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WRC Loeb in charge
WTCC Muller wins for Chevy
IRC Meeke on top in Brazil
NASCAR Kurt Busch victorious

→ Mark Hughes explores the fiercest fight on the grid



PLUS



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Meeting 6
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Meeting 8
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Supporting British F3/GT

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60,000

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AUTOSPORT (USPS 454230) is published weekly by Haymarket Magazines Ltd, c/o Mercury International Ltd of 365 Blair Road, Avenel, New Jersey 07001. For subscription rates please contact:

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Frontline Ltd, Park House, 117 Park Road Peterborough, Cambs, PE21 2TS. Tel: +44 (0) 1733 555161. Printed in England by Wyndeham Heron Ltd. Cover and centre sections printed by CSM Impact, Basingstoke. Colour original on: Colour Systems, 90-92 Pentonville Road, London N1 9PS (editorial and advertising). ISSN 0269-946X. AUTOSPORT, incorporating Autoclassic, is published weekly by Haymarket Consumer Media, Teddington Studios, Broom Road, Teddington, TW11 9BE, UK.

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There's light at the end of the windtunnel



THE WAIT is almost over. This weekend we will finally see who did their sums right and whose windtunnel needs recalibrating.

This has been the first off-season of homogenised F1 testing, yet if anything we're even more in the dark about relative performance levels than usual. The huge difference in potential fuel levels, and its impact on lap times, means that even the teams don't really know how they stack up.

Most observers reckon that the big four of McLaren, Ferrari, Mercedes and Red Bull are ahead of the rest. But Sauber, Force India and Williams are pleased with their winter's work, and it seems foolhardy to write off a Renault driven by Robert Kubica.

One thing everyone's agreed on is that the gap between front and back will be bigger than for some time, especially as we'll have two cars on the grid that are yet to turn a wheel, and lapped traffic will be more of a factor than has been the case in recent seasons. I can't wait.

● Everyone at AUTOSPORT wishes Sir Stirling Moss a speedy recovery following his nasty and very unfortunate accident in his lift at home last weekend.

Andrew van de Burgt, editor

BAMBER'S WEEK

'WE AT MCLAREN PROMISE TOTAL TRANSPARENCY'



GIVE IT A WEEK AND JENSON WILL BE INVISIBLE!







WRC

Give him a Mexican wave!

Henning Solberg trundles down a back street between stages in his Stobart Ford Focus WRC during last weekend's Rally Mexico. The Norwegian finished sixth – somewhat overshadowed by younger brother Petter who led for half the rally before finishing second to Sebastien Loeb.

Photography: Bettiol/Getty

Aero boost gives Merc confidence for Bahrain

A major aerodynamics upgrade and a fully-fit Michael Schumacher are expected to herald a strong start to Mercedes' race return as an F1 constructor this weekend. By EDD STRAW



GETTY

Mercedes will have new parts for Bahrain

Mercedes is confident of being in contention for victory in this weekend's Bahrain Grand Prix off the back of its long-awaited major aerodynamic upgrades.

The MGP W01 will feature a new front wing and diffuser, plus other aerodynamic tweaks – including modifications to the sidepods – designed to optimise airflow to the rear of the car.

Friday's opening free-practice session will be the first time the

upgrades have been run in anger. The car is understood to have run with some of them during a promotional filming session at Rockingham last Thursday and Friday, but the restrictions imposed on such activities mean that little meaningful data will have been gathered.

There have been mixed messages from Mercedes, and drivers Michael Schumacher and Nico Rosberg, over whether they are capable of fighting for victory in Bahrain.

Mercedes motorsport boss Norbert Haug declared himself happy with the team's testing progress and expects a close fight in Bahrain.

"Judging by the final test, it will be close," Haug told AUTOSPORT. "Everybody who is honest will have mixed impressions, because you never know exactly where you are compared to the opposition. We think that we are going in the right direction."

PRACTICE IS D-DAY

Mercedes must use the free-practice sessions on Friday to get to grips with the effects of the upgrades.

Major rival McLaren was able to run its major aero package at the final Barcelona test (see AUTOSPORT,

"We are not doing this as a last-minute panic reaction"

Mercedes sports boss Norbert Haug

March 4), so was able to steal a march in this respect. Mercedes trialled a new front wing late in the Barcelona test, but is understood to have discarded it. Nonetheless, Haug is confident that the team is not lagging behind the opposition.

"Everyone will have upgrades," said Haug. "We're not doing this as a last-minute panic reaction as this was in the pipeline for a long period

of time. But it gave us two more weeks of development time.

"Friday running is important for everyone, and it's helpful if you can get through your programme without being handicapped by any technical issues."

THE SCHUMACHER FACTOR

Seven-time world champion Michael Schumacher will start his first grand prix since October 2006 in Bahrain this weekend, and has shown strong pace during his eight test days in February.

Schumacher reported no problems with the neck injury that prevented his Ferrari comeback last August, but Haug urged a management of expectations, even though he is confident that the 41-year-old will be able to get the best out of the car.

"It's his first race after a long period of time, so we should not get carried away," said Haug. "I'm sure if we do not have any technical

Mercedes expects Schumacher to be quick



STALEY/AT

AUTOSPORT SAYS...

EDD STRAW
F1 EDITOR

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There seemed to be genuine shock in the media last year when Jenson Button went from being a nobody in a bad car to being a hero in a great car. Could it be that the car plays a big part in the competitive equation? Well, yes. And anyone who had been paying even the vaguest attention for the past century or so was not surprised.

Sadly, many then drew the conclusion that the competitive equation is *all* car and almost wrote off Button as a worthy world champion.

With the field looking set to be even closer this year, a driver who consistently gives away a few tenths to his team-mate could find himself lagging several rows, not just the odd place, further down the grid.

Then you need to add to the mix the requirement for drivers to box clever in the races and preserve their tyres.

It's the perfect showcase for judging just which drivers are a cut above the rest.

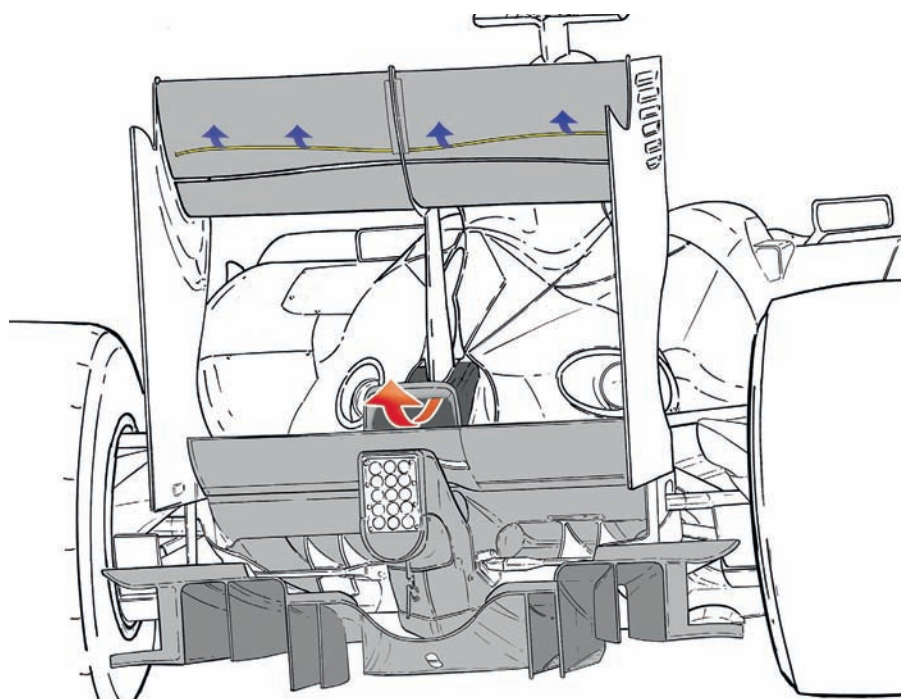
If you think that any old driver can win given the right car, this year will prove you emphatically wrong.

This is especially fascinating given the remarkable quality of the drivers in this year's field. You can make a strong case for seven of the eight Mercedes, Red Bull, Ferrari and McLaren drivers being potential champions, while Nico Rosberg remains an unknown quantity after four inconclusive years at Williams.

A recipe for reputations being made and shattered, if ever there was one.



Button: great car; great driver



2010'S DEMON TWEAK

McLAREN REAR WING

AUTOSPORT technical consultant Gary Anderson: The regulation says that between 75mm and 355mm from the car centre line, the maximum you can have is a two-piece wing. Yet McLaren has a tiny opening that becomes a slot if you feed enough air through it [shown by blue arrows].

It complies with the rules because, if you slice through the rear flap, it still only consists of one closed section. That, combined with the closed section of the main plane, makes up the maximum of two. It could be 2010's double diffuser.

I believe McLaren is feeding air from the airbox intake through the engine-cover fin into the area around the rear flap. If the intake for this airflow is positioned correctly, when the car is at low speed there will be virtually no flow through the small slot as the engine will be using all the available air. But at high speed you get spillage – and this spilt air then flows down the engine-cover fin and feeds the slot, reducing the drag of the assembly and giving a higher top speed.

It may also reduce the risk of airflow separation, which would give more consistent downforce.

problems, we can extract from the car and the team what we are capable of doing.”

Team principal Ross Brawn believes that Schumacher, the third-most-prolific race starter in F1 World Championship history (behind Rubens Barrichello and Riccardo Patrese), will be well-suited to the need to conserve tyre life and fuel.

“He’s very experienced and very intelligent,” said Brawn. “He will think through what he needs for a Sunday afternoon.”

Brawn rates Schumacher's intelligence



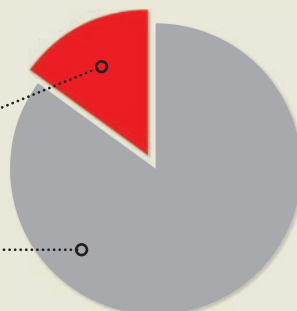
P18 BAHRAIN PREVIEW

STRIKING EARLY

Drivers' championships won by the team winning the first race of a season, 1990-2009

15% rebounded after losing early

85% won the opening race



Only three times in the past two decades has the team winning the first grand prix not gone on to field the driver who wins that year's world championship. McLaren won the opening race in 1997 and 2003 but failed to win the title (although it's worth noting that Ferrari, with which Michael Schumacher won the '03 title, won when its new car made its debut at that year's Spanish GP). In 1999, Ferrari won the opener but McLaren's Mika Hakkinen won the title.

REMEMBER WHEN...



...Rosberg left it late to begin his title charge? Nico's dad Keke Rosberg went a full 13 races before winning 28 years ago. His first, and only, win of his 1982 title season came in the 14th round at Dijon



STALEY/JAT

F1 teams may take fliers: this is Massa's Ferrari

Race strategies wide open

Practice race runs scuppered by lack of testing, meaning that refuelling ban may prompt unpredictable outcomes

The Formula 1 refuelling ban is expected to create unpredictable races early in the season as teams come to terms with the strategic demands of the rules.

The lack of pre-season testing means that race simulations have been limited and strategy options

will not have been perfected. Drivers will start the race with fuel loads of around 160kg, putting enormous stress on the tyres early in the race and forcing them to manage tyre and brake wear, and fuel economy.

Mercedes team principal Ross Brawn said: "It's going to be

fascinating how the strategy and the pitstops are going to work. That's one of the things that we've got to experience and see how it goes. It will be completely different to last year, because whoever stops first will be the quickest, but they've then got to make those tyres last the

rest of the race, unless they want to do a second pitstop."

Most are expected to favour one-stop strategies in this weekend's Bahrain season opener. Two-stop races are likely only at high-tyre-degradation circuits, but stints may not necessarily be of equal length.

QUALIFYING

All drivers will qualify on low fuel loads, but the competitive order within the top 10 could be shuffled due to the tyre rules.

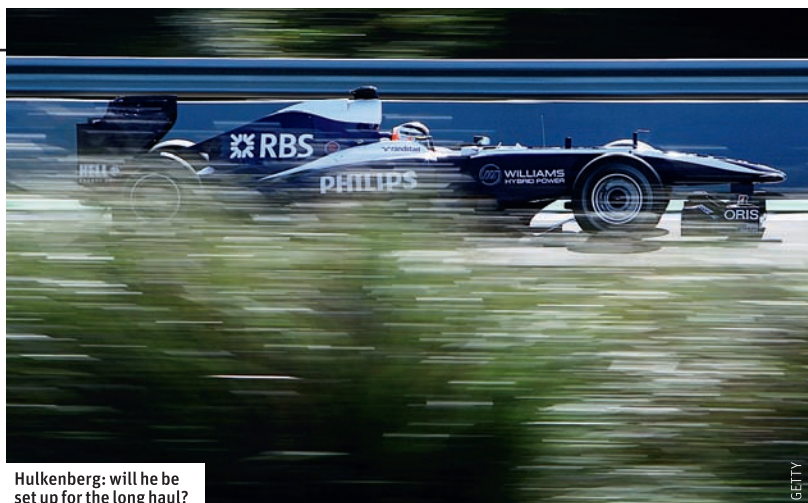
Those who make the top-10 Q3 shootout will be forced to start on the tyres on which they set their Q3 time. This means that some drivers could choose to set their times on the harder of the mandatory two types of tyre, sacrificing places on the grid but putting them in better shape for the race.

Previously, top drivers tried to hold back at least one set of the softer – and faster – rubber for Q3. But, with 160kg of fuel on board at

the start of the race, this could put heavy wear on the tyres, leading to a short first stint and then the risk of getting caught up with slower cars that have yet to pit.

The continuing ban on set-up changes after qualifying will mean that cars will require a higher ride height in qualifying to ensure they are effective when carrying large fuel loads at the start of the race.

Williams technical director Sam Michael said: "You can set your car up for qualifying, or the long haul. I think most teams would set it up for the race. You'll see a big fluctuation in qualifying and race pace."



Hulkenberg: will he be set up for the long haul?

GETTY

TYRE AND FUEL MANAGEMENT

Different cars induce varying levels of tyre wear, although it will be the driver who has the biggest effect in ensuring that the rubber lasts long enough

for the planned stint.

Testing suggests that Red Bull and Force India are among the teams that suffer from the worst tyre degradation, with

Sauber believed to be the most gentle on its rubber.

The early laps of the race will be particularly vital, as it will be easy to destroy the rear tyres when carrying full fuel loads. Drivers have also been working on minimising fuel consumption in testing, as it is understood that it will be possible to save 3kg or more by adapting their driving style. This could be worth over five seconds over a race distance.

Sauber's Pedro de la Rosa said: "The cleverer drivers will have a bigger advantage this year. Drivers who don't destroy the tyres, and think about tyre life and saving fuel, will have an edge."

They're going to have to look after these



PITSTOP TIMING

The onus will be on drivers to make a call based on the feedback they are getting from the grip levels.

Mercedes chief Ross Brawn said: "There'll be a big improvement of one or two seconds a lap when you put new tyres on. It's going to be tricky to sort the strategy out. If you come in too soon for your second set of tyres, can you make them last to the end? If you do the last 10 laps with the tyres falling apart, you'll be vulnerable to someone who stops later."

Teams may also be drawn into making a pitstop earlier than planned, to cover a rival's strategy. Or they could trust in their driver to be able to overtake that car later in the race.

Ferrari's Felipe Massa said: "You don't know when you're going to stop. You can have an idea,

but you don't know, because we stop when we think it's right for the tyres and also [bearing in mind] the strategy compared to other cars."

At last year's Australian Grand Prix, Robert Kubica closed on Sebastian Vettel, who was on a different strategy, and they crashed with three laps to go. This situation could arise more frequently in 2010.

Kubica/Renault to benefit from pitstop timing in 2010?



RULE CHANGES

➤ Refuelling banned

➤ Q3 drivers must start the race on the tyres that they set their qualifying time on

➤ Dry-weather-tyre allocation cut from 15 sets to 11 sets for a grand prix weekend. This is made up of six prime-compound sets and five softer option sets

➤ Front-tyre width now 245mm (mounted), compared to 270mm

➤ Points now awarded to top 10 finishers on a 25-18-15-12-10-8-6-4-2-1 basis

➤ Minimum weight of car raised by 15kg to 620kg

GAMBLING ON SAFETY CAR

There is scope for teams to take risks to move up the order in 2010, particularly with an early-race safety car.

A driver starting on the option tyre could gamble on a 'free' safety car pitstop and then attempt to go through the race on the harder tyre without stopping again. Although this may not work, it would create a potential strategic headache for the frontrunners, who could pit later in the race and be

bottled up behind a slower car with a driver nursing his tyres to the finish.

Drivers could also gamble on a set-up to boost their chances of pole, although Mercedes team boss Ross Brawn has his doubts.

"If you start the race on a high fuel load with a car that is not well balanced, you'll destroy the tyres," said Brawn. "And if you destroy the tyres, you'll be in trouble for the race."



Kovalainen/Lotus could go for qualifying glory

THIS WEEK IN F1



MERCEDES Sports boss Norbert Haug believes that an unfancied team could shock the 'big four' in this weekend's Bahrain GP. "A team that is not in the top four could surprise," Haug told AUTOSPORT. "If they get their act together and others don't, they could even get a win."



RED BULL Team principal Christian Horner expects the competitive edge to ebb and flow between the top teams this year. "I don't think you're going to have one dominant team throughout the year," he said.



McLAREN World champion Jenson Button believes that he heads into 2010 better prepared than in any previous season. "I've spent more time with my engineers this winter than I have before any other season," he said.



FERRARI GP3-bound Mirko Bortolotti, Formula Renault 3.5 racer Daniel Zampieri and karting graduate Raffaele Marciello have joined the new Ferrari Driver Academy. They join F3 Euro Series champion Jules Bianchi on the Scuderia's roster.



WILLIAMS Former Williams world champion driver Jacques Villeneuve has not ruled out a return to Formula 1. "Who knows, there might be some driver changes during the year," said Villeneuve. "And there's still 2011."



SAUBER Pedro de la Rosa and Kamui Kobayashi will run as numbers 22 and 23 this year, taking the numbers originally allocated to US F1.



RENAULT Lada branding will feature on the R30 chassis in a deal that has the support of Russian prime minister Vladimir Putin.



FORCE INDIA Director of business affairs Ian Phillips has left the squad. The former AUTOSPORT editor and Leyton House team boss played a key role in the success of Jordan after joining as commercial manager for the team's first year in F1 in 1991.



TORO ROSSO Technical director Giorgio Ascanelli believes that Jaime Alguersuari has taken a step forward. "Jaime ran in the same lap times as Sebastien Buemi, which is good news, because that never happened last year," said the Italian.



LOTUS Mike Gascoyne expects his team to be able to make rapid gains on F1's pacesetters this season. "Normally you are chipping away and finding tenths, but now we are looking at updates that will bring us a second," he said.



HRT Bernie Ecclestone has called for patience as F1 rookie Karun Chandhok gets up to speed. "While I believe it's going to take Karun until mid-season to show his potential, I wish him all the very best," he said.



VIRGIN Lucas di Grassi has admitted that the team is heading into the unknown this weekend. "Bahrain consumes a lot of brakes, the set-up is very different from testing so we have no data to predict how it's going to be," he said.

HRT: THE GREAT UNKNOWN

The Hispania Racing F1 Team, previously named Campos Meta1, will run its Dallara-designed car for the first time in tomorrow's opening free practice session for the Bahrain Grand Prix.

Former Force India team principal Colin Kolles heads up the new HRT squad, but following the late completion of a takeover of the formerly Adrian Campos-run project by Spanish financier Jose Ramon Carabante, Kolles has had little time to organise the team.

The Valencia-based outfit was still taking delivery of equipment late last week to be sent to Bahrain, and only confirmed its participation in the race in a low-key launch last week.

Karun Chandhok has been confirmed as the squad's second driver alongside former GP2 team-mate Bruno Senna, with several key technical personnel joining the operation including Geoff Willis, Jacky Eeckelaert, Ben Agathangelou and Toni Cuquerella, a former race engineer to Robert Kubica at BMW Sauber.



New car will not run until free practice in Bahrain



Launch was low-key affair in Murcia, Spain

HRT'S KEY FIGURES

The team's drivers might be inexperienced at Formula 1 level, but there is plenty of know-how on the pitwall and in the garage



GEOFF WILLIS

Technical director at Red Bull between 2007 and 2009, Willis also spent time at Leyton House and Williams before moving on for a lengthy stint at BAR and Honda.



JACKY EECKELAERT

Followed Peugeot from sportscars into F1 in the 1990s, and held senior engineering roles with Prost, Sauber and Honda. Recently worked for Kolles in the Le Mans Series.



BEN AGATHANGELOU

After early spells with Tyrrell, Honda's stillborn F1 project and Benetton, the aerodynamicist made his name at Jaguar/Red Bull. He left in 2007, and linked up with Dallara last year.

ROLL HOOP AND SIDEPODS

The engine air intake/rollover bar area is neatly sculpted to allow the airflow to spill out of the intake without upsetting the flow to the rear wing. The sidepod surfaces are neat and simple with the traditional leading edge undercut, which allows the coke bottle area at the rear of the sidepod to assist the bargeboard and scavenge the airflow out from beneath the front of the chassis.

**GARY ANDERSON'S
TECH FOCUS**



The Dallara-designed HRT car is what we have come to expect from the new teams – a neat and tidy, if simple, package. With a completely new team and no testing, plus two inexperienced drivers, it will be tough. It's very difficult to comment on details based on what we have seen, and it's a pity that the team will turn up at Bahrain with no testing, especially with Dallara's experience of GP2 cars – which run on Bridgestone tyres – and its enthusiasm. But with the right development budget this combination could be the one to watch, because, of all of the new teams, this looks the best initial package.

NOSE SECTION

The nose/chassis interface is along Red Bull lines, with raised lumps on the outer corners and the lower wishbone forward leg mounted under the chassis on the 'V' section. The front wing is three-piece, with the main plane lowered dramatically outside of the area governed by the defined central section. This will increase the stall characteristics of the assembly and reduce pitch sensitivity at high-speed and under braking. But the three-element design will make it more controllable and help airflow to re-attach. The upper forward wing has two pieces running into a single inner element, which will produce efficient front downforce without disturbing the airflow to the rear.

**P17 DAVID COULTHARD'S FEARS
OVER 'DANGER' OF NEW TEAMS**

Wraps came off Dallara-built HRT racer last week



60 SECONDS WITH

KARUN CHANDHOK

HRT F1 driver



How are the team's preparations?

The car is ready, so that's a relief. It's just a shame that we had some delays. They were waiting for hydraulic systems and wiring looms and things like that to come in. So that's why we couldn't have a shakedown.

You and Bruno Senna are both F1 rookies - does that make it more difficult from a development point of view?

It's going to be tough. Bruno and I know each other and get on as mates. At iSport [in GP2] we got on really well. Under the circumstances nobody is expecting miracles, but although we don't have F1 experience, we are both intelligent and experienced enough to work with the team to develop the car.

Are you worried about the criticism by people like Felipe Massa, who has suggested that the new cars will be so far off the pace that they could be dangerous?

It's all well and good for him to be saying it now, but I bet if it was him in our shoes five years ago he wouldn't be saying the same thing. I can understand that they have their concerns because there will be more cars on track and that they are going to be a good step quicker than us. There's no hiding that. But at the same time, what are they going to do? Are they going to sell us a customer car?

Where do you think you'll be relative to the other new teams?

On Friday night we'll have some idea. How much of an idea, I don't know. You can be an optimist and say that a GP2 car is six seconds off, but 80 kilos heavier and 200 horsepower less. You take those two factors, and there's three seconds straight away. But that's an optimistic view, I think! It doesn't really work as simply as that, so in all honesty I will reserve judgement until Friday.

Karun Chandhok was talking to AUTOSPORT deputy F1 editor Mark Glendenning



HRT is starting with an all-rookie line-up

FIA invites candidates for 2011

THE FIA will offer the 13th slot on the F1 grid to new applicants for the 2011 season following

US F1's failure to make this year's grid.

Despite Stefan GP's desire to take the vacant

slot this year, the FIA declared it to be too late to let another team into the field. Stefan GP is set

to be among the bidders for the 2011 slot, which is also expected to include US F1 and Lola. The details of the application process will be published by the FIA in the next few weeks.

The process is likely to put a strong emphasis on the financial strength of the potential entrants, and it is understood that US F1 will be allowed to re-apply despite its failure to get on the grid this year. The squad would have to show significant progress to be given a second chance.



Anderson (l) and Windsor hope to try again in 2011



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Straight talk David Coulthard

Britain's all-time leading F1 points scorer

With almost 250 F1 starts to his name, DC voices his concern about a new team going into the season-opening Bahrain GP 'blind', and what else we should be looking out for this weekend

A new season begins this weekend in Bahrain, and there's a lot of unanswered questions that will be asked of teams, cars and drivers. I can't remember the last time there was so much rumour, speculation and unknowns going into the opening round as there is right now. At the end of Sunday night there'll be someone giving it, "I told you so" and others shrugging, "We didn't optimise our car".

HOW THE LAND LIES

In terms of performance I'd rather wait until the chequered flag flies than make any rash

those teams will be fascinating to monitor too – apart from Nico Rosberg, we've got proven winners in all those teams. An exciting prospect.

FASCINATING TYRE STRATEGY

How will this play-out with 160kg of fuel and narrower front tyres? The refuelling ban has produced a big variable, with increased loads over a race distance. The preferred strategy is to run the faster option tyre in qualifying, but you then have to start on that.

You might start up front, but you're going to take a bigger hit

NEW TEAMS, FRESH DANGER?

Some of my BBC colleagues have stated that the new teams should be given time and only judged from Barcelona onwards. That's very public-spirited of them, but I'll borrow this line from Mark Webber: F1 is not a finishing school. You're either capable, or you shouldn't be out there.

Eddie the Eagle got the public's sympathy for trying hard at the Olympics, but, sorry, he was out of his depth. F1 is the pinnacle of motorsport, and it's all about achieving and raising the bar. If any of those guys can't put in a respectable performance, and I'm

“I’m concerned that a team can go into a race with no testing”

predictions based on testing. I know from personal experience that you can drive your car one day and it feels great, and then the next day you just can't find the right balance.

As a rule we can say that last year's spread of the field being covered by just over a second will be much wider with the new outfits coming in. Having said that, I'm confident that the big four teams have remained within half a second of each other.

We should see some close racing at the front between Ferrari, McLaren, Red Bull and Mercedes, and the new combinations in

with the energy required from a car starting on full tanks until the first pitstop, where you can use the prime tyre for the rest of the race. How will that work out, in terms of gaining? You might see teams forsaking qualifying performance to start on the prime tyre, and use the option at the end to sprint to the line.

WILL THE SCHU FIT?

He's been keeping fit, karting and bike racing, but how will Michael Schumacher react to that run down to the first corner? It should be instinctive, but he's not done that for three years. It should be ingrained in his cerebellum, but if he starts thinking things like, "there's a rookie driver behind me who's never driven with full tanks", then he risks taking his eye off the ball, i.e. what's in front.

thinking back to Lola in 1997 here, then frankly it's quite dangerous. I don't want to beat up on the new teams, but this isn't a charity, this is F1 racing.

I'm especially concerned that HRT can go to a GP without testing its car on a track. A new team, car and drivers going out for the first time in Friday morning free practice? What if the car develops fuel surge in a fast corner, with someone up their chuff?

I once tested a car with an ECU that kept resetting itself from time to time. I very eloquently told my electronics guy that if it did it in a fast corner, and caused a huge accident, then I'd extract his black box from the wreck of the car, return to the pits and shove up it his arse!

This is serious business; I can't wait for it to get started. ❌



Schumacher: what do I do on the run to the first corner?

ROBERTSON/GETTY

TRACK GUIDE



Circuit length: 3.914 miles Laps: 49 Race distance: 191.642 miles
Lap record: To be established (new track configuration)

Rubens' guide to Bahrain

Bahrain is a track that I really enjoy. Even though it isn't often a track that people talk about, I'd give it an eight out of 10.

One of the things that I particularly like is that it gives you plenty of set-up possibilities. The grip level is not so high, so you're looking for the best mechanical set-up and the best traction – especially with so many second-gear corners that are very demanding on traction.

There are also several quick corners where you have to be aerodynamically strong.

Overall, to be fast in Bahrain, normally you need to be very well-balanced in braking

and to have reasonable straightline speed.

It's very hot in Bahrain, but instead of opening all of the ducts on the helmet to create ventilation, you have to block them to stop hot air coming in. Unlike Malaysia, it's not humid, just very hot and very dry.

The conditions are completely different here to anywhere else, which I really enjoy.

Bahrain always produces a good show. Partly it's because there are good overtaking chances and partly it's because people are not yet plugged into their set-ups. Being the first race of the season this year, it should be a good one.

OVERTAKING

Turn 1 is by far the best opportunity you have to overtake, and we've seen a lot of action here in the past. There's a very long straight leading up to it, and sometimes you have the chance to complete a pass before you actually get to the corner. If you were in an F3 car, you could get ahead of someone and then they would slipstream back past you before Turn 1, but with F1 it's a long-enough straight to make one overtake possible. Turn 1 is a slow corner in second gear, so you can also outbrake people here.



FERRARO/LAT

BAHRAIN GP WEATHER

	30c FRIDAY SUNNY
	30c SATURDAY SUNNY
	30c SUNDAY SUNNY

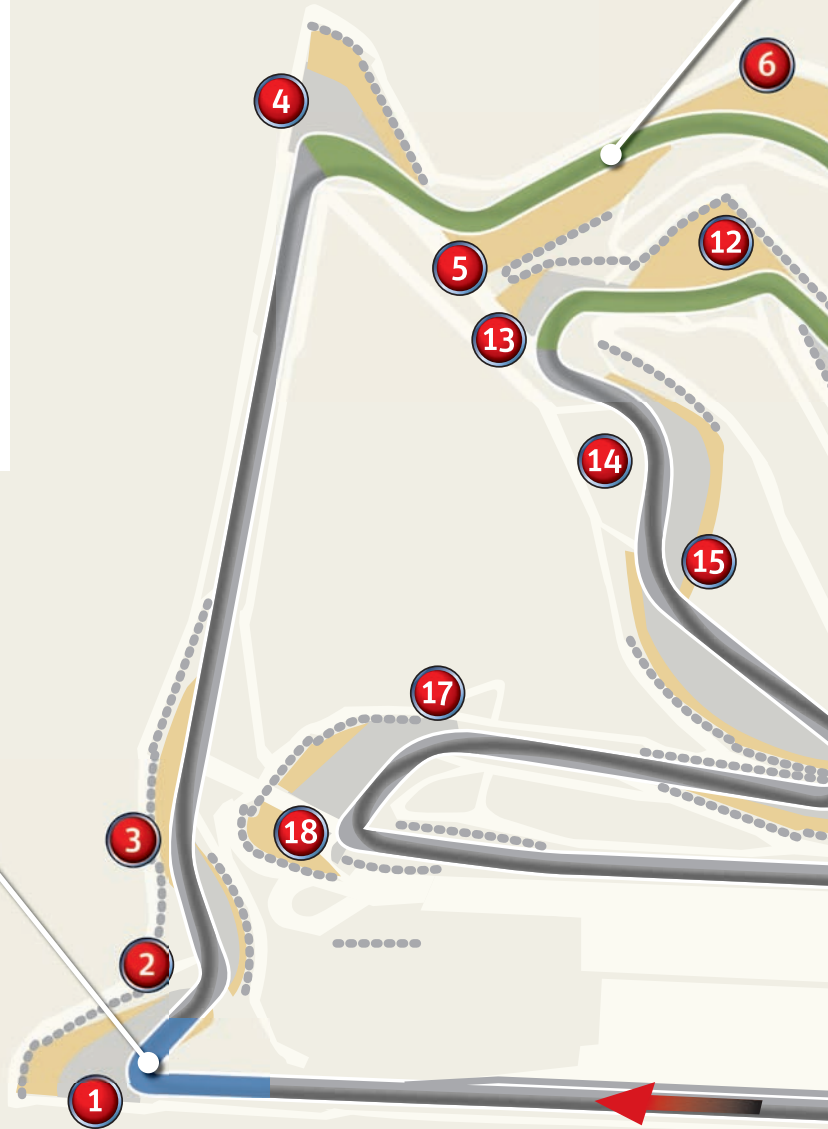
TYRE CHOICE

Super-Soft	Soft	Medium	Hard
Option	Unused	Prime	Unused

EXCLUSIVE

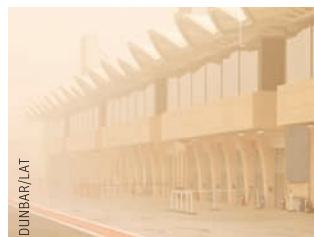
Barrichello's inside line

The most experienced driver in F1 history gives his thoughts on this weekend's challenge



MEMORIES

The first thing that comes to mind when I think of the Bahrain Grand Prix is that on the morning of the first race here, in 2004, there was a big sandstorm. When you got to the track on Sunday morning you couldn't see one metre in front of you! It cleared up for the race, but when we were driving to the grid on the installation laps you could see that Gulf Air jet flying very low, which was an amazing sight! Then in the race I finished second, so it was a good day.



DUNBAR/LAT

NEW SECTION

There is an unknown in Bahrain this year, which is the new section after Turn 4 that adds just over half a mile to the track length. I've driven it on the simulator and it looks like a very slow section, so that might change how you set up the car a little.



Rubens will be making his Williams debut



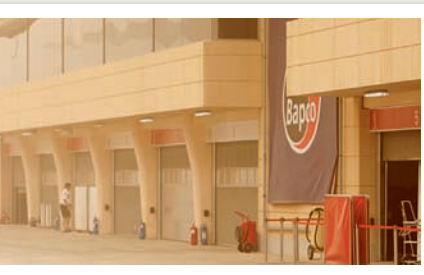
DRIVER CHALLENGE

I used to really like the old Turns 6 and 7, but they're gone now so I would say the section near the end of the lap. You go through Turns 19 and 20, which is a pretty quick left-right section that is fun to drive, and then you head into a slow, but very technically demanding, right-hander at Turn 21. There are plenty of lines you can take through here and you can gain or lose a lot of time. It's a section I really like.



KEY CORNER

The last corner is very important for track time and very important for setting up an overtaking move. It's a corner where you can gain or lose everything on a lap and it's really important to get it right. You can gain a lot of time by being on the throttle early, although you have to be careful, because if you have a good car it's very tempting to carry a lot of speed into the corner. Sometimes that works, but it's very easy to make a mistake. It's a bit of a 'do-or-die' corner!



BAHRAIN GP PREVIEW

MARK HUGHES



Why the refuelling ban will shape what we see in the Bahrain Grand Prix and who really is quick?

Bahrain is going to give us our first look at a wide range of issues triggered by the new no-refuelling era that will remain issues throughout the year: the strategic conundrum of when to pit is going to be the most obvious of these.

If you're the car in the lead and you have no tyre degradation issues (see MPH column, p22), as soon as you have sufficient clear space between you and the midfield that you will not drop into slower traffic, you are probably going to pit. Even if that means consigning yourself to a very long second stint. So if there is some midfield, first-lap incident that spreads the field, it's probably going to trigger a lot of what would normally seem crazily early stops for the frontrunners.

That's all about how, with no refuelling, you are now quicker after your stop than before it, whereas previously it was usually the other way around. Before, you wanted to stop after the guy you were fighting with; now you want to stop before him. The stops therefore are going to be much more apparently random than before – because they will be much more reactive than strategic. Races are probably going to be more complex, not less – that's



Pitstop timing will play a decisive part in Bahrain

assuming the cars are as closely matched as they have appeared to be in testing.

Which brings us onto the other big thing to look out for: was anyone sandbagging in testing by always running more fuel than everyone else? Was there a team that just judged its fuel load to give it a headline lap time that was no quicker than anyone else's, but which knows it's got plenty in hand?

If that's the case, the variation in pit strategies is going to mean very little.

P22 MPH ON TYRE DEGRADATION

Key questions

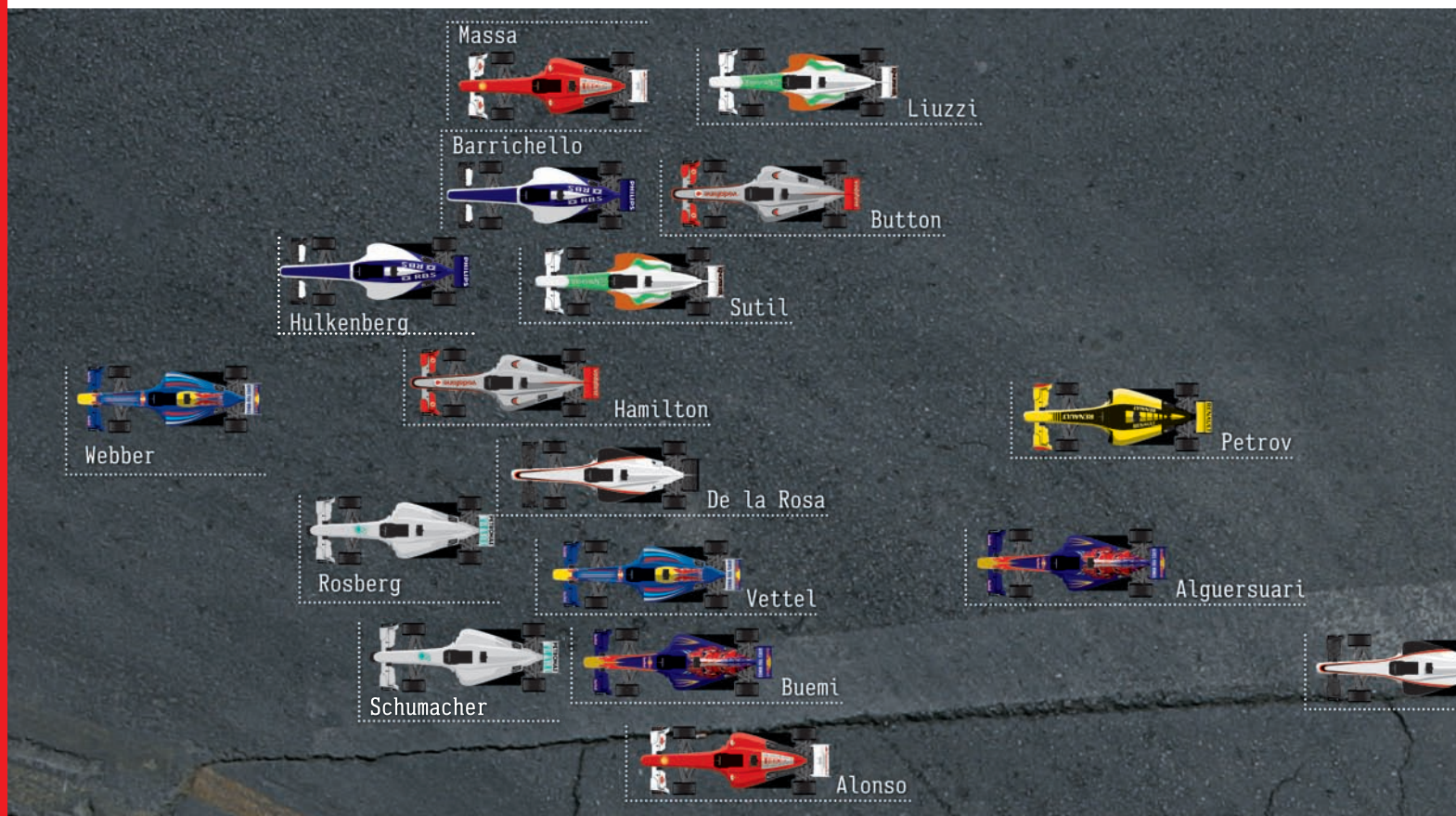
What the Bahrain Grand Prix will tell us

- Could strategy plans be upset by safety cars?
- How much more complex will the new rules make races?
- Have all of the top teams shown their true hand?



Early-race safety car could cause confusion

FERRARI/LAT



100%

101%

102%

103%

104%

GARY ANDERSON TECHNICAL CONSULTANT



SET-UP GUIDE

Bahrain requires good low-speed corner performance, with minimum understeer and good traction, as there is a high percentage of these type of corners. With heavy fuel loads, this set-up is difficult to achieve and will make it more difficult to get high-speed stability for driver confidence.

Slightly less than maximum wing will be used as top speed is around 194mph, so cars with good aero stability will be at an advantage as they can trim the wing that bit further. Brake cooling is even more important – if you get this wrong your race could be over by lap 29.

TV AND RADIO LISTINGS

FRIDAY, MARCH 12

0655-0835 Free practice 1 LIVE (BBC Red Button)
1100-1230 Free practice 2 LIVE (BBC Red Button)

SATURDAY, MARCH 13

0755-0855 Free practice 3 LIVE (BBC Red Button)
1000-1230 Qualifying LIVE (BBC1 and Radio 5 Live)

SUNDAY, MARCH 14

1110-1415 Grand Prix LIVE (BBC1 & Radio 5 Live)
1415-1515 Grand Prix forum (BBC Red Button)
1900-2000 Grand Prix highlights (BBC3)

AUTOSPORT TIPSTERS

Four AUTOSPORT journalists have been given £50 and carte blanche to bet their way through the season, starting with the Bahrain Grand Prix.

Pedro de la Rosa has caught the fancy of all four of AUTOSPORT's tipsters, as kind-on-tyres Sauber is this weekend's dark horse. With the top 10 finishers all getting on the scoreboard, the points-scoring market is potentially very lucrative this week.



JONATHAN NOBLE GROUP F1 EDITOR

£5 each way de la Rosa 66/1



EDD STRAW F1 EDITOR

£20 de la Rosa to score 11/10
£10 Alonso to win 11/4



ANDREW VAN DE BURG EDITOR

£20 on de la Rosa to score at 11/10



MARK GLENDEINING DEPUTY F1 EDITOR

£5 on de la Rosa to score at 11/10
£5 on Hulkenberg to score at 5/4
£1 on Chandhok to win at 1000/1

De la Rosa: Bahrain Grand Prix dark horse



RACE ODDS

Driver	Odds
Alonso	11/4
Hamilton	7/2
Vettel	9/2
Massa	11/2
Schumacher	6/1
Button	10/1
Weber	12/1
Rosberg	14/1
Kobayashi	33/1
Barrichello	40/1
Kubica	50/1
Hulkenberg	66/1
De la Rosa	66/1
Sutil	66/1
Liuzzi	125/1
Buemi	125/1
Alguersuari	200/1
Petrov	250/1
Trulli	250/1
Kovalainen	250/1
Glock	300/1
Di Grassi	400/1
Senna	500/1
Chandhok	1000/1

Odds supplied by Ladbrokes

2009 RESULTS

POS	DRIVER	TEAM
1	Jenson BUTTON	Brawn-Mercedes
2	Sebastian VETTEL	Red Bull-Renault
3	Jarno TRULLI	Toyota
4	Lewis HAMILTON	McLaren-Mercedes
5	Rubens BARRICHELLO	Brawn-Mercedes
6	Kimi RAIKKONEN	Ferrari
7	Timo GLOCK	Toyota
8	Fernando ALONSO	Renault

POLE Jarno TRULLI (Toyota) 1m33.431s

Glock and Trulli ran one-two early on, but lost ground running a long middle stint on the slower prime tyres. This handed the initiative to Button.

2008 RESULTS

POS	DRIVER	TEAM
1	Felipe MASSA	Ferrari
2	Kimi RAIKKONEN	Ferrari
3	Robert KUBICA	BMW Sauber
4	Nick HEIDFELD	BMW Sauber
5	Heikki KOVALAINEN	McLaren-Mercedes
6	Jarno TRULLI	Toyota
7	Mark WEBBER	Red Bull-Renault
8	Nico ROSBERG	Williams-Toyota

POLE Robert KUBICA (BMW Sauber) 1m33.096

Massa put a bad start to the season behind him with a dominant win after taking the lead from wheelspinning polesitter Kubica at the start.

2007 RESULTS

POS	DRIVER	TEAM
1	Felipe MASSA	Ferrari
2	Lewis HAMILTON	McLaren-Mercedes
3	Kimi RAIKKONEN	Ferrari
4	Nick HEIDFELD	BMW Sauber
5	Fernando ALONSO	McLaren-Mercedes
6	Robert KUBICA	BMW Sauber
7	Jarno TRULLI	Toyota
8	Giancarlo FISICHELLA	Renault

POLE Felipe MASSA (Ferrari) 1m32.652s

While Massa took a start-to-finish victory from pole position, Hamilton capitalised on team-mate Alonso's braking problems to take second ahead of Raikkonen.

2006 RESULTS

POS	DRIVER	TEAM
1	Fernando ALONSO	Renault
2	Michael SCHUMACHER	Ferrari
3	Kimi RAIKKONEN	Ferrari
4	Jenson BUTTON	Honda
5	Juan Pablo MONTOYA	McLaren-Mercedes
6	Mark WEBBER	Williams-Cosworth
7	Nico ROSBERG	Williams-Cosworth
8	Christian KLIEN	Red Bull-Ferrari

POLE Michael SCHUMACHER (Ferrari) 1m31.431s

Schumacher led the first two stints, but Alonso emerged from his final pitstop side by side with the Ferrari and took the lead into the first corner to win.

2005 RESULTS

POS	DRIVER	TEAM
1	Fernando ALONSO	Renault
2	Jarno TRULLI	Toyota
3	Kimi RAIKKONEN	McLaren-Mercedes
4	Ralf SCHUMACHER	Toyota
5	Pedro de la ROSA	McLaren-Mercedes
6	Mark WEBBER	Williams-Cosworth
7	Felipe MASSA	Sauber-Petronas
8	David COULTHARD	Red Bull-Cosworth

POLE Fernando ALONSO (Renault) 3m01.902s (agg)

Alonso took a dominant win after second-place runner Schumacher retired after 12 laps. This handed Trulli a second straight podium for Toyota.

PACE COMPARISON

This graphic, based on each driver's fastest lap times from each day of last month's Barcelona test (ranked on a percentage basis compared to the theoretical fastest time), shows that the competitive spread at the front of the field is very tight. The gap from fastest man Mark Webber to Vitantonio Liuzzi, who is at the back of the 13-driver cluster at the front represents just 1.5 seconds around a theoretical 90-second lap.

The graphic also shows that the new teams are a

long way off the back. With Robert Kubica and Kamui Kobayashi not completing proper qualifying runs at Barcelona, there is a chasm between Lotus, Virgin and the rest that shows just how much work they have to do to catch up with the established teams.

When looking at the graphic, it should be noted that varying track conditions and programmes distort the figures, but the general shape of the distribution suggests that we are in for a very close season at the front of the field.





MPH Mark Hughes

AUTOSPORT grand prix editor

Four teams look ultra-close heading into the Bahrain Grand Prix, and there are still more that could steal an advantage because of low tyre degradation

There was some interesting data among the last couple of days of Barcelona testing that might just have a major bearing on what unfolds this weekend in the Bahrain Grand Prix.

The one-lap pace of Ferrari, McLaren, Red Bull and Mercedes looks close enough that the quality of the drivers' qualifying laps will be crucial; one locked brake on the all-important lap and you're potentially going to drop two or even three rows of the grid. The other clear data to emerge concerned a great difference in tyre degradation between the top cars: on this front, the Ferrari looks very good and the McLaren not far behind, but the Red Bull appears to be chewing up its rear tyres a little too quickly.

Assuming a normal tyre-wear pattern, the fastest tactic everywhere this year will be to stop only once, because the ban on refuelling means there's no longer a light-weight reward for stopping more often, and that's how it will be for the top

contenders. Only for those with real tyre-degradation problems will it be quicker to accept the 20-odd-second penalty of stopping twice.

There was a suggestion during the off-season to stipulate a minimum of two stops but it was overruled, meaning that anyone with high

degradation is in serious bother.

The apparent pattern of the drop-off in the Red Bull's performance at Barcelona would suggest it might be in that category, but the Spanish track is more likely to induce the trait than is Sakhir this weekend. The team will doubtless have been working flat-out on eradicating the problem since then, although the stop/start nature of the track's new loop will certainly not help, in that it introduces a few more of the sort of low-speed traction-limited corners that wreak havoc with rear tyres.

But even if Red Bull has not succeeded in ameliorating this trait, don't expect things to remain this way. Things look set to vary wildly this year from race to race – for several reasons. The most obvious of these is the apparent closeness of performance. Taking the Barcelona times as an example, three teams – in other words six cars – were capable of qualifying on the same tenth of a second. So if you're just one tenth off you're going to qualify seventh at best. Find that tenth with an aero tweak and suddenly you're right in the ballpark – radical changes in the competitive order for not much change in performance.

Reason number two is the vastly enhanced importance of tyre degradation this year. A car capable of qualifying on the front row could be as much as a minute behind after a stint at Barcelona if it's taking too much out of its rubber, whereas at less-demanding tracks the critical

tyre temperature at which the performance rapidly degrades might never be reached – and so the car could be right on the pace. Then consider that there appear to be cars – such as the Sauber and Williams – almost as fast as the top teams over a lap but actually better than them on tyre degradation. What if they can use the softer, faster tyre for the first stint and the others can't? If so, a Sauber or Williams may have a grip advantage in qualifying over those ostensibly faster cars forced to opt for the slower tyre (because of the new rule for the top-10 qualifiers whereby you must start the race on the tyres with which you set your grid time).

The importance of each of these factors is going to vary with the venue according to the track's layout and temperature, and to how the choice of Bridgestone compounds for the weekend fits in with the varying requirements of each different car.

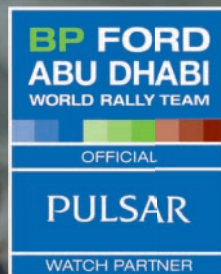
This variation of demands will probably play out too in the comparison between drivers on the same team. Which skill will be more important: the ability to instantly adapt to the wide range of handling characteristics as the fuel level comes down and the tyres wear, or the ability to look after the tyres, brakes and fuel consumption? The answer will almost certainly vary from track to track. Roll on Bahrain, but don't take what happens as a template for 2010. ☒



Vettel: he'll be quick, but will his tyres shred?

“A Sauber or Williams may have a grip advantage”

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GRAFFITHS/LAT

Former champion will stick with RML squad

BTCC

Plato stays after Volvo talks

Former champion to lead RML's attack with Chevrolet Cruze after Volvo's comeback is scrapped at the last minute

Jason Plato will race an RML Chevrolet in the British Touring Championship this year after plans for Volvo to return to the series with a works team fell through last week.

The Swedish manufacturer, which took Rickard Rydell to the 1998 title, has been evaluating a return to the BTCC for over a year and had agreed a letter of intent in early 2009 with '01 title winner Plato to head up its squad of C30 models.

However, despite several high-level meetings taking place during the past month to try to firm up a plan for this season, Volvo's director of motorsport Derek Crabb told AUTOSPORT that its racing programme would be limited to defending its Swedish Touring Car

title for the time being.

"I'm not ruling out the BTCC after 2010," said Crabb. "It's got a huge appeal internationally that

"There were some things from the financial side that didn't come together."

Volvo motorsport boss Derek Crabb

the STCC doesn't have, which is very attractive to us. However there were several factors that led us to take this decision.

"There is always a lot of cost involved with a racing programme and there were some things from the financial and sponsorship side that just didn't come together in time."

Volvo's decision means that Plato is free to return to RML, for which he missed out on the championship by just five points last year. Plato was not available for comment as AUTOSPORT closed for press, but it is understood that he will race a Cruze for what will be a Chevrolet UK-branded works team.

"We'd like to enter with two Cruzes," said RML's commercial director Rupert Manwaring. "And we're working hard to make sure that happens, just as we're trying to gather all the partners together to make sure we can run [as a works team] for Chevrolet

too. We aren't ready to announce any drivers, but certainly Jason will be top of our list if we do manage to do it."

● AUTOSPORT understands that Rod Underwood, RML's chief mechanic last year, is set to take on the role of BTCC team manager in place of Paul Field, who has left.

Plato signed late RML deal in 2009



GRAFFITHS/LAT

BTCC

Collard swaps Motorbase for WSR

ROB COLLARD has made a surprise switch to WSR for this year's British Touring Car Championship.

Collard won twice for Motorbase Performance on his way to finishing sixth in the standings last season and had looked certain to remain in one of the Kent squad's BMW 320si models this season. However, he said that the opportunity to return to the WSR squad

after a three-year absence was too good to turn down.

"I could see these cars on track last year and they just looked awesome, so I'm delighted to have the chance to drive one," said Collard, who scored his maiden BTCC victory in a WSR MG in 2005. "It was very difficult for me to make this late switch from Motorbase, but I had to look at what's best for my

career and driving for a championship-winning team is a real bonus for me."

Collard will partner Andy Neate at the BMW outfit this season, although team principal Dick Bennetts said he is still working on a deal to retain reigning champion Colin Turkington for the coming year.



Collard (l) will move BMW teams for 2010

WOOD/LAT

NASCAR

Edwards Atlanta retaliation investigated

THE FEUD between NASCAR drivers Carl Edwards and Brad Keselowski was being investigated by series officials as AUTOSPORT closed for press, after Edwards admitted to deliberately crashing into the Sprint Cup newcomer at Atlanta on Sunday.

The drivers, who have a history between them following their last-lap clash that sent Edwards airborne at Talladega last April, clashed early in the race when Keselowski tagged the Roush Fenway Ford driver, sending him into Joey Logano.

Edwards rejoined the

race over 150 laps down once his car was repaired and, with two laps to go he steered deliberately into Keselowski on the start/finish straight.

The Penske driver's car then took off in very similar fashion to Edwards's Talladega crash, and NASCAR intervened

by forcing Edwards to retire from the race.

"It was the same two cars – I would say there seems to be a history between the two drivers," said NASCAR's vice president for competition Robin Pemberton. "It's always a concern when you see retaliation and we will discuss it further this week."

Edwards claimed after the race that he had to "take care" of the situation, "considering that Brad wrecks me with no regard for anyone's safety or hard work." Keselowski added: "To wreck someone at 195mph is not cool. I didn't do it intentionally [at Talladega]."



Edwards sent rival's Dodge into the air

LEVITT/LAT

IN BRIEF



OSCHERSLEBEN ETCC CUT

The 2010 European Touring Car Cup round at Oschersleben has been cancelled, reducing the series to three rounds. The German round, which would have supported the WTCC, has been dropped due to it clashing with the finale of the Danish and Scandinavian championships at Jyllandsringen.

BTCC DRIVERS TESTING

BTCC newcomer Lea Wood shook down his Wood Motorsport Honda Integra at Silverstone on Monday. Boulevard Team Racing was also present, with Martin Johnson driving the Vauxhall Astra Coupe he campaigned last year.

BRIDGMAN TO SUPERCUP

Reigning Porsche Carrera Cup champion Tim Bridgman is graduating to the Supercup with Team Parker Racing. The team will double up with German squad Schnabl Engineering, which is running ex-F3 racer Niall Breen. Bridgman (below) shook down his car at Hockenheim last week.



WTCC

Lotti eyes Asia or the Middle East



This year's field won't go to Mexico

WTCC

WORLD TOURING Car Championship bosses are favouring a race in either Asia or the Middle East to replace the cancelled event in Mexico.

The planned second round of the season at Puebla on April 11 has been pulled from the calendar due to unrest in the region. It has not yet been decided whether it will be replaced, but WTCC promoter Marcello Lotti confirmed that any addition to the schedule would only come towards the end of the season.

"If there is another race, it will not be on Mexico's date – it's much too soon to organise," he told AUTOSPORT. "The only gap is between Valencia and Okayama, so maybe we can do something on the way to Japan – Abu Dhabi, Malaysia, Indonesia... I don't know the possibilities."

AUTOSPORT understands that Dubai and Zandvoort are interested in the slot.

AUTOSPORT SAYS...

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When you've got something that others are craving, common sense suggests that you would do everything in your power to hang onto it.

Apparently not. Le Mans Series boss Patrick Peter has decided that manufacturers should not be allowed to dip in and out of his series as they please, so he's pushing for a rule change that will force them to enter full-time if they want to compete at all. It's an understandable attempt, but in these times, where motorsport bosses of these big manufacturers are desperately clinging to their programmes every time they are called up to face the dreaded board members, it's surely not a wise one.

Sportscar racing has benefited hugely from the prestige of the Audi versus Peugeot battle since 2007. Yes, we were fortunate enough to see both enter the LMS full-time in 2008, but demanding that of them every year is madness. Surely a series like the LMS should welcome the manufacturers when they do grace the entry list, and enjoy the added attention that follows them through the door.

So what if they are only really using it as a warm-up for a bigger race, such as Le Mans? At least they haven't pulled the plug completely like so many others.



Peugeot v Audi should be welcomed by LMS

ROLL OF HONOUR

Jason Plato currently sits second on the BTCC all-time winners list. If he wins as many races for the RML Chevrolet team in 2010 as he did last year (seven), then he will equal the record of 60 victories set by Andy Rouse (below)

Andy Rouse (60) • Jason Plato (53) • Alain Menu (36) • Yvan Muller (36) • James Thompson (36) • Frank Gardner (35) • Matt Neal (31)



Rouse's final win came at Silverstone in 1992



LE MANS SERIES

ORECA ON TOP AT RICARD

The ORECA squad's new Peugeot 908 (pictured) made its public debut at the official Le Mans Series test at Paul Ricard earlier this week, but it had to play second fiddle to the petrol-engined ORECA-AIM O1. Soheil Ayari ended up fastest over the two days

LMS TESTING, PAUL RICARD, MARCH 7-8

1	Soheil Ayari (ORECA-AIM)	1m42.963s
2	Loic Duval (ORECA Peugeot)	1m43.756s
3	Marco Andretti (LoLa-Judd)	1m44.025s
LMP2	Danny Matts (HPD/Acura)	1m46.174s
GT1	Stefan Mücke (Aston Martin)	1m57.390s
GT2	Marco Holzer (Porsche)	1m59.213s

LE MANS SERIES

LMS boss pressures works teams

Manufacturers told to enter series full-time or not bother at all in a bid to stop them from dipping in and out

Peugeot and Audi could be forced to sign up for the full championship if they want to race in the Le Mans Series from next season.

Series boss Patrick Peter has revealed that he is unhappy that the manufacturers have opted to contest only selected LMS rounds in 2010 and favours a rule making participation in all races mandatory. The Automobile Club de l'Ouest, which sets the rules for the LMS, has hinted that it is giving the idea full consideration.

Peter said: "It is a problem for us, because we now have a two-level

series. One when the LMP1 manufacturers are with us, and another when they are not.

"I am saying to the ACO that the manufacturers should do all the races or no races."

When asked if the ACO was considering this idea, sport manager Vincent Beaumesnil said: "Good question. We expect everyone to participate in as much of the championship as possible, but manufacturers have their own set of circumstances. I cannot criticise them for what they have done this year."

The ACO and Peter's

organisation have taken a first step in the direction of mandatory participation with the introduction of a rule demanding any entry must do four of the five races to be eligible for points.

Audi has lodged two full-season entries, but at the moment only has plans to contest three events. It is expected to run one R15 TDI in the Paul Ricard season-opener next month, will field three at the Spa 1000Km

in May and then return, most likely with two cars, for the AUTOSPORT 1000km at Silverstone in September.

Peter said he believed that Audi could race at the Hungaroring event in the summer.

Audi and Peugeot may have to commit fully



Bernoldi tested once for Matech squad then left

WORLD GT1

Bernoldi leaves Matech after test

FORMER GRAND Prix driver Enrique Bernoldi has parted company with the Matech Ford team after just one test.

The Brazilian was scheduled to contest the FIA GT1 World Championship in the team's lead Ford GT alongside Thomas Mutsch. Bernoldi tried the car during the official Le Mans Series test at Paul Ricard on Sunday and on Monday

morning before leaving the team.

Matech boss Martin Bartek revealed on Monday afternoon that Bernoldi would not be part of the team's programme in the world championship.

"Maybe we published that he was joining us a little too early," he said. "He drove yesterday and this morning, but he will not be racing with us. All I

can say is that it didn't work out."

Bernoldi was unavailable for comment as AUTOSPORT closed for press.

● Matech will have an all-female line-up in one of its cars at the Le Mans 24 Hours in June. Natacha Gachnang and Cyndie Allemann are confirmed, while ex-Formula Master driver Rahel Frey tried out for the team at Ricard.

LE MANS SERIES

Turner in for Westbrook at JMW

DARREN TURNER has replaced Richard Westbrook in the factory-supported JMW Motorsport Aston Martin squad for this year's Le Mans Series.

Terms for factory driver Turner to join the team were agreed over the weekend after it became clear that Westbrook would not be able to take up the seat. Turner will share the JMW Aston Vantage GT2 with fellow Brit Rob Bell.

Westbrook signed to race for JMW in the LMS and at the Le Mans 24 Hours last month and was also contracted to race for ProSpeed Competition, which was due to contest



Turner replaces Porsche-committed Westbrook

the new FIA GT2 European Championship. The cancellation of that series resulted in the Belgian Porsche team switching to the LMS.

ProSpeed boss Rudi Penders, who gave

permission for Westbrook to race in the LMS with JMW, said: "Our contract was there with Richard and I told him he had to make a choice."

JMW team manager Tim Sugden would only

say that he was "very disappointed" with Westbrook's decision. The driver declined to comment on the situation.

Westbrook will share the ProSpeed Porsche with Marco Holzer.

IN BRIEF



DPPI

ICKX SET FOR ASTON

Vanina Ickx, daughter of six-time Le Mans 24 Hours winner Jacky, is favourite to land the vacant seat in the French Signature team's Aston Martin Racing coupe (above) in this year's endurance classic. The 35-year-old would share the car with Franck Mailleux and Pierre Ragues.

UPDATED AUDI SHAKEDOWN

The 2010-spec Audi R15 TDI, known internally as the 'R15 plus', was given a shakedown at the Neustadt test track in the hands of Mike Rockenfeller last week. The car begins its test schedule in earnest at Sebring the week after the 12 Hours on March 20.

DUMBRECK BACK TO SPYKER

Briton Peter Dumbreck will return to the Spyker Squadron team for this year's Le Mans Series and the Le Mans 24 Hours. His team-mates in the solo C8 Lavolette GT2R will be Jeroen Bleekemolen and Tom Coronel, who share the second seat in the LMS and will do Le Mans.

SHARK FIN ACCEPTED

Regulations that will mandate a Formula 1-style shark's fin to aid stability of LMP1 and P2 prototypes from next season have been agreed. The exact dimensions have yet to be released, but the fins will be as high as the top of the rear wing.

PICCIONE TO WORLD GT1

Former GP2 and A1GP driver Clivio Piccione will race for the French Hexis Aston Martin team in the FIA GT1 World Championship.

PIQUET COMMITS TO ARCA

Nelson Piquet Jr confirmed last week that he will contest three additional ARCA races at Texas in April, Michigan in June, and Pocono in July.

PICCINIS TEAM UP

Brothers Andrea and Giacomo Piccini will pair up at the Italian Racing Box LMP2 squad in the Le Mans Series this year. They will share the team's lead Lola-Judd B09/80 (below) together with team co-owner Ferdinando Geri.



DPPI

DTM

A1-Ring to re-open next March

DTM last raced at Austria's A1-Ring in 2003



IRL/REUTERS

RED BULL boss Dietrich Mateschitz expects to open the rebuilt A1-Ring this time next year.

The track has been out of service since the end of 2003, but Mateschitz has invested heavily in reviving the facility, built on the site of the old Osterreichring, and he is still confident of bringing the DTM to the circuit.

"The facility will be open in exactly one year," he said. "We still plan to have a DTM race as the sporting highlight, and the organisers want to race here. We could have a common DTM test already this autumn."

Mateschitz added that he would not pursue any top-line international motorsport for the circuit.

"Maybe there will be Renault World Series, but we have no illusions about F1 or MotoGP," he said.

60 SECONDS WITH

JEAN ALESI

Ex-Formula 1 driver



Former grand prix driver Jean Alesi began his preparations for his assault on the 2010 Le Mans Series at Paul Ricard on Sunday and Monday. He joined up with new team-mates Giancarlo Fisichella and Toni Vilander in AF Corse's second Ferrari 430 GT for the first time.

What brings you back to racing this year in the Le Mans Series?

It was not something I went looking for. It is really because AF Corse ran my car in the Speedcar Series in Asia and they asked me about racing the 430. We did a test at Fiorano last year and then they offered me the chance to do the series.

Did you have a desire to do a bit more sportscar racing after a couple of outings earlier in your career?

Not at all. I did the Le Mans 24 Hours in 1989 [in a Schuppan Porsche 962C] and I didn't enjoy it. I was just about to make my Formula 1 debut and I was very focused on that. To be honest it wasn't a good programme. I raced a Ferrari F40LM at Laguna Seca at the end of that year, and enjoyed that much more.

What does it mean to be back at the wheel of a Ferrari?

It is always good to drive a Ferrari and I think that if I race it should be in a Ferrari. I do a lot of business in Italy, so it makes sense for me. I'm definitely not looking to race anything else.

What are your aims for the season?

I have good team-mates in Giancarlo and Toni, but I'm still learning about the car. It's completely different to a Speedcar and even a DTM car. We have a lot of work to do, but I think we can have some good results.

There's a chance you could go back to Le Mans if AF Corse's reserve entry gets in. Is that something you would like to do?

I thought the old track with the long Mulsanne Straight was very dangerous. Last year, I went back to Le Mans to visit with [Ferrari boss] Luca di Montezemolo and I was impressed. The 24 Hours is now a race I could imagine myself doing.



Jean Alesi was talking to AUTOSPORT international editor-at-large Gary Watkins

Alesi has tested the AF Corse Ferrari at Paul Ricard



LE MANS/DPPI

INDYCAR

Fifth contender for Indy future

The brains behind several Indy 500 victories of the past team up to bid for the IRL's 2012 chassis concept



Early renderings give a rough idea of concept

Three veterans of Indycar design have joined forces to become the fifth contender in the battle to build the next-generation car for the IndyCar Series.

Bruce Ashmore, Alan Mertens and Tim Wardrop revealed their proposal at the end of last week. They have all designed Indianapolis 500-winning cars, for Lola and Reynard (Ashmore), G-Force (Mertens), and March and Galmer (Wardrop).

The main focus of the project is to improve racing, a factor that the group – known as BAT Engineering – believes none of the other four concepts have addressed.

Ashmore, who was involved with title-winning projects for 11 years out of 12 with Lola and

Reynard from 1990-2001, told AUTOSPORT that several of the common design features on single-seaters could be changed to improve the racing.

“The current cars have evolved from the process of us designers all trying to beat one another,” he said. “If you look at the driver, his helmet is thrust into his chest, his arms are tangled up with his chest. You can do a laptime like that, but you can’t race each other. We never put the driver in that position to improve the show – but now the business has changed.

“To improve the show you need the driver sitting more upright, so that he can attack the other drivers. The cars are very physical to drive, but the vehicle they are driving

doesn’t give them enough control to be able to showcase that. It [sitting more upright] also gives you a safer driving position, because you don’t get the compression on the spine in a crash.”

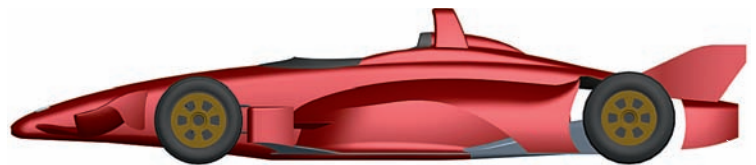
Ashmore added that BAT would be open to chassis competition, but he fears that the series would effectively return to one-make racing anyway.

“It doesn’t matter if you start



with two manufacturers or 10, you will end up with one,” he added. “Eventually everybody else will leave or go broke. Maybe we need to accept that the business has changed and just design a car to improve the show, because I don’t think any cars do right now.”

[➔ P64 IRL PREVIEW](#)



ATLANTIC

Bosses pull the plug on 2010 Atlantics

THE ATLANTIC championship has been canned for 2010 due to a lack of entries.

The long-standing US open-wheel feeder category struggled for drivers during most of 2009, with fields of just 10 cars contesting the final three races of the season. With things not looking any better for this year, the decision has been taken to put the series “on hiatus until global conditions improve”,

according to a statement.

Series boss Ben Johnston said: “It is with a heavy heart and only after deep consideration that I have accepted the recommendations from the stakeholders in the series to pause efforts related to the 2010 season. I know the heritage that Atlantics carries with it and I will not devalue that just to save face during these tough economic times.”



Atlantics struggled for entries in 2009



Wheldon in call for more track time

INDYCAR

Wheldon wants testing rules changed

FORMER INDY 500 winner and series champion Dan Wheldon has called on the IndyCar Series to rethink its testing rules.

The Briton believes that the series' test restriction is adversely

affecting the small teams it was designed to help.

Non-race-weekend running for 2010 was slashed, apart from tyre testing, to just a handful of days to cut costs. But Panther Racing's Wheldon feels that this will mean

the small teams fall further behind their better-funded rivals.

"Cutting back on testing, when you've got the same chassis, engine and tyres, helps the big teams," Wheldon told AUTOSPORT. "It means

they spend more time in the windtunnel, on the shaker rig or their CFD programme. It makes a huge difference.

"Even though times are tough, if the smaller teams can go testing, they will."

WEBB/LAT

INDYCAR

De Ferran won't go it alone

INCOMING INDYCAR team boss Gil de Ferran has confirmed that he has no intention of eventually going it alone in the series following his squad's merger with Luczo Dragon Motorsports.

The two-time CART champion had been working to get his team into IndyCar for this year,

but due to a lack of funds he eventually merged with Jay Penske's one-car Luczo Dragon team. He confirmed last week that, even if the economic situation improves, the team will remain together.

"The driving force behind this is that we realised we can all help each other," de Ferran



De Ferran (r) will work with Matos

told AUTOSPORT. "I have no thoughts of separation [in the future]. We need to grow within the same

umbrella. We are a small team at the moment, but we know where we want to go with this."

INDYCAR

Double duty not a worry for Danica

Patrick near the bottom of times



DANICA PATRICK does not believe that her NASCAR exploits this year will have an adverse effect on her IndyCar Series efforts ahead of this weekend's season opener in Brazil.

The Andretti Autosport driver has competed in four stock-car races already this year as she evaluates a switch to NASCAR. She then returned to her single-seater Dallara-Honda two weeks ago for IndyCar's only pre-season test at Barber Motorsports Park, and finished the running down in 18th fastest out of 21 drivers. Despite that, Patrick is happy that she is in good shape for this season.

"I think it's mostly circumstantial," she said, "getting into the IndyCar again, getting comfortable with how fast they are and the acceleration and the downforce. But being in IndyCar is my comfort zone. I know what it needs to feel like, and I know the changes that are needed to make it better. It's such a foreign land for me in NASCAR, but there is a comfort level when I look at an IndyCar set-up sheet."

Team boss Michael Andretti, who agreed to Patrick's part-schedule in the NASCAR Nationwide Series this year, also played down the effect of switching disciplines after the Barber test.

"Danica struggled a bit and I don't know what the answer is," he said. "Everybody is going to read something into that but I don't think [NASCAR] is the problem. We just haven't given her the car she needs. We're a little behind and we have to figure it out."

IN BRIEF



ART LEADS THE WAY IN GP3

Multiple GP2 and F3 Euro Series title-winning team ART Grand Prix set the pace at the first GP3 test at Paul Ricard last week. Alexander Rossi (above) led Esteban Gutierrez to complete a one-two for the French team.

LEO TOPS RENAULT 3.5 TEST

Federico Leo set the overall fastest time of the first Formula Renault 3.5 pre-season test

at Barcelona last week ahead of British F3 champion Daniel Ricciardo. GP2 refugee Nelson Panciatichi was the pacesetter on the first day of the test.

COSTA SUFFERS HAND INJURY

Reigning Formula Renault Eurocup champion Albert Costa could miss the next Formula Renault 3.5 test at Jerez this weekend after he suffered a hand injury in a crash at Barcelona last week. The Spaniard collided with Nathanael Berthon on the first day.

RACING ENGINEERING SORTED

Dani Clos and Christian Vietoris have been confirmed as Racing Engineering's drivers for

the upcoming GP2 main series. Spaniard Clos made his GP2 debut with the team last year, while German Vietoris has spent the past two seasons in the F3 Euro Series and is currently racing with DAMS in GP2 Asia.

WINSLOW WANTS LIGHTS DEAL

Briton James Winslow is targeting an Indy Lights season after testing with frontrunning team Sam Schmidt Motorsports at Sebring last week. "I can't reveal which team, but I'm close to a deal," said the 28-year-old.

DUNO MOVES TO COYNE

Milka Duno will switch to Dale Coyne Racing for this year's IndyCar Series, where the

37-year-old Venezuelan will attempt to complete a full campaign for the first time.

HOWARD GETS EXTRA RACE

Former Indy Lights champion Jay Howard (below) has added a fifth race to his IndyCar campaign with Sarah Fisher Racing. The Briton will now begin his season before the Indy 500 with the race in Kansas on May 1.





WRC RAIKKONEN'S MEXICO WRECK

Formula 1 star Kimi Raikkonen's first gravel event in the Red Bull Citroën C4 WRC didn't quite go to plan on last week's Rally Mexico. He lost 20 minutes with an electrical fault in SS2 and then rolled five times in SS7. He was unhurt

WRC

Ford writes off Mexican loss

Citroen domination at altitude will be a one-off according to M-Sport-run team after Hirvonen loses points lead

Mikko Hirvonen insists he is not worried by the Ford team's inability to compete with Citroen on last week's Rally Mexico – where the French firm scooped all three podium positions for the first time in seven years.

After winning the season-opener in Sweden last month, Hirvonen ran first on the road on the gravelly Mexican stages last week, but the Finn had no answer to a dominant Sebastien Loeb, who collected his fourth straight success on the Leon-based event.

None of the Ford drivers managed to set any fastest times and the highest a Focus ran for the duration

of the rally was fourth. Despite the nature of the defeat, Hirvonen is upbeat about the next gravel event,

“The problem here was the altitude - we don't have any worries for Jordan”

FORD'S MIKKO HIRVONEN

the Jordan Rally early next month.

Hirvonen said: “I'm sure we're going to be more competitive in Jordan. We tried so many changes with the suspension in Mexico and okay, some of that was working a bit, but we were never that close. I think the problem on this event was

because of the altitude and I don't think we have any worries about going to Jordan.”

Hirvonen's team-mate, Jari-Matti Latvala, admitted his event got off to a poor start after his pre-event test was run in cold, wet conditions. Latvala added that he thought Citroen's six-speed gearbox and higher-revving engine had offered the C4 an advantage on stages that were running well over 2000 metres above sea level.

Rally winner Loeb said he wasn't surprised the Fords struggled. He added: “They were never very good here in Mexico. In 2008, we were a bit wrong in the suspension, but we still won even with this trouble.

Our car seems to be better here.

“Now I'm sure in the next rallies the fight will be close again. They will be back in Jordan.”

Ford hasn't won in Mexico since Markko Martin won the inaugural WRC round in Guanajuato in 2004.

Hirvonen found Mexico a struggle



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WRC Sordo's works seat not in doubt

CITROEN TEAM principal Olivier Quesnel has confirmed that Dani Sordo will remain in a factory C4 for the rest of the year, following speculation that he could be replaced by Junior Team driver Sebastien Ogier.

Sordo broke the suspension on his C4 on the second day of last week's Rally Mexico, costing him what Quesnel saw as his best chance yet of scoring a maiden win. "I am still upset about what Dani did," said Quesnel. "But we have to remember with Dani that we got the last two manufacturers' titles because of him. I am still confident with him. And as



Sordo will keep drive despite Mexico error

I told him, I need Sebastien Loeb, Sebastien Ogier and Dani Sordo, so he doesn't have to worry. This is not a reason to say Sordo is finished. He is still fast."

Sordo said the pressure was beginning to get to him, especially after Ogier

finished third in Mexico. "I need to get back to enjoying driving," said the Spaniard. "There's so much pressure, people are always asking me: 'When will you win? Will it be here? When will it be?' Honestly? I don't know.

"All I can do is drive and keep trying to win. The pressure is coming from everybody else and all of these questions. For me, I get into the car and I start the rally and I try and I do my best. When I enjoy the driving, I'm quick."

IN BRIEF



ARAUJO UPGRADES LANCER

Armindo Araujo has competed in his Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX for the final time. The Portuguese won P-WRC on last week's Rally Mexico using the same car he used to lift last year's title (above), but he will campaign an Evo X from now on.

WRC DECISIONS IMMINENT

Two pivotal decisions for the World Rally Championship are expected from today's World Motor Sport Council meeting in Bahrain. The proposed 15-round WRC calendar will be discussed, as will Pirelli's tender to remain as control-tyre supplier to the series. Log onto AUTOSPORT.com for the latest news.

JOURDAIN TACKLES MEXICO

Former Champ Car racer Michel Jourdain competed on Rally Mexico, bringing his Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX home in 19th place overall and ninth in class.

RAIN AFFECTS CURITIBA

The heavy rain on last week's Curitiba Rally, the second round

of the IRC, forced the cancellation of the superspecial stage – which ran as a demonstration only – and both Rio Pesqueiro stages, which were lost when the nearby River Pesqueiro burst its banks.

FORD RUNS-UP BIG DOSH

Members of the Ford team raised close to £1000 for Sport Relief when they ran the Coca-Cola Street Stage in Leon during the build-up to last week's Rally Mexico.

FLODIN COMMITS TO P-WRC

Patrik Flodin has confirmed he will contest the remainder of the P-WRC season. Flodin won the opening round of the series as a wildcard in Sweden, but he has agreed a deal with the Russian Uspensky team for the rest of the year.

BREEN ON COURSE FOR BRC

Craig Breen ran his Ford Fiesta S2000 as course car on last weekend's Willie Loughman Memorial Forestry Rally in Ireland (below) to prepare for the Bulldog International – the first BRC event – in North Wales at the end of March.



WRC Solberg: Mexico P2 is crucial



Solberg celebrates his P2 in Mexico

FORMER WORLD champion Petter Solberg says his second place on last week's Rally Mexico in his privately-entered Citroen felt as good as a win.

Solberg, who hasn't won a rally for almost five years, collected his first runner-up spot since the Acropolis Rally in 2008 after a final-day fight with Citroen Junior Team driver Sebastien Ogier.

The 2003 champion said: "This shows that I am back. This is a f***ing win for me! I know I'm fast, I just need to work hard and make sure I get the chance. I'm so pumped up for this season, I really needed this – especially after Sweden."

Solberg, who is running his own team, suffered a disastrous opening round of this year's series, finishing ninth on Rally Sweden after going off the road early on.

"After Sweden it was quite hard for my head, but we are back now," he added.

AUTOSPORT SAYS...

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I have to confess, I was deeply sceptical about Ken Block when I arrived in Mexico last week. He kept doing funny things with his hands and wearing his hat the wrong way around. And then there's his green shoes...

As you can imagine, the Monster World Rally Team wasn't exactly hiding its light under a bushel when it arrived in the service park in Leon ahead of the event. There was a football team-sized entourage, promo girls aplenty, loud music and an ocean of the fizzy drink itself. My cynicism deepened as I continued to judge the book by the cover.

Then I met this man of a thousand handbrakes. And I was bowled over by his determination to succeed, his breathtaking honesty and, once the event got underway, his ability behind the wheel of a rally car.

Granted, he put the car off on Saturday morning, but before he misjudged the grip towards the end of the Ibarilla test, he was just six seconds behind Jari-Matti Latvala. And what was the first thing he did when he arrived back in the service park? He set up a table and started signing posters.

In short, Block is the monster-sized breath of fresh air the WRC needed. And he's quick. If he could just tuck his shirt in now and again, I think we could be on to a winner.

Block: a breath of fresh air for WRC?



MCKLEIN.DE

MILESTONES

HIRVONEN'S 100TH START























Mikko Hirvonen celebrated his 100th World Rally Championship start on Rally Mexico last week. The Finn, who made his debut in a Super 1600 Renault Clio on Rally Finland in 2002, has scored 12 wins and 42 podiums

THE BIG QUESTIONS OF 2010

Was Schuey right to return? Will Lewis get one over Jenson? What difference will the refuelling ban make? How far off the pace will the slowest of the new teams be? We asked some people who ought to know the answers

OUR PANEL

- | | |
|--|---|
|  Rubens BARRICHELLO |  Christian HORNER |
|  Luciano BURTI |  Nico HULKENBERG |
|  David COULTHARD |  Jonathan LEGARD |
|  David CROFT |  Vitantonio LIUZZI |
|  Anthony DAVIDSON |  Lee MCKENZIE |
|  Timo GLOCK |  Tiago MONTEIRO |
|  Lucas DI GRASSI |  Otmar SZAFNAUER |
|  Mika HAKKINEN |  Patrick TAMBAY |
|  Norbert HAUG |  Derek WARWICK |
|  Nick HEIDFELD |  Alex WURZ |

Alonso: top tip for Bahrain and 2010 world title glory



GIBSON/LAT



THE WINNERS



WHO WILL WIN THE DRIVERS' WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP?

- Barrichello:** I hope to have a chance.
- Burti:** Alonso.
- Coulthard:** Someone from Red Bull, McLaren or Ferrari.
- Croft:** Alonso.
- Davidson:** Alonso.
- Glock:** Alonso.
- Hakkinen:** Hamilton.
- Haug:** I hope one of our drivers.
- Heidfeld:** Alonso.
- Horner:** Not Jarno Trulli.
- Hulkenberg:** Alonso.
- Legard:** Hamilton.
- Liuzzi:** Alonso.
- McKenzie:** Alonso.
- Monteiro:** Hamilton.
- Szafnauer:** Alonso.
- Tambay:** Alonso.
- Warwick:** Alonso, but I hope Lewis or Jenson.
- Wurz:** Hamilton.

WHO WILL WIN THE CONSTRUCTORS' WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP?

NINE VOTES		
WARWICK		
TAMBAY	SEVEN VOTES	
SZAFNAUER	WURZ	
LUIZZI	MONTEIRO	
GLOCK	McKENZIE	
DI GRASSI	LEGARD	THREE VOTES
DAVIDSON	CROFT	HORNER
COULTHARD*	COULTHARD*	COULTHARD*
BARRICHELLO*	BARRICHELLO*	BURTI
FERRARI	McLAREN	RED BULL
TWO VOTES	TWO VOTES	
HULKENBERG	HAUG	
BARRICHELLO*	HAKKINEN	
WILLIAMS	MERCEDES GP	

*Voted more than once

WHO WILL WIN IN BAHRAIN?

- Barrichello:** How the hell would I know?
- Burti:** Felipe Massa.
- Coulthard:** One of the Red Bull drivers.
- Croft:** Lewis Hamilton
- Davidson:** Hamilton.
- Di Grassi:** Ferrari has strong long-distance pace. It is a strong candidate.
- Glock:** **Fernando Alonso**
- Hakkinen:** Due to changes in regulations, it was very difficult to read clearly the test results. So very difficult to give the right answer at this moment.
- Haug:** McLaren should be quick.
- Heidfeld:** Sebastian Vettel.
- Horner:** A Red Bull driver.
- Hulkenberg:** **Alonso**
- Legard:** Massa.
- Liuzzi:** **Alonso**.
- McKenzie:** Hamilton.
- Monteiro:** **Alonso**.
- Szafnauer:** **Alonso**.
- Tambay:** **Alonso**.
- Warwick:** **Alonso**, but I hope Lewis or Jenson Button.
- Wurz:** **Alonso**

GIBSON/LAT

MOVERS AND SHAKERS

WHICH DRIVER CAN BREAK HIS DUCK AND WIN A RACE THIS YEAR?

Barrichello: Nico Hulkenberg.

Coulthard: Pedro de la Rosa?

Or Hulkenberg?

Croft: Adrian Sutil.

Davidson: Rosberg.

Di Grassi: Rosberg might be a strong candidate for his first win.

Glock: Rosberg.

Hakkinen: Rosberg.

Haug: Rosberg.

Heidfeld: Rosberg.

Horner: Rosberg.

Hulkenberg: Rosberg.

Legard: Rosberg.

Liuzzi: Me!

McKenzie: Don't think any will but, if any, Rosberg has the best chance.

Monteiro: Michael Schumacher and, seriously, Adrian Sutil.

Szafnauer: Sutil.

Tambay: Rosberg.

Warwick: Rosberg.

Wurz: Rosberg.

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GIBSON/LAT

HOW DO YOU THINK MERCEDES GP WILL FARE?

Barrichello: They have more money, but they have more pressure as well. So it remains a question mark.

Burti: Top three.

Coulthard: Solid season, but I don't expect a second championship.

Davidson: Third in constructors' race.

Di Grassi: They don't have the big advantage that

they started last year with: the double diffuser. They have a good car, but they are much more level to the other ones.

Glock: Good. Very good, I think.

Hakkinen: With an exciting driver pairing and Ross Brawn onboard, I expect Mercedes GP to be competitive but you can never be sure of

the outcome... watch this space!

Haug: I think we will get better and better during the season.

Horner: Hopefully just behind Red Bull Racing

Hulkenberg: Good.

Legard: Title contender.

Liuzzi: Well, they are a professional team.

McKenzie: They will be strong and get stronger

as the year progresses.

Monteiro: Will struggle more than when the team was Brawn.

Szafnauer: Very well.

Tambay: Second behind Ferrari.

Warwick: I really hope

they are as quick as last year and Schumacher embarrasses a lot of the other drivers.

Wurz: Mercedes will establish itself as frontrunner this season.

Croft: Three wins and third place in the constructors' championship.



FEBRI/ROLAT

WHICH WILL BE THE BEST OF THE NEW TEAMS?

Barrichello: I like the Virgin guys. I've worked with them so I hope they do well.

Burti: Virgin.

Coulthard: Lotus.

Croft: Does Sauber count? If not, then Lotus.

Davidson: Lotus.

Di Grassi: I hope Virgin! We are working very hard to do so.

Glock: Virgin Racing.

Hakkinen: Lotus or Virgin.

Haug: Mercedes GP Petronas.

Heidfeld: Lotus.

Horner: Virgin.

Hulkenberg: Virgin.

Legard: Lotus.

Liuzzi: Lotus.

McKenzie: Lotus.

Monteiro: Mercedes GP should be considered a new team. Otherwise

Virgin.

Szafnauer: Virgin.

Tambay: Lotus.

Warwick: I presume you are not including Sauber in this; I think they will all struggle and not impress anyone.

Wurz: On lap time Virgin, on finishing races I think Lotus.

LOTUS

WHO, OR WHAT, WILL BE THE BIGGEST STAR OF 2010?

Barrichello: I think that the Williams-Cosworth will be the one that impresses.

Burti: Alonso.

Coulthard: The world champion!

Croft: Speedy pitstops and the crews that break 2.5sec for a tyre change.

Davidson: The Force India car.

Glock: I would love to say Timo Glock. But it will probably be Schumacher.

Hakkinen: Due to his comeback, Michael Schumacher probably.

Haug: I hope the three-pointed star of Mercedes-Benz.

Horner: Bernie Ecclestone.

Hulkenberg: Schumacher.

Legard: Hamilton.

Liuzzi: Alonso.

McKenzie: Schumacher's return will dominate – whether he is doing well or not.

Monteiro: Schumacher.

Szafnauer: Force India's race-winning car.

Tambay: Alonso and Ferrari.

Warwick: Being British it has to be Lewis, but I think the Ferrari will be quicker and therefore Alonso will star.

Wurz: Schumi, because he polarizes the opinion of the fans, so whether he wins or loses, he will get most of the attention.

WHO, OR WHAT, WILL BE THE BIGGEST DISAPPOINTMENT OF 2010?

Barrichello: Maybe the fact that we were supposed to have 26 cars, and we don't.

Burti: The new teams.

Coulthard: Overtaking and continued politics in F1.

Croft: If the on-track action doesn't live up to the off-track hype. This should be a season to remember, the ingredients are all there, it just needs a dollop of overtaking to make it legendary.

Davidson: The teams that never made it.

Di Grassi: Not having 13 teams on the grid during the season. It would have been ideal to have everyone running together.

Hakkinen: If politics interfere too much with the sport.

Haug: I easily can live without.

Heidfeld: New teams unfortunately struggling for long-term financing.

Horner: Peter Windsor.

Legard: New teams not all making it. This great hope that they were going to broaden the competition, that this would be a way of bringing the costs down and proving that F1 could appeal to a broader base. But it's not going to happen.

Liuzzi: US F1.

McKenzie: New teams.

Monteiro: Lotus/Campos.

Tambay: Only the WINNER will not be disappointed... the first year for new teams will be tough and disappointing!

Warwick: Maybe the reliability of the Red Bull.

Wurz: The biggest disappointment will be the economic situation in our industry, so I am afraid that more jobs will be terminated and the industry will shrink further. And that would be really frustrating and disappointing.



FERRARI/LAT



TEE/LAT

Plenty of people think Schuey will star in 2010

COMPLEX ISSUES

WHAT WILL BE THE BIGGEST STORY OF THE YEAR?

- Coulthard:** Some cross-dressing team principal or a dog named Rex befriending Michael in Korea.
Croft: I'm thinking that for once it might just be the racing.
Davidson: Something involving the teams and the FIA, not the racing!
Haug: AUTOSPORT to double its Grand Prix coverage.
Heidfeld: Pay drivers.
Horner: I will read it in AUTOSPORT.
Liuzzi: Force India winning a race.
Legard: FIA keeping quiet.
Monteiro: Some teams being slower than GP2 cars at some tracks.
Tambay: Financial difficulties for a lot of operations and survival of the new teams.
Warwick: Lewis & Jenson.

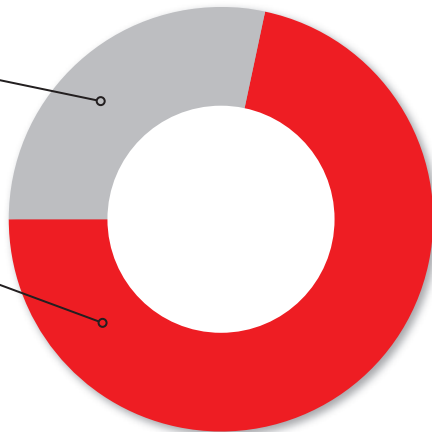


Button: What does that one there do, Lewis?

WILL THERE BE MORE OVERTAKING DUE TO THE NEW RULES?

Yes 4

No 10



- Barrichello:** Yes.
Burti: I think it will be the same as the last few years.
Coulthard: Probably through driver mistakes rather than real passes.
Davidson: No, there will be less.
Di Grassi: Yes, because there is a big difference to starting 10th with a used tyre to 11th with a new tyre.
Glock: In the first 10 laps of the race on high fuel, yes I think so.
Heidfeld: No.
Horner: No.
Hulkenberg: No.
Liuzzi: Yes.
McKenzie: No.
Tambay: I am not convinced... maybe on the base of technical aspects, like tyres, and not driving exploits.
Warwick: Just the same I'm afraid, although it depends how different the strategy is.
Wurz: No, less.

WHAT DIFFERENCE TO THE RACING WILL THE REFUELLING BAN MAKE?

- Barrichello:** The fact that we have to look after the tyres – that's going to be different.
Burti: Races more boring in the beginning, but could be more exciting towards the end.
Coulthard: Slower, less physical and more driver tactics with tyre preservation.
Davidson: Harder on tyres, more importance on qualifying well, less overtaking.
Hakkinen: Obviously cars will be heavier to handle. It will be more demanding on the brakes and the best teams will be the ones with the best possible cooling and brakes.
Horner: Faster pitstops and drivers

- looking after tyres.
Liuzzi: Much more strategic thinking for drivers during races.
McKenzie: I will miss the unknown quantity of refuelling in qualifying and seeing who was on fuel-adjusted pole on Saturday night.
Szafnauer: More endurance, less sprint.
Hulkenberg: It will make it more like a GP2 race.
Tambay: Consistency in car balance throughout the race will be the key.
Wurz: For the hardcore fan it will be great, because qualifying is on empty tanks. But that could be the problem for the race, because if the fastest car starts from pole, it tends to stay in front for the whole race.

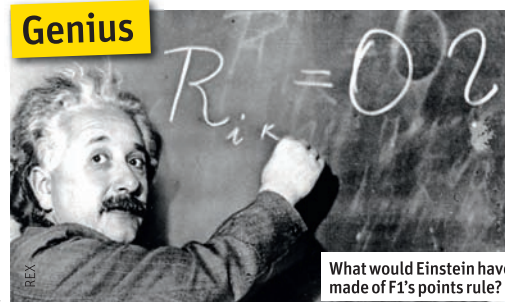




NEW POINT-SCORING SYSTEM: GENIUS OR MADNESS?

Barrichello: A bit of both.
Coulthard: Madness. It fucks up historical data. Why not change the Olympics and give a lead medal for 10th place while we're at it?
Croft: Better.
Davidson: It needed changing as most teams finish now.
Di Grassi: I think it is good.
Glock: Genius.
Hakkinen: Genius.
Haug: Neither, but not necessary.
Heidfeld: No big difference, so madness to change.

Horner: Indifferent.
Hulkenberg: It's okay.
Legard: Madness.
Liuzzi: Genius.
Szafnauer: Genius.
Tambay: I like the idea of a 'bonus' for victory... but it could become a risk (madness?) if a team/driver dominates from early on.
Warwick: It will give the crap cars a few more points.
Wurz: It's a good PR-driven change, but messes up the statistics of all-time points scoring.



Genius

What would Einstein have made of F1's points rule?



Madness

Is Jack Nicholson the FIA's new *Shining* light?

Hakkinen: Yes – a new Formula 1 circuit is always interesting for the fans.

No-one seems to care that Donington lost out



DONINGTON PARK DIDN'T GET ITS GRAND PRIX – DO YOU CARE?

Barrichello: I love racing in England, and I am a big lover of Silverstone.
Burti: No, I prefer Silverstone.
Croft: It's a shame for Donington.
Davidson: As long as it stayed in Britain, no.
Glock: It's great we have Silverstone again because it is a mega track.
Hakkinen: Yes. A new F1 circuit is always more interesting for fans.
Haug: Silverstone is perfect.
Heidfeld: Never been to Donington but I really like Silverstone, so happy that it remains.
Horner: Silverstone is the natural home of the British Grand Prix.
Hulkenberg: No, I prefer Silverstone.
Legard: Yes, I do.

Liuzzi: Not much, I like Silverstone.
McKenzie: It was a waste of everyone's time, energy and newspaper print.
Monteiro: Can't say that it kept me awake at night...
Szafnauer: It's just good to have a British Grand Prix.
Tambay: No I don't... I am very happy that Silverstone's 'historical' GP is back – it should have never left! Well done the 'rosbeef', but I feel sorry for the 'frogs' – they were incapable of getting their act together.
Warwick: Absolutely not, although I do care about the circuit. But anyone who thought it was going to happen as a GP circuit needs shooting – and that includes Bernie!

ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO RACING IN KOREA?

Barrichello: Yes, it's always nice to visit a new place.
Burti: I've been there before, so not really.
Coulthard: No, as I won't be!
Croft: Korea is a fabulous country with great people. But where is everybody going to stay?
Davidson: I won't be racing there, but I'm still looking forward to it!
Glock: Yes.
Hakkinen: Definitely. A new country is always exciting for F1 and the audience.
Haug: Ask me after the race, please.
Horner: Yes.
Hulkenberg: Yes.
Legard: Yes.
Liuzzi: Hope it's not a typical new circuit.
McKenzie: It's always nice to be at the first race at a new venue.
Monteiro: Raced there in F3 in 2002. Fun, but they're not really fans of F1 nor ready for it. It's very different to Japan.
Szafnauer: Yes.
Tambay: And in India, Russia... France at Le Castellet again?
Warwick: I would be more interested if there were more races in America and Europe.
Wurz: The real question is, will we look forward to coming back for the second and third time?



Korea is readying itself for its GP debut in 2010

PERSONALITY TEST

HOW WILL BUTTON FARE DURING HIS TITLE DEFENCE?



Barrichello: I don't know if he's going to be able to win again, but I think he's going to give Lewis a hard time.

Burti: Tough. It will be very difficult to beat Hamilton, so that's already one ahead of him.

Croft: He'll win races but will just fail to beat his team-mate in the title race.

Davidson: He will always be fast in the races, but qualify will be tough for him.

Di Grassi: McLaren showed good pace in pre-season, so he should be able to fight for it.

Glock: I think he could be in a bit of a difficult situation, but as a world champion he has everything he needs to win it again. But the conditions are quite difficult for him.

Hakkinen: I'm sure that he will try his utmost to defend his title.

Haug: Jenson is a quick and competent driver. Lewis will not be the only challenge though during his title defence.

Horner: He will probably look better turned out than he was last year.

Hulkenberg: He will do all right, but it is not easy for him.

Legard: Title contender.

Coulthard: Just fine, he is solid, experienced and moved for the right reasons.

Liuzzi: Well, but it's difficult.

McKenzie: I think it will be very tough. No disrespect to him, but he is stepping into a team built around Lewis. He has to win equality before he can win the championship again.

Monteiro: I think it made him stronger, but facing Lewis will be tough.

Szafnauer: Well.

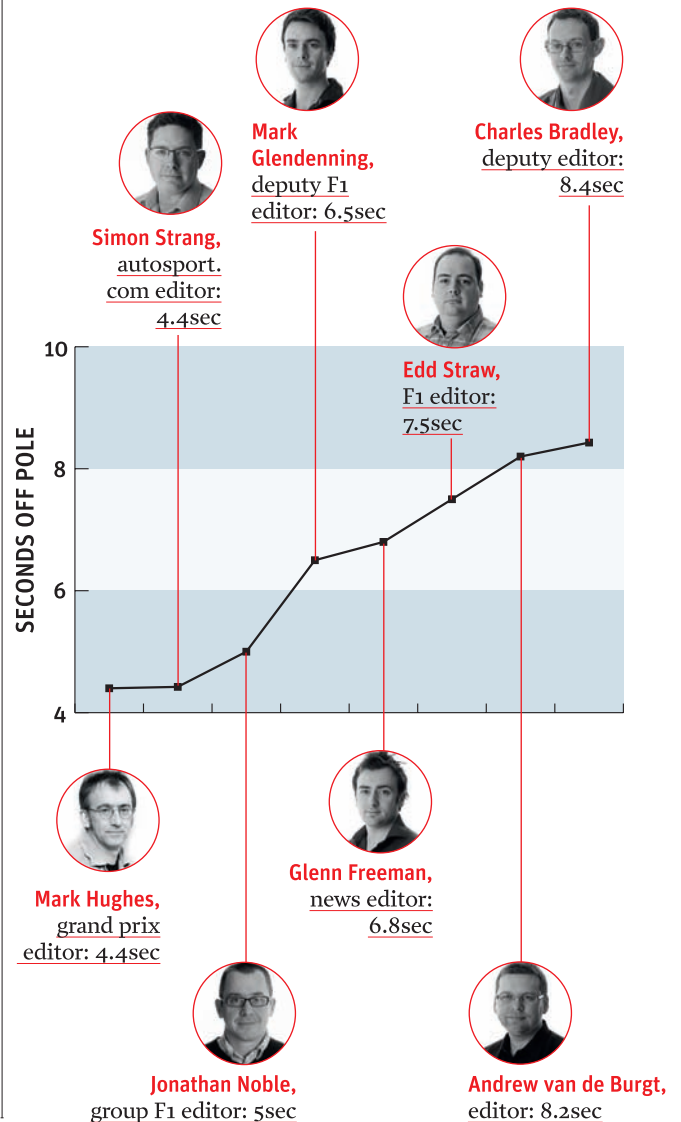
Tambay: It will be a very difficult driver management situation for Martin Whitmarsh and McLaren. I hope and think they will give him fair and honest treatment – but he will suffer!

Warwick: I, like most people, think he will struggle against Lewis, but I wonder if we have *all* underestimated what Jenson can do?

Wurz: I have been at McLaren and its cars always feel and drive very differently from others, so Jenson will require some time to adjust. It simply takes time to integrate, and in my five years there with various drivers joining the team, the adjustment period is not done in a month.

DRIVER BY DRIVER

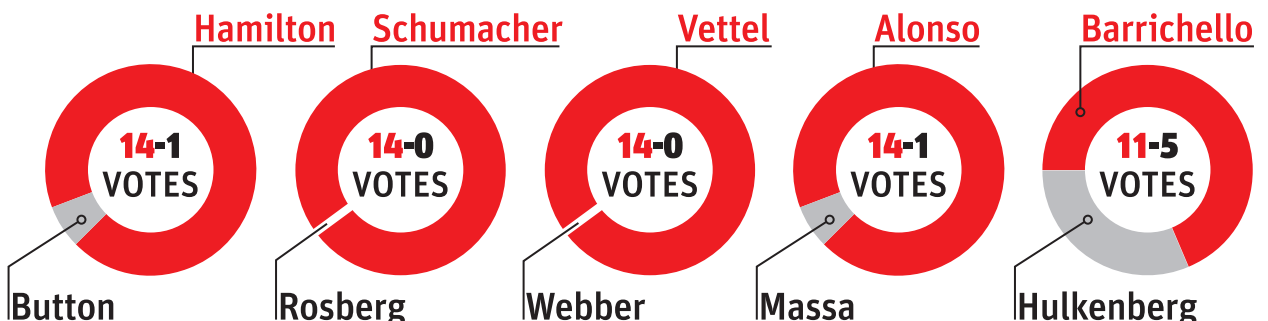
The AUTOSPORT staff sweepstake: What will be the spread between the fastest and slowest qualifier in Bahrain?



WHO WILL WIN INTRA-TEAM RIVALRIES?



Webber won't match Vettel, says the panel



H U L K E N B E R G

WHO WILL BE THE BEST ROOKIE?

Burti: Hulkenberg.
Coulthard: Hulkenberg.
Croft: The Hulk.
Davidson: Hulkenberg.
Di Grassi: The rookie who has the best car will prevail.
Glock: Di Grassi.
Hakkinen: Hulkenberg.
Haug: Paul Di Resta.
Horner: Pedro de la Rosa!

Hulkenberg: Hulkenberg.
Legard: Hulkenberg.
Liuzzi: Hulkenberg.
McKenzie: Hulkenberg.
Szafnauer: Hulkenberg.
Tambay: Hulkenberg.
Warwick: Hulkenberg.
Wurz: Pedro de la Rosa – with his new hairstyle he looks so young and smiles as innocent as a rookie.

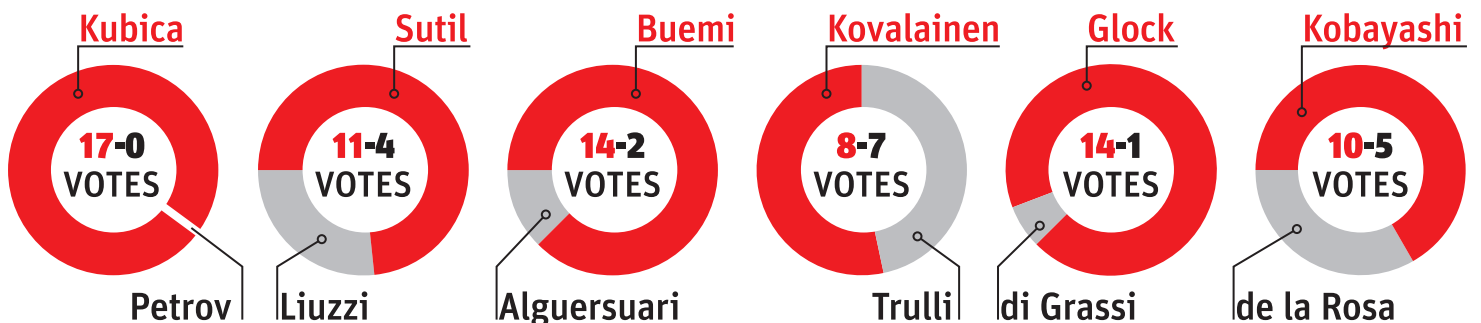
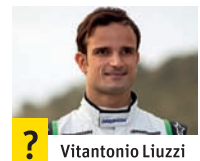
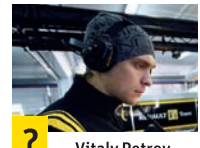
MICHAEL SCHUMACHER'S RETURN: INSPIRED OR FOOLHARDY?

Barrichello: I don't have the right answer, but it is probably the biggest decision he ever took so he had to have big balls to make that decision because it's not easy.
Burti: Inspired.
Coulthard: Inspired as he has nothing to lose, but fun and challenge to gain. The record books will stand for some time if not all time!
Croft: What else is he going to do, sit at home and count his money? He quit too early.
Davidson: I doubt if he will dominate like before, but he will be fast.
Di Grassi: It is an honour to have Michael racing with me – but at the same time I will battle him like any other driver.
Glock: Inspired, I think. It's a bit difficult for the rest of us Germans though.

Hakkinen: I would say inspired, but a tough challenge ahead.
Haug: I think Michael is even better than he ever was.
Horner: Brave!
Hulkenberg: I don't know. It's his business.
Legard: Inspired.
Liuzzi: Inspired.
McKenzie: He seems more determined now than ever.
Monteiro: Inspired – totally!
Szafnauer: Inspired.
Tambay: Passion never dies in a true champion and I respect this incredible decision.
Warwick: Inspired, it's perfect for F1 at this time.
Wurz: Well I'm Austrian and we never quite worked out how the Germans tick, if anyone ever can work that out! The fans are the real winners.

WHO WILL BE THE FIRST HIGH-PROFILE SACKING?

Coulthard: Charles Bradley of AUTOSPORT :-)
Croft: The man who thought HRT was a good name for a racing team – expect some sniggers all round on that one.
Davidson: Liuzzi.
Haug: That's strictly confidential.
Legard: Liuzzi.
Monteiro: Mike Gascoyne.
Horner: Who's the AUTOSPORT editor? Oh yes, Andrew van de Burgt.
McKenzie: Surely it won't be a year like last year? I think it will be a much calmer ship! People won't like each other, that's normal, but we might all make it 'til November!
Tambay: Trulli.
Warwick: Petrov or di Grassi.
Wurz: Well, I would hope that the government will be sacked first, because they deserve nothing else. In F1, I would assume some of the new drivers will be under massive pressure.





BEST OF BRITISH

Lewis Hamilton and Jenson Button are both racing in McLaren silver. But who will be the golden boy? *By MARK HUGHES*



Button has number 1, but is he just ahead?

So far, it's been the easy bit: standing together at the launch of the car, smiling for the cameras, fielding questions about one of the most fascinating driver pairings of recent times, saying how it's all about the team, not in-house rivalry, how they will compete together against the rest, not with each other.

All bollocks, of course. It's Lewis Hamilton, 2008 world champion, versus Jenson Button, 2009 world champion, in the same car, one that looks from testing like a very fast one – and that's just the headline part of the plot. The subplots and layers of

fascination therein are many: Button is stepping into the lion's den of Hamilton's own team, the team responsible for his career since he was 13, the team in which as a rookie he was good enough to see off double champ Fernando Alonso – and not without a huge degree of controversy. Button has been audacious in opting for such a challenge when he didn't have to, when he could've stayed with the team that had given him the world championship in his 10th season, where everything was already centred around him, where he was comfortable with the engineers, where he could have striven for a performance edge

from the team to allow him to again beat Hamilton and the rest.

Behind Hamilton's easy-going smiles lies the absolute certainty in his mind that he's the best, and Button's recent plaudits will niggle him, make him absolutely determined to nail him. There's a certain self-reverence about Hamilton that irritates some but is just part of the personality that has got him where he is; you'll hear him make comparisons with his idol Senna, for example: "There I was leading at Monaco and I thought back to how Ayrton always used to win here, and now I'm in his team doing the same."

Back at the start of Hamilton's ►

It all looks very easy-going for now, doesn't it?



Hungary '06: Button was catching Alonso

BELLANCA/LAT



Barcelona '10: Button wasn't going very far

FERRAROLI/LAT

“Behind Hamilton’s smiles lies the certainty that he’s the best, and Button’s recent plaudits will niggle him, make him want to nail him”

Hamilton became champion in 2008



FERRAROLI/LAT

JUNIOR SINGLE-SEATER WINS

BUTTON 12

HAMILTON 34

knew each other, he could see he might be able to do what Jenson had done; it was touchable.

Such hero-worship was long gone by the time Hamilton arrived in F1, of course. But, with Jenson winning the world title last year, finally the wider world was seeing what the karting community knew many years ago, and suddenly he was getting the plaudits that Lewis had enjoyed for the previous two years but which had now withered away on account of that uncompetitive 2009 McLaren. Lewis recently made the point that he'd 'blown Alonso away' in the same team despite being a rookie. Quite aside from whether the closeness of their performances constituted 'blowing him away', the very fact that he felt compelled to make the point tells you of his mindset ahead of Button joining him. He's building the guy up in order to prepare to demolish him. He actually even said: "Jenson has the number 1 on his car, so obviously he'll get any new bits first." Yeah, right! As if Lewis would tolerate that scenario. This is pure, undiluted competitive jostling ahead of the real fight.

Behind Button's bland platitudes lie his huge frustration in the years prior to his title season, knowing he was the best but forever consigned to cars where that couldn't be shown. It was a frustration doubtless aggravated when

◀ karting career, before emulating Senna was a realistic possibility, the guy he looked up to, the guy who he could feasibly be, was karting sensation Jenson Button, five years Lewis's senior. Button was the best, he won everything – and Lewis knew him, their dads

Hamilton – five years his junior – climbed into the best car on the grid in his rookie season, and was instantly given the opportunity he'd still not had. Imagine his feelings, after nine years of sub-standard machinery, when he finally got his butt into a great car and won the world title, then heard people say, 'Oh, that was just the car. He's not really in Hamilton's class.'

Yeah? Well, what about the years when he was prevented by the car?

Button has an inner confidence the equal of Hamilton's. When all is right with his world, he feels there is no-one who can touch him. He used to get that feeling all the time in karts, where he was a true phenomenon. He used to get it in Formula Ford. But since then, since falling off the ladder by being in the wrong F3 car, he'd been hanging on.

There'd be moments, when circumstances allowed, that the feeling came back: Indy 2000; Hungary '06; those staggering wet early laps at the Nurburgring in '07, when he wondered what on earth everyone else was doing. But the wider world didn't see these meaningful snapshots, just the big headline results that would be out of his reach unless he ever got a worthy car. Then he did, and it was no surprise to him that he was able to deliver, but it was a surprise to that wider world. Now, having done it, here was that wider world still not understanding his level.

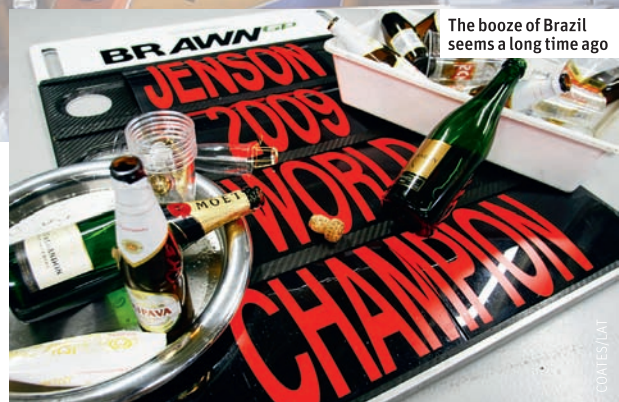
What would be the perfect riposte to the doubters? What about walking into the lion's den and taking on their beloved Hamilton in his team? Would the truth finally dawn on everyone then? As world champion, suddenly those sorts of options were open to him. He did it, and the F1 world drew sharp intakes of astonished breath. 'Now watch.'

So much for each of the drivers' realities. What of the actual reality?

Scenario one: Hamilton, an all-time great, in the lineage of Senna and Schumacher, up against just another averagely good F1 driver? Or scenario



Exuberant Hamilton: a grand prix great



The booze of Brazil seems a long time ago

two: the exceptional Hamilton up against someone of very similar calibre, like in 2007, but without the general standing of Alonso? Both drivers have, over their careers, delivered special performances. Let's look at them...

KARTING

The karting careers of Button and Hamilton are very similar, Hamilton generally replicating what Button had done five years earlier. The difference in their career trajectories only really came when Hamilton was picked up and backed by McLaren, ensuring his route through the minefield of the junior car-racing categories was well-planned and fully funded, giving him control over his destiny, leaving him only to perform – which was the easy part.

Both began their careers at the minimum age of eight. Both had received their karts as Christmas presents from fathers separated/divorced who were now totally devoted to their sons. Beginning in cadets (eight-to-12-year-olds), both took a couple of seasons of regular race wins before dominating. Ten-year old Button was British cadet champion in 1990, a feat he repeated in '91 with the astonishing record of winning all 34 races entered! Ten-year old Hamilton won the British cadet series in '95, but was only third the following year.

Button was British TKM champion in 1992, his first season in the faster category. Hamilton didn't take part in the Junior TKM championship, but

instead dominated the less-hotly-contested Junior Yamaha series in '97. He did, however, do a late-season one-off in the tougher category – and proved a point by dominating.

Stepping up another category, Button was European and Italian JICA champion in 1994. Hamilton was a close second in the British JICA series in '98 and second again in European JICA in '99. Button was second in the Formula A world championship of '95. Hamilton won the European Formula A series in 2000. Button was Formula Super A European champion in '97, the youngest ever. Hamilton suffered a difficult Super A season in 2001, the only season in which he failed to win even one race.

Both were widely reckoned as the best karters of their era by the time they graduated.

JUNIOR CAR RACING

Hamilton had been backed by McLaren since 1998 and so, when he graduated to cars at the end of 2001, he was already on a planned, secure trajectory. If the titles didn't come in the first year – as happened in Formula Renault and Formula 3 – then they'd just tweak things and keep him there for a second, when he would duly wipe up. The momentum became irresistible when he became GP2 champion at just the time a McLaren F1 vacancy was opening up. By racing standards, this was a serene passage, albeit based on hard graft and stunning ability.

Button had been paid by the works

teams in the last four years of his karting career. But there was no family money to embark upon car racing. It was happy circumstance that Dave Robertson and Harald Huysman were looking to invest in a young guy they could take to F1 at just the time Button was ready to graduate from karts.

Huysman asked his friend, a kart track owner, who was any good and the guy replied: "I've only ever seen two guys in karting that were in a different league to the others: Ayrton Senna and this kid Jenson Button." That was enough. Robertson and Huysman underwrote the cost of Button's 1998 Formula Ford season, in which he won the British championship – nine wins and 11 poles from 20 races – and the

KARTING TITLES

BUTTON

9

HAMILTON

7



DIXON/MAX

Brit GP '08: Lewis dominated; Jenson screwed up big chance



GIBSON/LAT

“In the gloom of Silverstone, Hamilton was four seconds faster than Kovalainen; Button was three quicker than Barrichello. These are margins possible only for the supertalents”

Hamilton struggled on Michelins in '06 test



◀ all-important Festival. But they couldn't stretch to the quarter-million required for a top F3 ride in '99. So they took a Renault-subsidised drive – and that's the point at which Button fell off the ladder in a way that the McLaren-backed Hamilton didn't.

The Renault engine was uncompetitive and he finished third in the British championship. From now on, he'd be taking whatever opportunities were put in front of him, but neither he nor his management were now in the driving seat. So, when an F1 opportunity came up, they took it with both hands. But he wasn't really ready.

Button: two seasons in cars before F1. Hamilton: five seasons, all strategically mapped out and funded, then huge preparation beforehand.

Button: graduates to F1 with an average car before he's ready. Hamilton: goes in with the best car when more than ready. Perceptions – and seemingly very different destinies – set. Then the fluky miracle of the horrible Honda morphing into the 2009 Brawn, Button's career coming alive. Now those two destinies could come together – and that's the story of McLaren's 2010 driver line-up.

F1 MOMENTS OF MAGIC

Jean Alesi stood down from testing his Prost in the winter of 1999 because the team wanted to try out this F3 guy Button. Team manager Humphrey Corbett was attending to something else when he heard an F1 car being driven very hard indeed and wondered who it was – because it sounded way quicker than their car usually did. He took a look and was astonished to see the Prost fly by with Button's helmet in the cockpit. Jenson was quickly up to Alesi's pace and subsequently lapped almost half a second quicker. It was a quite stunning performance, one that would trigger the interest of Frank Williams. Alesi looked on and thought: 'Yes, he's the next special one.'

On Lewis Hamilton's first serious run in a McLaren during the 2006 off-season, still on Michelins, he was

around 0.9s slower than Fernando Alonso. But as soon as they switched to the control Bridgestones, he was suddenly lapping every bit as fast, sometimes slightly faster, and the Spaniard's brows furrowed. Without Hamilton's sensational rookie pace in '07, Alonso and McLaren would have got along just fine.

China 2007 is recalled as the race in which McLaren lost Hamilton the championship by not bringing him in when his rear tyre was down to the canvas. But Button – who finished fifth in a Honda that had no right to be anywhere near the points – played a cameo that was hugely significant to anyone interested enough to monitor him. His pace on a wet track with new dry-weather tyres fitted was astonishing – a full four seconds faster than anyone else's. It had been a similar story in the wet early laps of that year's European Grand Prix at the Nurburgring – from 19th to pressuring Alonso for third within a lap, lapping 1.8s faster than the next quickest guy. Then he went off...

Button's victory at Hungary in 2006 is often recalled as lucky, given that Alonso's Renault retired from the lead when a wheel came loose. What is not often recalled is that immediately prior to that Button had been reeling him in at 0.5s per lap. This was one of Alonso's greatest performances, a magnificent fight to the front in the wet from a penalised mid-grid position. Yet in a car not as good, and from a similar grid position, Button was actually faster. Even if they were noticed, such facts didn't readily fit into the general perception of Button – so were simply discarded.

Hamilton's Senna-like performance in the gloom of Silverstone 2008 is the stuff of legend. There was a sequence of laps – 40 to 46 – where he was lapping over four seconds faster than team-mate Heikki Kovalainen. Rubens Barrichello starred in that race, using an astute switch to extreme rain tyres to bring him a podium in a dog of a Honda. Button had made the same



Button flew on F1 test debut with Prost in 1999

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F1 STATISTICS

	BUTTON	HAMILTON
RACES	170	52
WINS	7	11
POLES	7	17
F/LAPS	2	3
POINTS	327	256



Hamilton claimed GP2 title in style in 2006

FERRARO/GP2



change a lap later, and his out-lap and first flying lap were quicker than Barrichello's by almost three seconds. These are staggering margins, possible only for the supertalents. Button then again spoiled things by spinning off. He later admitted he sometimes pushed too hard when the rare opportunities arose, in those dark Honda days, to display the full extent of his gift.

Button's tally against team-mates is another point of reference for those who don't believe he has the stuff of greatness in him. He's been too often outqualified by the likes of Barrichello, they say, not least in the latter half of last year, when Rubens was ahead on the grid every time. There may be something in that. It may have been nothing more than championship nerves, and certainly Button was still usually the better race driver even when he did start behind – witness Brazil and Abu Dhabi. He's probably too sensitive to the handling vagaries of his car, in that he doesn't deal well with rear instability on corner entry. But give him the grip and balance he needs and he can conjure magic. There is no other word to describe the wondrous lap he pulled out of the bag in Monaco qualifying last year.

Of course, one can list a litany of great moments in Hamilton's brief F1 career to date. But, great though a driver must be to deliver performances like his at Fuji '07, Shanghai '08 and Singapore '09, he has more access to this level if he's in a competitive car.



Button leads Nicolas Kiesa in 1998 FF Festival

BELLA/CA/LAT

“Button had been paid by karting teams, but there was no family money to embark upon car racing”

Button has performed enough magic to suggest he's one of just a tiny handful of drivers that could be put alongside Hamilton and have a realistic chance.

But as well as that worrying sensitivity to handling difficulties, he is going to be alongside a guy who, in his ferocity to win, is at a different level to any previous team-mate of Button's. To have any hope, Jenson is going to have to recognise that and dig deeper than ever before. But maybe, just maybe, the immensity of that challenge is going to give him better access to his magic than before, emboldened by the fact that he's now champion of the world. ❧



RALLY MEXICO

Leon

ROUND 2/13

WINNER

Sebastien Loeb
3h42m41.7s

RALLY RATING

★★★★★

Perfect rally from Loeb. The Solberg/Ogier scrap for P2 made it interesting

DRIVER STANDINGS

Loeb 43
Hirvonen 37
Latvala/Ogier 25

MILESTONES

- * Loeb's fourth straight Mexico win
- * Hirvonen off the podium for the first time since Rally Argentina last year



David Evans reports

LOEB MAKES HIS POSITION CLEAR

Road position on the gravel roads of Mexico was always going to be crucial - and the world champion timed it to perfection

In the end, the Sebastien Loeb-Mikko Hirvonen scrap didn't quite live up to the billing on Rally Mexico. Actually, it didn't come close. Remember Frank Bruno taking on Mike Tyson or England at Headingley last summer?

We're talking a big defeat for the Finn and the whole Ford team. Just as Ford's performance wasn't pretty, Loeb's win was a joy to watch. He accepted there was nothing he could do from second on the road on Friday, so he let rip on

Saturday. The six-time champion played the perfect day, winning stage after stage to build a near-minute lead. Then on Sunday, he cruised through, won the rally and moved to the top of the table. Petter Solberg picked up his best result since the Acropolis in 2008, beating Sebastien Ogier to the runner-up spot.

DAY ONE 9 stages, 85.28m

WEATHER: OVERCAST 14-26C

"Forget Sweden," said Petter Solberg, almost conspiratorially. "It's a different game here..." With a big grin, the Norwegian

slid into his C4 WRC and promptly destroyed the opposition to the tune of 10 seconds through the opening stage of Rally Mexico. Into Ortega and he added another five before piling on three more in El Cubliete, the morning's final test of any significance.

In just over two hours, Solberg had built a 17.4sec lead. Out of nowhere the depths of despair of round one three weeks earlier had been forgotten. Solberg was leading again and we were, indeed, in the middle of a different game.

As grim as Rally Sweden

had been for Solberg, it had landed him in the near perfect position of ninth on the road for the opening day in Mexico. And he made the most of what were the best road conditions.

The extent of the road sweeping being done by the cars ahead was quite clear by the fact that Mikko Hirvonen, the man first into the Guanajuato stages, was a minute and a half down on Solberg by Friday night.

Solberg's control over day one was absolute, but his decision to stick with a 15-second lead at the end of the day rather than

dropping time to run in a more favourable position on day two raised a few eyebrows. Solberg was utterly unfazed by the switch from poacher to gamekeeper that awaited him on the second day of the event.

"I didn't even think about the tactics," he said. "F*** it. I'm here to drive. Let's enjoy the lead and then try and keep it tomorrow."

Day one had been classic Solberg. Despite the five years that have passed since his last genuine WRC win here, his desire and determination remain



Loeb never looked like going over the edge

utterly undimmed and the pleasure he took from five fastest times and a start-to-finish lead on Friday was clear to see.

Citroen team principal Olivier Quesnel was quick to shake Solberg's hand at the end of the day, adding a "Bravo!" for good measure. But it was the man in second place for whom Quesnel saved the plaudits. Despite only having been on these roads once before – in a Citroen C2 S1600 in 2008 – Sebastien Ogier was fastest on the other four of the day's stages to keep Solberg in sight.

Ogier was only fastest on one of the long gravel stages, but as in Australia last year, he bossed all three of the asphalt spectator-pleasers.

That performance was, of course, a double-edged sword. He would now run second through the stages on Saturday.

"I have to change my brain a little bit," he said.

Ogier's day was considerably better than that of his CJT team-mate, Kimi Raikkonen. The Finn's event was spoiled on SS2 with an electrical fault and completely ruined five

stages later when he rolled spectacularly out of the event. Both he and co-driver Kaj Lindstrom walked away from what had been a violent accident. The C4 wouldn't be re-starting.

But what of the big two – Loeb and Hirvonen?

Loeb had been fourth after the first two stages, but moved past his Citroen team-mate Dani Sordo on SS3 and remained there for the rest of the day. Having seen Hirvonen slaughtered, he was quick to offer some defence for his rival.

"It would have been very hard for Mikko today," he

said. "The difference between being first and second on the road, where I was, is bigger than between any other two cars. Mikko had no line at all to follow, nothing. I had his line, which means some of the gravel has gone. I can't keep my car in his line all of the time, but it's something."

With Sordo a comfortable fourth, Rally Mexico was already looking like a Citroen benefit as C4s locked out the top four places. Jari-Matti Latvala led Ford's attack in fifth after a steady day in his factory Focus.

Latvala had spent much of the morning building his confidence on fast gravel rallies and rarely looked like troubling the French firepower ahead. Half a minute further back came Hirvonen, after a day he described as his worst ever running first on the road.

"Every time I tried to push today, we had a moment," said the then championship leader. "It was bad, really bad – much worse than I thought it would be. We had a massive moment on the second stage. Jarmo [Lehtinen, co-driver] stopped reading the notes and we thought, 'Oh f***!' I thought we were going to rip a rear wheel off, but in the end we scratched the bumper on a concrete post. We were lucky. And not just once today. We have to see what we can do tomorrow now."

Stobart Fordsters Henning Solberg and Matthew Wilson were seventh and eighth, with both finding the perfect set-up hard to come by through the opening loop. Wilson's morning might not have been the best as he struggled to persuade the back of his Ford to follow the front, but he did at least provide the most enlightened description of a bump which caught out the frontrunners near the end of SS3.

"It was unbelievable," said the Cumbrian. "The car absolutely stood on its nose. I thought that was the end. It didn't look bad on the recce, we thought it was easy flat and just a small

jump. It wasn't actually a jump, it was a sleeping policeman. We definitely woke him up!"

END OF LEG ONE

1 SOLBERG/MILLS	1h23m39.9s
2 OGIER/INGRASSIA	+15.0s
3 LOEB/ELENA	+27.5s
4 SORDO/MARTI	+40.8s
5 LATVALA/ANTTILA	+1m01.2s
6 HIRVONEN/LEHTINEN	+1m31.5s

DAY TWO 9 stages, 98.69m

WEATHER: OVERCAST 13-30C

Amid a flurry of conspiracy theories about why Solberg had remained in the lead, the #11 C4 took to the Saturday stages to perform a passable imitation of a lamb to the slaughter. For the first 1100 metres of the day, things didn't look too bad for the leader – he only dropped two tenths of a second to Loeb. But by the end of the 19-mile Ibarra test, which opened day two, the damage was done. And it was done to the tune of almost a second per mile. Loeb had leap-frogged Ogier and slashed Solberg's advantage to 10 seconds. One stage later and Loeb was in the lead.

By the time the cars arrived back in service, Loeb's perfect morning was complete: four stages and four wins had netted him a 17.8sec lead.

"I pushed to the limit this morning," said Loeb. "I had a few moments when I came close to the rocks at the side of the road, otherwise there's not so much to say about the morning."

Despite having lost 40 seconds, Solberg was still smiling. "We knew that was coming," he said. "We calculated between 35 and 40 seconds. It was hard work being at the front, but somebody's got to go first."

Having seen Hirvonen lose more time through the second run of stages on day one, Solberg didn't look terribly optimistic about his chances of staying in touch with Loeb, but his battle with Ogier was keeping him more than occupied. The Citroen Junior Team took time out of Solberg on the first three stages – despite a five-second spin on the second test. They would return to the stages after lunch, with Solberg



◀ clinging to a 2.1sec advantage. Ogier reversed the order on the second run through Ibarra only for the Norwegian to bounce back on SS15, but it was the final gravel stage of the day that gave Solberg hope.

“The first two this afternoon were really loose,” said Solberg, “but then the last one was hard like hell. We got down to a hard base and got some good traction. And look at the time, close to Loeb. I needed that this afternoon. All I can do is push for second tomorrow. He [Ogier] will be one position better on the road, but it should be possible for us to hold onto second.”

Ogier, understandably, saw things slightly differently. “We were faster than him today and we can be tomorrow as well,” he appraised with a shrug and a smile. Before remembering his chat with team boss Quesnel moments before. “But we won’t take the big risk. We have to be at the finish.”

Four more fastest times from the afternoon’s five stages cemented Loeb’s position out front. Privately, the leader had hoped for half a minute going into the final day, so a 55.5sec lead left him in a relaxed mood on Saturday night.

“I’ve still got to drive the stages,” he grinned, “but today has been good day. I have pushed as hard as I can



Solberg (right) was chuffed with second

remember on these roads and we have a good lead.”

The only fly in Citroën’s ointment was Sordo’s retirement on the opening stage, when the Spaniard smacked a rock and wrecked the steering on his C4.

Ford was grateful for the subsequent elevation of one position, but the BP Ford Finns were nowhere for the second day in a row. Fourth-placed Latvala lost less time than on day one, but when that’s 42 seconds rather than a minute, it’s hardly a

reason to be cheerful. One place behind and Hirvonen ended the day two minutes behind Loeb. A switch to harder suspension helped in the afternoon, but there was little to smile about. Worse still, Hirvonen felt ill as the day progressed and he looked increasingly like a man who’d rather have been elsewhere.

Henning Solberg had provided a brief respite from Ford’s gloom as he posted quick times through the morning, but over-

working the brakes on two of the day’s stages cost him the chance of troubling Hirvonen for fifth. Wilson’s seventh place was taken by Federico Villagra when the Brit slid off on the day’s opener, while American Ken Block’s hopes of a points finish on his debut in the Monster-backed Focus RS WRC were shot when he slapped the car against a rock on the same stage. A smashed wheel and mangled suspension left him stranded roadside.

END OF LEG TWO

1 LOEB/ELENA	3h08m49.6s
2 SOLBERG/MILLS	+55.5s
3 OGIER/INGRASSIA	+58.2s
4 LATVALA/ANTTILA	+1m43.9s
5 HIRVONEN/LEHTINEN	+1m59.9s
6 SOLBERG/MINOR	+2m25.2s

DAY THREE 4 stages,
31.99m **WEATHER: OVERCAST 13-30C**

Sipping his coffee early on Sunday morning, Citroën team principal Olivier Quesnel smiled.

“Nothing will stop him today,” he said as Loeb fired-up the C4 for the third and final day in Central America. Quesnel’s not about to win any awards for his prediction, his number one driver could afford to drop two seconds per mile through the final loop – and Loeb simply doesn’t do that. He won his fourth Rally Mexico in the trouble-free breeze of a day he’d toiled for on Saturday.

Behind him, the contrast couldn’t have been bigger. The competition for the runner-up spot was incredible. Ogier overturned Solberg’s advantage in the day’s longest test, moving ahead by 1.4sec.

Solberg was furious. “I got out of the line near the end of the stage,” he said. “I slid wide and half-spun.”

Ogier was looking unflappable and, despite

STAGE TIMES

SS1 ALFARO 1 (14.26 MILES)

Fastest: P Solberg 14m05.4s
Leader: P Solberg

SS2 ORTEGA 1 (14.80 MILES)

Fastest: P Solberg 13m51.4s
Leader: P Solberg

SS3 EL CUBILETE 1 (11.72 MILES)

Fastest: P Solberg 11m49.9s
Leader: P Solberg

SS4 COCA-COLA STREET STAGE (0.93 MILES)

Fastest: Ogier 1m16.6s
Leader: P Solberg

SS5 ALFARO 2 (14.26 MILES)

Fastest: P Solberg 13m56.1s
Leader: P Solberg

SS6 ORTEGA 2 (14.80 MILES)

Fastest: P Solberg 13m41.2s
Leader: P Solberg

SS7 EL CUBILETE 2 (11.72 MILES)

Fastest: Ogier 11m38.9s
Leader: P Solberg

SS8 SUPERSPECIAL 1 (1.37 MILES)

Fastest: Ogier 1m37.5s
Leader: P Solberg

SS9 SUPERSPECIAL 2 (1.37 MILES)

Fastest: Ogier 1m36.9s
Leader: P Solberg

SS10 IBARRILLA 1 (18.58 MILES)

Fastest: Loeb 18m18.3s
Leader: P Solberg

SS11 DUARTE 1 (14.45 MILES)

Fastest: Loeb 18m10.2s
Leader: Loeb

SS12 DERRAMADERO 1 (14.46 MILES)

Fastest: Loeb 14m03.7s
Leader: Loeb

SS13 COCA-COLA STREET STAGE (0.93 MILES)

Fastest: Loeb 1m15.3s
Leader: Loeb

SS14 IBARRILLA 2 (18.58 MILES)

Fastest: Loeb 18m01.6s
Leader: Loeb

SS15 DUARTE 2 (14.45 MILES)

Fastest: Loeb 17m44.9s
Leader: Loeb

SS16 DERRAMADERO 2 (14.46 MILES)

Fastest: Loeb 13m50.4s
Leader: Loeb

SS17 SUPERSPECIAL 3 (1.37 MILES)

Fastest: Loeb 1m39.1s
Leader: Loeb

SS18 SUPERSPECIAL 4 (1.37 MILES)

Fastest: Ogier 1m38.1s
Leader: Loeb

SS19 GUANAJUATO (18.10 MILES)

Fastest: Ogier 19m47.8s
Leader: Loeb

SS20 SAUZ SECO (4.38 MILES)

Cancelled due to road condition

SS21 COMANJILLA (11.14 MILES)

Fastest: P Solberg 10m16.2s
Leader: Loeb

SS22 SUPERSPECIAL 5 (1.37 MILES)

Fastest: P Solberg 3m12.7s
Leader: Loeb



Ogier made it a 1-2-3 for Citroën C4 WRCs



Unhappy P4 for top Ford man Hirvonen

S-WRC

Pons's winning return

After an absence of two years, former factory driver Xavier Pons returned to world rallying in the best possible fashion on last week's Rally Mexico, when the Ford Fiesta S2000 driver scored a narrow victory over Martin Prokop.

In a direct opposite to the main event, Ford was utterly dominant in the S-WRC, with Michal Kosciuszko setting the initial pace before his Fiesta was halted by a broken alternator belt. From then on, Pons and Prokop were the class of a six-strong S-WRC field. By his own admission, Prokop wasn't taking risks as he tried to learn more about the car. But the Czech driver kept finding himself back in the thick of the fight for the lead by dint of a day-two clutch problem on Pons's car.

The Spaniard's clutch was changed on Saturday night,

Pons took his Fiesta to debut win



allowing him to push for victory on Sunday. Come the finish, he was delighted.

"I only tested the car for 40 kilometers on Monday before the event, so this is a very good result," said Pons.

Prokop's second place is enough to move him into the lead in the S-WRC title race. Nasser Al-Attiyah had been third, but had to drop out when a change of exhaust manifold took longer than expected on Saturday night, forcing him into retirement. Kosciuszko was a registered finisher after two days of running under Supere Rally regulations, the Polish driver finishing on the bottom step of the podium.

S-WRC - Round 2 of 10

POS	DRIVER/NAVIGATOR	CAR	TIME
1	Xavier Pons/Alex Haro	Ford Fiesta S2000	4h01m26.1s
2	Martin Prokop/Jan Tomanek	Ford Fiesta S2000	+17.6s
3	M Kosciuszko/M Szczepaniak	Ford Fiesta S2000	+32m.36.8s

P-WRC

Champion stays on top

On the face of it, Armindo Araujo's first win in the defence of his P-WRC title was a straightforward affair, with more than three minutes separating his Mitsubishi from Toshi Arai's second-placed Subaru. For the first half of the event, however, nothing could have been further than the truth.

Araujo led in the first stage, but an overly cautious approach in SS2 dropped him behind Arai. Such was the drop off in the Portuguese driver's pace, his team manager called him to ask what was wrong. Having received the message loud and clear, he closed the gap

on Arai in the next stage. Araujo passed Arai in SS6 and remained out front for the rest of day one.

A big push from Arai first thing on Saturday morning ensured the pair were dead level after SS10, but that was as good as it would get for Toshi. On the way to SS12, he pulled over for a compulsory spot check by the organisers. While waiting, the brakes on his Impreza boiled and the Japanese driver crashed on the next corner of the road section. With the suspension damaged, Arai crawled through the stage and dropped three minutes.

Miguel Baldoni took third in his Mitsubishi Lancer E9.

P-WRC - Round 2 of 9

POS	DRIVER/NAVIGATOR	CAR	TIME
1	Armindo Araujo/Miguel Ramalho	Mitsubishi Lancer X	4h04m14.2s
2	Toshihiro Arai/Daniel Barritt	Subaru Impreza STi	+3m16.7s
3	M-A Baldoni/Jose Diaz	Mitsubishi Lancer E9	+9m13.0s

Quesnel's voice ringing in his ear telling him to bring the car home, he still pushed as hard as he dared.

Solberg moved back past with fastest time in the penultimate stage, leaving just six-tenths of a second between the pair when they arrived at the fifth and final run around the superspecial stage on the outskirts of Leon. Psychologically, the advantage was with Ogier: he'd won three of four previous visits to the stage. Solberg was going to have to pull something out of the bag this time.

The pair ran side by side and further down the order, so Solberg made good use of

the waiting time. He ran to the side of the track and watched the lines those before him were taking. He's also had a bit of encouragement as Loeb told him he was too old for all this and his brother told him to make sure he didn't lose. Fully fired up, Solberg was inch-perfect to take the place by 1.1sec. He was overjoyed and massively relieved after his shocker of a start in Sweden.

Ogier admitted he was disappointed, but third on his first visit to Mexico in a World Rally Car was still an exceptional result. Behind the three Citroens, Latvala stopped near the end of the

Comanjilla stage to allow Hirvonen up to fourth. Hirvonen had smacked the side of his Ford on the day's opener and admitted he wouldn't be too sorry to see the back of round two.

After the highest of the highs, metaphorically and physically for Citroen, round three takes the WRC to the lowest of the low, as the series goes below sea level for Rally Jordan later this month. It's one-all for Loeb and Hirvonen now, but the advantage certainly lies with the Frenchman after another clinical demonstration of how to win rallies on the far side of the Atlantic. ☒

RESULTS

Rally Mexico, March 5-7, round 2 of 13

22 SPECIAL STAGES, 220.34 MILES

POS	NO	DRIVER/NAVIGATOR	CAR	TIME
1	1	Sebastien Loeb/Daniel Elena	Citroen C4 WRC	3h42m41.7s
2	11	Petter Solberg/Phil Mills	Citroen C4 WRC	+24.2s
3	7	Sebastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia	Citroen C4 WRC	+25.3s
4	3	Mikko Hirvonen/Jarmo Lehtinen	Ford Focus RS WRC09	+1m47.5s
5	4	Jari-Matti Latvala/Miikka Anttila	Ford Focus RS WRC09	+2m15.1s
6	6	Henning Solberg/Ilka Minor	Ford Focus RS WRC08	+2m48.0s
7	9	Federico Villagra/Lorge Perez Companc	Ford Focus RS WRC08	+10m13.4s
8	28	Xavier Pons/Alex Haro	Ford Fiesta S2000	+18m44.4s
9	21	Martin Prokop/Jan Tomanek	Ford Fiesta S2000	+19m02.0s
10	31	Armindo Araujo/Miguel Ramalho	Mitsubishi Lancer X	+21m32.5s

OTHERS

14	2	Dani Sordo/Marc Marti	Citroen C4 WRC	4h22m34.1s
16	5	Matthew Wilson/Scott Martin	Ford Focus RS WRC08	4h25m58.9s
R	8	Kimi Raikkonen/Kaj Lindstrom	Citroen C4 WRC	SS7-crash

CLASS WINNERS A8 Loeb/Elena; N4 Pons/Haro; Starters/finishers 30/25; Leaders: SS1-10 P Solberg; SS11-22 Loeb.

CHAMPIONSHIP TABLE

POS	DRIVER	PTS
1	Loeb	43
2	Hirvonen	37
3=	Latvala	25
3=	Ogier	25
5	P Solberg	20
6	H Solberg	16
7	Sordo	6
8	Ostberg	4
9	P Solberg	2
10	Andersson	1

MANUFACTURERS' POINTS	
1	BP Ford WRT 67
2	Citroen Total WRT 61
3	Citroen Junior Team 32

RALLY SUMMARY Missing from the 2009 calendar, Rally Mexico remained largely the same as the '08 event. A mile-long stage through the centre of Leon was added for the first two legs. 60,000 screaming fans at the ceremonial start in the centre of Guanajuato was a highlight.

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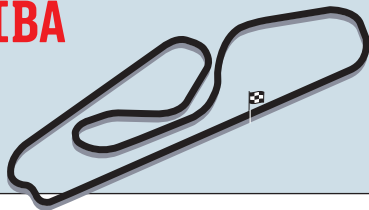
CURITIBA

Brazil

March 6-7

WTCC

Round 1/11



AT A GLANCE

- Race 1 Yvan Muller
- Race 2 Gabriele Tarquini
- Pole position Muller
- Fastest laps Huff/Tarquini



Tarquini took reversed-grid win

Quality: Muller on-track; Gene, Menu and Huff off



Muller gets off to a perfect start

The 2008 champion hadn't raced a petrol-engined car in the WTCC for almost three years, but that didn't stop him on his first outing with Chevrolet

QUALIFYING

Chevy moves to the front

The weekend belonged to BMW – until everyone bolted new tyres onto a qualifying set-up. Then Chevrolet took over – 1-2-3 in Q1 and 1-3-4 in Q2, after Norbert Michelisz spun in front of Alain Menu and Rob Huff and cost them what each believes was a pole lap. That put Jordi Gene on the front row with Yvan Muller, and Menu and Huff on row two.

Gabriele Tarquini made a mistake on his crucial lap, but still nipped in ahead of the two BMWs, which were left behind when they didn't find anything like the same gains as their rivals on fresh rubber.

Obligatory 'P1' thumb-aloft pose from Muller



As far as new beginnings go, victory from pole position and a share of the championship lead is right up there.

That was the result of Yvan Muller's first race weekend with Chevrolet works team RML. During the World Touring Car Championship's three-month winter break he will have imagined the outcome of the Curitiba opener many times, but even he admitted that his success was beyond his expectations for his first petrol-powered WTCC races since 2007.

"It was basically perfect, I could not expect this," he said. "I have still a bit to find with my style in this

car so I know there is more to come." That's a worrying thought for the others, although Muller never had much daylight between himself and his team-mates.

Chevrolet has started 2010 with the car to beat. The Cruze's pace in both qualifying and race trim was pretty enviable in Brazil. All three drivers were in the frame all weekend, and Muller, Rob Huff and Alain Menu took a dominant 1-2-3 in the wet first race, with neither BMW nor SEAT able to provide an answer.

BMW showed well in free practice, but the 320si was left seriously wanting when it mattered most. It had a hard time of it when the track was wet, and didn't look a lot more threatening in the dry.

SEAT was the most difficult to read. Jordi Gene's front-row start was the product of successful team slipstreaming for a single lap, rather than a representation of a consistent pace – and he, and all the other diesel drivers, went backwards early in the wet race.

The dry second race was a different story. Instead of having their mirrors full, Gabriele Tarquini and Gene cleared off up front to a pretty easy one-two from the top-eight-reversed grid.

Curitiba has historically suited the Leon TDI very well, so it's a bit early yet to know whether that speed can be expected to last all year. The changeable conditions on Sunday also blurred the image of the

RACE RATING

★★★★★

Some decent action in the first race, in variable weather, but the second was an anti-climax



I was just saving my tyres and then Rob came right up behind me and I had to wake up - I was saving too much!"
Yvan Muller on his 'Cruze' in race one

REPORT WTCC CURITIBA



Steven English reports

Qualifying **Michelisz spins in front of Menu and Huff on crucial last lap; Muller gets pole** **Race 1 Torrential downpour livens track conditions but causes boring safety-car start** **Race 2 First-lap clashes spread frontrunners and set stalemate**

balance of power.

The circuit had been overcast for three days without rain affecting a single session. Then race day was bright and hot, before rain started lashing down half an hour before race one. It eased to a light shower as the grid formed up, but it was too late to save the proper rolling start.

The pools of standing water forced a parade behind the safety car and granted Muller an automatic lead from his pole position.

Gene drafted Muller down the main straight and got alongside, but then overshot the braking point and lost places to Huff and Menu as he rejoined. Diesel power had him back

alongside Huff by the end of the back straight, but he went straight on at the next corner too and dropped down the field, leaving the trio of Chevrolets up front.

Muller and Huff edged away from Menu throughout the race, but there was never going to be a scrap for the lead that would risk the team's 1-2-3. Huff got close enough for a look inside Muller only once, and thought better of it.

Behind, Tarquini and Tom Coronel repeated Gene's Turn 1 error at the start of the second lap and were split by the BMWs of Andy Priaulx and Augusto Farfus. Priaulx was struggling for speed early on and ended up backing his team-mate into the SEATs.

Priaulx got taken out at start of second race



Farfus lost half the race slipping behind Coronel, regaining the place and catching back up to Priaulx. As Farfus passed Coronel, Gene took the opportunity to follow him through, but the Dutchman wasn't too flustered, knowing it gave him pole for race two.

As it turned out, it turned to disaster for Coronel. He was beaten to Turn 1 by team-mate Gene, and then collected just yards later by Huff and pitched into retirement – for which Huff later apologised. Meanwhile, Tarquini made a flying start and got into second place, via a clash with Priaulx into the first corner that ended the Briton's race.

The reigning champion declared afterwards that there were no team orders from the SR-Sport team, but Gene couldn't have been more welcoming when Tarquini went up

the inside on the third lap. From there the two SEATs simply cruised away.

All three Chevrolets passed Farfus but could make no impression on the leaders. Huff lost out on a second podium by outbraking himself at the first turn. That allowed Menu and Muller to take advantage, and it was Menu who claimed a second visit to the rostrum by holding Muller at bay throughout.

Just as they did last year, Muller and Tarquini come away from the opening round in Brazil with a joint championship lead, but this time it's the Chevys of Menu and Huff giving chase, while BMW is left with a lot to think about in the two months before the next event, in Marrakech. ☑

THE INSIDE LINE

Michelisz and Zengo: the mighty Magyars



Norbert Michelisz had already created a stir in the WTCC before last weekend. On a guest outing at Brands Hatch last year, his prize for his exploits in the SEAT Leon Eurocup, he'd made it into the top-10 qualifying shootout at the expense of SEAT's reigning world champ Yvan Muller.

For the Hungarian, who

went on to claim the SEAT title in 2009, Curitiba was the start of a new era: a full-time step-up for both driver and the Zengo-Dension team to the WTCC with a Leon TDI.

Four years ago, Michelisz was a student in the town of Mohacs when he got a call from the Zengo team asking if he'd like to be a racing driver. The team, which was looking for a Hungarian

driver, had seen his name near the top of a leaderboard on a computer game...

Things didn't pan out too well in Brazil, after he'd taken fifth in free practice (ahead of world champ Tarquini!). He broke his diffuser in an off during qualifying and was without a spare for the rest of the weekend, but watch out for him – he's rather rapid.

RESULTS

FIA World Touring Car Championship, Curitiba (BR), March 6-7, round 1 of 11

GRID		RACE 1 - 16 LAPS, 36.735 MILES						RACE 2 - 14 LAPS, 32.143 MILES						CHAMPIONSHIP TABLE		
POS	DRIVER (NATIONALITY)	TEAM	CAR	WEIGHT	TIME	GRID	POS	DRIVER	TIME	GRID	POS	DRIVER	PTS			
2	GENE	1	MULLER	Chevrolet (RML)	Chevrolet Cruze LT	1150kg	26m57.181s	1	1	Tarquini	20m13.311s	5	1=	Muller	37	
4	HUFF	3	MENU	Chevrolet (RML)	Chevrolet Cruze LT	1150kg	+1.053s	4	2	Gene	+1.276s	2	1=	Tarquini	37	
3	ALAIN MENU (CH)	Chevrolet (RML)	Chevrolet Cruze LT	1150kg	+5.582s	3	3	Menu	+5.407s	6	3	Menu	30			
6	PRIAULX	5	TARQUINI	SEAT Sport (SUNRED)	SEAT Leon TDI	1170kg	+7.136s	5	4	Muller	+5.985s	8	4	Huff	28	
5	ANDY PRIAULX (GB)	BMW Team RBM	BMW 320si	1155kg	+11.625s	6	5	Huff	+8.295s	7	5	Gene	24			
6	AUGUSTO FARFUS (BR)	BMW Team RBM	BMW 320si	1155kg	+12.098s	7	6	Farfus	+8.596s	3	6	Farfus	16			
7	JORDI GENE (E)	SR-Sport (SUNRED)	SEAT Leon TDI	1170kg	+14.379s	2	7	Monteiro	+10.419s	11	7	Priaulx	10			
8	TOM CORONEL (NL)	SR-Sport (SUNRED)	SEAT Leon TDI	1170kg	+14.647s	9	8	Nykjaer	+11.808s	12	8	Monteiro	6			
9	FREDDY BARTH (CH)	SUNRED Engineering	SEAT Leon TDI	1170kg	+18.773s	12	9	Michelisz	+17.576s	10	9=	Coronel	4			
10	NORBERT MICHELISZ (H)	Zengo-Dension Team	SEAT Leon TDI	1170kg	+20.359s	10	10	Hernandez	+24.244s	13	9=	Nykjaer	4			
11	TIAGO MONTEIRO (P)	SR-Sport (SUNRED)	SEAT Leon TDI	1170kg	+21.691s	11	11	Engstler	+24.643s	14						
12	MICHEL NYKJAER (DK)	SUNRED Engineering	SEAT Leon TDI	1170kg	+22.645s	8	12	Bennani	+30.072s	18						
13	SERGIO HERNANDEZ (E)	Scuderia Proteam Motorsport	BMW 320si	1155kg	+34.973s	19	13	Vaulkhard	+30.923s	16						
14	Franz Engstler (D)	Liqui Moly Team Engstler	BMW 320si	1155kg	+38.092s	16	14	d'Aste	+40.328s	17						
15	Darryll O'Young (PRC)	Bamboo Engineering	Chevrolet Lacetti	1140kg	+44.692s	14	15	O'Young	+40.481s	15						
16	Harry Vaulkhard (GB)	Bamboo Engineering	Chevrolet Lacetti	1140kg	+50.005s	17	16	Barth	+1m09.780s	9						
17	Stefano d'Aste (I)	Scuderia Proteam Motorsport	BMW 320si	1155kg	+50.742s	13	R	Coronel	1 lap-acc damage	1						
18	Mehdi Bennani (MA)	Wiechers-Sport	BMW 320si	1155kg	+1m20.825s	15	R	Priaulx	0 laps-acc damage	4						
R	Andrei Romanov (RUS)	Liqui Moly Team Engstler	BMW 320si	1155kg	5 laps-acc damage	18	NS	Romanov		19						

* grid penalty

KEY R=Retired; NS=Non-Starter. **Race 1** Winner's average: 81.77mph. Fastest lap: Huff, 1m33.904s, 88.02mph. **Race 2** Winner's average: 95.37mph. Fastest lap: Tarquini, 1m25.803s, 96.33mph.

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AT A GLANCE

→ Winners Kris Meeke/Paul Nagle
→ Points leader Juho Hanninen/
Mikko Markkula

RALLY RATING

★★★★★

Brits fight it out at the front in game of weather-predicting cat and mouse

Meeke leads British one-two in the Brazilian rain

Reigning champion defeats Guy Wilks to get title defence back on track with second Curitiba win



Meeke mastered the Brazilian gravel tracks

Kris Meeke headed Guy Wilks in a British one-two on the high-speed gravel stages around Curitiba last weekend. But this wasn't an exercise in earning bragging rights over an old adversary.

Instead, victory for Peugeot driver Meeke not only propelled him to top of the list of IRC career winners, but it also got the defence of his Intercontinental Rally

Challenge title back on track following his crash on the Monte Carlo opener.

Meeke was the only IRC regular competing in Brazil with prior knowledge of the stages (he won here for Peugeot UK in 2009 too) and knew he had to make that advantage count. He did so in impressive fashion by winning the first four stages to hold a 23-second lead at first service.

While his starting

position of fifth could have contributed to his lofty status had it been dry, persistent rain in the build-up to the rally, including a heavy deluge on Thursday night, had left the stages damp in parts and effectively swept away any loose surface gravel.

With forecasts suggesting a downpour on Friday afternoon, Meeke's main rivals all opted to run a soft-compound tyre in the mistaken belief it would rain. Meeke chose a harder option that gave him the edge in the fast sections.

He maintained he would have been fastest on all seven stages on Friday but was too cautious over a crossroads on stage five, mindful of a hefty knock his 207 had taken during the morning run-through.

Meeke's tenure of first place (he led Wilks by 32.7s after day one) meant he would start Saturday's leg first on the road.

Fortunately, for Meeke at least, thunderstorms overnight made for a damp and compact surface that negated any disadvantage he might have faced.

The rain had fallen with such intensity on Friday night that the two runs over the Rio Pesqueiro stage on Saturday were canned when the river of the same name running adjacent to it burst its banks. The deluge also forced organisers to run the event-closing superspecial as a demonstration only.

While Meeke deserved the plaudits for a faultless effort, Wilks had also shone by beating the factory Skoda Fabias of Juho Hanninen and Jan Kopecky in his semi-works version. Wilks bemoaned his lack of experience on the event for failing to beat Meeke. But points finishes on both rounds to date have put him into second in the title reckoning, three points adrift of Hanninen.

The Finn, who finished third with six stage wins, could have challenged for the win but for a left-rear puncture on the very first stage. He eventually clawed his way back to third after overhauling Kopecky when the Czech suffered a deflation of his own on Saturday's opener.

Brazilian Eduardo Scheer was the first of the Group N runners in his Mitsubishi Lancer after Eduardo Pereda's similar car broke its engine within sight of the finish.

RESULTS

1 Kris Meeke/Paul Nagle (Peugeot 207 S2000), 1h42m45.4; 2 Guy Wilks/Phil Pugh (Skoda Fabia S2000) +46.7s; 3 Juho Hanninen/Mikko Markkula (Skoda); 4 Jan Kopecky/Petr Stary (Skoda); 5 Bruno Magalhaes/Carlos Magalhaes (Peugeot); 6 Daniel Oliveira/Denis Giraudet (Peugeot). **Points** 1 Hanninen, 14; 2 Wilks, 11; 3= Meeke/Mikko Hirvonen, 10; 5 Kopecky, 9; 6 Nicolas Vouilloz, 6.

Second gave Wilks P2 in the IRC points





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NASCAR SPRINT CUP ATLANTA (USA), MARCH 7, RD 4/36

Busch wins Atlanta grudge match

A brilliant restart at the second green/white chequer handed Kurt Busch victory at Atlanta.

The Penske Dodge driver, along with Juan Pablo Montoya and Kasey Kahne, fought for victory in a typically fraught race. But when Carl Edwards, who was over 150 laps down, exerted a pathetic piece of revenge on top-five runner Brad Keselowski, it teed up a dramatic finale.

The Roush Fenway Ford man has history with the Penske junior, and an early race incident between the two sent Edwards up into Joey Logano, the wall and ultimately the pits for lengthy repairs. Back on track, he actively sought out Keselowski, tapping him into a spin.

As the Dodge rotated,

air got under the rear wing, lifting it into a mid-air spin before it crashed down, roof first, into the retaining wall. "I'm okay," said Keselowski. "To intentionally wreck someone is not cool. We could have killed someone in the grandstand."

Edwards, who was subsequently parked by NASCAR, could barely muster an apology. "His car going airborne was not what I expected," he offered.

At the restart an audacious move by Kahne caught Jamie McMurray by surprise so much that he jumped into the path of Clint Bowyer, sparking a chain reaction that resulted in a hard lick for Mark Martin, and damage for Kyle Busch, Denny Hamlin and Martin Truex.

Second time around, Kurt

Great restart worked for Busch



Busch timed it perfectly, while Kahne ran into the back of Montoya, ruining both their chances and allowing Matt Kenseth to sneak into second.

Paul Menard was fifth, ahead of AJ Allmendinger. Despite being off the pace all weekend, points leader Kevin Harvick kept out of trouble to come home ninth. All the Hendrick Chevys suffered tyre issues, but Jimmie Johnson coped best to take 12th.

● Connell Sanders Jr

RESULTS

1 Kurt Busch (Dodge Charger), 341 laps in 3h59m59s; 2 Matt Kenseth (Ford Fusion), +0.482s; 3 Juan Pablo Montoya (Chevrolet Impala); 4 Kasey Kahne (Ford); 5 Paul Menard (Ford); 6 AJ Allmendinger (Ford); 7 Brian Vickers (Toyota Camry); 8 Greg Biffle (Ford); 9 Kevin Harvick (Chevy); 10 Scott Speed (Toyota). **Points** 1 Harvick, 644; 2 Kenseth, 618; 3 Biffle, 585; 4 Jimmie Johnson, 570; 5 Clint Bowyer, 558; 6 Jeff Burton, 538; 7 Mark Martin, 521; 8 Tony Stewart, 510; 9 Menard, 505; 10 Kurt Busch, 502; 11 Jeff Gordon, 482; 12 Speed, 482.

GRAND-AM HOMESTEAD (USA), MARCH 6, RD 2/12

Late caution not enough to stop Pruett at Homestead

A largely professional Grand-Am Rolex Sports Car Series race at Homestead-Miami Speedway's combined oval/road course was enlivened by a late caution period due to debris on the race track (it was claimed). All of a sudden, former series champion Scott Pruett had his hands full.

Pruett's comfortable 12-seconds lead over the pole-winning Brumos Racing Riley-Porsche of David

Donohue was slashed to nothing, and the cagey veteran, who will celebrate his 50th birthday in less than three weeks, had to work hard to beat Donohue by a scant 0.255s margin.

"It was a nailbiter at the end," said Pruett after securing his 23rd Grand-Am race win and the 24th for his Riley-BMW's team owner Chip Ganassi.

Defending series champion Jon Fogarty (Gainsco Riley-Chevrolet)

jumped past Donohue's team-mate Darren Law to take the early lead in the day/night race, but soon relinquished his advantage as Law put the Porsche's prodigious straight-line speed to good use.

Law led by as much as 20s in the middle stages, but Pruett was charging hard after taking over the Telmex Riley-BMW from Memo Rojas after 45 minutes, and slipped past the Fogarty/Alex Gurney car on lap 50.

As Law came into the pits to hand over to Donohue with just over an hour remaining, he was forced to slow dramatically to avoid a GT-class Mazda that had caught fire and been abandoned in the middle of the pitlane.

Donohue emerged with a deficit of around eight seconds and never looked likely to close the gap until that late caution. He had to

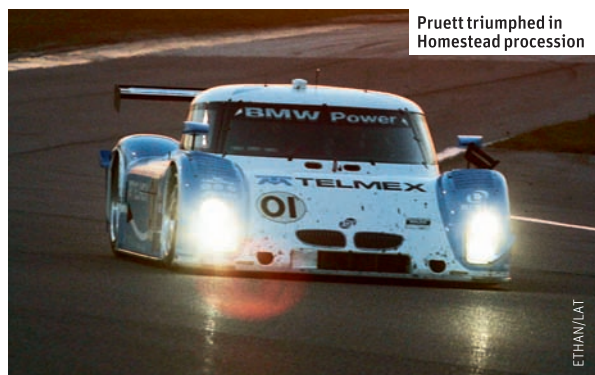
be content with second, followed at a distance by Fogarty/Gurney.

Burt Frisselle and Mark Wilkins (AIM Autosport Riley-Ford) narrowly headed Daytona winner Ryan Dalziel and new team-mate Mike Forest (Starworks Riley-BMW) and Ricky Taylor/Max Angelelli (Dallara-Ford) in a thrilling battle for the minor placings.

● Jeremy Shaw

RESULTS

1 Memo Rojas/Scott Pruett (Riley-BMW), 129 laps in 2h46m04.101s; 2 Darren Law/David Donohue (Riley-Porsche), +0.255s; 3 Jon Fogarty/Alex Gurney (Riley-Chevrolet); 4 Burt Frisselle/Mark Wilkins (Riley-Ford); 5 Ryan Dalziel/Mike Forest (Riley-BMW); 6 Ricky Taylor/Max Angelelli (Dallara-Ford). **Points** 1 Rojas/Pruett, 67; 2 Dalziel, 61; 3 Frisselle/Wilkins, 54; 4 Fogarty/Gurney, 53; 5 Donohue/Law, 52; 6 Terry Borcheller/Joao Barbosa, 51.



Pruett triumphed in Homestead procession

ETHAN/LAT

IN BRIEF



NASCAR TRUCKS

Kevin Harvick made good use of a brand-new Chevrolet (above) to dominate last weekend's Truck Series race at Atlanta. Harvick crossed the line 1.308s clear of Kyle Busch.

AUSTRALIAN F3

Mitch Evans capitalised on Australian F3's new-for-2010 three-race format by taking three wins in the season opener at Wakefield Park, although the 15-year-old's cause was helped by the fact that just six cars took to the track.

CONTINENTAL CHALLENGE

After qualifying on pole, then failing scrutineering and being relegated to the back of the grid, Jack Roush Jr and Billy Johnson (Ford Mustang GT) stormed through to win round two of the Grand-Am Continental Tire Sports Car Challenge at Homestead on Saturday.

PACIFIC F2000

Last year's rookie of the year David Cheng scored his maiden victory in a bizarre wet-weather race on Saturday at Fontana. Defending champion Robert Podlesni, who claimed both poles, overcame a nasty cold and an electrical glitch in race one to secure top honours over Scott Rarick in dry conditions the following afternoon.

KUWAIT RALLY



The UAE's Sheikh Khalid Al-Qassimi and Ulster co-driver Michael Orr clinched a comfortable victory in the 2010 Kuwait International Rally, round two of the FIA Middle East Rally Championship, at the wheel of their Ford Fiesta S2000 (above).



SLIDE RULES!

Fancy sliding a rally-prepared Porsche 911 RS around a frozen Norwegian lake?
DAVID EVANS did just that and thinks he may have discovered driving heaven

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My arms are starting to ache now. And my head's been pounding for ages. I can't feel my feet and I'm tired. But I couldn't be happier. In fact, I think I've found heaven. It involves six cylinders from Stuttgart and a lake in Norway.

The cylinders are hot, the lake cold – frozen, in fact. And frozen hard. There's a metre of ice between my feet and the water below. The cylinders are sitting behind me, burbling away and composing Porsche 911 poetry while wrapped in three-litres of loveliness. Sharing the car is Chris Atkinson, one of the world's fastest rally drivers. Until Subaru pulled out of the sport and took his seat with it. Luckily for Chris, he's found the seat next to me. My seat comes with a steering wheel in front of it. His doesn't. Hence the Aussie apprehension.

I've been invited to sample Norway Ice Driving. The formula is pretty straightforward: three 911s, an enormous frozen lake and a policy of 'driving 'til you drop'. And that's it. There's not a classroom in sight and there's enough fuel to keep the combined 800 horses booming from dawn until dusk.

Norway Ice Driving was the brainchild of Richard Tuthill. His father, Francis, runs Britain's most renowned Porsche preparation firm – so the use of 911s makes sense. But what about the Norway bit?

Richard explains: "I did the Swedish Rally in 2000 and learned more about driving in three days than ever before. I also wanted to dispel the myth about the 911 being difficult to drive."

And what better way than to combine the two. But, keeping the nose of the 911 out front on the slippery stuff is far from easy, particularly for those of us with ice experience limited to a Sainsbury's car park, a handbrake and a bitterly cold January morning. To remedy that, Tuthill drafts in some of the world's finest drivers, such as Atkinson, former Production Car World Rally champion, Martin Rowe, up-and-coming WRC star Andreas Mikkelsen and – if the price is right – you could even find the first-ever world champion, Bjorn Waldegaard, telling you that you have the throttle control

"Please help me to beat Tuthill and Atkinson. Please!"



Master the lake and you'll tackle a proper stage

of a rock ape from the right-hand seat.

Tuthill is keen to point out, however, that learning is an inevitable by-product of the fun had behind the wheel. Let's see.

The day starts with a mild panic from me as we drive out onto the ice. Up ahead, I see a tractor ploughing this afternoon's stage. I'm not sure if this is a good thing. Am I glad to see the ice is strong enough to hold the weight of all our cars and the tractor or am I deeply concerned at the prospect of this all being too much for the deep freeze below? A metre's not that much, after all. To make matters worse, Tuthill's lighting a fire. That's it, we're doomed and confined to a watery grave in the name of the science of sideways.

My dilemma is forgotten in an instant. With the help of a chocolate bun and a cup of coffee.

RICHARD TUTHILL



Richard started rallying aged 17 in a Volkswagen Beetle. He took part in several WRC rounds, most recently Rally GB in 2005 in which he won his class in a Fiesta ST.

Bun done, it's time to get on with the day, starting with driving around some cones. Atkinson shows me the way to do it. And it's amazing. The car drifts from one direction to the next under his complete control. It's astonishing. And it looks pretty damned easy.

I'm two cones in before the 911's nose is parked in the snow.

Unlike some drivers, Atko's ability to translate what he's doing into English for the mere mortals is staggering. Within 10 minutes he's got me through the cones in one piece.

We're running a 1973 race-tuned 911 RS – a car that has finished on the podium of the East African Safari three times. And we're running it on 'button' studs, which offer a millimetre or two of protrusion out of a heavily treaded, soft-compound tyre. This kind of cover works well for hire cars, but the



Evans (right) makes his excuses to Chris Atkinson



Absolutely nothing in here you won't need



Studded tyres offer uncanny grip levels



Evans is all arms and elbows from the cockpit

CHRIS ATKINSON



Joined Subaru in 2005 and stayed until the Japanese firm left WRC at the end of 2008. Atkinson, 30, has scored six podium finishes and is now seeking a full-time return to the WRC.

resistance is slight between the rear wheels of our rally car and the ice beneath. That's the plan. While wheel speed will have risen alarmingly from time to time, we're rarely exceeding 20mph between the cones. But you soon appreciate the need for absolute (complete and utter) throttle control.

"Just a millimetre too much is enough to send you round," smiles Atkinson as I fumble for reverse. Again. The onset of dizziness cements the Byzantine equation of right foot and forward motion in your mind.

Cones done, we're off to the first stage – one of three tracks cut through the snow on the lake. Atkinson hurls the Porsche through the stage. It's still not fast because of the buttons, but it's enormously impressive.

"The idea is to keep the car moving

all of the time," he says as we swap seats. "You want to keep a tiny bit of throttle on to keep the wheels spinning; it's much easier to change the direction of the car when you've broken traction. And you steer with the throttle."

He then went on to start talking about rudders and things, but, frankly I'd stopped listening. I was in a world of my own. I'd strung some corners together in a perfect drift going from lock to lock. We were still at walking pace, but I felt like a driving God.

Exhausted, I emerged from the car bathed in sweat. Only for Tuthill to insist I have a shot in the 1965 two-litre car. Serious Porsche enthusiasts reckon this car is to auto motion what the Magna Carta is to liberty. I like it. It is undoubtedly more manageable, having a 100 or so less horsepower,

"The idea is to keep the car moving all the time. Keep a tiny bit of throttle on to keep the wheels spinning"

Chris Atkinson

but I preferred the noise and madness of the RS. So, under Tuthill's strict instructions, I got back in it and stayed there for the rest of the day.

With an hour or so under my belt, Tuthill gets the stopwatch out. Now this I am not expecting. I am now being actively encouraged to drive this car like I'd lifted it from the pub car park.

"Get in and really give it some stick," is Tutty's only advice.

Suddenly, in the heat of competition, I find everything that had come ▶

ALL PICS: GRIFFITHS/LAT

ABUTMENTS AND MOUNTING SCREWS
- NOTE DIFFERENT ABUTMENTS
FOR DIFFERENT PAD TYPES.
- TORQUE ABUTMENT TO
CALIPER SCREWS 3.0NM

2. WRAP BUSH IN BELLLOTAPE 4405 CUT TO WIDTH.
3. ADD CONFOR FOAM (BLUE CF45) 5.0MM THICK (NOTE "CAD" NOMINAL SIZE IS 3.6MM THICK BUT FOAM COMPRESSED WHEN TAPED).
4. WRAP IN PTFE TAPE, WRAP IN DIRECTION OF ROTATION, OVERLAP END 50MM.
5. CHECK WHEEL RADIAL CLEARANCE 0.5mm.

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GRIFFITHS/LAT

Evans masters the art of steering on the throttle

◀ naturally minutes earlier really tricky. I'm thinking about every slide, my arms are stiffening, I'm almost having to remind myself to breathe and blink. It's ridiculous. It was a 1m11.8s lap.

Tuthill is genuinely enthusiastic and full of praise. He needn't have been – I'm already saving my pennies for a return trip, I'm so sold on the scheme. But, when Atkinson's lap ends up just a tenth of a second quicker than mine, I'm pretty chuffed.

Tuthill then gets in and shaves a further two tenths from Atko's time. Atko then gets in and does more laps, getting quicker and quicker until he peaks at a 1m10.2s. Tuthill can't quite better that, so he stops, full of pain from his left arm. Turns out he'd had a tendon operation a month ago and he'd been driving one-handed.

My turn again. With the 'full-attack' advice ringing in my ears, I crossed the finish line backwards, six seconds down on the boys. Oh dear.

Just when I think the day can't get better, I'm introduced to full-length studs – the type used on the world championship Rally Sweden last month. Now I truly believe I'm going to be found out. Everything we'd done before had been at slow-speed. But now, with more grip, we'd be exploring the limits of second and third gear. Not big on commitment, I console myself with reindeer. Eating them, that is, not talking to them.

Cars are prepared by the renowned Tuthill squad



GRIFFITHS/LAT

While I'd been stuffing my face with the engine room from Santa's sleigh, the cars had been checked over and fitted with the big studs. And now Atkinson's efforts were truly staggering. The level of grip is unbelievable and the ease with which you can control the slides is beyond belief. Within five or so corners, I am seriously into it. Setting-up the car with a big dab of left foot on the brakes to unsettle it, shifting the 980-odd kilos onto a front corner to get it turned in before playing with the throttle to go as sideways as I want.

It is immense. And, behind the birth of my children, my wedding day and November 22, 2003 (England rugby fans know what that's all about) this is comfortably the best day of my life; a proper pinch-yourself moment.

I am literally chucking this car at corners and sliding through in second and third gear. And you really know when you get it right courtesy of the big blast of fresh air coming through the open slider window next to my left shoulder. Nothing can compete with this. There I am, a metre above a lake in Norway on the lock-stops at six-and-some-thousand revs in third gear with the most fantastic noise coming from just over my right shoulder.

Just as I am starting to think the time has come to quit the keyboard in favour of becoming a world champion, we head to a pukka five-mile stage through the woods. It's time to practise what we'd learned on the lake. I was busted. Big time.

Again, Atkinson's ability is beyond question as he places a car he'd only driven for a couple of days where he wanted it at the most astonishing speed. Where he wants fourth, I am content with second. A hero on the wide-open lake, my cowardice behind the wheel knows no bounds when

“You don't see the trees, you just see the line of the road. You don't take anything else in”

Chris Atkinson

the trees come to town.

“You don't see them,” Atkinson says, “you just see the line of the road – you don't take anything else in.”

There we have it, my perfect excuse at the end of an exceptional day: I see too much to be a world champion. ☒

 **P63 PORSCHE IN RALLYING**

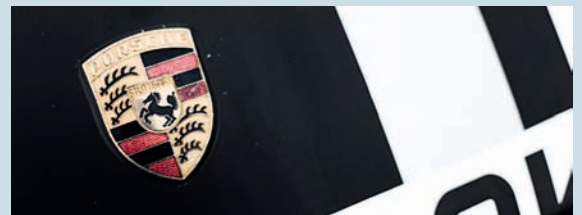
SLIDE ON SUNDAY, SELL ON MONDAY THE TUTHILL PHILOSOPHY

NORWAY ICE Driving started six years ago as a way for Tuthill Porsche customers to get to grips with their 911s in the most hostile of conditions. Since then, it's got bigger and bigger.

Based out of the ski town of Geilo, the courses start in December and can run until May, depending on the weather. In addition to the 911s, there are some BMW M3s for when a bigger group comes to town, but mainly this is a Porsche experience.

“Our USP is seat time,” says Tuthill. “We want people here and driving all the time. Yes, we are here to show what the cars are capable of – and we've already sold two historic 911s off the back of this year's courses – but the priority is putting smiles on faces. We've taken the track-day philosophy a step further.”

And anybody doubting the pedigree of the Tuthill Porsche would do well to take a look at the results garnered by the Oxfordshire firm; Dessie Nutt is a regular winner of the British Historic title at the wheel of his Tuthill-tended 911 and the firm's other victories stretch from Scandinavia to Africa.



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CHRIS ATKINSON:
"Easy on the throttle"



CA: "Off the throttle, she might come back"



CA: "She's not coming back!"



CA: "She's gone!"



DAVID EVANS: "I can still get this back..."

CA: "Yeah, with reverse"



DE: "Sorry"

CA: "I can't wait to get back to my day job"



GRIFFITHS/LAT

PORSCHE IN RALLYING STAGE FRIGHT

PORSCHE'S TRADITION and success in racing is well documented. Less well known is the German firm's ability to turn out rally cars capable of challenging the established order on the stages. The two-litre and subsequent 2.2-litre 911s of the late '60s and early '70s were enormously capable rally cars and regular winners on the Monte Carlo and Swedish Rallies.

The combination of power and traction gave them the edge over the competition in the early days, but Porsche's reluctance to commit budget to a significant factory effort stymied the potential of the cars.

The Carrera RS continued to demonstrate Porsche's prowess in the cross-over from track to stage. And there's nowhere further from the likes of Le Mans than Kenya in the rainy season. Yet, in 1974, Bjorn Waldegaard came within a whisker of winning the Safari, only for the car's rear suspension to falter in the final hour. Four years later, Jean-Pierre Nicolas did collect the car's first win, on the Monte Carlo Rally.

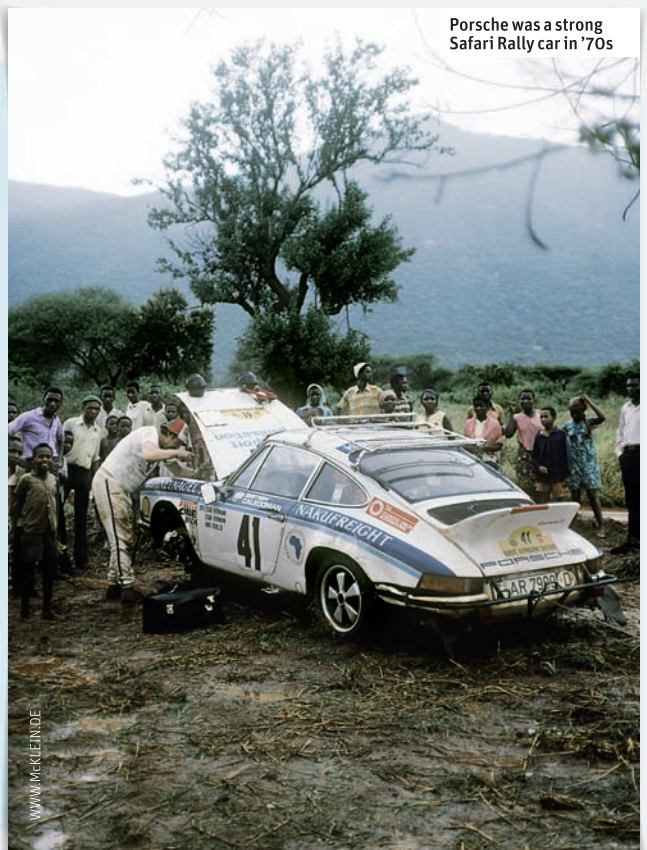
Bolstered by Nicolas's win on the world's

most famous rally, the 911 SC and then the SC RS were developed, with both three-litre cars churning out a good 300bhp and weighing in at well below the 1000kg mark. Unfortunately for Porsche, rallying had moved on by this point and four-wheel-drive was the future. There would be a smattering of high-profile results and a good number of national wins, but Porsche's time at or close to the top of rallying was drawing to a close.

There was, however, one final roll of the dice: the 959. This seemed to tick all the boxes: it was twin-turbocharged and capable of producing 600bhp on full boost; it was also four-wheel-drive. Work on the car had begun in 1983 and if it had been delivered on time (and Porsche had rattled off the 200 units needed for Group B homologation) it would likely have ruffled feathers among the ranks of Audi and Peugeot.

Instead, it was confined to the long-distance side of the sport and won the 1986 Paris-Dakar Rally.

Porsche was a strong Safari Rally car in '70s



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INDY BRITS READY TO ROCK

The new IndyCar season kicks off in Sao Paulo this weekend with some top UK racers in the field. By CHARLES BRADLEY

British drivers and Indycars have often proved a good mix. From Jim Clark and Graham Hill in the 1960s, through Nigel Mansell in the early '90s and modern-era champions Dario Franchitti and Dan Wheldon, the Brits have enjoyed their fair share of success in America's premier single-seater arena. This year should be no different, with as many as six UK drivers likely to feature on the grid at some point, and at least three of them going into the season with genuine prospects of winning races.

Franchitti is by far the best positioned, the reigning champion remaining for a second IndyCar season with Chip Ganassi Racing. Wheldon was winless last year, but the 2005 champion remains a threat with Panther Racing, especially on the larger ovals such as Indianapolis. Justin Wilson switches from the tiny Dale Coyne Racing team, with which he won at Watkins Glen last year, to the mid-sized Dreyer & Reinbold operation.



LEVITT/LAT

DARIO FRANCHITTI

TARGET: Winning a third title

THE LAST time Franchitti won the IndyCar Series, he upped sticks to try his hand at NASCAR. After winning the crown on his return, he's determined to retain it.

"I'm looking forward to defending my title, which I didn't do the last time I won it," says Franchitti. "Over the winter I've been up at the [race]shop a bunch, talking to the boys – they've certainly not been sitting still. They've been working their arses off all winter, and they're gonna have to when you look at the competition we've got."

Franchitti says he doesn't have far to look for his main competition: "Look no further than the other side of the garage! Scott [Dixon] in the other Target car; you can never count him out. He's on top form.

"Then you've got the three Penskes now, they'll be tough. I spoke to Michael [Andretti, rival team boss] and I get the impression that they've refocused – they'll be trouble too. It's gonna be interesting, and I wouldn't count out Newman/Haas either, when you look at the people they've got on board – they are first class."

Franchitti is also looking forward to new venues, Sao Paulo and Barber Motorsports Park. The fact they come in the first three rounds gives them added importance.

"We've seen this from the past few years – you cannot afford to be dropping any points, from the first race to the last. Last year in particular, the difference between a second-place finish and a fourth was crucial because the points race was so close. You've got to be on it straight out of the box."



Franchitti reckons it'll be ultra-close in 2010

 **P66 De Ferran back as IndyCar team boss**



Buckinghamshire bomber: Wheldon

DAN WHELTON

TARGET: Winning at Indy

HE'S WON the title and the Indy 500, but his fortunes have waned after splitting from Ganassi for last year. His new team – former champion squad Panther Racing – couldn't quite keep up in the development race. "Last year was very disappointing," says Wheldon. "Going into last year my expectations were high, and through no fault of anybody's the team lost its sponsor in Delphi. It got to a point around Indianapolis where we didn't develop the car from then on. And when

you're competing against Penske and Ganassi, that's tough. It was no lack of effort; it was something we couldn't do anything about. We couldn't keep up with the Joneses."

He stays for a second season, and has refocused his targets: "Without being negative, the expectation has changed; we're being more realistic. Through that, I think we'll see better results. I vented my frustration at the end of last season, and I think everyone is pulling in the same direction now."

Two new Dallara chassis have been bought, and windtunnel time and CFD work are in the pipeline for the future.

"I don't think we're going to be able to compete with the big teams, but as the season moves along we'll be aiming to be the best of rest," says Wheldon. "But don't forget that KV has made some big strides and Michael Andretti never goes down without a fight."

"I really think we have the potential to win at Indy. We had a difficult month there last year and still finished second. We know what we need, and I have a very good understanding of what I need to be quick around there."

JUSTIN WILSON

TARGET: More race wins

AFTER LOSING his drive with Newman/Haas Racing for 2009, Wilson buckled down with series minnow Dale Coyne Racing and took a hugely popular victory at Watkins Glen. Now he's switched camps to the two-car Dreyer & Reinbold squad, whose development plans should enable him to take a step forward.

"I think it's a strong team, with a lot of potential for us to get out there and do well," says Wilson. "We've got two cars, three at some races. There's a lot going on to develop the car and it's pretty exciting to be a part of that. We have the opportunity to do some good things, and it's up to us to get the car exactly how I like it to make it quick."

His full-time team-mate for 2010 is Mike Conway, the former GP2 racer who made his series debut with D&R last season.

"Having a team-mate like Mike is a big part of the deal," says Wilson. "As a pair we can cover more ground to develop the car faster. We both understand that we need to work together to get the cars where they need to be. We'll fight between who's first and second after that!"

Wilson's strength is his road-racing skills, but he's also keen to improve his results

on the ovals, and thinks he can make some strides this season.

"The D&R car is pretty good on the ovals, and they've done a lot of work on reducing drag, efficiency loss, and that's a big part of the deal," he says. "The rest is finding a set-up that the driver is comfortable enough to push hard. I'm hopeful that we'll constantly be in the top eight, and be in the frame for wins on the road courses."

"Looking at the testing times, you're going to have to be on your game every weekend. Consistency is going to be critical, because I'd say there are 15 competitive cars in the field. I'm going to give it my best shot and make sure I don't leave anything on the table."

Yorkshire best: Wilson switches to D&R team



West Lothian's finest: Franchitti bids for title

NOT ONLY BUT...



MIKE CONWAY

Should be able to build his results in second season with D&R, especially with team-mate Wilson to learn from.



JAY HOWARD

Five races with Sarah Fisher's team should give him a shop window to showcase his road-racing skills.



JAMES ROSSITER

Ex-Super Aguri F1 tester hopes to tie up KV Racing deal as he looks to finally break through into big-time racing.

GIL GETS BACK ON INDYCAR TRACK

The former Indy 500 winner returns, this time as a team owner. By **GLENN FREEMAN**

Ever since he set up his team to compete in the American Le Mans Series in 2008, those on the outside considered it only a matter of time until Gil de Ferran took his squad into the IndyCar Series. It was therefore little surprise when the Brazilian began hinting at the move for his De Ferran Motorsports team last year.

As it turns out, such a plan had been formulated ever since de Ferran retired from single-seater racing, after a nine-year career in the US that had yielded two CART titles and an Indianapolis 500 victory.

"This is something that I've had in my mind since I stepped out of the car in 2003," says a man who came out of retirement to race in the ALMS for the past two years. "On an emotional level, Indycar racing has been a huge part of my life. I love sportscar racing as well, so to have the opportunity to set up my own operation just five years after I retired was just great. But from day one, I definitely wanted to be in sportscars and Indycar racing.

"Unfortunately, the sportscar thing couldn't happen this year, but for now we have all the right resources to do a

good programme in IndyCar."

De Ferran worked hard over the winter to bring his team over to the IRL, but his struggles to make it happen led to talks with good friend Jay Penske, son of legendary team boss Roger and the co-owner of the Luczo Dragon team. Eventually the two decided that the best way for either party to ever have a chance of taking on IndyCar's big hitters was to join forces. In the short term, little appears to have changed – apart from the new, long-winded name of Luczo Dragon Racing/De Ferran Motorsports – with the team remaining as a one-car entry for Raphael Matos.

But that's not to say there haven't been subtle effects of the new alliance, or that the future will bring a more obvious transformation. After all, having driven for several high-profile team bosses over the years, de Ferran has seen up close what it takes to run a successful squad.

"I've been exposed to some pretty incredible people in my life," he adds.



Now he's returned on the other side of the pitwall...

LEVITT/LAT

KINRADE/LAT

De Ferran took victory in 2003 Indy 500



LEVITT/LAT

"Jackie Stewart, Jim Hall, Roger Penske... they all formed part of my schooling. Unquestionably Roger and Team Penske were a huge influence on me, and I consider them to be the yardstick, one of the best motorsport organisations in the world, full stop. I had the good fortune to drive for them [from 2000-03] and it's impossible not to have learned a lot."

But what driving for Penske also taught de Ferran is that competing at the same level as such a powerful team on a weekly basis is not the work of a moment. And it's for that reason that he has targeted the use of technologies such as CFD to give his team a fighting chance in the future.

**AND HERE'S ANOTHER EX-BAR F1 MAN...
 SATO AT THE WHEEL AGAIN**

TAKUMA SATO, who joins the IndyCar Series with KV Racing this season, says he had to “finish Formula 1 discussions before moving on mentally” to his new discipline.

That involved flirtations with Lotus and Renault that came frustratingly close to being realised. “I met Tony Fernandes [team principal of Malaysian-owned Lotus] just two days before the Kovalainen announcement,” says Sato. “He said it was only a possibility, but would I be ready to go to Malaysia the next Monday – it was that close!”

Now that he has committed to IndyCar, Sato is just relieved to be back in a racing environment for the first time in nearly two years. The 33 year-old, always mindful of his enormous fanbase, says: “I’ve got a great reaction from my fans and supporters in Japan. They’ve been very patient, and finally I get to go racing.

“We did a press conference in Japan and I had fantastic support. I was in the country for four days and not a minute to relax!”

Sato says he felt “immediately happy” in his new environment at KV Racing, and looks forward to teaming up with friend EJ Viso, who he describes as “an exciting, aggressive driver”. *MS*



Sato has joined KV Racing

➔ P68 INDYCAR RUNNERS AND RIDERS



...and will oversee fellow Brazilian Raphael Matos

“The science of it all will give us a competitive edge,” he says. “Obviously, most winning operations have developed their understanding of technology to a high level, but we believe that going in the CFD direction will make us more competitive. Our belief is if we become better than our competitors on this front, hopefully we will gain an advantage. But this does not happen overnight. It’s a mixture of people, processes and culture. We have the culture, but we need to continue to attract the right people and then develop the processes. We’re a small team, racing against teams much larger in size, so there’s a lot of work ahead.”

When he launched his team to join the ALMS two years ago, de Ferran

brought himself out of retirement to race. At the end of last year he then retired for a second time, which begs the question: what it would take to get him back in a single-seater? Unfortunately, it seems nothing will entice him, not even the chance of going back to Indianapolis.

“When I was running the sportscar team and driving, I was finding it difficult to do both to the standards that I hold myself,” he says. “Frankly, one is a distraction from the other. It’s hard enough when you’re doing one of them full-time and it’s your sole focus in life, so the answer is no. I enjoyed very much my career as a driver, but my passion for racing extends beyond my enjoyment of driving. For me there

is a time and a place for everything, and now it’s time to move on.”

As far as de Ferran is concerned, these are exciting times for single-seater racing in the US, and he is desperate to see this form of motorsport enjoy some sort of renaissance as it moves into a new era, with a new chassis over the next couple of years.

“Once upon a time Indycars were known as the fastest cars on the planet,” he says. “To me, that was a key attribute to racing over here. The [CART/IRL] split was very damaging, but now I think there is a lot of potential for this sport to claim its rightful place in the world of motor racing.”

THEY'RE ALL CHIPPING AWAY

Chip Ganassi's boys are the target for the IndyCar field. By **CHARLES BRADLEY**

CHIP GANASSI RACING

9 SCOTT DIXON (NZ)

Two-time champion is the benchmark of this series, and has finished first or second in each of the past three seasons. Twenty-one wins at this level, but a lot will depend on how Ganassi squad stands up against Team Penske in the battle of the superpowers.

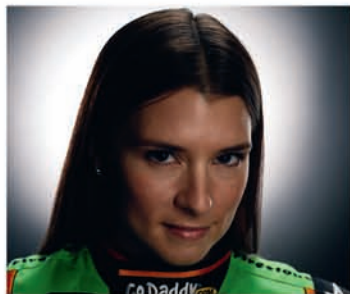


10 DARIO FRANCHITTI (GB)

Ditto Dixon, although his year out to embark on a brief NASCAR odyssey interrupted his IndyCar record somewhat. To win title on his return to series showed his class, but 2010 has started badly with recent testing crash at Barber Motorsports Park. He's made of tough stuff though.



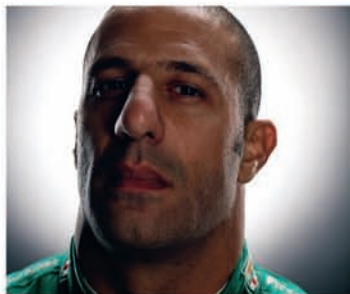
Dixon: is it the New Zealander's turn in 2010?



ANDRETTI AUTOSPORT

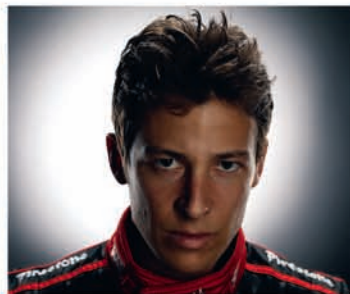
7 DANICA PATRICK (USA)

No wonder she drives for Dale Earnhardt Jr in NASCAR; she faces the same challenge as Earnhardt does in his regular discipline: the star turn who isn't delivering. And if the 'princess-mobile' doesn't win again soon, expect stamped feet and full-time NASCAR switch.



11 TONY KANAAN (BR)

Like many great prizefighters, you wonder if TK has taken one too many punches. Last year was the 2004 champion's poorest return since '02. Needs the management changes at the team formerly known as Andretti Green Racing to work for him.



26 MARCO ANDRETTI (USA)

The latest iteration of one of world motorsport's most famous gene pools has started 65 races at this level now. At the age of 22, he needs a big season to deliver on the hopes and dreams that father Michael and grandad Mario have for him.



37 RYAN HUNTER-REAY (USA)

What a crazy old career Hunter-Reay has had. A winner in Champ Car as far back as 2003, he's been in and out of it faster than an England cricket opener. He's fallen on his feet with IZOD funding. Is he the genuinely quick American this series craves?

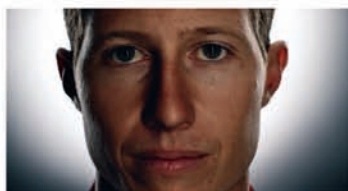
ALL PICS: FERREY/GETTY



TEAM PENSKE

3 HELIO CASTRONEVES (BR)

After all the hoopla of his 'dancing with tax evasion' exploits, and his fantastic comeback at Indianapolis, this is a crucial season. Castroneves has two bonza team-mates, and he's going to have to raise his game from last year if he's ever going to win this title.



6 RYAN BRISCOE (AUS)

Dumped from Toyota's F1 programme; almost literally blown up at Ganassi – you can't keep this kid down. Has scored five wins with Penske, and this is the season he needs to take it on to the final level. He looked on it in testing; now only the title will suffice.



12 WILL POWER (AUS)

Totally deserves this big break on the back of his superlative performances in a part-time campaign last season, which ended with him hospitalised after a huge crash at Sears Point. Expect him to repay the faith that Penske has put in him.

IRL CALENDAR

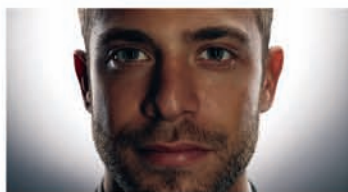
March 14	Sao Paulo (BR)
March 28	St Petersburg (USA)
April 11	Barber (USA)
April 18	Long Beach (USA)
May 1	Kansas (USA)
May 30	Indianapolis (USA)
June 5	Texas (USA)
June 20	Iowa (USA)
July 4	Watkins Glen (USA)
July 18	Toronto (CDN)
July 25	Edmonton (CDN)
August 8	Mid-Ohio (USA)
August 22	Sears Point (USA)
August 28	Chicago (USA)
September 4	Kentucky (USA)
September 19	Motegi (J)
October 2	Homestead (USA)



KV RACING TECHNOLOGY

5 TAKUMA SATO (J)

After a hatful of false starts, the ex-F1 racer has finally found the chance he's been searching for in IndyCars. Always exciting, and prone to more than the odd moment of overenthusiasm, he should be a massive hit with the fans. And just wait until Motegi...



8 EJ VISO (YV)

He's been solid, if a little unspectacular, so far in IndyCars. This former GP2 race winner has moved on after a couple of years of learning with HVM, and it's time for him to raise his game as KV targets nibbling at the coat tails of the big boys.



DREYER & REINBOLD

22 JUSTIN WILSON (GB)

A habitual winner in America's top tier of single-seater racing since his brief time in F1 with Jaguar, Wilson should thrive at Dreyer & Reinbold after giving the tiny Dale Coyne operation its first-ever win last year. Never count him out on the road courses.



24 MIKE CONWAY (GB)

A renowned slow burner, expect Conway to appear much more often at the sharp end in his second season in the US. Huge shunt at Indy took the wind out of his sails last year, but podium at Sears Point showed things are going in the right direction.



PANTHER RACING

4 DAN WHELDON (GB)

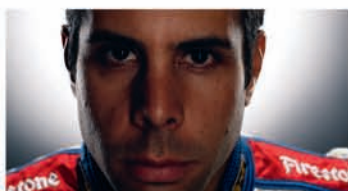
By far the strongest of the single-car teams, on paper the combination of a former champion driver and multiple title-winning team should be dynamite. Expectations have been downscaled in lieu of budget constraints, but never rule them out – especially at Indy.



NEWMAN/HAAS/LANIGAN

06 HIDEKI MUTOH (J)

Another mighty team with a first-class history, NHL has hit hard times. The McDonald's money has gone, handing Graham Rahal a P45. Mutoh showed flashes of promise at AGR, but he needs a team-mate to improve further. Like the series itself, he needs Graham Rahal.



AJ FOYT ENTERPRISES

14 VITOR MEIRA (BR)

Missed most of last season after a terrifying crash at Indianapolis, where he broke his back though no fault of his own – he should've realised it wasn't his day when he caught fire in the pits! Has scored eight second places from 97 series starts. Will he ever win one? Nah.



FAZZT RACING

77 ALEX TAGLIANI (CDN)

This former Champ Car race winner has started his own team with Montreal entrepreneur Andre Azzi, using Roth Racing's surprisingly expansive kit. His run to 11th from last in last year's Indy 500 shows the fire still burns bright. One to keep an eye on.



DE FERRAN LUCZO DRAGON RACING

2 RAPHAEL MATOS (BR)

Penske/Gil de Ferran combo won two CART titles and the Indy 500. Okay, so its Roger's son Jay behind this team, but Matos is no shrinking violet and well capable of top 10s.



SARAH FISHER RACING

67 SARAH FISHER (GB)

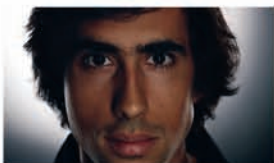
Dollar General backing has helped turn this into a serious IndyCar team. Fisher has become a reliable performer. Underrated Brit Jay Howard will drive at five road courses.



HVM RACING

78 SIMONA DE SILVESTRO (CH)

Swiss girl steps up from Atlantic (where she won four times) with HVM, and both have modest targets for 2010. Brace yourself for countless (pointless) comparisons to Patrick.



CONQUEST RACING

34 MARIO ROMANCINI (BR)

A two-time winner in Indy Lights last year, and a blink-and-you'd-miss-it FRenault 3.5 campaign in '08, this 22-year-old rookie's Brazilian dough keeps Eric Bachelart's team in the series. No bad thing.



DALE COYNE RACING

18 MILKA DUNO (YV)

Graham Rahal. Paul Tracy. Patrick Carpentier. Alex Lloyd. Oriol Servia. Bruno Junqueira. JR Hildebrand. Ed Carpenter. Nelson Philippe. Franck Perera. AJ Foyt IV. Richard Antinucci. Billy Boat. Anyone but her!

INTRODUCING... MITCH EVANS

"I'll have to deliver the goods in F3 in Australia, but if I do that then the plan is Europe. First things first though..."



EUAN CAMERON

Evans currently leads the Toyota Racing Series

INTRODUCING Mitch Evans

The 15-year-old aims to be the first Kiwi to race in F1 since Mike Thackwell in 1984

MITCH EVANS CV



Born June 24, 1994
From Auckland, New Zealand
2010 Toyota Racing Series, leading; Australian F3, leading
2009 Australian FFord, 2nd; New Zealand FFord, 2nd; Australian F3, 5th
2008 New Zealand Formula First, 9th; Manfeild FFord Winter Series, Champion
2003-07 Seven karting titles

While Scott Dixon may be one of IndyCar racing's biggest stars, it's been a long, long time since New Zealand has had a bona fide Formula 1 driver to cheer for, and even longer since Kiwi legends Bruce McLaren, Denis Hulme and Chris Amon graced racetracks around the world.

One youngster trying to change all that is Aucklander Mitch Evans. He may be only 15, but with two full seasons of racing under his belt, the son of New Zealand land-speed record holder Owen Evans is anything but a novice, as his form in his homeland's Toyota Racing Series proves.

EARLY START

After graduating to car racing in Formula First aged just 12, Evans claimed his first title at the end of 2008 by winning the Formula Ford Winter Series based at Manfeild.

Last year was spent completing dual campaigns in the New Zealand and Australian Formula Ford series. He finished as runner-up in both championships, raising a few eyebrows in the process.

"In New Zealand it's normal to start so early because the licence criteria allows it, but in the Aussie

series I did get some funny looks because of my age. That was definitely the case when I made my F3 debut – especially I won a race the next day!"

That win, which he describes as "the highlight of my career," was just one of 23 race victories he has already chalked up.

Earlier this year he sealed the International Trophy section of the TRS in his Giles Motorsport-run car, and is the hot favourite to add the overall title to his growing trophy cabinet at Taupo next month.

WHAT'S NEXT?

A full campaign in Australian F3 with double champion outfit Team BRM kicked off last weekend with three wins from three at Wakefield. However, rather than fall into a comfortable

career in one of the popular V8 Supercar championships in New Zealand or Australia, Evans has set his sights on following the example of Antipodean wanderer Mark Webber – a man he classes as one of his racing heroes – to Europe.

Having the backing of the Giltrap family, which has been instrumental in furthering the careers of quick Kiwis Scott Dixon, Chris van der Drift and Brendon Hartley (pre-Red Bull), he has a good chance of doing just that too.

"Obviously I'll have to deliver the goods in F3 in Australia, but if I do that, then the plan is Europe, because by the end of the year I'll have a decent amount of F3 experience and will be 16 too, so I'll be eligible for a licence to race in Europe.

"First things first though..."

Evans is backed by Kiwi entrepreneur Colin Giltrap



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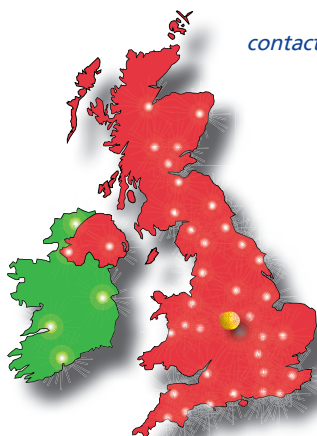
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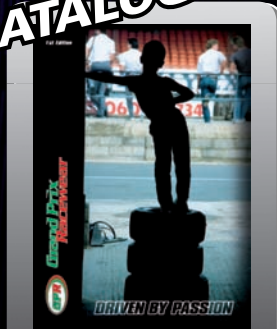
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Moore moves to single-seaters in Formula Palmer Audi, p84



Amaral will race Porsche that won at Spa in 1986

AUTOSPORT SAYS...

KEVIN TURNER
NATIONAL EDITOR

kevin.turner@haymarket.com



NIGEL MOORE and Chrissy Palmer are two of the best teenaged racers we currently have in the country.

Moore has swept all before him in Ginettas, to get him all the way to Le Mans last year - at the age of 17! But we've not seen him race a single-seater. Just how well will he get on in Formula Palmer Audi (page 84)?

Logic suggests he should be good. He's beaten some pretty reasonable drivers - Rob Austin, Paul O'Neill - in G50s, and the years of pounding around his family's Tockwith facility in anything from karts to trucks should mean adaptability isn't a problem.

We don't yet know who he'll be up against, but Moore's season will now be one that many people will follow closely. Wins are expected.

Palmer knows he has to face a strong grid in Formula Renault (p86). After a fine year in Formula Ford, he'll also be under pressure, despite the fact that it will be his first season in a car with downforce.

That said, if his recent tests (including his McLaren AUTOSPORT BRDC Award F3 runs) are anything to go by, it shouldn't take long for him to get on the pace. Then it's all down to getting himself fit and making sure he has the budget - the two things that hurt him last year.

● The club-racing season kicks off this weekend and we're launching our twitter service. AutosportGB will provide updates on race meetings we attend during the year, such as British GT and Fford. Our own Ben Anderson will also give updates on his Formula Vee campaign, which starts at Snetterton on Saturday. Follow us on twitter.com.

Extra contact details

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ben.anderson@haymarket.com

Top teams to boost Group C with Aston and Porsche

Barwell Motorsport and ASM prepare cars for historic Group C/GTP entries

TOP-LINE SPORTSCAR squads Barwell Motorsport and ASM are planning to join the rejuvenated Group C/GTP Racing series this season.

Barwell, which claimed the British GT crown in 2006, has linked up with Paul Whight to run his 1989 Aston Martin AMR1 under the Barwell-Cadena banner. Portuguese team ASM is aiming to run an ex-Brun Porsche 962C in at least one race for Miguel Amaral, who was part of the team's Le Mans Series title-winning LMP2 assault in 2009.

ASTON AND BARWELL

Whight is scheduled to contest three of the six Group C/GTP events alongside his commitments with his Barwell-run Aston DBRS9 in selected GT events around Europe. An outing at the Group C blue-riband event at Le Mans on the morning of the 24 Hours has not been ruled out.

Barwell commercial director Chris Needell said: "We've been involved in historic for a while, but this is the first time that we will have raced in Group C/GTP. We're looking forward to it, because the series looks as though it's got real strength in depth this year."

Michael Bentwood could join Whight in the car. The ex-Formula 3 and touring car driver is scheduled to share the DBRS9 and will test the AMR1 for the first time at the Algarve circuit this week.

AMARAL'S ATTACK

Porsche enthusiast Amaral, who is defending his LMS title with ASM's Ginetta-Zytek this year, is aiming to race the Jagermeister-liveried 962 in which Thierry Boutsen and Frank Jelinski beat the factory cars in the 1986 Spa 1000Km.

Amaral, 55, said: "I bought this car to race when I stop competing at

international level. It is being rebuilt and I really want to do my local race at Portimao [Algarve] if the car is ready."

GROUP C GROWTH

Another top-line team is returning to the Group C/GTP series with a familiar car. CGA Engineering, run by Colin Bennett (a former Lotus mechanic and boss of the CoBRa F3000 team), will run former Thoroughbred GP racer Katsu Kubota in the ex-NPTI Nissan R90CK he previously fielded for Peter Sowerby.

Kubota, the new owner of the car, could share with Sowerby, who has won Group C/GTP races with the Nissan, or a Japanese co-driver.

Group C/GTP director Bob Berridge welcomed the arrival of the new teams after a difficult 2009. "This is further proof of the growth of the series and shows that our ideas for the future are correct," he said.



Barwell will run Whight's Aston



Race-winning Nissan returns

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Moore heads to Palmer Audi

Sportscar ace in single-seater switch

Nigel Moore

2007 Ginetta Junior champion with Hepworth International
2008 Ginetta G50 Cup champion with Tockwith Motorsport; selected **British GT4** programme
2009 Second in **British GT4** with Team WFR; **Le Mans** debut (retired)



SPORTSCAR STAR Nigel Moore will move into single-seaters this season in the Formula Palmer Audi Championship.

The 18-year-old won the Ginetta Junior title in 2007 and was G50 Cup champion in 2008, before last year becoming the youngest Briton ever to start the Le Mans 24 Hours, at the wheel of a Ginetta-Zytek.

Moore, whose only open-wheeled

experience came in a Formula Ford test in 2008, is aiming for the FPA champion prize of a £100,000 scholarship towards an FIA Formula 2 Championship budget. "I'm just ecstatic to be given this chance," he said. "There couldn't be any bigger incentive to go for the title than the chance to win an F2 scholarship for 2011."

Although Moore has not turned his back on sportscars, he is unlikely to undertake many non-FPA outings

in 2010. He will begin FPA testing in the next few weeks and his car will be liveried in Ginetta orange and bear the number 6 – the same number as the Ginetta he drove at Le Mans.

Ginetta chairman Lawrence Tomlinson, who is helping to guide Moore's career, said: "Formula Palmer Audi is a natural step for Nigel and I'm very pleased that he will get the chance to prove his driving capabilities in such a high-profile series.

I am confident that he will be a genuine contender for the title."

FPA chief executive Jonathan Palmer said: "The motorsport world has been well aware of Nigel's considerable driving talents as he's progressed through the Ginetta ladder over the past three years. I'm delighted to have a name of his calibre added to the 2010 line-up and I know Nigel is going to be one to watch."

Star Mazda

Daly targets Star Mazda title

EX-WALTER HAYES Trophy winner Conor Daly will race for Juncos Racing in the 2010 Star Mazda Championship.

The American, who was an FF1600 frontrunner on a brief campaign in Britain in 2008, finished third in Star Mazda last year. He tested Formula Renault machinery in the UK last autumn, but has now decided to return for a title attack in the US.

Daly, son of ex-Formula 1 racer Derek, topped pre-season testing

at Sebring at the end of January.

"I'm just thrilled to finally get our 2010 season plans confirmed," said the 18-year-old. "This will be the first time that I've returned to a series, and I feel better prepared for this racing season than any time before."



Daly will stay in America in 2010

British GT

G50 and X-Bow line-ups settled

SPEEDWORKS MOTORSPORT

and ABG Motorsport have confirmed their GT4 line-ups for this year's British GT Championship.

Ginetta squad Speedworks will graduate to British GT by running a G50 for team boss Christian Dick and former Lotus Elise Trophy pacesetter Jamie Stanley. ABG, which ran the Craig Wilkins/Aaron Scott Viper last year, will prepare a KTM X-Bow for ex-FF1600 star Rory Butcher and GT Cup graduate Ben Harvey.

Dick said: "It's a great move for the team to be racing in a major championship. Jamie is a strong driver so we hope to be fighting for the title."

For FF1600 Festival winner Butcher the move means the end of his single-seater career. "GT is where I was planning to go anyway," he said.

Seven GT4 cars are now expected for the Oulton opener, including G50s for Euro GT4 champion Joe Osborne and John Ingram/Tom Dunstan.

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British GT

Freke joins forces with Chad for British GT campaign in 2010

REIGNING GINETTA G50 Cup champion Nathan Freke will contest the British GT4 Championship this season with Danish racer Vibe Smed.

Freke's Century Motorsport team will prepare a Ginetta G50 for the pair, which plans to race at all rounds except Spa. Freke will remain in charge of the team on G50 Cup weekends.

Smed, who has raced in Britcar and Formula Palmer Audi in recent years, is part of British GT3 squad Chad Racing's junior-driver programme.

Freke said: "It's great to be involved with Chad's junior package - if they can feed us drivers and then we send them on to GT3 it will be a good relationship."

Chad manager Piers Masarati believes the link between the two team could grow. "We're looking to develop a clear route for drivers into international sportscars via GT4, so it made sense to form a relationship with Century," he said.

"Nathan is an exceptional driver and Vibe will develop a lot from driving with him this year."

Smed added: "I'm looking forward to my third consecutive year in Britain. Racing with Nathan is the best chance to be competitive in '10."



Freke raced in Brit GT once last season

P89 Nathan Freke profile

Formula Renault UK

Manor men lead the way at Brands

MANOR COMPETITION drivers topped the first official Formula Renault UK test of the season at Brands Hatch last week.

Lewis Williamson became the first FRenault driver ever to lap the Indy circuit at more than 100mph on the first day, before Will Stevens dipped under the Scot's best on day two.

Williamson spent the second day running development brake discs as teams have been experiencing problems with warping discs on the new car, as well as cracked rockers.

Manor team boss Tony Shaw said: "Our drivers are obviously pretty good, but everybody in every team is working their socks off with this new car. Allen Collen and

John Millett [FR UK technical chiefs] have been fantastic with help."

BRANDS HATCH TESTING TIMES		
POS	DRIVER (TEAM)	TIME
1	Will Stevens (Manor)	42.968s
2	Lewis Williamson (Manor)	43.091s
3	Tamas Pal Kiss (Atech)	43.174s
4	Harry Tincnell (CRS)	43.181s
5	Ollie Millroy (Portec)	43.214s
6	Tom Blomqvist (Portec)	43.296s



Stevens set the pace at Brands

MARCUS PYE

HUMBLE PYE

The voice of club motor racing



Whether Formula 1 or British club racing is your bag, the weekend ahead will be a pretty important one on your calendar. The countdown to the Bahrain Grand Prix, where the last two world champions Jenson Button and Lewis Hamilton line up as McLaren team-mates for the first time, has commanded the daily headlines, but for weekend warriors on the sport's nursery slopes there are plenty of other titles to chase.

Just as our most biting cold winter for three decades has been fraught for F1 teams working to a new set of ground rules - not least McLaren, which must beat the determined Red Bull, a resurgent Ferrari and Mercedes-Benz (nee BAR, via Brawn) bolstered by Michael Schumacher - amateur throttle jockeys and their unsung heroes back in lock-up garages and workshops will have burned the midnight oil to come out refreshed and fighting.

There's a choice this weekend of Snetterton with the 750 Motor Club or Britcar at Brands Hatch for those of us who prefer our race action live and closer to home. And if you have your TV recorders set to capture F1's Middle Eastern kick-off on Sunday - as many marshals, some of whom also work the British GP, will doubtless have done - you will have a bonus to warm your marrow on returning home.

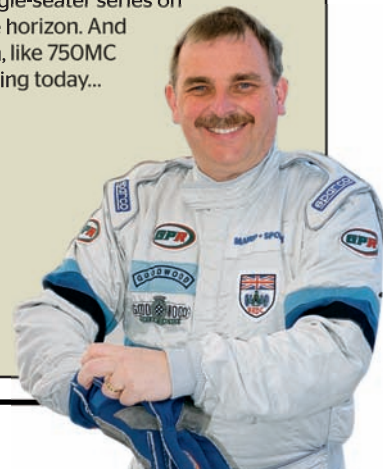
I'm heading to 'Snett' via RaceRetro, the annual historic-themed motorsport show at

Stoneleigh, which caters for fans of two, three and four-wheeled motorsport. I've been every year since founder Ian Williamson (who passed the baton to new owners last spring) launched the bold venture at the National Agricultural Centre, and find it an essential trip to catch up with the minutiae of this highly fertile seam of activity.

RaceRetro is a bit late for those yet to make up their minds about stepping off the sidelines and joining the fray for the coming season, but there are race and rally cars for sale, and no end of preparation specialists and suppliers to speak to, whether you need expert advice, or merely seek to update your mouldy racekit having just opened your holdall after October's soggy finale!

Talking 30 years ago, per the climatic reference, the national racing scene in 1980 was very different to today's. The British F3 season had already begun at Silverstone - where eventual champion Stefan Johansson (in a March 803 prepped by Ron Dennis's Project Four team) had won the opening round in the face of strong opposition from rivals in Argo and Lola chassis - and FF1600, Sports 2000, Clubmans Sports and Production Sports were the supporting cast. No TOCA back then, not a plausible one-make single-seater series on the horizon. And fun, like 750MC racing today...

“Amateur throttle jockeys will have burned the midnight oil to come out refreshed and fighting”



GT Academy

Two left to fight for Euro GT4 seat

ITALIAN ROOKIE Luca Lorenzini and Frenchman Jordan Tresson are one step away from a full season in the European GT4 Cup after winning the 2010 GT Academy.

The pair emerged from 1.2 million PlayStation gamer applicants for the competition, and were chosen from a final 18 by a panel that included

Johnny Herbert and Eddie Jordan.

"We had two clear winners and I think they will do very well," said former F1 team boss Jordan.

Herbert said that the two had "really stood out", and were obviously "ready to compete" at GT4 level.

Only one of the two will get the seat in the Nissan 370Z after further tests.

Kumho BMW

Whittaker gets new car for BMW attack

KUMHO BMW

Championship frontrunner Garrie Whittaker will switch from his successful E30 M3 to a more-modern E36 for this season.

Whittaker, who has taken class titles and outright wins in his older car over the past four years, has bought an E36 M3 Evo.

"For a long time my competitors have thought that I had a car advantage with the E30 M3," he said. "I feel that I have nothing left to prove with the E30, hence the move to hopefully prove that

I can do it with the E36." Whittaker has already decided to leave the engine as standard and believes the six-cylinder unit will be on the pace. "I'm hoping it will show that a standard engine can be competitive against cars with modified engines," he said.

Reigning Class A champion David Kempton is also expected to run a standard engine this year in his E36, as is ex-British Touring Car racer Richard Marsh, who will campaign a newly-built E46.

Whittaker switches to E36 M3 for 2010



Rallycross

Focus man wins Lydden season opener

BELGIAN KOEN PAUWELS dominated the Lydden Hill Motorsport Club's winter rallycross event that kicked off the circuit's 2010 season last Saturday.

The Ford Focus driver took clear wins in both the Supercars Final and the Lydden Masters Final.

Pauwels's challenge was aided by the trouble that hit his chief rivals. Steve Hill's Mitsubishi expired after only one lap of practice, and then a flat front tyre caused Chris Langley to crash his Escort Cosworth in the Masters Final.

Renowned engine tuner Julian Godfrey, runner-up to Pauwels in the Masters Final, dominated the Super Modified event in his Fiesta ST.

The best race by far was the Minicross Final, which featured a frantic four-way fight. Ben Clark led by a narrow margin from the start and seemed the clear favourite until the last



KERRY DUNLOP

Focus of Pauwels dominated

lap when he was blitzed by George Edwardes, Tom Edwardes and Kris Hudson. They went on to finish 1-2-3, leaving Clark in fourth place.

Ex-British rallycross champion Ollie O'Donovan just held off a challenge from Joe Shrimpton to top the RX150s.

Gordon Rogers, a regular rallycross winner in the 1970s, notched up the first win for one of the new Suzuki Swifts in the Stock Hatch Final. James Coney-Wright, son of former Super Modified star Paul Coney, had led all the way on his competition debut but spun out at the last corner after a clash with Rogers.



Formula Renault UK

Palmer will try to take winning form to Fortec

Palmer moves to Renault

Formula Ford Festival winner joins champion Formula Renault UK team Fortec Motorsport for 2010 campaign, after GP3 bid fails

FORMULA FORD Festival winner Chrissy Palmer will contest the Formula Renault UK Championship this season with leading squad Fortec Motorsport.

Palmer, a McLaren AUTOSPORT BRDC Award finalist last year, completes the reigning teams' champion's line-up alongside Tom Blomqvist, Alex Lynn and Ollie Millroy.

Team manager Dave Moore said that Palmer's experience of the UK circuits – he is the only one of Fortec's four drivers to have raced a full season in Britain – put him in good stead for the seat. Palmer, 19, was also recommended by ex-Fortec Formula BMW team manager Julian Rouse, who has moved to GP3 team MW Arden and has been testing drivers in old Formula

Master chassis while awaiting the new GP3 cars.

Moore said: "Chrissy drove a Formula Master car at Barcelona with Arden and, once he got the braking sorted with the aero, he was blindingly quick. He doesn't have a massive amount of money, but it's good to have good drivers who will be quick from the start."

Palmer was due to drive in this week's FR UK test at Silverstone, subject to Fortec being able to locate enough parts for the new chassis to get him on track.

Palmer, who finished fourth in British Formula Ford last year with five wins, said: "Until a week ago I didn't know what I was going to do – we couldn't get the budget for GP3.

"All of my focus is now on Formula Renault – I'm going for the title and nothing else."

AUTOSPORT Young Guns

Karting ace joins Young Guns

KART STAR Josh Webster will race for Falcon Motorsport in the new AUTOSPORT Young Guns series this season.

The 16-year-old, who took the European Rotax Junior Max karting Championship last season, will join former T-Cars racer James Nutbrown. Falcon hopes to run four cars in AYG.

Webster, who has already started

testing for the team, said: "It's great to have the opportunity to drive this year with Falcon. Testing is going well and we can't wait to start racing."

Team principal Nick Streatfield said Webster should be a frontrunner: "Josh first tested for us at Pembrey in late January and immediately set blistering times. He will be a very strong challenger for the title."

Webster will race for Falcon in new series



GARY HAWKINS

IN BRIEF



SILVERSTONE CELEBRATED

International Women's Day last Monday with a gathering of female racers, personalities and marshals (above). ITV presenter Louise Goodman and reigning Ginetta Junior champion Sarah Moore were among those present.

THOUSANDS OF motorsport fans attended the Save Donington parade at the Leicestershire venue last Sunday. Circuit owner Kevin Wheatcroft was present, but was unable to announce a new leaseholder for the circuit.

FORTEC MOTORSPORT has expanded its line-up for the Formula Renault BARC series, and will run former karter Joseph Reilly alongside Mitchell Hale.

TJ MOTORSPORT has signed kart star Jody Fannin for the Ginetta Junior Championship this season. Team boss Trevor Griffiths said: "Jody has shown great potential while testing for the team in last season's G20."



FORMER RENAULT

Clio Cup racer Daniel Lloyd made his single-seater debut in the US Skip Barber National

season opener at Homestead-Miami Speedway last weekend (above). The 18-year-old scored a ninth and a 10th.

EX-F1600 Champion of Snetterton title holder Martin Byford will return to his single-seater roots when he races a Van Diemen in the 750MC Formula 4 2010 opener at the Norfolk circuit this Sunday.

ALFA ROMEO, the Audi Quattro and Norton will all be celebrated at the seventh annual RaceRetro International Historic Motorsport Show at Stoneleigh Park this weekend. An improved live rally stage will also feature, while several Lister cars will be displayed.

THE CHEVRON GR8 racer started testing at a private track last month. The car, which ran without bodywork, was driven by ex-F3 racer Martin O'Connell.

STEVE PEREZ and Paul Spooner won last Saturday's Malcolm Wilson Rally, despite this off (below). Their Ford Focus



fought back to beat the similar car of Jonathan Greer/Jonny Hart by 17 seconds.

Rallycross

Tockwith track nearing race debut despite noise threat

THE NEW Tockwith rallycross circuit hosted its first day of testing last Sunday ahead of its 2010 events.

The plan for the new track is being developed by Rallycross Open Championship promoter Peter Stott in conjunction with Tockwith Motorsport boss Simon Moore, who already has a karting operation on the site (see AUTOSPORT, January 21). It is set to host two ROC rounds later this year.

The 1400-metre track was used by 25 cars on Sunday. It combines sections of the recently resurfaced testing track at Tockwith, together with areas of broken asphalt. The plan is that gravel will be laid over these parts when the track layout is finalised. A long section of gravel on one side of the basically triangular track is to be added once additional clearance work on the site is completed.

The test day had a very small paddock area but Stott said that this, along with public access to the venue and the track design, were all being evaluated. "The paddock area will be cleared out and enlarged to be big

enough for 80 or 90 cars, and we will talk to the neighbouring farmers about use of their land to move spectators in and out," he said.

Stott also believes the recent threat of noise complaints from residents will not prevent the venue becoming a success. "This is a long-term, 10-year plan," he said. "We need to see the feedback from the council's noise tests

and consider what we've seen today, but I don't see any objections to this."

The initial reaction from drivers to the new venue was broadly positive. Subaru Supercar driver Gareth Wood said: "It's a good basic layout but it needs some work, and the lack of runoff doesn't inspire confidence. It's not a replacement for Croft."

Mini racer Lance Foster said: "I thought it was pointy squirty this morning, but now I've been out with other cars it seems better and I can see some places where you might pass. It needs some work but it's quite good."



Tockwith is moving closer to event debut

GRAHAM READ

Motor Sports Association

MSA launches driver award

THE MSA has announced a new Young Driver of the Year Award, which will be presented to one of the students enrolled on its in-house scheme.

Students of the MSA Academy's Advanced Apprenticeship in Sporting Excellence (AASE) course will be eligible to receive the award, which will consist of a trophy and a cheque for £1000.

MSA performance director Robert Reid said: "We wanted to recognise the commitment the students are putting in and give them an incentive to keep pushing themselves."

Porsche Club

Champions return to Porsches

FORMER PORSCHE Club class champions Peter Morris and Richard Lambert are returning to the series.

Morris, a long-time supporter of the series through his construction company, took a car to the final two rounds of the 2009 season to test the water before deciding on a full-blown Class One 2010 assault in a newly built 968CS.

"I'm really looking forward to the season," said 50-year-old Morris, who has also raced Porsches in Britcar. "We tested the car at Silverstone and were pleased with the times. It felt good, so I'm looking forward to the first race."

Morris returns with his 968CS



Lambert will again contest limited rounds with his 964 C2, although he too will challenge for Class One wins.

"We have a new baby so it will be another limited season for me," said Lambert. "Our first race will be at Zolder and we will try to do as many rounds as possible."

CSL Cup

German BMW squad plots CSL Cup campaign



Team Schirmer is coming to the UK

GERMAN RACING squad Team Schirmer will enter the CSL Cup this season with drivers Steve Gill and Dan Stringfellow.

It will be the first time the Nurburgring-based concern has raced in a UK series, although it is well-known in European club racing circles. It was encouraged to race in Britain by privateer driver Gill, who is confident of good results with the team.

"We are keen to build on the success Team Schirmer has achieved in Europe, and are confident we can reproduce that in the UK," he said.

Stringfellow added: "I'm excited to join Team Schirmer to try to reproduce my form in 2010. It was an easy decision to make."

Schirmer is also planning to run an E92 M3 in selected rounds for ex-touring car racer Michael Funke.



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Knockhill Racing Circuit - 27th June 2010

Awards on the day include the David Leslie Memorial Trophy, Sir Jackie Stewart Trophy and the Angel Burgueno Trophy, presented to the drivers of the day and fastest lap.

The overall winner will be the first name to be added to the Scottish Formula Ford Festival Trophy along with a test in a Formula Ford Duratec courtesy of Fluid Motorsport. There are also two sets of Avon race tyres up for grabs, along with prize money and trophies for the two semi final races.



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General Test Day

Friday 19th March 2010

Due to the circuit's restrictions this is the only test day this season. MSA Licences required

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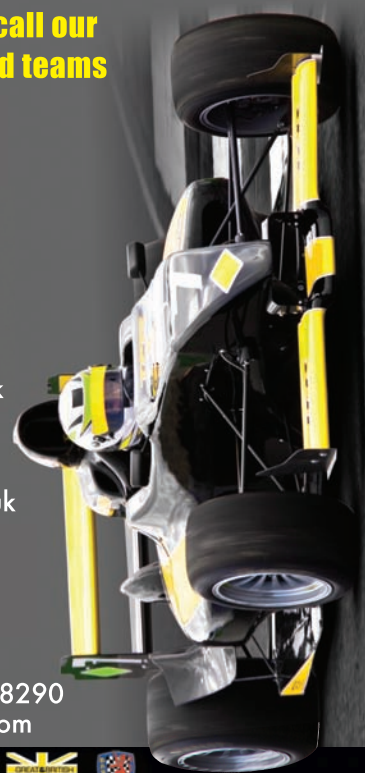
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Success is no Freke event

Freke was class of the G50 pack in 2009

He's won titles as a driver. Now Nathan Freke wants more for his team. By KEVIN TURNER

With two national titles in four years, Nathan Freke could probably have a reasonable shot at making a living behind the wheel. But the 26-year-old is more than just a driver: he has his own Century Motorsport team, and that could give him a longer career in the sport.

Freke struggled to finance his racing after taking the 2006 British Formula Ford title, but was thrown a lifeline last season. Not only did he go on to take the Ginetta G50 Cup crown, he did it with his own team. Now Century has a multi-car G50 effort, an involvement in British GT, and a relationship with Juno to run its works British FFord squad.

Having his own team was not the path Freke had planned. With finances a constant worry, the family squad was born out of necessity during Freke's karting days in the 1990s. Cheaper to be self-run than pay for a top drive.

A move to gearbox karting in 2000 brought wins and titles, and internet service provider NewNet stepped in for

2005, giving Freke the chance to try cars – and his driving was still the focus.

Castle Combe FF1600 was the chosen battleground, and he scored some strong late-season results in a Jamun T25, leaving marque boss Tony Mundy impressed enough to offer Freke the chance to drive one of his British-championship Mygales. "We started 2006 with half a budget to see how it went," recalls Freke. "After four rounds we led the championship, so NewNet coughed up some more money. Jamun dug deep, and we dug deep."

On-track, Freke delivered. Ten wins comfortably took him to the crown.

Despite the success he struggled to find the budget to move up. He was tempted by the American racing scene, but things went badly. "In 2008 we had a Porsche Carrera Cup offer, but at the time I had the blinkers on," he says.

Instead, Freke signed with Michael Crawford Motorsports for Indy Lights. He never looked like being competitive: "At Homestead, which is flat-out all the way, we were 8mph down. We soon realised we'd made a massive mistake and pulled out, but we'd crippled ourselves financially."

All now seemed lost. Then Ian Hetherington came onto the scene. Century had ran Ian's sons Benji and Freddie in karts. Car careers beckoned.

"Ian offered to buy a G50 for me to race and set up in 2009, which I could then run for them in 2010," remembers



Ford title came in Jamun Racing Mygale

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

- 1993-99** Karting
- 2000-04** Gearbox karting (2003 British champ and British GP winner)
- 2005** Castle Combe FF1600, second in Carnival, third in Walter Hayes Trophy
- 2006** British Formula Ford champion with Jamun (10 wins)
- 2007-08** Limited outings in Porsche Carrera Cup and Indy Lights
- 2009** Ginetta G50 Cup champion with Century (15 wins)

Freke. "I didn't need asking twice."

He went on to take 15 wins from 28 races. It not only added a second title to Freke's CV, it made him realise his squad could perform on a national level and offered an alternative future.

"We really started making a proper go of Century," he says. "Halfway through 2009 I realised we had a great opportunity to establish the team."

It means that Century will run up to four cars in G50s in 2010, including likely frontrunners Benji Hetherington and Ginetta Junior graduate Aaron Williamson. For Freke himself, there's a tie-up with Chad Racing for a British GT4 attack (see p85).

Nevertheless, Freke is trying not to overstretch himself, or Century. There'll be no driving outings in a TOCA series, as he concentrates on the squad. "I have to be 100 per cent focused at G50 weekends," he asserts. "I drive the truck, I'm the data engineer, I'm the set-up guy. I'm the glue really. This year is going to be a big one for Century because it could really set us up."

"I'd rather do a few things well than lots of things badly. I want a career in motorsport."

Whether he's racing or not, it seems Freke is well on the way to having just that. ☘



Freke hopes to add to success with Century

EBREY/LAT

EBREY/LAT

BLOKH/M/LAT

Rotary club revitalised

Rotary rally cars are a rarity, but Mazda had a go during the Group B era. And now one of the RX7s is back. By MARTYN MORGAN JONES



Back in 1961, Mazda entered into a technical co-operation with NSU, and Dr Felix Wankel, with a view to developing Dr Wankel's revolutionary rotary engine. However, there were simply too many technical and cost issues for NSU and, in 1969, the company was taken over by Volkswagen.

Mazda, on the other hand, had been making steady progress and from the 1970s it went its own way. Very successfully, as it transpired, and the company threw its considerable technical and fiscal weight behind the rotary engine. And, to help assuage doubts about reliability, it embarked on an intensive and long-lived endurance racing project.

Victory in the 1991 Le Mans 24 Hours silenced most critics (in a very loud, screaming fashion) as well as providing a first win in the event for a Japanese manufacturer. There is no doubt that endurance racing certainly enhanced Mazda's image, but was it time and money well spent?

Considering the global appeal of rallying, particularly during the now legendary Group B era, it is a shame that Mazda didn't truly grasp the rally rotary and run with it. Nonetheless, at

least Mazda did try its hand at Group B and, considering the self-imposed limitations, it did rather well.

NOT SO LIMITED EDITION

To achieve Group B homologation, manufacturers were required to produce a minimum run of 200 road-going cars, from which an 'evolution' version could be created (only 20 would be required). Hence the arrival of cars such as the Audi Sport Quattro, Metro 6R4, Ford RS200 and Peugeot 205 T16. However, Mazda's take on the homologation process was slightly different.

Not wishing to produce a limited run of costly and complex 'specials', Mazda Rally Team Europe managed to homologate a complete run of standard production RX7s. And the ink had barely dried on the original homologation entry before Mazda was submitting papers for the 20 evolution versions. Of these, just eight became fully-fledged Group B rally cars.

Apparently, Mazda's budget for rallying was limited, which probably explains why such a small number were built, why there was no customer programme and why the firm had such a stunted WRC involvement (it only entered gravel and snow events).

Despite this, thanks to Harri Toivonen, Rod Millen, Ingvar Carlsson, and Achim Warmbold in particular, the RX7 was successful. On the 1983 Acropolis Rally, driving a Group 2 RX7, Toivonen set several top-five stage times, although he didn't finish very high in the final classification. Team-mate/manager Warmbold managed 15th place. Encouraged, Mazda made a return visit in 1984. However, for that year, the RX7 was in full Group B specification and the 12A engine had made way for the feistier and faster 13B, which powered Warmbold to ninth overall. Things would go even better in 1985.

While not quite a rotary rout, the 1985 Acropolis has to be considered the high-water mark in the RX7's rally career. Warmbold finished a creditable sixth and Carlsson steered his RX7 into third. A great result, albeit some 48 minutes adrift of Timo Salonen's 205 T16 E2 (remember when rallies were

1985 RAC Rally weapon has been fully fettled



OBORNE/HAWKINS



Dave Paveley will enter CJH 710 in Euro events

1308cc rotary engine produces over 300bhp



GARY HAWKINS

The RX7 on the other hand, still retained too many familial links with its roadgoing counterpart to be truly competitive. Regrettably, yet understandably, rather than develop a more visceral and harder-edged RX7, Mazda went ahead with a four-wheel-drive 323 instead. It did, however, also produce a prototype four-wheel-drive, three-rotor, RX7 for the stillborn Group S class, which is an indication of intent.

It might not have contested many events, and it certainly wasn't

long enough to create such gaps?).

And there's the rub. The RX7 had masses of potential and could run hard, and fast, on one of the world's toughest rallies, but it was shackled by two-wheel-drive. At the time, the move towards driving all four corners, a revolution started by Audi's Quattro, had garnered speed. The pace of technical development was ever-growing, as was the differential in stage times. Boundaries were approached, stepped over even; and the umbilical ties between the road cars and their rally siblings were stretched to the limits and often severed.



Car has "real character and serious pace"

developed to its full potential, but the RX7 was still a very capable rally car. Had Mazda grasped the concept by the neck and pushed its development, then it might have climbed even higher up the rankings. Nevertheless, Mazda should be applauded for its efforts.

Silverstone Autosport should also be applauded for thinking outside the box and bringing one of Group B's most interesting and unusual offerings back into the rallying domain.

BACK TO THE FUTURE

CJH 710, the feature car, has the mechanical components of car #1, the Rod Millen 1985 RAC Rally car, which was re-shelled in bodyshell number 20 in 1992. It is owned by Steve Hopewell, boss of rotary-engine specialist Silverstone Autosport.

Although passionate about rotary power, Steve didn't really intend buying a Group B RX7.

"I'd never thought about it until I started looking into its rallying history," he says. "As it happens, I was recently looking at a video of the 1985 RAC Rally and spotted Rod competing in an RX7. He finished ninth.

"Rather bizarrely, two weeks later, I was scanning the web for information on the RX7 and came across Rod's car for sale. We discovered that it was owned by Christophe Jacob, a very well-respected collector and rally driver."

Following a healthy discussion concerning exchange rates, a deal was struck. The RX7 has since been through Silverstone's workshops in readiness for its participation on a number of historic events, mostly in Europe, where it will be driven by Dave Paveley. It recently competed on the Boucles de Spa, where it proved to be a revelation.

"Obviously it will take some time before we have it set-up to our liking and there are inevitably going to be some niggles," admits Dave, "but it has real character and serious pace.

"The gearbox has the MRTE synchro and you can't rush it, but the engine is a gem. It has surprising low-down torque and will rev to stratospheric levels. The brakes are strong and I was impressed at the car's handling, although we are planning revisions to the spring rates and ride height."

However the team gets on, it's great to see one of rallying's more interesting footnotes back out again. There's nothing quite like a rotary scream. ❧

"The team should be applauded for bringing the RX7 back to life"



Factory cars await pre-rally attention in 1984

MCKLEIN/DE

MAZDA RX7 TECH SPEC

1308cc, 13B rotary peripheral-port, twin-port engine (FIA historic passport-registered as 2300cc)

Power 302bhp at 8400rpm

Torque 219lb ft at 6200rpm

Gearbox

Five-speed MRTE synchromesh

Weight 960kg

TERRY O'BORNE/HAWKINS

YOUR SAY

What you think of the motorsport news of the past week

Pressing the panic button

I never thought I'd disagree with Mark Hughes, but I'm disappointed by his reinterpretation of Michael Schumacher's misdemeanours. He suggests we could view them "as moments of madness triggered by panic". Well that's alright then. Madness and panic, just what I want to see in an F1 driver!

David Goddard Hove



TOP FIVE ON OUR WEBSITE

1. TEAM US F1 SHUTS DOWN OPERATION
2. ANDERSON: WHY US F1 ISN'T ON 2010 GRID
3. STEFAN GP NOT GRANTED F1 ENTRY
4. HAMILTON TO MAKE MANAGEMENT CHANGE
5. HRT UNVEILS ITS 2010 F1 CONTENDER

WIN!



ROAD ANGEL PROFESSIONAL CONNECTED

This week's star letter will receive a Road Angel Professional Connected – the world's only safety camera alert device to use GPRS/GSM update technology while you drive.

For more details on Road Angel please visit www.roadangelgroup.com Please ensure that your full address is included on all correspondence.

CORRECTIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS

● In last week's Formula 1 season preview a production error resulted in Adrian Sutil's helmet appearing in the Jarno Trulli summary.

It is the policy of AUTOSPORT to correct significant errors as soon as possible. Please note the issue date and page number when contacting us on autosport.editorial@haynet.com

EDITORIAL CONTACT mail@autosport.com

As the Bahrain Grand Prix approaches, I'd like to thank the many people who have made it possible for Virgin Racing to be on the grid for its first race.

The task facing new teams has been substantial, but I'm sure I echo the feelings of the other new teams when I say Virgin Racing hopes to contribute positively to F1 over the coming years. I'd like to thank the investors, suppliers, staff, families, race drivers, sponsors, supporters and fans. I hope everyone enjoys the ride!

Graeme Lowdon
CEO Virgin Racing

It is unfortunate that US F1 has fallen by the wayside. But were the FIA not supposed to have carried out some form of audit to make sure the new teams were robustly financed?

Never mind, we have Stefan GP waiting in the wings. But the FIA won't let them in! Maybe they are worried that history might repeat itself and someone acquiring the assets of a hitherto unsuccessful Japanese team might blow the front-runners away and win the championship at their first attempt!

John Fox
East Bridgford, Notts

It's interesting to read of the WRC promoters' interest to have the Monte Carlo Rally back in the WRC (Special Stage, February 25). It was ditched in 2008 because it didn't (or wouldn't) conform to the WRC template. In the last two years the Monte has proved you don't have to conform to a format to be a success.

It will be interesting to see if the Automobile Club de Monaco is receptive to the WRC's advances. It would appear the boot is now on the other foot.

Andy Maclean
Chipping Norton, Oxon

Re MPH, March 4, may I point out that before the start of the Japanese Grand Prix in 1990 at Suzuka, Ayrton Senna was denied the clean inside line of the track for his pole position by Frenchman J-M Balestre – which was therefore handed on a plate to fellow Frenchman Alain Prost, who led into the first turn, as expected.

Senna argued long and hard about it beforehand – to no avail – and then, wonderful as ever, came up with his own solution to the problem.

John Stewart
Middleham, North Yorks

AUTOSPORT.COM FANTASY LEAGUE GRAND PRIX 2010

THE 2010 F1 SEASON starts in Bahrain on 14th March, and that's when the autosport.com Fantasy League F1 gets underway, with the commencement of the Mini Championship.

There are £20,000 in prizes to be won throughout the season. The top team boss at

the end of the year wins £5,000 and a VIP trip to the Monaco GP, with cash prizes at every GP. There's also the opportunity to take on your mates in your own Friends & Enemies League.

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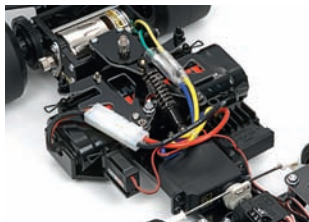
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One final word of warning: find a very flat and smooth area and then stand back – this thing is very rapid.



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Critically acclaimed by AUTOSPORT's Grand Prix editor Mark Hughes in his regular column last month, *Overdrive - Formula 1 in the zone* is a cerebral analysis of what goes through drivers' minds when they are really 'on it'.

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autosport.com/shop

One of Kyosho's latest 1:18 scale diecast models, the Repsol Lancia Delta Integrale is a faithful reproduction of the car driven to second in the 1993 Acropolis Rally by 'King' Carlos Sainz.

The Spaniard spent just one – largely unfruitful – season with Lancia so this is a bit of WRC history.

HOT ON THE WEB THIS WEEK

YOUTUBE: SAO PAULO INDYCAR VIRTUAL LAP



SEARCH: Sao Paulo Virtual Lap (3:03)

The IndyCar Series kicks off this weekend on a new street circuit in Sao Paulo, but you knew that because you've just read the season preview in this same issue. Bet you haven't seen this on-board virtual lap though...

Manage your own Formula 1 team. Who would you choose to be in your Formula 1 team?

To start playing log onto <http://autosport.fantasyleaguef1.com>

Or visit autosport.com and click on **Fantasy League F1**

WHAT'S ON...

Your guide to the best events taking place around the world this week – plus TV and online

BRANDS HATCH

Britcar
March 13
Admission: £12
Tel: 01474 872331

The Britcar series fires up for the first time in 2010 with an endurance opener on the Brands Hatch Indy circuit that will feature three categories.

The main event will be the GT race, including star

marques Ferrari, Aston Martin, Porsche and Ginetta. Famous names on the grid will include sometime BTCC father-and-son pairing Mike and Andrew Jordan.

There's also the Britcar Production Championship in the form of a 90-minute race featuring Honda Civics, SEAT Leons and Lotus Elises. The second support act will be the Britsports Championship, in which a grid of Caterhams will battle it out over the course of two 40-minute races.



Porsches always show strongly in Britcar

Formula 4 should be among the fastest action



STEVE JONES

SNETTERTON

750 Motor Club
March 13-14
Admission: weekend (online) £16;
single-day price (on gate) £12
Tel: 01953 887303

The 750 Motor Club season kicks off at Snetterton this weekend, with a diverse range of cars on show that often provides some of the closest racing in the country. Formula 4 and Formula Vee should top the single-seater action, while the ever-popular Stock Hatch series is likely to be a tin-top highlight.

F1 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

Rd 1/19
Bahrain Grand Prix
Sakhir, Bahrain
March 14
www.formula1.com

Well, Toyota won't throw the race away this year



ETHERINGTON/LAT

INDYCAR SERIES

Rd 1/17
Sao Paulo, Brazil
March 14
www.indycar.com



Will Power will be one of the IndyCar top liners

KINRADE

GP2 ASIA SERIES

Rd 4/4
Sakhir, Bahrain
March 13-14
www.gp2series.com

PORSCHE SUPERCUP

Rd 1/9
Sakhir, Bahrain
March 13-14
www.porsche.com/motorsport

V8 SUPERCARS

Rd 3/15
Adelaide, Australia
March 13-14
www.v8supercars.com.au

Television

THURSDAY MARCH 11

1725-1935 [ESPN Classic](#)

Formula 1 retro: 1978

Mario Andretti, JPS Lotus, etc.

1945-2115 [Eurosport 2](#)

Curitiba WTCC

2115-2145 [Eurosport 2](#)

Curitiba IRC

FRIDAY MARCH 12

0655-0835 [BBC Red Button LIVE](#)

Formula 1 free practice

The first free practice session of the 2010

Formula 1 season from Bahrain. Which of

the new teams will break down first?

1100-1230 [BBC Red Button LIVE](#)

Formula 1 free practice

Session two from Bahrain, with the Radio 5

Live commentary posse.

1755-1935 [ESPN Classic](#)

Formula 1 retro: 1979

Jody Scheckter, Ferrari, etc.

1915-1945 [Eurosport 2](#)

Inside WTCC

1945-2045 [Eurosport 2](#)

GP2 Asia

SATURDAY MARCH 13

0755-0855 [BBC Red Button LIVE](#)

Formula 1 free practice

Final session ahead of qualifying for

the Bahrain GP.

1010-1230 [BBC1 LIVE](#)

Formula 1 qualifying

Who will take the first pole of the year?

0930-1015 [Eurosport 2 LIVE](#)

Porsche Supercup

The season-opening race from Bahrain.

1630-1715, 2130-2215 [Eurosport 2](#)

GP2 Asia

The feature race from Bahrain. Not live.

SUNDAY MARCH 14

0745-0830 [Eurosport 2 LIVE](#)

GP2 Asia

The sprint race from Bahrain. Live!

0900-0945 [Eurosport 2 LIVE](#)

Porsche Supercup

1110-1415 [BBC1 LIVE](#)

Bahrain Grand Prix

The season kicks off. Shame it's not in

Australia like it should be, but at least you

don't have to get up too early to watch it.

1415-1515 [BBC Red Button LIVE](#)

Bahrain GP post-race forum

Jake and gang sit around and chat a bit.

1500-1605 [ESPN Classic](#)

Formula 1 retro: 1980

Alan Jones, Williams, etc.

1900-2000 [BBC Three](#)

Bahrain GP highlights

We prefer old-school moniker *Grand Prix*.

2300-0100 [Sky Sports 4](#)

IndyCar Series

Season opener from Sao Paulo is tape-

delayed, thanks to all of Sky's other sports

annoyingly being on at the same time.

MONDAY MARCH 15

0150-0245 [BBC Three](#)

Bahrain GP highlights

1330-1530, 1800-2000 [Sky Sports 4](#)

IndyCar Series

Repeats of the Sao Paulo race. There's no

NASCAR this week, so don't panic that the

regular highlights show isn't on.

Online

AUTOSPORT.COM

Coming up on the web this week

F1, INDYCAR & GP2

It's finally here. All the waiting and wondering is over – Formula 1 is back. Check out AUTOSPORT.com's previews this week for the thoughts of David Coulthard, Gary Anderson and our other regular columnists. Then follow every step of the weekend as we bring you live commentary and breaking news each day. Elsewhere in the world there's also the IndyCar season opener at Sao Paulo and the GP2 Asia finale in Bahrain.

Felipe Massa/Ferrari among contenders



Read this week's AUTOSPORT magazine in full on the internet

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AUTOSPORT magazine is now available online. Print subscribers get free access, while PLUS subscribers will get a discount on the £112 annual fee for all 51 issues. To get on board the digital revolution, click on autosport.com/digital

REVVED UP OVER WHAT'S ON THE BOX

We cast a critical eye over the best and worst of this week's TV coverage

Wanted: graphic designers to jazz up dull WTCC SEATs



REVVED UP is a year old. To celebrate, there was no jelly and ice cream, no hundreds and thousands, Ice Magic or Soda Streams, although the thought of the E-numbers in any of the above is enough to get me bouncing off the walls.

No, better than all that, better even than a Big Trak and trailer, better than a fully loaded Raleigh Vektor, better than a Commodore Amiga with joystick and Kick Off 2, I got the World Touring Car Championship in Brazil! (Okay, so I may have exaggerated the size of the prize here.)

Still, this is where it all began. And what a lot has happened in 12 months:

Michael Jackson danced his last moonwalk; Bradley Branning stifled his last blush and Nick Heidfeld trundled to his last fifth place (at least for the time being anyway).

In motorsports telly land we've seen NASCAR end its stable two-year-old relationship with Sky, briefly shack up with someone it met on the internet, before finally settling down with a less attractive version of the partner it had before – it's a tragically familiar affair.

And what of the WTCC? Well, just a quick look at the grid told you all you needed to know. The top eight looked sensible

quality plummeted faster than the pound/dollar exchange rate.

It looked even worse on telly too, with half the field seemingly made up of cars straight out of the Spanish SEAT Supercopa. Someone needs to put them in touch with a decent graphic designer pdq.

For us armchair fans, the next most obvious change was behind the mike, with James 'Jimmy T' Thompson taking over co-com duties from John Cleland. And

a bloody good job he did too; starting with an informative explanation of how to switch an S2000 tourer from dry to wet settings, and ending with an eagle-eyed spot that the dash in Rob Huff's Chevy had broken loose. Or maybe not – I couldn't really see what he was getting at, but he sounded convincing enough.

Top marks indeed, but it's a shame he's not out there in the Lada – well, anything other than a badly-painted SEAT. *Revved Up*

"The top eight of the WTCC looked sensible, but then the quality fell faster than the pound/dollar rate"

THE WEEK IN PICTURES

The lensmen pounding the beat, from Kent to Le Castellet



DAYTONA TAKES THE LYDD OFF ITS NEW KART VENUE
Martin Brundle reopened the Daytona-acquired Lydd kart venue, but couldn't beat AUTOSPORT dep ed Charles Bradley and Rick Parfitt Jr



HAITI RELIEF FUND COMES INTO FOCUS
BTCC star Tom Chilton was among the stars who raced for the Haiti fund. Donate at justgiving.com/theracecentre



RED 5 HOGS CENTRE STAGE
Okay, so it's only a photo shoot for the LMS, but Our Nige makes sure he's in front

Engineering debrief – startline strategy



GARY ANDERSON

BIO
Gary has designed grand prix race-winning cars during his long F1 career and worked for Brabham, McLaren, Jordan, Stewart and Jaguar.



BELLANCA/LAT

START STRATEGY and clutch assemblies are now going to be a make-or-break part of Formula 1 in 2010. When you consider that an F1 car is now going to have a startline weight of about 20 per cent more than 2009, getting it wrong will have disastrous results. Too many engine revs can result

in too much wheelspin, and it is then very easy to lose a few places on the run down to the first corner. You need some clutch slip to reduce the risk of engine stall, but just that little extra and the clutch assembly will fry itself. The starts for the first few races of 2010 are going to be nailbiting experiences for everyone.

Got an engineering question you'd like answered? Send it to mark.glendenning@haymarket.com



FROM THE ARCHIVE

Tiago Monteiro, British F3, Spa, 2000



Monteiro takes the flag to beat 'Brits'

"We knew that the top five or six guys were all Formula 1 material, but of course it was never about just talent"

WHEN TIAGO MONTEIRO contested a one-off British Formula 3 Championship race at Spa in 2000, he ended up beating a pack that included current World Touring Car Championship rival Andy Priaulx, together with many other big stars of the future.

Monteiro was focused on his French F3 campaign with ASM (he lost the title to Jonathan Cochet), but the team opted to take in the British round at the Belgian GP circuit.

"British F3 didn't race outside the UK much then, so they used to invite other teams to race against them in the continental events," remembers the Portuguese driver. "We were a bit reluctant to do it because we weren't used to the Avon tyres British F3 cars ran on. But I really like Spa so I was pleased to enter it."

Monteiro put his Dallara-Renault on the front row. Takuma Sato had taken pole position, while behind the leading duo were future F1 drivers Antonio Pizzonia, Nicolas Kiesa, Gianmaria Bruni and Narain Karthikeyan, as well as Priaulx, DTM champion-to-be Gary Paffett and future IndyCar race winner Tomas Scheckter

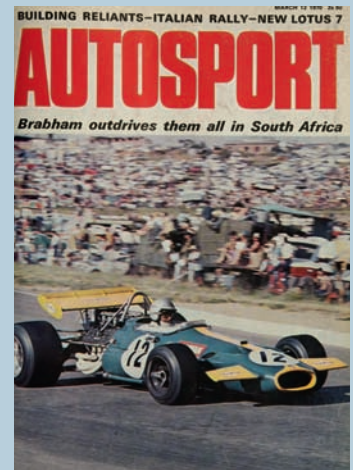
When Sato's clutch broke on the green-flag lap, that opened up the opportunity for Monteiro, who was able to keep Pizzonia at bay throughout and take the win.

Monteiro won by two seconds, and as an invitation entry was not registered for championship points. The maximum score went to Pizzonia, who had little reason to attack Monteiro as the points for this race enabled him to clinch the championship with a round to spare. It was a second consecutive F3 title for current Virgin Racing F1 boss John Booth's Manor Motorsport team.

"There is an extra motivation and an extra pressure when you know you're racing against the top guys from two or three different series," says Monteiro. "You want to prove yourself. If you have a good race, it will help you more than to have a good race in your own series."

"We knew that the top five or six guys were all Formula 1 material, but of course it was never about just talent. You never know who is going to make it, but a lot of them did." ❧

THIS WEEK IN...



MARCH 12 1970

'THE FOX is back on form', declared AUTOSPORT in deference to 44-year-old Jack Brabham, who took a comfortable win for his own team at the South African Grand Prix ahead of Denny Hulme's McLaren. Not bad for a man who only decided a month earlier to postpone his retirement from racing.

Qualifying had resulted in a 1-2 for March on its world championship debut as a constructor, with works driver Chris Amon beaten to pole by the customer car of Tyrrell-run world champion Jackie Stewart.

At Interlagos, Emerson Fittipaldi stepped back from Formula 3 domination to win the Brazilian Formula Ford crown (below). Fittipaldi beat brother Wilson, also in a Lotus 61M, while Britain's Ian Ashley came home third.



NEXT WEEK



Lights are out as another F1 season starts

BAHRAIN GP

All the analysis from Mark Hughes *On sale Mar 18*

PLUS

IndyCar under way for 2010 in Brazil; preview to Sebring 12 Hours

MARTIN SCHANCHE

■ European Rallycross Championship, Lydden ■ September 8, 1978 ■ Ford Escort ■ First big title



Schanche takes his first title at Lydden

IT HAD been a great year for me, and a lot of that was down to the car I had. I never had a factory car and always prepared my own machines. It's the way I started and I never wanted to do it any other way – especially not in the beginning of my rallycross career.

I'd seen what the factory Escorts were like and I didn't like what I saw. They were rally cars, very nice, very soft and very predictable in the way they went. I knew straight away that what was needed was a car that was going to be hugely quick off the line – as I only had a normally-aspirated, two-litre engine. That was going to be stiffer and more unpredictable – why have six inches of suspension travel if you only use three?

I did some drawings of the rear suspension and axle and ended up totally changing the geometries in a way that I thought would make the car as fast as possible, even if you did have to be a real dictator to drive. I basically took a rally car and turned it into a rallycross car.

“Somehow, ‘Mr Escort’ John Taylor and I ended up in the three heats together and I beat him in all of them”

I had been to Lydden once before, in 1977, and it rained and the Minis walked all over us, but despite this, I loved Lydden. You could overtake nearly everywhere, it was fairly wide, and there were lots of corners. It was a track that rewarded good driving rather than

a car with lots of power. There were lots of gradient and surface changes: tarmac, sand, clay, gravel.

Coming into the event in '78, I'd just won a couple of events in a row and knew I could win the championship, but the British press chose to build it up as a

showdown between me and another Ford driver, John Taylor, who was 'Mr Escort' at the time. Somehow from the three heats we always ended up together, and I beat him in all of them.

There was a bit of a panic in the final heat. The disadvantage of having less suspension travel is that you have to avoid the potholes. I hit one with the bottom of the gearbox and broke a wheel so badly that the rim separated. But we managed to repair it for the final.

It was me against John again in the final, and John Welch too, all of us in Escorts. I beat them and won the race, and my first European title. It was a pretty good day. ☘

IN PROFILE



AFTER INITIALLY competing in hillclimbs and ice racing, Martin Schanche converted to rallycross in 1976 in an Opel after keeping up with Bjorn Waldegaard in an initial trial outing. He soon switched to the Ford machinery with which he would become synonymous and took the European Rallycross title six times between 1978 and '95 – winning a record 74 events on the way. Still competitive right up to his retirement at the age of 57, he now runs an engineering firm in Norway.

NEXT WEEK

Junior JOHNSON



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