assisted by questionmaster and BBC Radio colleague James Allen.

The lecture traditionally focuses on safety, and McNish was able to offer a unique driver's perspective during a gripping hour and a quarter.

ON THE RISK OF LEG INJURIES DURING HIS EARLY DAYS IN SINGLE-SEATERS...

"You accepted it because they were the safest cars at the time, but in comparison to now it was prehistoric.

"I remember Jason Elliott, who was a young British driver, testing in Formula 3 and he came through the old Russell chicane at Snetterton, which was *just* flat-out but you had to be flat-out. He lost the rear coming in and it ripped the floor off the car and his legs were absolutely decimated.

"Then, it wasn't usually impacts to the head, even though it was exposed; the majority of injuries were to your legs. You didn't have the crash tests you have today to ensure the driver was in a survival cell. It's only now, looking back, that I'm lucky still to be five-foot-five."

ON YOUNG DRIVERS' ATTITUDE TO SAFETY IN THAT PERIOD...

"When you are 20 years old, you never think about it because chances are you have never had a big shunt. So you think you're indestructible. I thought I was.

"I remember the situation when a driver got injured; the next morning there was a list of 10 drivers phoning up wanting the seat. Motorsport is a very cut-throat game.



Lecture always draws a capacity crowd



Senna's fatal crash changed attitudes



McNish shunted at Suzuka in 2002

"It wasn't until Ayrton Senna was killed that we realised if he could be killed, then something could happen to the rest of us. It was also when organisations, specifically the FIA and Sid [Watkins], got involved because there was resistance to change that they broke down. Since then, the momentum has built. But it did require an incident to start it and make someone grasp the nettle, as Jackie Stewart did in the 1970s."

ON JACKIE STEWART...

"Jackie saw a lot of his friends pass away. Having seen it at close quarters in the past couple of years I can understand you would become very passionate about it. He was the first one who stood up against it and push safety forward."

"I started racing in Formula Ford at the same time as Paul, his eldest son. At Snetterton I was wearing a watch and Jackie came up to me and said, 'Take that watch off.' He said that if you have an accident, you naturally tense up on the wheel, which opens the clasp of the watch and the winder of the watch goes into the back of your hand and breaks a bone. It was a very valid point."

ON HIS 130R CRASH AT SUZUKA FOR TOYOTA IN 2002...

"That was one of the most frustrating moments of the season. 130R wasn't flat but I thought I would give it a go on the last run of qualifying. I was seven tenths up coming into 130R and I thought, 'Right, McNish – this is flat, my boy'. And it wasn't.

"I knew I was going off because it was a 185mph corner, so I was waiting on this impact and it went spectacularly up in the air. The next thing I remember is lying on the grass."

"I then stood up and Sid came. He looked over me and I walked down the little slope with assistance and through this hole in the barrier; I have this mental note where I said I must speak to Charlie Whiting because that's a stupid place to have a gap in that barrier, not realising my Toyota was smouldering in bits just to the side!"

ON INCREASING SPEEDS AND SAFETY...

"Le Mans is a very good example of this. Loic Duval had a huge accident last year in the middle of the Porsche Curves and it was a replica of Marc Gene's accident in 2009. But the corner speed through that actual point was 22mph quicker. That corner is just flat-out. The cars are narrower, have narrower tyres



Corner speeds have gone up at Le Mans

THE MOTORSPORT SAFETY FUND



Dr Roberts is the Fund's chairman

The Motorsport Safety Fund has its roots in a fund created following the death of Roger Williamson at Zandvoort in 1973. Fourteen years later, it became the Motor Racing Safety Fund and achieved charity status, changing its name to the Motorsport Safety Fund in 1999.

Run by volunteers, and chaired by Formula 1 rescue coordinator Dr Ian Roberts, the fund plays a key role in the training of marshals and rescue crews – people who give their own time for no reward other than their love of the sport, and without whom motorsport would not be possible.

PREVIOUS LECTURERS

1998 Prof Sid Watkins	2007 Prof Sid Watkins
1999 Jackie Stewart	2008 Malcolm Wilson
2000 Max Mosley	2009 Ron Dennis
2001 Niki Lauda	2010 Adrian Newey
2002 David Richards	2011 Christian Horner/ Adrian Newey
2003 Dr Terry Trammell	2012 Jonathan Neale
2004 Martin Brundle	2013 Andy Mellor
2005 Ross Brawn	2014 Charlie Whiting
2006 Bernie Ecclestone	

and less aero to slow them down, but the designers are always pushing.

"If I rewind, in 1998 when I won Le Mans for the first time, we did 350km/h at the end of the straights and a laptime of 3m42s-3m43s in the race. I qualified on a 3m37s.

"Now, we are doing 345km/h top speed, but our race laptimes are 3m22s – that is all corner speed so it's a massive change. Now, corners that were once real corners are absolutely nailed flat."

ON HIS EXCELLENCE IN TRAFFIC...

"When you came across traffic, you could lose two or three seconds but it was pretty hard to lose two or three seconds on a flat-out lap. Therefore, from a time-gain point of view, if you kept your average better on your traffic laps, then over a stint you were significantly better."

"I focused on the traffic laps in terms of the way I drove and set the car up. It was something not many people thought about because they all went out for qualifying and we thought in a different way."

"But you have an instinct for it or not, and it all goes back to karting. When I started karting, you had three heats and a final starting at the front, middle and back, and your starting position for the final was decided by that. If you were just quick and couldn't overtake, you wouldn't win much. So I learned the tricks of what to do and what not to do." ❧



Al-Attiyah on Copiapo-Antofagasta stage

DAKARRALLY BUENOS AIRES (RA), JANUARY 4-17

Al-Attiyah leads way into final week

QATAR'S NASSER SALEH AL-ATTIYAH started the final week of the 2015 Dakar Rally locked in a fascinating tussle with South Africa's Giniel de Villiers for outright victory.

The 2011 winner had led from the second day in his Mini All4 Racing and headed the '09 victor's Toyota Hilux by 8m27s when cars left the rest day in Iquique in northern Chile on Tuesday.

Al-Attiyah had won three of the eight special stages and, save for several punctures and a bout of altitude sickness on the climb onto the Bolivian high plateau last weekend, had enjoyed a relatively trouble-free Dakar.

An official Toyota has never won the event, but de Villiers has been knocking on the door for three years since leaving the Volkswagen team. After second, third and fourth-place

finishes, the South African is determined to reach the top step of the podium. "We know Nasser is very quick, so it's not easy to catch him," said de Villiers, who sustained a puncture on the eighth stage when he struck a stone in the sand after being distracted by the dust thrown up by an overhead helicopter.

X-raid Minis and Toyotas have dominated the 2015 Dakar. Mini All4 Racings won all but one of the first eight special stages, although there were four Toyota Hiluxes in the overall top seven in Iquique.

The drive of the rally has come from Saudi Arabian rookie Yazeed Al-Rajhi, who held third overall in his Overdrive Toyota after eight stages and claimed a maiden stage win into the rest day.

Last year's winner Joan Roma was struggling down in 30th place after numerous early delays and triple

stage winner Orlando Terranova held 23rd after his own share of problems.

Peugeot had endured a disappointing Dakar so far with the new 2008 DXR. Only Stephane Peterhansel had been able to show the car's potential to a degree. He climbed to fifth before losing several hours with transmission issues and a broken steering arm. 'Mr Dakar' held eighth at the rest day in Iquique.

Carlos Sainz had burned the midnight oil and been as high as fourth before clipping a rock hidden in the sand on the dusty stage into Antofagasta. The impact launched the Peugeot into a series of five rolls and spelt the end of the road for the 2010 winner. "It was very disappointing," insisted Sainz. "Particularly after the mechanics had worked all the previous night to get the car ready when we arrived at the bivouac at 3.30am!"

Cyril Despres, making his four-wheeled Dakar debut in the third 2008 DXR, had already spent one night under the stars with a broken wheel and suspension and held 41st in Iquique.

The rally finishes on Saturday back in Buenos Aires.

● Neil Perkins

RESULTS

1 Nasser Saleh Al-Attiyah/Matthieu Baume (Mini All4 Racing), 26h41m15s; 2 Giniel de Villiers/Dirk von Zitzewitz (Toyota Hilux), +8m27s; 3 Yazeed Al-Rajhi/Timo Gottschalk (Toyota); 4 Krzysztof Holowczyc/Xavier Panseri (Mini); 5 Bernhard ten Brinke/Tom Colsoul (Toyota); 6 Erik van Loon/Wouter Roesegar (Mini); 7 Christian Lavieille/Pascal Maimon (Toyota); 8 Stephane Peterhansel/Jean-Paul Cottret (Peugeot 2008 DXR); 9 Carlos Sousa/Paulo Fuiza (Mitsubishi Racing Lancer); 10 Ronan Chabot/Gilles Pillot (SMG Buggy).

ANDROS TROPHY ISOLA 2000 (F), JANUARY 10 RD 4/6

Panis shares spoils with veteran Balas



THERE WAS A CHANGE IN ROUTINE AS 65-year-old Bertrand Balas — an ever-present in the Andros Trophy since it started a quarter of a century ago — won the first final, before ex-F1 driver Olivier Panis took the second.

Balas topped Friday's heats in his Sainteloc-run Mini and then fended off the Dacia of Franck Lagorce in

the first Saturday final for his eighth career Andros win.

Lagorce led Saturday's second final for four of the six laps, before the WRT Toyota of Panis — who had won the heats earlier in the day — stole the spoils away.

Usual dominator Jean-Philippe Dayraut was restricted to a pair of fifths in his Mazda.

RESULTS

Final 1 1 Bertrand Balas (Mini), 6 laps in 4m43.794s; 2 Franck Lagorce (Dacia Lodgy), +0.702s; 3 Toomas Heikkinen (Mazda 3); 4 Jean-Baptiste Dubourg (Renault Clio 3); 5 Jean-Philippe Dayraut (Mazda); 6 Andrea Dubourg (Renault).

Final 2 1 Olivier Panis (Toyota Auris), 6 laps in 4m45.147s; 2 Lagorce, +1.395s; 3 Gerard Fontanel (Mini); 4 Benjamin Riviere (Citroen DS3); 5 Dayraut; 6 Heikkinen.

Points 1 Dayraut, 441; 2 Lagorce, 416; 3 Panis, 413; 4 J-B Dubourg, 396; 5 Riviere, 396; 6 Heikkinen, 370.

24H SERIES DUBAI (UAE),
JANUARY 9-10 RD 1/6

Merc takes honours in the desert

IT WAS NO SURPRISE THAT THE Black Falcon Mercedes team took its third Dubai 24 Hours win, but it's fair to say that it was team's other SLS that was expected to take the chequered flag.

The Merc was the car of choice in the 24-strong GT3 class with 12 entries, the largest number of gullwings ever to have taken part in one race. German team Black Falcon had two of them, but this time it wasn't the supposed best car with the star line-up of Bernd Schneider, Jeroen Bleekemolen, Andreas Simonsen and local hero Khaled Al Qubaisi that shone – a crash by Al Qubaisi in the fourth hour led to the team's retirement.

That allowed the other Black Falcon car, with British driver Oliver Webb, Saudi prince Abdulaziz Al Faisal, German Hubert Haupt and Dutchman Yelmer Buurman, to come to the fore. The quartet racked up a total of 604 laps, of which they spent 550 laps in the lead.

Four laps down, British team Ram Racing completed a one-two for Mercedes with its SLS driven by Brits Tom Onslow-Cole and Adam Christodoulou, Cheerag Arya and Thomas Jager. For its return to racing after its aborted season in the World Endurance



Black Falcon Merc
topped 89-strong field

Championship last year, the team ran a brand-new Merc chassis and showed a consistent performance to start its full-season campaign in the Creventic-run 24H Series.

Third overall and victory in the GT3 amateur class went to local team Dragon Racing with a Ferrari 458 Italia GT3, with British GT Championship aces Matt Griffin and Rob Barff joined by Mohammed Jawa and Jordan Grogor. The KPM Racing Aston Martin with Stefan Mucke, Jonny Adam and Paul White also took a turn in the lead, but eventually finished fourth overall and third in the pro class, followed by the Nissan GT Academy Team RJN entry.

British teams had a clean sweep of

the podium in the GT4 class with victory for Optimum Motorsport's Ginetta G55, driven by Euan Hankey, Bradley Ellis, Adrian Barwick and Salih Yoluc, followed by two Speedworks Motorsport cars, the Ginetta of Tom Oliphant, Ollie Jackson, Tony Hughes and Ross Warburton in second and the Aston Martin of Paul O'Neill, Devon Modell, Flick Haigh and John Gilbert third.

No fewer than 89 cars took the start of the 10th running of the race. As well as the 24 GT3 cars there were 17 Porsche Cup machines, eight from GT4 and a good turnout in the touring car classes too. Having been granted official FIA status for its 24H Series, Creventic was able to award

championship points for the first time, which was an important factor for the interest in the race.

● Rene de Boer

RESULTS

1 Yelmer Buurman/Oliver Webb/Hubert Haupt/Abdulaziz Al Faisal (Mercedes SLS AMG GT3), 604 laps in 24h01m40s; 2 Thomas Jager/Adam Christodoulou/Tom Onslow-Cole/Cheerag Arya (Mercedes), -4 laps; 3 Matt Griffin/Rob Barff/Jordan Grogor/Mohammed Jawa (Ferrari 458 Italia GT3); 4 Stefan Mucke/Jonny Adam/Paul White (Aston Martin Vantage GT3); 5 Florian Strauss/Ricardo Sanchez/Ahmed bin Khanen/Nick Hammann/Gaetan Paletou (Nissan GT-R); 6 Matteo Malucelli/Peter Kox/Jiri Pisarik/Jaromir Jirik (Ferrari).

EUROPEAN RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP JANNER RALLY (A), JANUARY 4-6 RD 1/10

Kajetanowicz is unstoppable as Breen slides out

KAJETAN KAJETANOWICZ WAS ONE stage shy of claiming a whitewash of fastest times, but his winning seven-minute margin more than underlined his dominance on the ice and snow-coated Upper Austrian roads.

The Pole, whose supply of 15-inch Pirelli tyres gave his Ford Fiesta R5

the edge in the tricky conditions, sprinted into an early lead and gradually pulled clear as several rivals hit trouble.

They included Craig Breen, who slid his factory-supported Peugeot 208 into a ditch nearing the finish of stage one in what the Irishman

described as a "10kph accident", and Alexey Lukyanuk, who lost five minutes with an overheating engine on the first test. But a determined recovery propelled the Russian from 23rd to third after he demoted Jaromir Tarabus to fourth on the final stage.

Tarabus, whose ailing Michelins

were all but spent at the completion of the last run, settled for fourth with Martin Fischerlehner finishing as the top Austrian in fifth after Hermann Neubauer retired on day one.

Citroen youngster Stephane Lefebvre, on the first of two ERC prize drives for winning last year's Junior crown, dropped out of fifth on the final afternoon when his Citroen DS3 R5 developed an electrical fault.

● Graham Lister



Kajetanowicz won
by over seven minutes

RESULTS

1 Kajetan Kajetanowicz/Jarek Baran (Ford Fiesta R5), 2h50m52.6s; 2 Robert Consani/Maxime Vilnot (Peugeot 207 S2000), +7m07.4s; 3 Alexey Lukyanuk/Yevhen Chervonenko (Ford); 4 Jaromir Tarabus/Daniel Trunkat (Skoda Fabia S2000); 5 Martin Fischerlehner/Tobias Unterweger (Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX); 6 Jonathan Hirschi/Vincent Landais (Peugeot 208 T16). **Points 1 Kajetanowicz, 39**; 2 Consani, 28; 3 Lukyanuk, 25; 4 Tarabus, 22; 5 Fischerlehner, 14; 6 Hirschi, 8.

Formula E

Buenos Aires (RA)

January 10

Round 4/10



RESULTS

35 LAPS, 52.347 MILES

1	ANTONIO FELIX DA COSTA (P)	48m52.100s
	Amlin Aguri; Grid: 8th-1m09.658s	
2	NICOLAS PROST (F)	+5.354s
	e.dams Renault; Grid: 7th-1m09.636s	
3	NELSON PIQUET JR (BR)	+8.552s
	China Racing (Campos); Grid: 9th-1m09.742s	
4	JAIME ALGUERSUARI (E)	+11.148s
	Virgin Racing; Grid: 2nd-1m09.161s	
5	BRUNO SENNA (BR)	+11.535s
	Mahindra Racing (Carlin); Grid: 19th-1m13.209s	
6	JEAN-ERIC VERGNE (F)	+13.319s
	Andretti Autosport; Grid: 6th-1m09.527s	
7	SAM BIRD (GB)	+13.617s
	Virgin Racing; Grid: 4th-1m09.388s	
8	NICK HEIDFELD (D)	+15.464s
	Venturi (Signature); Grid: 3rd-1m09.367s	
9	ORIOLE SERVA (E)	+19.334s
	Dragon Racing; Grid: 13th-1m10.588s	
10	STEPHANE SARRAZIN (F)	+28.973s
	Venturi (Signature); Grid: 11th-1m10.165s	
11	HO-PIN TUNG (PRC)	+1m12.858s
	China Racing (Campos); Grid: 15th-1m11.049s	
12	MARCO ANDRETTI (USA)	-1 lap
	Andretti Autosport; Grid: 14th-1m10.713s	
13	DANIEL ABT (D)	33 laps-accident
	Audi Sport Abt; Grid: 12th-1m10.329s	
14	JEROME D'AMBROSIO (B)	-2 laps
	Dragon Racing; Grid: 18th-1m12.239s	
R	JARNO TRULLI (I)	30 laps-engine shut down
	Trulli (Super Nova); Grid: 20th-no time	
R	LUCAS DI GRASSI (BR)	26 laps-suspension/accident
	Audi Sport Abt; Grid: 5th-1m09.521s	
R	SEBASTIEN BUEMI (CH)	23 laps-accident damage
	e.dams Renault; Grid: 1st-1m09.134s	
R	MICHELA CERRUTI (I)	20 laps-accident in first car; second out of battery
	Trulli (Super Nova); Grid: 17th-1m11.785s	
R	KARUN CHANDHOK (IND)	15 laps-suspension/accident
	Mahindra Racing (Carlin); Grid: 10th-1m09.875s	
EX	SALVADOR DURAN (MEX)	+14.724s
	Amlin Aguri; Grid: 16th-1m11.331s	

Winner's average speed: 64.271mph. Fastest lap: Bird, 1m11.540s, 75.263mph.
All drivers in Spark-Renault SRT_01E.

DRIVERS' CHAMPIONSHIP

1	DI GRASSI	58	6	DA COSTA	29
2	BIRD	48	7	ALGUERSUARI	26
3	BUEMI	43	8	D'AMBROSIO	22
4	PROST	42	9	MONTAGNY	18
5	PIQUET	37	10	CHANDHOK	18

TEAMS' CHAMPIONSHIP

1	E.DAMS-RENAULT	85	4	ANDRETTI AUTOSPORT	41
2	VIRGIN RACING	74	5	DRAGON RACING	38
3	AUDI SPORT ABT	62	6	CHINA RACING	37

POINTS SYSTEM EXPLAINED

25-18-15-12-10-8-6-4-2-1 to top 10 finishers. Three points for pole position.
Two points for fastest lap.



Piquet gives AFdC a soaking



Da Costa's electric shock

He spent much of the race lurking around the bottom of the top six, but Antonio Felix da Costa stayed calm as the favourites fell

AS THE SUN WAS JUST BEGINNING TO CREEP towards the Buenos Aires skyline, it was Jaime Alguersuari – now considerably more bearded than he was in his Toro Rosso days, and probably sporting a couple of extra tattoos – who did the best job of framing what had happened earlier in the afternoon.

"I think the race was confusing for us, and amazing for the spectators," he said. "As a group, I am very disappointed in us as Formula E drivers. We are all professionals. We are not junior drivers, we are experienced. And today was just a nightmare of people making mistakes, people pushing each other.

"It's not all bad. It's a nice event, we're in Buenos Aires, the atmosphere is great. But I think

we should all talk about what we want and where we want this to go, because today I didn't really understand the race, and I didn't enjoy it at all."

The Spaniard was right on most counts. We were most definitely in Buenos Aires, and the weather and city were glorious. Argentina has largely been starved for international single-seaters since the late 1990s, and the fans from the country that invented Fangio were out in force.

And in terms of pure entertainment, every one of them would have gone home happy: so frantic was the action over the second half of the race that the simple act of taking notes had to be weighed up against the risk of missing something important while looking at the notepad. It says a lot about how everything unfolded that the



The one that got away, part one: Buemi led half race

FOR IN-DEPTH RESULTS
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Da Costa heads
second man Prost



The one that got away,
part two: di Grassi went out

first reference to race winner Antonio Felix da Costa appears on the second-last page of AUTOSPORT's notebook. And that the sole mention of Nicolas Prost and Nelson Piquet Jr, who joined him on the podium, came when they missed the call to pit with the rest of the field under the safety car. It was a weird day.

One of the few absolutes that came out of the race was that the rear suspension is the Achilles' Heel of the Spark-Renault. All brand-new race cars have teething problems no matter how much they test before they compete, and the Formula E car was tested extensively. But Jean-Eric Vergne's accident at the previous round in Uruguay and the mishaps that struck Karun Chandhok and Lucas di Grassi last weekend confirmed that a

certain combination of bumpy street circuits and the Formula E car's unusually biased weight distribution take the current rear suspension very close to its limits.

It was Chandhok's accident – a rear-suspension failure on the entry to the final chicane that ended with heavy contact with the outside wall – that served as a sort of cue for things to go nuts in the first place. Up until that point, the first half of the race had been a fairly sedate affair led by Sebastien Buemi. The e.dams driver had been dominant earlier in the day, topping both practice sessions and claiming pole position, and he swung into the pits at the end of the first stint looking every bit in command.

Chandhok's crash came just as everyone was



The one that got away,
part three: Heidfeld had penalty

starting to prepare to change cars, and the overlap of these two events seemingly threw the FIA race stewards for a loop: the safety car was delayed in coming out, and then there was confusion over which car it should pick up as the leader. That was followed by several drivers being waved back around, and a couple of others finding themselves a lap down with no idea how they got there.

And then there was Piquet, who actually spent the entire final stint convinced that he was a lap behind the leaders, right up until the moment that he crossed the line and was congratulated by his team for finishing third.

"I said, 'What happened? Did everybody stop?'" he recounted. "They said, 'Well no, you were on the lead lap' and I said, 'Guys, two laps from the end I backed off to try to get the fastest lap because I didn't want to fight with them...'"

During that chaotic pit window, Piquet had also distinguished himself by being the only driver to observe a red light that had been illuminated at the pit exit. Several other drivers ignored it without any repercussions, but Virgin's Sam Bird, who had been delayed by a slow stop, attempted to do the same thing and was penalised. He was second when he served his drive-through and set the fastest lap on his way back to seventh, but it was scant consolation (see next page).

As soon as the field had more or less sorted itself out, the leaders began dropping like flies. Buemi overcooked it at the chicane and crashed, handing the lead to di Grassi... who hit the wall two laps later due to suspension failure. That put Nick Heidfeld into P1, until he was called in to serve a drive-through for pitlane speeding.

The F1 veteran observed his punishment just one lap before the end, which is where Felix da Costa popped up. Like Piquet, he'd somehow completed an extra lap during the safety-car mess, and then a miscommunication with his Amlin Aguri team prompted him to save energy when in fact he had more than he needed. Quirkily, he and Prost were the two big winners in a battle that they weren't even involved in: Felix da Costa had made it up to second, putting him just clear of an almighty fight that was unfolding right behind him, and Prost was about to capitalise on a lot of other people's mistakes.

Different levels of energy conservation over the final run to the flag resulted in huge speed differentials between Vergne, Alguersuari and Daniel Abt, who were disputing the minor podium places. Every corner brought a new lunge, and not all of them were especially smart: Alguersuari managed to get hit by both his rivals on separate occasions, the crash with Abt putting the German out of the race on the final lap and leaving Alguersuari with a bent wishbone and steering. Prost and Piquet reaped great rewards from simply being smart enough to keep clear of it all.

Was the whole thing an advertisement for great driving standards? No. Did the race make sense from an operational standpoint? No. Did the crowd get an entertaining day out? Absolutely. It was a basket case of a contest, but a fabulous event. ▶

IN THE PADDOCK

MARK GLENDENNING
SPECIAL CONTRIBUTOR
@m_glendenning



HISTORICALLY, IF YOU WERE TO FIND some chemical that could distill motorsport down to its most fundamental elements, the two things that would be left sitting in the beaker would be noise and speed.

In relative terms, Formula E doesn't have either of those, and yet it's brilliant. If anything, its idiosyncrasies (things that some might consider drawbacks) are the most fascinating things about it. I didn't miss the lack of engine noise last weekend and, as long as the field is close enough to be competitive, the outright numbers as they relate to speed don't really matter.

Even elements that I was initially wary of proved interesting, most of all the car change during the pitstop. Yes, on one level it's amusing that the batteries can only last 20 or so minutes at a time, but it doesn't affect the spectacle, and it gives us a benchmark to look back on in future years when battery technology has developed – as it will – to the point where a single unit can run an entire grand prix distance.

All one-make categories have some sort of gimmick; the difference here is that the 'gimmick' is a glimpse into the future. I'll take that over football liveries any day.



Fans in BA had a great day

Aero war could force cost explosion, teams warn

FORMULA E TEAMS AND DRIVERS

are urging the FIA not to encourage aero development in the series if the regulations are loosened to coincide with the arrival of manufacturer involvement next season.

AUTOSPORT revealed last month that the series is anticipating the arrival of between six and eight manufacturers for the 2015-16 season, and that change is expected to be accompanied by increased scope for technical development of the all-electric race car.

But the extent to which the car could be opened up remains unclear, and several teams warned of a cost blow-out if aerodynamics are freed up.

"Leave the car alone, let it be the way it is, and let the development go into the power and the batteries," said Andretti Autosport boss Michael Andretti. "If they open the car up, then you have a Formula 1 budget. There's been talk of that, so we're lobbying hard to make sure that the car stays frozen."

Amlin Aguri's Mark Preston, whose CV includes F1 roles at McLaren and Super Aguri, agreed. "What a lot of people here



Andretti: 'leave the car alone'

don't understand, because they haven't done F1, is how far things can go," he said.

The stance was shared by the drivers, with Karun Chandhok warning that open aero regulations would force some teams out of the series.

"I don't think Mahindra would carry on if they opened it up for bodywork [development]," he said. "No chance. If you

want to do aero, you go to Formula 1, or you do Le Mans. The core of this series should always be about the powertrain and batteries. Nobody has the spending power to do an aero programme. There's not enough money in motorsport for that today. Look at a front wing on the Mercedes, or Red Bull or whatever – that alone would equal the entire budget of half the [FE] grid."

F1 veteran is Trulli happy in FE

JARNO TRULLI SAYS THAT IT WAS the unique appeal of Formula E that coaxed him into breaking a two-year sabbatical to return to the cockpit.

The Italian, whose 15-year F1 career included stints with Minardi, Prost, Renault, Toyota and Team Lotus, had not raced since the end of the 2011 F1 season when he joined the Formula E field as an owner/driver, despite having received

several offers in sportscars.

"It's a brand-new series that can have a bright future," he said. "It's the only new alternative in the motorsport panorama. It's a brand-new project, which is attracting a lot of people. The races are spicy and people are following every race; lots of fans. The media numbers are pretty good. So I think we are doing the right thing, and I'm happy that I've joined the series."



Trulli likes the new concept

REMEMBER WHEN

13/1/80



The last time an FIA championship race was run in Buenos Aires in January – the 1980 Argentinian GP – Nicolas Prost's father Alain (above) scored a debut F1 point, while Nelson Piquet Jr's old man got on the podium in second place.

Angry Bird on hunt for officials

SAM BIRD PLANS TO SEEK

clarification from Formula E officials regarding his drive-through penalty for ignoring the red light at the end of pitlane.

The Virgin Racing driver – who would likely have won without the penalty – said that several other drivers also passed a red light. While he did not try to argue his guilt, he was baffled to be the only one penalised. "I will be trying to speak to the race

director," he said. "But regardless of whether I think it's right or wrong, it has happened now. They will just say that a red light is a red light and you can't go through it."

"The people that I was fighting with were in the pits with me, and they went through. I had a problem in the pits and was delayed by five or six seconds, so they could go through but why couldn't I? That's the bit I don't understand."

DURAN EXCLUDED

Salvador Duran was excluded from the results in Buenos Aires for exceeding his maximum power allocation after crossing the line in eighth place.

ANDRETTI TO RETURN

IndyCar driver Marco Andretti is expected to return for two more Formula E races. Andretti endured a series of setbacks on his debut on his way to a disappointed 12th, but is likely to reappear at Miami and Long Beach.

PENALTIES FOR MIAMI

Jarno Trulli and Nelson Piquet Jr have been handed grid penalties for the next round at Miami. Trulli is docked 10 places for a gearbox change, while Piquet loses five for speeding under yellow flags.

MARUSSIA MEN JOIN

Dragon Racing's staff was reinforced ahead of Buenos Aires when it recruited several former members of the defunct Marussia Formula 1 team to run Oriol Servia and Jerome d'Ambrosio.



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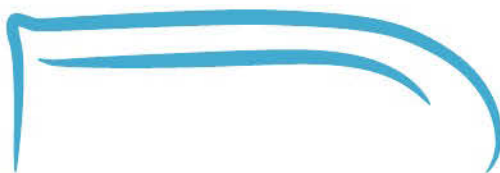
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McLaren GT juniors
will test and race
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New GT young-driver schemes

McLaren and Aston Martin announce new programmes for 2015

GT GIANTS McLAREN AND Aston Martin have launched factory young-driver programmes.

Aston's Evolution Academy will evaluate a number of GT3 and GT4 drivers over the course of the season while McLaren's GT Young Driver programme will introduce two drivers into a test and race plan with its 650S GT3.

Both schemes were announced at AUTOSPORT International last week, where British GT4 champion Ross Wylie and Ginetta GT4 Supercup race winner Andrew Watson were confirmed as McLaren's first GT juniors.

Through the initiative the duo will join the test programme of the

650S GT3 machine, work with factory drivers Rob Bell, Kevin Estre and Alvaro Parente, and share a car in a prominent 2015 series.

"If I can impart a little bit of knowledge, a little bit that I have, we'll have a good time," said Bell. "The future of GTs is really good at the minute, everyone wants to be there doing it, so if we can all play our part and get a few guys through then we're going to have more British drivers at the top level going forward."

AMR's Evolution Academy is open to a maximum of 10 drivers aged between 17 and 25 who will be racing Aston Martin GT3 or GT4 machinery in 2015, with the view to

finding a factory driver for 2016.

They will each be assigned a mentor from AMR's existing roster of drivers and evaluated over the course of the season, be given advice and training on fitness and sessions in the Aston Martin simulator run by factory driver Darren Turner's Base Performance company as part of the programme.

AMR boss John Gaw said: "We've always had a mix of experienced drivers and young talent, and are really just formalising what we have done in the past with guys like Jonny Adam and Richie Stanaway.

"We want to look a bit closer to find the next youngster to come along, at the same time as getting involved with them at an earlier stage to help their development."

AMR is not committing to where the successful Evolution Academy applicant will race in 2016, with Gaw adding: "We aren't going to put them straight in the #97 car [AMR's lead World Endurance Championship entry], but this is real."

SCOTT MITCHELL
FEATURES
EDITOR

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CRITICS OF THE PORSCHE

Carrera Cup GB have not been difficult to find in recent years.

The championship's nadir in 2013 was a sorry sight to behold. It didn't matter to a lot of people that the calibre of driver fighting at the front – such as Michael Meadows, Dean Stoneman and Rory Butcher – was probably as high as it has been for a while. The fact that only seven raced at Rockingham that year was impossible to ignore.

That said, the British Touring Car Championship support bill could not afford to lose a manufacturer like Porsche. It is arguably motorsport's most significant brand and is a valuable part of the TOCA package, so when the new Type-991 car was introduced for last year, it was of huge significance as it showed the British series was still important to the German marque.

While not hitting the heights organisers hoped for, last season was a stepping stone in its recovery. And the signs are that this year it will truly re-establish itself as a genuine option for aspiring GT drivers and a home for gentleman racers to learn the ropes.

That GP3 podium finisher Dino Zamparelli has been tempted (see page 76), champion Josh Webster will return and British Formula Ford champions Dan Cammish and Jayde Kruger are keen is a testimony to the renewed strength of the Carrera Cup.

You only need to look at the efforts McLaren and Aston Martin are now making to dig out rising talent to see the impact GT racing's rise in recent years is having. The Porsche series is as good a place to start as any.

Aston wants to
find a future
factory star



P81 KIRKALDY INSIDE LINE



Zamparelli (r) will
join Webster in PCC



Zamparelli was a podium finisher in the GP3 Series

Carrera Cup GB

Ex-GP3 racer Zamparelli to Carrera Cup

FORMER GP3 RACER DINO

Zamparelli will return to British racing in the Porsche Carrera Cup GB this season with the Parr Motorsport team.

The 22-year-old claimed the Formula Renault BARC title in 2011, before switching to international single-seaters in the FIA Formula 2 Championship in '12, and then the GP3 Series in 2013 and '14.

He claimed six podiums with the ART Grand Prix outfit last season, finishing seventh in the points, but said his move into the Porsche series was because his single-seater aspirations had become unrealistic.

"I began to look at alternative options outside of GP3 halfway through last season," Zamparelli said. "When [Max] Verstappen was fast-tracked into F1 after only a

season in F3, it was a tough time. The heads of all GP3 drivers dropped and we felt depressed. If it's difficult for the GP2 champion to get an F1 seat, then the rest of the hopeful drivers don't stand much chance."

Zamparelli, the 2008 Ginetta Junior champion, tested a type-991 Porsche 911 at Silverstone towards the end of 2014.

"It will certainly be a different

way of driving a sportscar rather than a single-seater machine, but it's not totally alien to me," he said.

Mark Cole, Francis Galashan, Josh Files and David Walley all completed entries into the championship over the past week, bringing the total number of registered drivers to 18. Organisers hope the grid will reach the mid-twenties in time for the season-opener at Brands Hatch.

BRDC F4

Champion F4 team Lanan signs Bartholomew for 2015

LANAN RACING HAS SIGNED

Jack Bartholomew for its 2015 BRDC Formula 4 Championship campaign as it eyes a third straight drivers' title in the series.

The 16-year-old will make his car-racing debut in the category after six years in British karting, having tested Lanan's F4 racer last November.

"We're really pleased to welcome Jack on," he said. "He has shown great potential in karting and we're confident that we can work together to achieve great results this year."

Bartholomew said he was wary of setting targets for his first year in single-seaters despite rookies Jake Hughes and George Russell winning the in title their own debut campaigns.

"Lanan has a great record in the series and I'd like to help them continue that and achieve some podiums or wins, but I'll have to wait and see where I stand when the season starts," he said. "It depends how many other new drivers are in the series but my target is to win."



Lanan has already tested Bartholomew

MSA Formula

Pull joins Ford dominator JTR for inaugural MSA Formula

REIGNING BRITISH FORMULA

Ford champion squad JTR will field British-based karting graduate James Pull as its first signing in the inaugural season of this year's MSA Formula.

The 15-year-old, who has dual British and Singaporean nationality, made a permanent move to the UK last year to further his motorsport career ambitions.

"I am really excited to be joining JTR," Pull said. "JTR drivers have won the British Formula Ford Championship for the past three years, and I am looking



Pull will race for JTR

forward to working with [team boss] Nick Tandy and the team. I am going to be working very hard between now and the first race at Brands Hatch in April."

Porsche factory driver Tandy added: "James tested with us a few times at the end of last year and on the back of that we are delighted he will be joining us in the team."

"His preparation and commitment to starting his racing career in 2015 meant he was top of our list for winter testing and he didn't disappoint."

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British GT

Parfitt gets Ginetta drive as British GT nears capacity

ROCKER-TURNED-RACER RICK

Parfitt Jr will step up to the GT3 class in British GT this season, driving a factory-entered Ginetta G55, as the championship nears a capacity entry. The 2013 British GT4 champion will remain with his team-mate from last year, Ginetta GT4 Supercup race winner Tom Oliphant, for his debut campaign with Team LNT.



Parfitt (l) will race for LNT in 2015

Ginetta is my spiritual home, having come through the ranks with them.

"It will be a tough learning year for me, but Tom and I are a formidable pairing as we showed last year in GT4, we work extremely well together and both he and I have been quick in testing, so the aim is to surprise people and ruffle as many feathers as possible!"

For the first time in the championship's history the GT4 class is set to have at least as many entries as the main category, with 15 pairings confirmed.

Series manager Benjamin Franassovici says it is reward for their perseverance.

"We've reached capacity, we've put people on hold," he said. "People said we were flogging a dead horse, but I knew there was substance."

"If you have numbers and diversity you're a happy promoter."

HUMBLE PYE

The voice of club racing



Radical's new RXC Spyder was on display at ASI

Best of Britain in focus at AUTOSPORT International

Marvellous machinery, new and old, had fans drooling at AUTOSPORT International 2015. Between superb offerings from grandee marques like Bentley, Ford (both via M-Sport), Porsche and Renault, however, I sensed that national sport was better represented than for many years at the NEC.

Be this a signal of confidence in the British economy's recovery or living for today, the halls were peppered with great kit. Launched last Thursday, Radical's three-litre V8-engined RXC Spyder has dramatically reinvented the V8 sports-prototype concept debuted with its SR8 of 2005. Six deposits were taken on the trade days. The SR3 RSX also impressed.

I was fascinated to see the new Mygale-built MSA Formula car and proven tubeframe MSV BRDC F4 (a monocoque successor is due for 2016) in close company. If hype translates into take-up, the FIA-aligned newcomer will be OK, yet should parallel categories dilute the talent pool in today's market?

Rumours of a cheap entry-level single-seater being prototyped with a one-litre, three-cylinder Toyota turbo engine for next season began to gel. Necessary or a blind alley? Time will judge, but why others insist on 'repackaging' failed pro classes when the Monoposto Racing Club has long done a first-class job of mopping up such cars eludes me.

You couldn't miss the production version of Dylan Popovic's dramatic Audi V6 bi-turbo engined Avatar One sports car on a stand shared with Castle Combe Racing Club, in whose Special GT championship the Marlin-built machine was evolved last season.

Barry Pike's brand new Wildmoor

Mtc 750 Formula racer was a 750 Motor Club talking point. The uprated Arrow FRS2 (now two-litre Ford Duratec-powered, with specialist induction system and racing clutch), which creator John Moore believes capable of joining Sport Specials' frontrunners, was another.

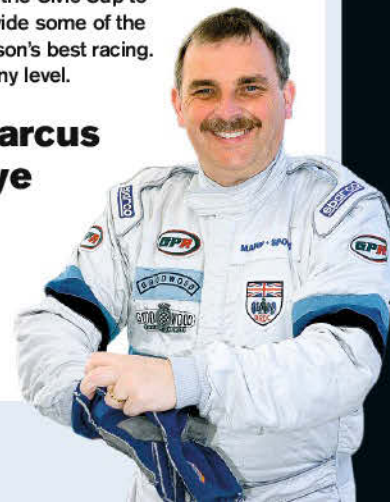
Having gone down the route in depth, the low-cost-racing pioneer's marque championships are buzzing.

"I sensed that national sport was better represented than for many years"

It's no surprise, since the Civic Cup, with registrations closing on 50 and many rorty cars in build, Compact Cup, Clio 182 (40 kits sold) and increasingly Mk3 'Roadsterised' Toyota MR2 promotions are among Britain's most vibrant!

More specialised is its Road-Going Bike-engined arena, a high-revving hotbed of engineering endeavour and daredevil driving in front- and rear-engined divisions. Expect RGB and the Civic Cup to provide some of the season's best racing. At any level.

Marcus Pye



New VW Beetle racer unveiled

The first new-generation Volkswagen Beetle to be developed for circuit racing broke cover at AUTOSPORT International last weekend. Volkswagen Racing Cup veteran Andrew Smith will race the two-litre turbocharged car in the championship, which will adopt a new championship format in 2015 (see page 79).

Club racing

Hot Hatch returns to 750MC

THE 750 MOTOR CLUB WILL

re-launch its Hot Hatch Championship this season especially for tuned Ford Fiesta ST machines.

The series, which will run alongside the club's Stock Hatch championship, will cater for 230bhp Fiestas and club officials plan for this year to be a development season alongside Stock Hatch before a planned separate grid in 2016.

"We didn't want the extra cost of slick tyres which are used in other Fiesta championships," said co-ordinator and 2013 Stock Hatch champion Tom Bell, "so instead wanted a category with enough power. The Class A and B cars

will produce 230bhp and contain a throttle body as well as an ECU. Cars will not be able to be developed to keep costs down."

750MC competitions secretary Giles Groombridge added: "This Fiesta ST will be a different animal compared to the car raced in other club championships."



New series will cater for basic STs



FFord winner Sutton will tackle Clio Cup in 2015

Renault Clio Cup UK

Ford ace Sutton makes Clio Cup switch

BRITISH FORMULA FORD RACE winner Ashley Sutton will switch to the Renault Clio Cup UK this season with British Touring Car squad Team BMR.

The 20-year-old ex-Formula Vee racer took third place in last year's FFord standings, with five wins, despite missing a round while he changed teams.

Sutton, who raced a part-season in a Ford Fiesta in 2011 before a road-car accident curtailed his programme, has targeted a move

into touring cars with the team, which plans to field a multiple-car attack in its maiden season in the Clio Cup.

"This is the start of a three-year plan with Team BMR, which will hopefully lead to a touring car seat," Sutton said. "I've always wanted to move into a touring car, and tested a Clio before racing the Fiesta but budget prevented it at the time."

"I need to gain more front-wheel-drive and tin-top experience and the Clio Cup will give me just that."

Team BMR boss Warren Scott said: "Ashley will certainly be the team leader, and I'm certain he'll be a championship contender from the off. It will be very different compared to his single-seater racing last year, but he's got so much natural talent."

"He's also had previous experience in front-wheel-drive machinery, and will have plenty of test days with the BTCC team, so he'll be ready to go from the opening round."

FR Eurocup

Aitken switches to Koiranen

FORMULA RENAULT EURO CUP

frontrunner Jack Aitken will contest the series for a second season in 2015, having agreed a deal with champion team Koiranen GP.

The 2013 Fomula Renault Northern European Cup runner-up finished seventh in last year's Eurocup with one victory and three other podium finishes.

He joins fellow former McLaren AUTOSPORT BRDC Award finalist Jake Hughes at Koiranen after splitting with Fortec Motorsport, where he has spent his entire career so far.

"I've tested with several excellent teams this winter, and Koiranen GP particularly impressed me with their quiet but highly professional approach," said the 18-year-old. "This is an important year for me as I'll be looking to carry my momentum from last year into the first round and to challenge for the top spot from the word go."

Aitken is moving from Fortec to Koiranen GP



Historics

Scott Brown trophy at Snett

A NEW RACE MARKING THE LIFE of former Lister sportscar ace Archie Scott Brown will take place at Snetterton.

The 30-minute Historic Archie Scott Brown Trophy will cater for pre-1959 sports-racing cars as part of the Historic Sports Car Club's AUTOSPORT 3 Hours June 14 meeting, which will also feature a gathering of Listers and a reunion of former drivers and engineers.

Scott Brown overcame disability from birth to become one of the leading sportscar racers of the 1950s, chiefly in cars built by Brian Lister, who died just before Christmas.

Organisers of the invitation race also aim to attract cars from Allard, Tojeiro and HWM. FISCAR's Inter-Marque series will also feature.



Scott Brown was Lister ace



Radical bosses hope grids will grow in 2015

Radical

Radical shake-up to boost British grids

RADICAL WILL DRAMATICALLY revamp its UK racing classes this season to broaden the range of its cars that can compete on home soil.

From this year Radical will cease to run its traditional Clubmans Cup and SR3 Challenge categories and will instead introduce new Sprint and Endurance Championships.

The Sprint Championship is a reworking of the Clubmans concept and will feature triple-header races at seven single-day UK events plus a round at

Spa-Francorchamps. The final race of each weekend will feature a reversed grid for the top 10. It will be open to models of Radical up to and including the SR3.

The Endurance Championship will cater for the higher-powered SR8 models, as well as the coupe RXC, RXC Spyder and all SR3 variants. It will feature mixed race lengths from double-header 40-minute events to 90-minute endurance races.

Radical co-founder Phil Abbott said:

"We decided to simplify our UK championship structure and this was the simplest solution. As the economy has picked up there's been a desire for the more powerful cars to return."

"The Endurance Series should be fascinating as we've deliberately made the race distances for the longer races further than an SR8's tank of fuel will accommodate. It will act to equalise the field as SR8s may be faster than SR3s, but they will have to make a fuel stop whereas the SR3s won't."

MSV

Pirelli to supply BRDC F4, F3 Cup tyres

THE BRDC FORMULA 4 SERIES has signed a multi-year deal with Formula 1 tyre supplier Pirelli.

The Italian manufacturer, which replaces Yokohama as official supplier, will provide full support and technical backing at each meeting.

It will partner the championship as it switches to a Tatuus-manufactured carbon chassis from 2016, and will also supply its tyres to the MotorSport Vision-run F3 Cup from this season.

Pirelli motorsport manager Paul

Hembery said the company, which supplied the Tatuus-based Italian F4 Championship with its rubber in 2014, thought it was important to have a link to a competitive junior category.

"This is the single biggest and most important British contract that Pirelli has achieved," he said. "This importantly links us and the championship up with series which we already supply."

"BRDC F4 is a key element to Pirelli's motorsport future, as it enables drivers to make that move up towards

F1 using similar rubber on each step of the ladder."

MSV chief executive and BRDC F4 boss Jonathan Palmer said: "We're always keen to move the championship on and our key values are for the utmost equality, performance and affordability."

"Pirelli is the most prestigious tyre brand in the world. It was chosen to supply tyres for Italian F4 as well as sportscars and British Superbikes. The tyres are incredibly consistent and very competitive in cost."

In brief



VW CUP SHAKE-UP

The Volkswagen Racing Cup will expand to 16 races this season. Its seven-meeting format in support of the British GT Championship remains, but the first two rounds at Oulton Park and Rockingham will become triple-headers. The two races at Spa will be 25 minutes in length and Snetterton's brace of races 30 minutes. The finale at Donington Park will become a 40-minute race.

EX-FORDSTER TO GOLF

Sometime British Formula Ford driver Bobby Thompson will contest the Volkswagen Racing Cup this season with Team Hard. The ex-BTCC squad will also field 16-year-old Damani Marciano. "After my first meeting with [team boss] Tony Gilham I knew this is where I wanted to be," said Thompson.

PIKE'S TROPHY PEAK

Multiple 750 Trophy race winner Barry Pike will contest the 750 Formula championship this season with the brand new Fiat-powered Wildmoor DM1. Pike won four races in the Trophy category last year in the JGS III.

F3 GRID MOURNS LOSS

The British and French Classic F3 fraternities have been devastated by the death of racer Ian Jacobs's wife Vicki – his constant companion of 14 years – on December 23, aged just 31. Diagnosed with cancer last June, Vicki implored Ian to enter July's Silverstone Classic, where he scored a maiden French victory with his ex-Gerhard Berger Martini MK37.

KARI KICKS OFF NEZ

Fifteen-year-old Finnish racer Niko Kari is the first driver confirmed for the new FIA-certified SMP F4 Championship, which is centrally run by Koiranen GP and races in Russia, Finland and Estonia. The series offers a €350,000 prize for the winner to put towards a European F3 campaign.

MILLS TO LEGENDS

Former single-seater racer Connor Mills will switch to Legends racing this season. The 17-year-old former British karting champion competed in British Formula Ford with the Meridian Motorsport squad last season, but a lack of budget has forced him to consider alternative series.



Club

MGB 'GT3' for the 'Ring

A 1966 MGB POWERED BY A turbocharged four-litre Rover V8 engine is being built by an amateur enthusiast in the hope of setting the fastest lap for a fully road-legal car at the Nurburgring Nordschleife.

The Manchester-based 'GT3' MGB has been in build by novice Jason Shalders and two others over the course of the past 21 months. Its engine has been upgraded with Lotus heads and a turbo. The finished car is planned to be driven around the Nurburgring by newly crowned Dubai

24 Hours winner Oliver Webb.

"This is part of a 20-year personal dream," Shalder said. "Initially the concept was just to build the engine when it was bought in 2007, not the car. But when the engine was finished, we decided to put it to some use."

"We looked at what we could do, and the Nurburgring target was appealing. The car has gradually developed, but there's no time target. I've not decided whether the car should race; the first target is to break the record with Oli."



Reid is up for the Cup



Fun Cup

Ex-BTCC ace Reid to Fun Cup

FORMER BRITISH TOURING CAR star Anthony Reid will contest the UK Fun Cup series this season.

The 15-time BTCC race winner and historic racer will join forces with Antonio Armelin, who returned to competition last season in Historic FF2000 after several years out of the sport. Classic FF2000 racer Paul Wighton will run the car.

"Antonio and I started out racing together and I've helped him back in," said Reid. "He's decided to buy a Fun Cup car and we're doing the full season."

Reid also has a chance of contesting the blue-riband Spa 25 Hours event.

"In any one-make series, you've really got to get to grips with it," he added. "It's not going to be easy."

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Andrew Kirkaldy

The Inside Line



The single-seater rising-star-turned-McLaren-GT-chief is hoping to help nurture talent with the marque's new young-driver programme

There is a huge amount of talent on every GT grid week in, week out, so it can be difficult for young drivers to get on the first rung of the ladder to show their true potential.

The new McLaren GT Young Driver programme is designed to offer the young drivers we feel have something special a chance to show what they can do behind the wheel of a GT car, and also work closely with our drivers, engineers and technical teams, giving them access to many years of race- and championship-winning experience at the highest levels.

It's unbelievable really how GT3 racing has gone. All the manufacturers are out there, they're all building stunning cars, and every year it's getting bigger and better. So for 2015 we wanted to start the young driver programme. I've been involved in Formula Renault and lower formulas in single-seaters for years, and with the drivers in the single-seater categories that come through we do a lot of coaching with them, and a lot of different stuff to bring them up to speed, with simulators and suchlike.

What we noticed is when you come into GT racing you're just expected to jump in and nail it. We thought we needed to do something with that; we needed to find a way to bring them on.

I'm at a lot of races and people like Rob [Bell, McLaren GT factory driver] and a lot of the people around us, they tend to come and say 'Oh, have you seen this young guy? Have you seen how this other guy has been getting on?' You just hear a lot about them.

My involvement in the McLaren AUTOSPORT



So that kind of got my mind to thinking that there are lots of these kids out there, and a lot of kids want to go into single-seaters and Formula 1. To do that, as we all know, you need a huge amount of backing behind you. So there are a lot more people at a younger age looking at GT racing.

We're looking at these guys and heard a lot of positive reports about them. I've known Ross [Wylie] for a while, from the people that I used to do karting with, and heard a lot of good things about them. And with Andrew

“We want to play a role in nurturing talent and helping young drivers become professionals”

BRDC Award [Andrew, a previous winner, is now one of the judges], where we used the 650S GT3 this year, makes you notice when you put one of these young drivers in the car just how good they can be straight away. They jump in and are exceptionally quick. Rob comes sometimes to benchmark and it's a bit of a nervous time for him, with some of the times these lads are doing!



ANDREW KIRKALDY

A former rising single-seater star and winner of the McLaren AUTOSPORT BRDC Award in 1997, Kirkaldy was runner-up in Formula Vauxhall that year before finishing second in the 1998 Euroseries Formula Opel season. He switched to GTs and now heads McLaren's sportscar arm.

[Watson] he'd been racing against Charlie Robertson, who I think had been a very special kid when I'd seen him in the 2013 McLaren AUTOSPORT BRDC Award, and he was as quick if not quicker a lot of the time through the year.

That's how I ended up getting to know these guys. We want to get them in a car this year and basically hit the ground running and show what these kids can do with a bit of help. We want to play an active role in nurturing talent and helping young drivers to develop to the stage where they can become professional racing drivers.

Drivers racing GT3 cars don't get the chance to do much development and we thought we should do our bit to put that right. We did about 40 test days last year, so that means we can invite them to join in with our existing factory drivers.

We are not saying that there is a definite chance for one of them to get a factory contract; we just want to give them the chance to develop, and then it is up to them to prove that they can do the job. ❧

In pictures

Images around the globe, from Bolivia to Dubai via Austria and France

MOUTHARPOULOS/GETTY

CAMPBELL'S LUCKY ESCAPE
Canadian Matthew Campbell somersaulted his Durango jimco six times before it burst into flames on Saturday's marathon stage on the Dakar, near Oruro, Bolivia



DUBAI 24 HOUR FIELD UNLEASHED
The opening enduro of 2015 attracted 89 entries. Up front, the winning Black Falcon Mercedes SLS battles the Swiss-entered Stadler Porsche



SNOW POLES
Grzegorz Sikorskin overdoes it on the Janner Rally. The Pole, who is registered for ERC3 points, took sixth in class and 18th overall in his Honda Civic



ANDROS UNITY
Andros Trophy competitors at Isola2000 show support for the victims of the Charlie Hebdo Paris terrorist attack by displaying 'Je suis Charlie' cards

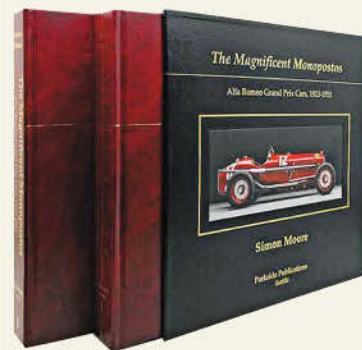


In the shops

Desirable new releases

ALFA ROMEO GP CARS BOOK

£300 – autosport.com/shop
Author Simon Moore originally intended this lavish work to be about just Alfa's single-seaters from 1931-1940, before he discovered heaps more unpublished photos. With access to the Alfa Corse records he has created an incredible history, featuring technical notes and chassis/engine logs of all the Monoposto cars from 1923-1951. Bellissimo!



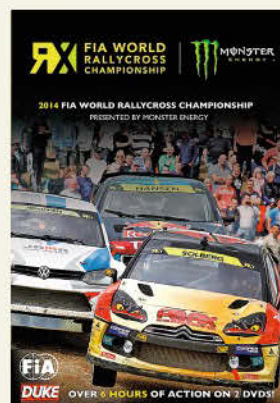
LANCIA 037 1:24 PLASTIC KIT

£30.95 – grandprixmodels.com
Japanese plastic-model maker Hasegawa's 1:24-scale Lancia 037 apes the Martini-liveried machine used by Markku Alen/Ilkka Kivimaki to win the 1984 Tour de Corse Rally, the car's last WRC victory. Details are as good as usual and the decals allow you to build the #1 car of seventh-placed finisher Attilio Bettega/Sergio Cresto if you prefer.



FIA WORLD RALLYCROSS DVD

£16.99 – dukevideo.com
Over six hours of thumping action from the inaugural FIA World Rallycross season has been packed into the official season-review DVD. Relive a season in which seven drivers in five different cars won the 12 rounds and former WRC king Petter Solberg got the better of them all to take the title in his family-run Citroen DS3.



WHAT'S ON

ON TRACK AROUND THE WORLD

Dakar is still in full swing

MOUHARROPOULOS/GETTY



DAKAR RALLY

Buenos Aires, Argentina to Buenos Aires, via Chile and Bolivia
January 4-17
dakar.com



(Very) sideways antics in France

TOYOTA RACING SERIES

Rd 1/5
Ruapuna, New Zealand
January 17-18
toyota.co.nz

ANDROS TROPHY

Rd 5/6
Lans en Vercors, France
January 16-17
tropheeandros.com

MY FAVOURITE DRIVER

Gilles Villeneuve

As a Formula Atlantic racer the Canadian failed to make a big impression on **DIETER RENCKEN** when they first met. But that soon changed

The date: Wednesday January 17 1977; the venue: a bluegrass music venue/pub overlooking Durban's stretch of the Indian Ocean. My 'mucker' Tony Martin had arranged a noggin in honour of the Chevron team, in town ahead of a Formula Atlantic race at Pietermaritzburg's Roy Hesketh circuit.

Tony – winner of the 1984 Daytona 24 Hours in a March-Porsche, and thus no slouch – introduced me to his team-mate for the trio of South African races Chevron had entered as a shakedown ahead of the northern season.

Gilles Villeneuve struck me as slender and shy, the last-named characteristic compounded by the Quebecois's rudimentary English. At the time I idolised such as Niki Lauda, recovering from his Nurburgring inferno, party animal James Hunt and wild guy Jody Scheckter. Canada's Atlantic champ simply didn't cut it.

Gilles's trio of SA races proved uninspiring: at Hesketh he finished third (behind Tony); Kyalami saw him place fifth; and in the third race his car died. I recall thinking, 'If that's the best Canada can muster...' Little did I know the Chevron B39 was later diagnosed with a misaligned chassis.

"It was a sublime display, one that left me agape"

In those days, when AUTOSPORT took two months to hit our stands and TV coverage was non-existent, following F1 was a mission. I knew Gilles finished 11th in the 1977 British Grand Prix (with McLaren), then switched to Ferrari and was involved – innocently it transpired – in a fatal crash in Japan. That was it.

At Kyalami he trailed team-mate Carlos Reutemann inauspiciously before retiring. His maiden victory in teeming rain followed in Montreal, yet I remained unconvinced – until, that is, F1 returned to the Highveld in 1979.

Gilles controlled the opening laps in brilliant slip-sliding style from Scheckter until the race was red-flagged due to a sudden shower. After the restart he raced tactically to win, beating the local hero on home soil in the same car in atrocious conditions. It was a sublime display,



Rencken avidly followed tales of the Canadian star's derring-do



Gilles failed to shine in SA Atlantic rounds

one that left me agape such were the angles from which Gilles recovered, and for the first time I took real notice of him.

Thereafter scanning weekend papers for his name became the norm. Never did he disappoint, not even when victory proved elusive, as it (so) often did. Hair-raising tales of wheelbashing with Arnoux or three-wheeling at Zandvoort thrilled

as much as his 'mobile chicanery' in Jarama and a Monaco win with Ferrari's dreadful Ferrari 126C.

Until, that is, May 8 1982. I saw Gilles race but six times in total and spoke only briefly to him on occasion in SA, but after moving to Belgium my journeys have regularly taken me past the Zolder circuit that claimed his life that fateful Saturday. Always I am left with an utterly dry mouth.

Your guide to the best events taking place in the UK and around the world – plus TV and online

ON TELEVISION

THURSDAY JANUARY 15

1750-1925 Motors TV
Andros Trophy: Isola 2000 highlights
2230-2300 Eurosport
Dakar Rally stage 11 highlights

FRIDAY JANUARY 16

2000-2100 Sky Sports F1
1978 F1 season review
2100-2205 Motors TV
AUTOSPORT International highlights
2230-2300 Eurosport
Dakar Rally stage 12 highlights

SATURDAY JANUARY 17

2230-2300 Eurosport
Dakar Rally stage 13 highlights

SUNDAY JANUARY 18

2000-2100 Sky Sports F1
1979 F1 season review
2230-2300 Eurosport
Dakar 2015 highlights



Motors TV has Andros Trophy highlights

MONDAY JANUARY 19

1600-1700 BT Sport 2
WRC 2015 season preview

TUESDAY JANUARY 20

2000-2100 Sky Sports F1
1980 F1 season review



BT Sport previews the 2015 WRC season

ONLINE

HOT ON THE WEB THIS WEEK

YouTube **SPECTACULAR SOLBERG AT AUTOSPORT INTERNATIONAL**



SEARCH FOR: Petter Solberg at #AIS15 (2:07)

2014 World Rallycross and '03 World Rally champion Petter Solberg loves to entertain, as he proves with a stunning display of car control in the ASI Live Action arena last weekend, using MC Dave Richardson as an unwitting prop in a white-knuckle finale.

AUTOSPORT+

Exclusive content coming up in our premium website this week

AUTOSPORT technical expert Gary Anderson returns with the first of many tech updates in 2015, outlining what he expects to see from the new Formula 1 cars as they're unveiled over the coming weeks. And don't miss Dieter Rencken's latest ruminations on the political scene.

GET AUTOSPORT ON THE MOVE

IN THE IPAD ISSUE THIS WEEK

- ACTION FROM FORMULA E, ERC AND DAKAR RALLY
- ON SALE ALL OVER THE WORLD FOR ONLY \$2.99

DOWNLOAD IT NOW FROM AUTOSPORT.COM



Revved up over what's on the box

THERE WAS A NEW CHALLENGE for host Henry Hope-Frost's guests on the AUTOSPORT International stage in 2015. In previous years, any indiscretions – whether swearing, criticising rivals, or anything else that may enrage a team boss or offend viewers – were kept within the walls of the NEC and then skilfully edited out of the highlights packages.

But this year stage video was being broadcast live via AUTOSPORT.com. That meant the 'squeeze this random word/fruit or vegetable or dessert/euphemism into your stage interview' challenges were somewhat reduced, though the fact that regular tomfoolery instigator and deserved ASI crowd favourite Jason Plato only appeared on one day also played a role

here. It was to Hope-Frost's credit that of his 136 interviews, 134 didn't feature anything that required an apology. One well-known name swiftly learned that whispered words were still audible when



Will Stevens and Alex Lynn fared well with HHF

you have a microphone in hand.

Glueing yourself to all six hours of live streaming on each of the four days would've been a little too committed, but the broadcast was like having a room in your house where you could be confident someone you recognised like an old friend would be having an interesting natter about motorsport at any time during the day. It wasn't like enjoying all that AUTOSPORT International had to offer live from the comfort of your living room, but that wasn't the point – a labyrinth event of that sort is always better experienced and explored in person. This was a little teaser window into one element of the ASI weekend, a 24.5-hour-long, 136-interview, 76-guest motor

racing chat show spread across four days.

And like any TV chat show, it was a chance to see who thrived in that environment, and who looked like they'd rather be anywhere else. The trio of British racers-turned-pundits David Coulthard, Allan McNish and Anthony Davidson are all now extremely sharp media pros (all the more impressive in Davidson's case as he has that little second job in winning WEC titles alongside being Crofty's partner) who pitch the information/entertainment balance beautifully.

But there was promise for the future too: should Alex Lynn ever get an invitation onto Graham Norton's sofa, he'll handle himself very well.

Revved Up

INTRODUCING

Colton Herta

The 14-year-old American winner with a dream of racing in Formula 1



HERTA CV

Born March 30 2000
From Valencia, California, USA



2014 US F2000 with two top-five finishes; AsiaCup with one win and two second places
2013 Pacific F1600 champion with 10 wins, at age 13; 2nd in Skip Barber Racing Summer Series with five wins
2007-12 Karting, IKF KP2 champion, multiple winner in SuperKarts USA TaG Juniors



Should Colton Herta's surname look familiar, that's because his dad Bryan is an Indycar race winner and Indy 500-winning team owner. But while the majority of his father's racing was at home in the US, Herta Jr's eyes are set on Formula 1. To that end, he is moving to Britain for this year's inaugural MSA Formula (FIA-certified Formula 4) championship, driving for Carlin.

The former SuperKarts USA TaG Cadet champion turns 15 in March – just a week before the opening MSA Formula round – but Herta has already amassed a good deal of car-racing experience since winning that kart title in 2011. He graduated through the Skip Barber Series, finishing second with five wins, and won the Pacific F1600 Championship in '13.

EXPANDING EDUCATION

Last year Herta raced in the US F2000 series, part of Mazda's Road to Indy programme, as well as taking up an offer from Meritus GP to take in four races in the centrally run AsiaCup Series at Sepang, which netted a race win and two second-place finishes. By the end of March,

he'll be old enough to race in Europe!

"It's a great opportunity," Herta says of MSA Formula. "In America you learn, and the ladder system is very good, but I think in England the engineers are very good at teaching you. It's like going to a school, but instead you're getting your teaching in a regular race team.

"Carlin as a team has been proven as one of the best, if not the best team in Europe. They've won championships in pretty much everything they've run in. If you're going to go to Europe, you want to do it right. Carlin definitely does it right."

From his early karting days, Herta's dream has been of F1, despite his nationality and dad's history and success in American open-wheel racing.

"I went to Sepang last year because I wanted to learn as much as possible," he says, "and I got to learn an F1 circuit. Now with MSA Formula the tracks I get to race on and learn are also going to be awesome: Donington, Brands Hatch, Knockhill... and of course Silverstone will be a great highlight for me."

FOLLOWING FATHER'S FOOTSTEPS

With the growing number of 'sons of' making their names in racing, how much influence does Herta's dad have? Is he hands on? "He's very good about that. He wants to see me succeed, but he wants me to do it, and I thank him for that, for letting me do my own thing. But when I do need help, I will ask him, and he's right there for me. I've told him if I make it to F1 he can hold my drinks bottle, and I'll let my grandpa hold my helmet!"

While there'll be lots of on-track learning, he'll be doing his general schooling online. He's also bracing himself for the switch in climate from California to England. "I was over at the end of last year and had a test day in Carlin's 'training car'. They didn't have the F4 car yet. It was a Formula ADAC chassis with F3 wings. That was at Pembrey, and it was funny as there was actually moss growing on the track." Not something you find at Laguna Seca. *Colton Herta was talking to Andy Hallbery*



Ex-kart champ Herta raced in US F2000 last year

NEXT WEEK

ALONSO AT McLAREN

Plus: Daytona 24 Hours and World Rally previews



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** 17.1% of drink drive accidents are between hours of 5am and 1pm (Source: Dept. for Transport, Road Accidents and Safety Annual Report 2010)

* 4 Pints of Abbot Reserve contain 14.8 units of alcohol (Source: Greene King) and each unit takes 1 hour to leave the body (Source: NHS). Therefore 14.8 hours after 9pm the alcohol will have passed from the body.



June 13/14

LE MANS 24 HOURS

Self-Drive Packages with
Hotel or Camping
Coach Tours & Paris Stop-Overs

Indianapolis - 24 May

INDY 500

"The Greatest Race in the World"
4 Nights in Indianapolis

Melbourne - 15 March

AUSTRALIAN GRAND PRIX

5 Nights Melbourne
Melbourne & Sydney
2 Centre Holiday

Montreal - 7 June

CANADIAN GRAND PRIX

4 Nights in Montreal
Niagara Falls Extension

Silverstone - 5 July

BRITISH GRAND PRIX

Tickets, Hospitality
& Hotels

Sepang - 29 March

MALAYSIAN GRAND PRIX

5 Nights in Kuala Lumpur
Penang & KL
2 Centre Holiday

Motor Racing International



Spa - 23 August

BELGIAN GRAND PRIX

Selection of Tours by Coach,
Air or Eurostar
Self Drive Packages

Sakhir - 19 April

BAHRAIN GRAND PRIX

Direct Flights
5 Nights in Manama

Monza - 6 September

ITALIAN GRAND PRIX

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Based in Como

Barcelona - 10 May

SPANISH GRAND PRIX

Selection of Weekend &
Longer Tours by Air

Austin - 25 October

UNITED STATES GRAND PRIX

Texas Hosts
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Monte Carlo - 24 May

MONACO GRAND PRIX

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Arrangements including
Flights & Hotels

Spielberg - 21 June

AUSTRIAN GRAND PRIX

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Vienna & Graz
2 Centre Holiday

Mexico City - 1 November

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Hermanos Rodriguez

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