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POLE POSITION

Formula 1's most frustrating mega-talent

KIMI RAIKKONEN IS A HUGELY FRUSTRATING DRIVER.

He is the equal, perhaps even the better, of every other rival on the grid in terms of the toolkit he has as a driver. But sadly, last year he underdelivered desperately compared to Fernando Alonso.

Hence the cover of this week's magazine. If he has another season like 2014, why would Ferrari keep hold of him? And why would any other credible team want to take him?

AUTOSPORT has no doubt that Raikkonen still has it in him to deliver the kind of performances that were once his trademark. But as well as the improvements in the front-end feel of the Ferrari, Raikkonen must go the proverbial mountain.

Ever since 2007, when Bridgestone produced tyres with an understeer balance, his front-end sensitivities have held him back to a greater or lesser degree. The great drivers must adapt; they always have done. It would be for the betterment of F1 if he did.

As Helmut Marko said of Raikkonen in September 2013, "If he had the life and the approach of Vettel, nobody would see him".

The ability is there. Whether Raikkonen makes the most of it is up to him.



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COVER STORY



"Raikkonen appears a pale imitation of the driver who won the 2007 title"

Raikkonen, p14

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Cover image: Batchelor/XPB Images; Ebrey/LAT

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THE BIG PICTURE

"It's a proper racing car!" Red Bull ace Daniel Ricciardo attempts to tame the Alfa Romeo T33 that Helmut Marko drove in the 1972 Targa Florio, on the same Sicilian roads

Photographer Jim Krantz / Red Bulletin



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This week in F1

RENAULT MAY PUT BACK ENGINE PUSH

Renault has revealed that it may tactically delay using engine development tokens early this season in a bid to make bigger gains for 2016.

Power unit manufacturers are free to use their 32 development tokens at any point over the season rather than having to hit a pre-season deadline.

Renault F1 managing director Cyril Abiteboul told AUTOSPORT: "We need to maximise the value of money from the token allocation that we have. I think that there is a bit of strategic thinking to employ for this decision."

Renault believes that the input of engine guru Mario Illien could also be key to its bid to close the gap to Mercedes. Illien's engine company is working as a consultant for the French car manufacturer and works team Red Bull.

"Mario is an opportunity to benchmark what we are doing," Abiteboul told AUTOSPORT. "I very much see Mario's company as an opportunity to bring additional knowledge."

DID YOU KNOW?

Mario Illien played a key role in helping his then-Ilmor company develop the Mercedes engine that went on to achieve success with McLaren, including three race wins in 1997 and back-to-back drivers' championships in 1998 and 1999.



THOMPSON/GETTY



DUNBAR/LAT

Red Bull hints at nose change

Red Bull has dropped a very firm hint that it may switch from a long nose to a short Williams-style version as Formula 1 teams continue to hunt for the best solution.

Chief engineering officer Rob Marshall said: "Of the different noses we tried, it's the one we like best at present. What you see on the first day of the first test isn't what we'll always roll out later on."

I'm very pleased with the solution we've got. It was a good one.



Williams technical director Pat Symonds on his team's nose design



FORCE INDIA RUNS '14 CAR

Force India has confirmed it will run its 2014 car at this week's Barcelona test.

The Silverstone-based squad had hoped to run its new VJM08 machine on Thursday, but that has looked unlikely for several weeks. The team has confirmed it will not appear until the final pre-season test, also at Barcelona, on February 26.



P20 BARCELONA TEST

For all the breaking news, visit AUTOSPORT.COM



SBCLOX/AM/LAT

JAPANESE ACES WANTED

Honda plans to try to get more Japanese drivers into Formula 1 as part of its return to the sport with McLaren this year.

The manufacturer launched its 2015 motorsport programme last Friday, which included news it will place Japanese Formula 3 champion Nobuharu Matsushita alongside McLaren protege Stoffel Vandoorne at ART Grand Prix in GP2.

“Through collaboration with McLaren, Honda will create more opportunities to encourage Japanese drivers to succeed on a global scale,” said a Honda statement after the event.



GIBSON/LAT

Manor gets FIA entry list boost

The FIA has boosted Manor Grand Prix's hopes of making it onto the 2015 grid by saying it will keep the entry list open as long as possible.

The former Marussia squad's plan to compete suffered a setback when Force India voted against concessions that would have allowed the team to run a modified 2014 car for the start of the season.

Manor is now planning to get a 2015-specification car ready in time for one of the early flyaway races. To secure valuable commercial rights income, the team needs to be racing by the Bahrain Grand Prix on April 19.

AUTOSPORT has learned the FIA has been in discussions with Manor regarding how best to proceed.



FLAMAND/DUPPI

Renault wary of 1000bhp costs

Renault is urging caution over Formula 1's push towards 1000bhp engines, amid fears that costs could rise dramatically.

F1's strategy group has given a green light for further work on ramping up engine power for 2017.

Renault F1's managing director Cyril Abiteboul told AUTOSPORT: “I would love it, but I need someone to pay for it.”

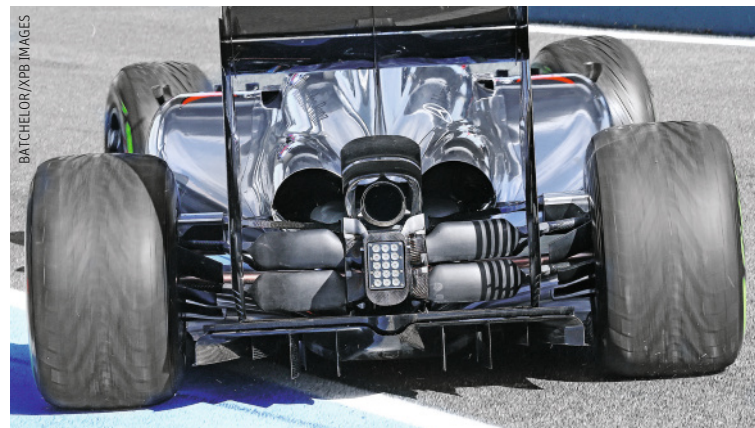
McLaren 'blockers' could return

McLaren has not ruled out reintroducing to its radical rear suspension blocker system from 2014 later this season, even though the concept did not appear on its new car during the first test at Jerez.

The innovative system was designed to increase downforce at low speed and

reduce drag at high speed – although rival teams were not convinced of its benefits and felt it actually hampered top speeds.

McLaren engineering director Matt Morris said: “We have designed a rear suspension layout that gives us options to do different things.”



BATCHELOR/XPB IMAGES



MASON/GETTY

REVOLUTION COULD TEMPT NEWKEY BACK

Red Bull design wizard Adrian Newey could be lured back to the sport full time if plans to introduce faster cars come to fruition, says team boss Christian Horner.

Newey has decided to reduce his commitments to F1 because of growing frustration with restrictive rules.

Horner said: “If the regulations change and become a little bit more open, and more enticing, then perhaps that will whet his appetite to get further involved.”



MCGRATH/GETTY

McLAREN HONDA

Dennis: title sponsors 'history'

McLaren chairman Ron Dennis says he would rather be without a title sponsor than undersell space on his team's car.

The Woking-based team has been without a title partner since its Vodafone deal ended in 2013.

“Title sponsorship doesn't exist any

more as a concept,” said Dennis. “If you look at what title sponsorship would normally be, it would be somewhere between 40-50 per cent of your budget. No company will come in and give you that kind of money [now].”

9 BIG NUMBER

the number of constructors' titles Adrian Newey has won with cars he has designed in Formula 1

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Jonathan Noble

F1's newshound

By focusing on more rule changes rather than on new ways to engage modern audiences, are F1's chiefs in danger of losing the plot?

As talks continued this week to try to edge Formula 1 closer to a rules revolution package between now and 2017, it is as though everyone is now convinced that something major is broken.

Such is the clamour for change, with wider cars, bigger tyres and 1000bhp engines all being targeted, that you could be forgiven for thinking that the current generation of machinery is an utter failure.

Yet there is a danger of F1 getting a bit ahead of itself here in deciding that it is the cars that are at fault. What if it is not actually what is happening on track that is the root of the problem?

This ever-growing momentum for a new F1 has been fuelled by the panic that set in last year when the sport was hit by falling television viewing numbers.

Headline-grabbing figures of a five per cent audience drop worldwide, with bigger losses in key markets like Italy and Germany, left Bernie Ecclestone convinced that the sound of the engines and the new fuel economy formula were to blame.

It was his constant lashing out, supported by comments from figures including Luca di Montezemolo and Sebastian Vettel, that helped deliver a self-fulfilling prophecy of doom.

Did anyone actually ask the F1 fans what they thought, though? Did they really all hate it last year? Or, as the 10 per cent hike in Australian Grand Prix ticket sales for this year shows, was it all much ado about nothing?

in putting up and taking down clips of F1 racing. Perhaps by doing this, though, F1 is killing off the goose that can lay its golden egg.

Maybe audiences aren't tuning in to grand prix racing, not because the cars or the racing are lacking, but because sitting through two hours of live sport in the middle of an afternoon is no longer a normal thing to do.

Younger generations want instant gratification these days – with maximum return. Within seconds, they can watch the most spectacular life moments, epic fails, the best overtaking moves or the best crashes. They are not going to readily sit for two hours watching 66 laps of Barcelona for a potential last-lap overtaking move.

But if F1's race highlights, crammed into two minutes, were readily available within minutes of the chequered flag dropping, then you might just be able to hook them in enough to get them coming back for more.

A loyal F1 audience should not just be counted on those that tune in every other Sunday to sit through two hours. The reach has to go bigger than that; it has to focus on more than grabbing in those who are happy to just read about it; it also has to lure those that want their 120-second YouTube highlights.

It is about giving fans access to F1 in the way they want it rather than the way that they are told to take it. Do that and you are more likely to see them make that transition to becoming fully engaged and spending their Sundays watching it live.

“Did anyone actually ask the F1 fans what they thought? Did they really all hate it last year?”

For without proper market research – something F1 seems ridiculously loathe to do – it is hard to reach a firm conclusion about what all fans (and not just the loudest minority) really thought of the new rules.

If there are genuine complaints, though – are they really related to what is wrong with the cars? Or could they actually be as a consequence of how fans are getting to watch grand prix racing?

F1's business model has been built around a lot of the commercial rights income coming from the sale of exclusive live television rights in different markets.

Keeping that income at the levels free-to-air companies were previously willing to pay has forced the exodus to pay-TV channels – which has served to further drive down the audience reach.

It is the intense paranoia around maintaining the value of those television rights deals that has fuelled the huge limits on footage of races online – and the constant fight between YouTube users and Formula One Management

But F1's commercial chiefs, with their insistence that social media is not valuable, don't seem to care much for anyone other than the fan who is already giving up their Sunday afternoon.

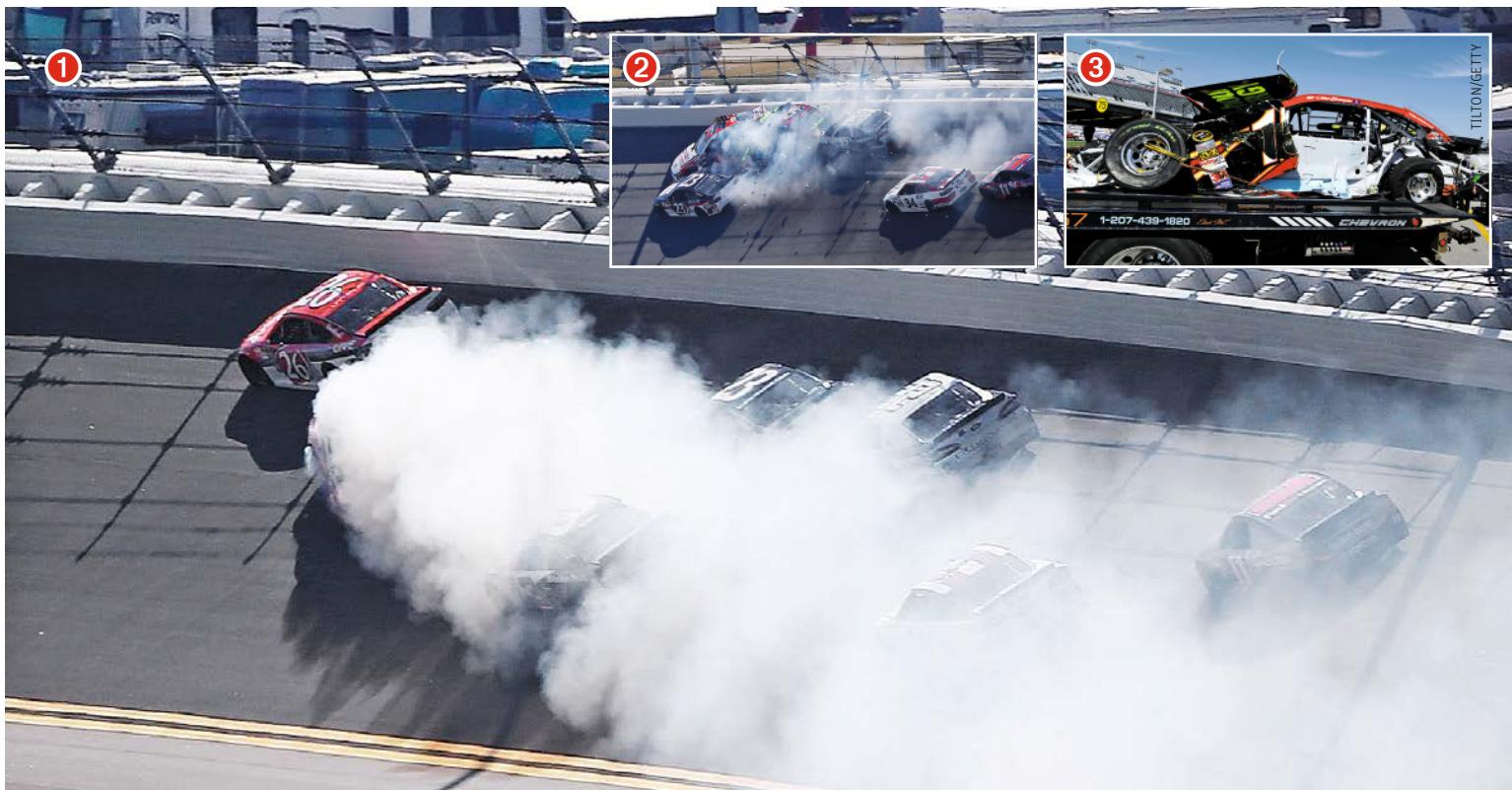
That is not good enough any more. Race edits that are shown on F1's official website only appear several days after the event, by which stage the world has moved on and the media's spotlight is no longer interested in what has happened on the track.

If F1 woke up to delivering the brilliant highlights packages, as well as mobile and tablet coverage that most people now think is the standard way to watch sport, would the product based on the current cars and formula be a turn off? Of course not.

There is plenty to get excited about with the way F1 is right now. And that's without the need for wider cars, bigger tyres or 1000bhp engines.

Perhaps F1's revolution should not be about what is televised but focus on how it is televised instead. ❧

This week in motorsport



'Idiotic' Daytona qualifying slammed

The first attempt at group qualifying for the Daytona 500 was branded "idiotic" by Clint Bowyer and "an embarrassment" by Tony Stewart, following a multi-car crash and complaints that it was a poor spectacle and made the session a lottery.

Bowyer came off worst (see number three above) in a pile-up triggered by Reed Sorenson (numbers one and two), while all four segments of the session were marred by drivers waiting until the last possible moment to run then jostling down pitlane trying to ensure they were at the back of the pack where

the slipstream was strongest.

The 500 was the only event that stuck with single-car qualifying when the rest of the calendar switched to the Formula 1-style knockout system last year. NASCAR executive vice-president Steve O'Donnell said the series would seek "feedback from the industry" but

intimated that the chaotic session had promotional benefits that shouldn't be ignored.

"Was it more exciting? Were there more people talking about qualifying? Hopefully so," he said. "What does that result in at the end of the day?"



Jordan completes first MG test

New works MG BTCC driver Andrew Jordan tried the MG6 for the first time at Brands Hatch last week. "It's good to be inside the car and get to know the team, it was quite relaxed," the 2013 champion said.

Champion duo join Team BMR

British Touring Car champion Colin Turkington and record race winner Jason Plato will race Team BMR Volkswagen CCs this season. The top two in last year's championship have joined Warren Scott's fledgling outfit on multi-year deals. The team boss and Aron Smith complete the driver line-up.



P34 SUPERTeam INTERVIEW

Collard claims final WSR seat

Rob Collard will continue with West Surrey Racing for a sixth consecutive season after beating Colin Turkington to the team's final BMW 125i M Sport seat.

The eight-time race winner will line up alongside three-time world champion Andy Priaulx and MG convert Sam Tordoff at

Dick Bennetts' squad.

"I've had to be patient but I'm very pleased to be continuing," he said.

● Chris Stockton has sold BTC Racing, its Chevrolet Cruze and TOCA BTCC Licence to Automotive Brands. The team will be renamed Power Maxed Racing.

For all the breaking news, visit AUTOSPORT.COM

GT Academy graduates to LMP1

Nissan has promoted GT Academy winners Jann Mardenborough and Lucas Ordonez to race its radical new GT-R LM NISMO World Endurance Championship contender in 2015.

Briton Mardenborough, who won the Academy in 2011, will be a full-season driver. Spaniard Ordonez, the inaugural winner of the gamer-to-racer scheme, will drive the additional GT-R LM at the Le Mans 24 Hours.

Nissan global motorsport boss Darren Cox told AUTOSPORT: "We are promoting these guys on talent: we are going to Le Mans to be credible and have chosen them because we know they can do the job."

Nissan stalwart Michael Krumm will contest the first three WEC races up to and including Le Mans.



● Nissan will field a car in the Pro class of the Blancpain Endurance Series for the first time this season. The RJN team will run a GT-R NISMO GT3 for Alex Buncombe, Katsumasa Chiyo and Wolfgang Reip.



New WTCC Lada hits track

Lada's new ORECA-built Vesta made its track debut in a private test at Magny-Cours rather than at the official Barcelona WTCC test. The Vesta, which replaces the Granta model that won two races last year.

"The new car fully meets our expectations for the fact that it boasts higher straightline speeds, greater cornering stability and much-improved aerodynamics," said team boss Victor Shapovalov. "Unfortunately, due to the early season start this year we are time-restricted, and it's obvious that tests

In brief

HONDA MAN JOINS ART
Honda has placed another Japanese protege at ART in GP2, with Nobuharu Matsushita becoming Stoffel Vandoorne's team-mate after winning the Formula 3 title in his homeland. He replaces Takuya Izawa, who returns to Super Formula.

ALBUQUERQUE AT JOTA
Audi factory driver Filipe Albuquerque will remain with the Jota Sport LMP2 team for this year's ELMS. The Portuguese, who will race the third Audi R18 e-tron quattro at the Le Mans and Spa WEC rounds, will share the team's renamed Gibson-Nissan O15S with Simon Dolan and a replacement for new Nissan P1 driver Harry Tincknell to be announced next month.

FR3.5 DODGES MOTOGP
The date for the World Series by Renault's return to Silverstone has been moved back a week to September 4-6 after the track stepped in to reclaim Britain's MotoGP round - scheduled for August 28-30 - when the Circuit of Wales' deal with Donington Park to host the race on its behalf fell through.

TURVEY TO JAPAN
McLaren Formula 1 test driver Oliver Turvey will race for the Dome Honda team in Super GT. The winner of the LMP2 class at last year's Le Mans 24 Hours will share his Honda NSX CONCEPT-GT with Takashi Kogure.

No P2 performance balancing

There will be no performance balancing in LMP2 ahead of the start of the season on the arrival of a new wave of coupes in the secondary prototype class in the World Endurance Championship and the European Le Mans Series.

The Automobile Club de l'Ouest, which organises the two series, has stated that it does not believe the old-generation of open-top machinery will be rendered uncompetitive by the Ligier JSP2, HPD ARX-04b, the Strakka Dome S103 and the ORECA 03.

ACO sporting manager Vincent Beaumesnil said: "At the moment, we think the competition is very equal."



BIG NUMBER

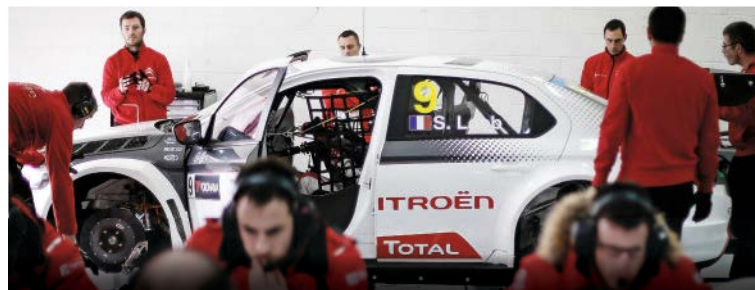
6ft 9in

The height of Serbian WTCC racer Dusan Borkovic, who skipped last week's test while his new Honda Civic is modified to fit his tall frame.

Jakes returns to IndyCar

Briton James Jakes will return to IndyCar as James Hinchcliffe's Schmidt Peterson Motorsport team-mate after a year out. Team boss Sam Schmidt said: "The goal of the team when it moved to IndyCar in 2011 was to get to the point where we had two veteran drivers in the car, capable of pushing each other. This finally checks that box."

GP2 veteran Stefano Coletti is also closing on an IndyCar drive, having impressed KV Racing Technology, which needs a team-mate for Sebastien Bourdais, in the NOLA test. General manager Steve Moore said: "We found his technological knowledge and feedback to be exceptional."



Late deals boost WTCC field

Twenty drivers have been confirmed for the 2015 World Touring Car Championship, with a further two in the offing. The entry list was unveiled in a media launch ahead of a sparsely attended official test at Barcelona.

Late additions included a number of privateers in Chevrolet Cruzes, including series returnee Stefano

D'Aste, ROAL's Tom Coronel - with extra backing from series sponsor DHL - and John Filippi at Campos.

Munnich Motorsport intends to name a full-season team-mate for D'Aste soon, while Campo Racing may run a third Cruze on a race-by-race basis. Sebastien Loeb headed the eight drivers to run at the test.

Morbidelli tries TCR Honda

Ex-Formula 1 driver Gianni Morbidelli carried out a development test in West Coast Racing's TCR Honda Civic at Barcelona. Morbidelli was a winner in the rival World Touring Car Championship last year, but lost his seat when the Munnich team decided to seek funded drivers as it doubted the Chevrolet Cruze would remain competitive. The inaugural TCR series kicks off as part of the Malaysian Grand Prix support bill next month.





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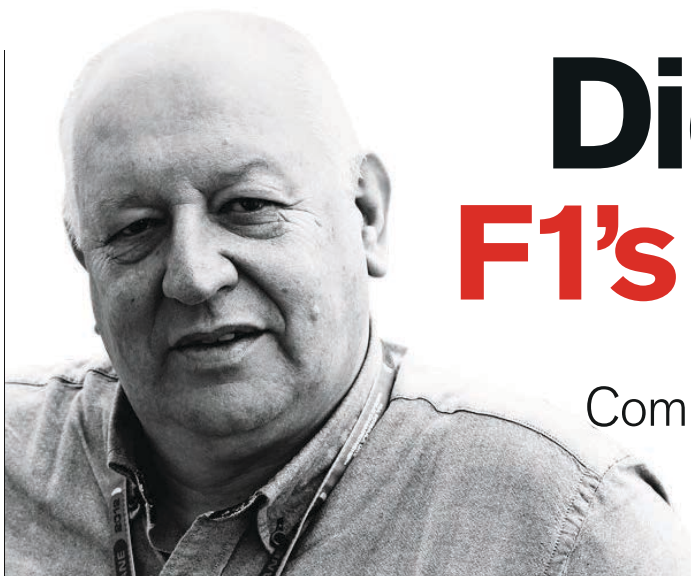
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April 19th	Whilton Mill - Extended Circuit
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July 19th	Rye House - Full Circuit
August 16th	Daytona Sandown Park - Alternate Circuit
September 20th	Clay Pigeon - Full Circuit
October 18th	Daytona Tamworth - Extended Circuit
November 15th	Daytona Milton Keynes - International

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Dieter Rencken

F1's political animal

Comparisons with the recent English Premier League TV deal cast a revealing light on the state of F1's own rights revenues

To paraphrase Sir Winston Churchill in this, the year of the 50th anniversary of the great man's death: never before in the history of sport have so few paid so much for just three full seasons as have Sky and BT for the Premier League football rights.

The contract is exceedingly complex and, as such, not directly comparable to F1. Plus, this is, of course, a motorsport publication, so full analysis of that combined £5.136bn deal is best left to broadsheet journalists with sight of the salient details. However, it is sufficient to record that the two broadcasters are paying £120k per minute of football over the full duration.

There are obviously more moments of action during a Premier League season than an F1 season but, whichever way it is sliced, this marks an eye-watering sum for 60 seconds of sporting action – it would equate to £21.6m per grand prix weekend (qualifying and race), or almost £500m over a full 20-race season: roughly speaking, this is what Formula One Management annually generates from all F1 global TV, radio and internet rights, claimed to reach over 450m unique viewers.

Expressed differently, the Premier League deal, for a domestic championship played on an island with a population of 65m, has two broadcasters paying an increase of 70 per cent over the comparable 2013-2016 period. In itself, this is a similar increase over the previous equivalent 2009-2013 block. This would suggest that FOM's TV electronic media rights revenues

– £6m per 90-minute match. The combined annual value of British F1 TV contracts is said to be £40m, or £2m per 180-minute grand prix block.

The Premier League's audience ratings are estimated to be up seven per cent year-on-year (by comparison, F1's ratings declined 30 per cent over three seasons), suggesting average British viewerships of around 7m per match. Last year's Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, a showdown featuring Britain versus Germany, peaked at 7m (split 6m/1m between BBC/Sky), yet FOM earned a third of the Premier League's income for the same audience.

Worse – for F1's teams contesting allegedly the world's largest annual sporting block, that is – is that the Premier League distributes 90 per cent of income to 20 participating clubs, with the latest numbers showing the gap from top to bottom as being £97m to £62m (a 30 per cent differential).

FOM distributes 50 per cent of revenues to (a diminishing number of) eligible teams (previously 11, now nine confirmed), with a further 12.5 per cent distributed to elite outfits, netting a whopping 37.5 per cent for venture fund house CVC Capital Partners!

F1's top-to-bottom spread is equally illuminating, running to 90 per cent, with top earners Ferrari and Red Bull last season raking in £100m and straggler Marussia taking home £6.7m for 11th, based on the 2013 season. Any wonder the last-named plunged into administration, joined in its fate by the other bottom-two team, Caterham?

“The Premier League deal is roughly what FOM makes annually from all F1 global media rights”

should, by this metric, rocket to £800m (\$1.2bn) by 2020.

Yet F1's income is largely stagnating or, at best, creeping north despite a plethora of shared subscription and free-to-air deals such as the Sky F1/BBC arrangement, the latest of which was struck in Australia. Against that, the home of the last grand prix to be added to the calendar, Russia – which has an enormous untapped F1 market – currently has no TV deal.

Germany, despite delivering a second multiple champion in as many decades and world constructors' champion Mercedes, still has no race contract. So broadcasters fear continued viewer apathy. Last year, the country that gave the world the automobile experienced a 30 per cent drop in TV audiences.

The Premier League's deal suggests it attracts massive domestic viewerships, but a comparison of the latest statistics shows this to be not the case: overseas sales are estimated to make up 40 per cent of the total value, leaving the 'British' cost at £3bn, or £1bn per full season

All this would not be critical for F1 were the Premier League's deal a one-off, but sources claim Turkey's football league, played in a country that totally shuns F1 despite having arguably the best new “drome”, also shades F1 in both the viewership and revenue stakes.

This suggests that comments made by FOM and team bosses alike that TV sport audiences and viewer habits across the world have dramatically changed (for worse) are disingenuous at best, and indicate that F1 should instead be searching inwardly for the cause of the stagnation and switch-off.

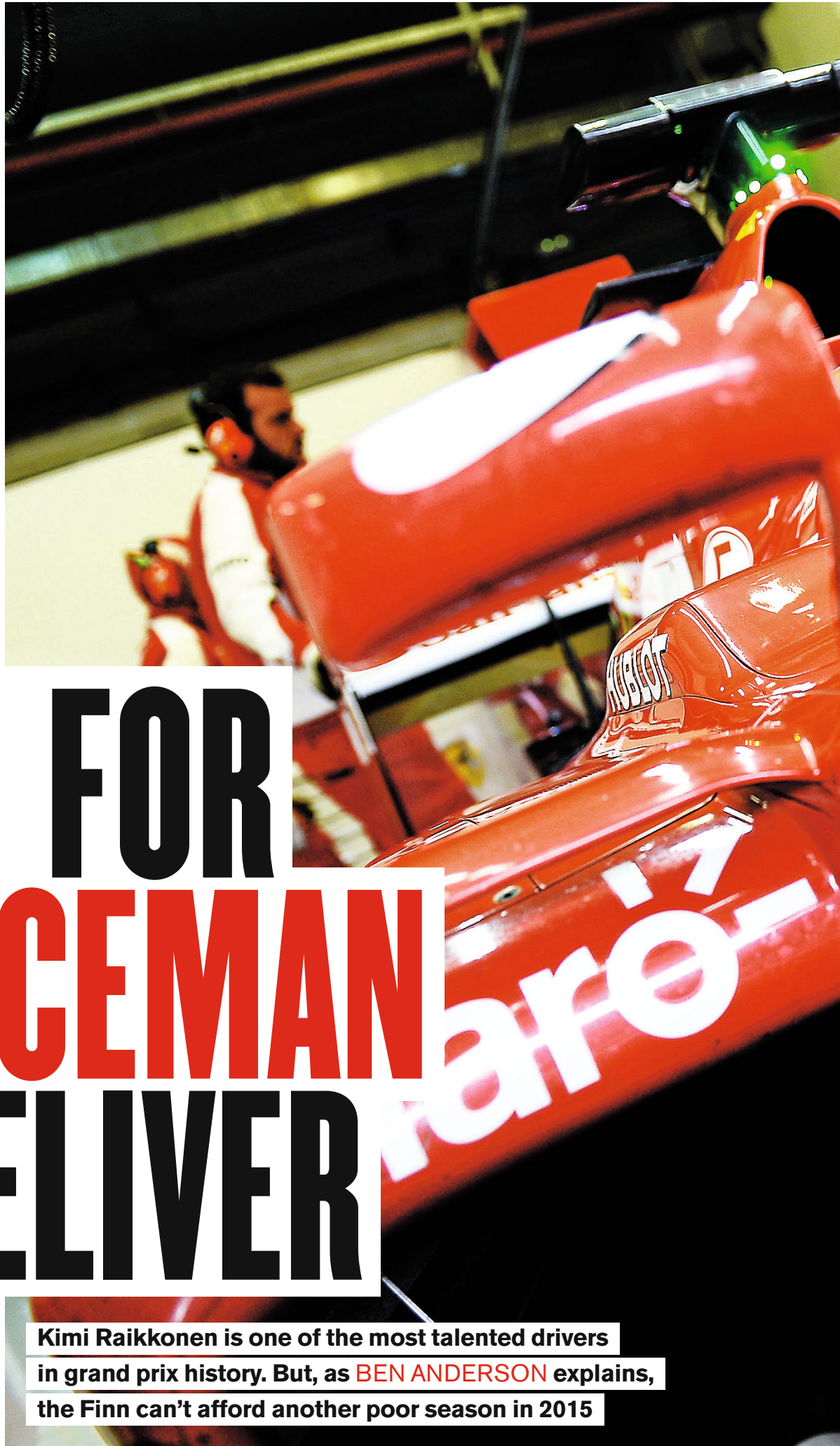
It is oft said that F1 supremo Bernie Ecclestone is a superb salesman, but when domestic sport leagues requiring no more than 22 human legs and a leather bladder emphatically out-earn a world championship featuring the globe's fastest cars, then clearly football is doing by far the superior job at marketing itself to broadcasters and viewing public alike. Therein lies the difference: sales versus marketing. ☞

2007

2008

2009

2014



14

TIME FOR THE **ICEMAN** TO DELIVER

2015

Kimi Raikkonen is one of the most talented drivers in grand prix history. But, as **BEN ANDERSON** explains, the Finn can't afford another poor season in 2015



Kimi Raikkonen is undoubtedly one of the greatest natural talents ever to grace Formula 1. Until Red Bull signed Max Verstappen, granting him the chance to make his F1 debut aged 17 (after one season of car racing), and thus galvanising the FIA into overhauling its superlicence criteria, Raikkonen was the sport's outstanding example of prodigious potential.

Formula Renault UK champion aged 21, a points scorer on his F1 debut for Sauber a few months later, and podium finisher for McLaren the following season (having replaced double world champion Mika Hakkinen in the team's 2002 line-up), Raikkonen – now 35 – is one of most successful drivers in the sport's history, with 20 grand prix victories, 77 podium finishes and 16 pole positions to his name.

Like Verstappen, Raikkonen made his first moves in F1 aboard a Red Bull-liveried car. But, while the Dutch teenager embarks on a first heady campaign in motorsport's premier league, Raikkonen may well be conducting a farewell tour.

The Finn has entered the final season of a guaranteed two-year deal with Ferrari (with an option to continue into 2016), and – option or not – he will have to raise his game significantly if he wants to extend that stay.

Statistically speaking, the 2014 season goes down as the worst of Raikkonen's F1 career. Having rejoined the Scuderia from Lotus for a second spell at Maranello, the 2007 world champion was obliterated by team-mate Fernando Alonso. Alonso qualified ahead more often (and usually by a large margin), scored 106 more points and finished six places further up in the drivers' championship (the largest gap between scoring team-mates on the grid). Not since Raikkonen's rookie campaign in '01 has he fared this badly. It was the first time since that fledgling season that he failed to finish on the podium and, if you apply the current scoring system to his results for Sauber that year, he would have been 11 points better off in '01 than he was in '14.

Ferrari would have expected far better when it re-signed Raikkonen. In fairness, it knew what it was getting. After all, Ferrari paid him *not* to race for the final two years of his previous contract, so

that Alonso could join the team alongside Felipe Massa. But even if Ferrari thought Alonso would have the edge over a season, it surely presumed Raikkonen would run the Spaniard much closer than he did.

Perhaps Ferrari took encouragement from Raikkonen's race-winning performances with Lotus upon his return to F1 in 2012. Strong results at Enstone restored Raikkonen's reputation as one of the sport's most effective operators, but the naysayers who wrote him off in '09, when he was largely overshadowed by Massa before the Brazilian's season-ending accident in Hungary, will feel vindicated by last year's record. To the watching world, Raikkonen appears a pale imitation of the driver who won the '07 title and dazzled the world during his time with McLaren.

But why did 'The Iceman' melt away in the searing competitive heat of F1 last season? There's no doubt that the F14 T wasn't one of the finest F1 cars Ferrari ever produced, but Alonso hustled it to podiums, and a near-victory in Hungary. Raikkonen didn't come close... He has admitted that he struggled all season to get it handling the way he likes, complaining constantly about the front-end feel of the car. But this is nothing new – he struggled with this during the latter phase of his first spell at Ferrari. Raikkonen is highly sensitive to understeer. He deplores a car that won't turn in the way he wants. He says it's been that way ever since he started racing.

"Since go-karts, if it doesn't turn on the front bite I never liked it – my driving style is more to try and carry the speed into the corners and try to keep it up in the mid-corner," Raikkonen explained at the end of last year. "It's just the way that I'm used to doing things. Obviously we change it a little bit every year and with every car, but I still think it's the fastest way – when you get the car working for you as you want."

Occasionally, such as in Spain, Singapore and Brazil, Raikkonen looked genuinely competitive compared with Alonso in qualifying, but the average gap between them on Saturdays across 19 events was larger than between any other team-mate pairing on the grid.

F1 cars changed a lot last year: they had less downforce, harder tyres, new braking systems and completely different engines compared with the ones with which Raikkonen got reacquainted to Formula 1 at Lotus. Ferrari technical director ▶



Raikkonen made big leap to F1 with Sauber in 2001



THE VETTEL EFFECT

Though perhaps not quite as pressing, Ferrari new boy Sebastian Vettel faces similar questions to team-mate Kimi Raikkonen this season on the subject of his performances behind the wheel.

Vettel has come to Maranello aiming to emulate boyhood hero Michael Schumacher and return Ferrari to the top of the Formula 1 tree. But unlike Schumacher (who joined the Scuderia as a reigning double world champion), Vettel arrives off the back of his first winless campaign since becoming a full-time F1 driver in late 2007.

Like Raikkonen, Vettel struggled with the handling characteristics generated by the new V6 hybrid turbo formula, and was soundly beaten



The Finn set the fastest time at Jerez in the SF15-T

by his team-mate. But unlike Raikkonen (defeated by arguably the most complete driver on the grid in Fernando Alonso), Vettel was a reigning four-time world champion beaten by a relative nobody in Daniel Ricciardo – as superb as the Australian rising star's performances undoubtedly were.

Raikkonen and Vettel benefited from extreme levels of exhaust-blown downforce at their previous teams and then struggled badly when that was taken away. Perhaps now the cars are getting faster and more stable (as lost downforce is recovered by other means), they will both show more of the searing speed that made them phenomena.

At 27, Vettel has time on his side and the potential advantage of being Alonso's replacement (on a long-term contract). The German exited the car to warm applause after comfortably setting the pace on his first two days of pre-season testing at Jerez, suggesting the Scuderia is already taking to its new charge. As well as that, Vettel's pace on medium-compound tyres also caught the attention of Mercedes driver Nico Rosberg.

So perhaps this move is already turning out to be the tonic Vettel needed to rediscover his old magic.



It's all smiles for Ferrari new boy Vettel – for now

RAIKKONEN'S FERRARI YEARS

2007

Victory on debut in Australia. Although he wins the championship after winning the final two races of the season, it's an erratic year. With the Bridgestone tyres having more of an understeer balance, he struggles with turn-in and is often outpaced by team-mate Felipe Massa.



2008

Two early-season wins promise a title bid but, with the understeer balance problem still there, it's Massa who leads Ferrari's charge. But 10 fastest laps, set in stints where the rear tyres had degraded to compensate for the understeer, showed the pace was there.



2009

The Ferrari is a poor car, but a stunning win at Spa is the highlight of what is a pretty good season for Raikkonen once machinery is taken into account. Paid off at the end of the year to make way for big-name signing Fernando Alonso.



2014

Raikkonen's results are the worst of his F1 career (on the current scoring system, he'd have scored more points in his first year with Sauber) as he struggles badly for front-end feel. Fourth place is as good as it gets, although he could have been on the podium in Monaco.



► James Allison, who also worked with Raikkonen at Lotus, reckoned the particulars of his driving style didn't mesh particularly well with the latest generation of F1 car.

"Kimi's style is quite heavy on the front tyres and gentle on the rear," Allison explained after the final race of 2014 in Abu Dhabi. "Given that F1 cars are, in general, rear-limited, this has been one of Kimi's trump cards in the past. However, for Kimi to be able to exploit this advantage he needs a car/tyre combination that allows him to lean on the front axle quite heavily."

Allison also reckoned the fact that Ferrari produced a poor car for the first season of F1's V6 hybrid turbo era amplified Raikkonen's difficulties. "The 2014 cars were inherently tricky," he adds. "On top of this, the F14 T was not an easy car. We improved it considerably during the year, but it still lacked downforce and power relative to the competition, and had certain handling characteristics that were a little unpredictable."

"Kimi has spent a lifetime racing cars where he can use his gifts on the entry of a corner, leaving him free to be gentle with the rears on exit. Being gentle on the rear is a real asset over a season and our challenge is to produce a car that allows Kimi to exploit that talent."

Critics will argue that the very best drivers should adapt to their given circumstances, that if Raikkonen belongs in that group, he should adjust his technique behind the wheel to get more from the car. The man himself does not agree, arguing that he will be much more effective if a car can be moulded to suit him.

"I have been in F1 quite a few years, I have never changed my driving style and I will never change; it's not the right way to fix problems," he argues.

Ferrari seems to have accepted this uncompromising approach and made significant effort with the design of this year's SF15-T to make Raikkonen more comfortable. Allison hopes a stronger front-end mid-corner, combined with more support from the rear under braking (and a stronger rear construction from control-tyre-supplier Pirelli that will increase the contact patch and will partly offset any accelerated thermal degradation caused by trying to overcome the understeer balance inherent to cars running on these tyres) will help Raikkonen return to form.

"It will be the rear [tyre] casing that is the most significant," explains Allison. "It allows the car better support under [cornering] load and gives the driver more confidence."

But with Raikkonen's problems now clearly defined and addressed by the team, he will run out of excuses if results don't follow. Ferrari has paid him off handsomely before; if he drives poorly this year the team can easily let him go with much less fanfare.

Regardless of what he says publicly, the pressure is on Raikkonen. Ferrari has held tentative talks with other drivers – notably Raikkonen's fellow Finn Valtteri Bottas – so it's clear the incumbent is no longer a cast-iron first option for the Scuderia should results fall short.

But there is hope. Being team-mate to Alonso is not easy for any driver (just ask Massa) and, with the Spaniard returning to McLaren, there is perhaps a chance for Raikkonen's preferences to receive greater priority at Maranello, and for him to become a leader of the team. But history does not suggest this dynamic is likely to emerge. Raikkonen clearly prefers to simply turn up at the track and drive as fast as he can. A leave-no-stone-unturned work ethic is not something associated with his natural speed. He is almost too talented for his own good.

The arrival of four-time world champion

Sebastian Vettel as his new team-mate may be good news for Raikkonen – the two get on well away from the track and appear to have compatible driving styles – but Vettel is the definition of a workaholic driver and Raikkonen may well find Ferrari naturally gravitates towards its new signing at his expense. There is a pattern of this through the recent years of Raikkonen's career, and he has so far shown little appetite to correct the trend. In short, if the car is good, expect Raikkonen to deliver results; if not, then the jury is out...

Further complicating matters is the well-worn topic of his motivation, a question regularly batted away with a weary frown (or occasionally some colourful language, as in China last year). He has already spoken of (and tentatively explored) a

desire for a career outside F1: trying rallying and NASCAR, and expressing interest in racing at Le Mans and in World Rallycross. The fact that he has recently become a father is another question mark. It was interesting to note, after his first day of pre-season testing at Jerez, a visibly knackered Raikkonen say he would "rather be at home" than be driving the new Ferrari. Perhaps he will naturally find himself drawn to a more flexible (and less draining) schedule after this season is over.

The good news for Kimi fans is that he was far

happier with the SF15-T after his first taste than he was with last year's F14-T, describing the new car as a "completely different story". For a man only interested in winning, that is welcome.

But the fact remains that Raikkonen underperformed last year, so there must be plenty of room for improvement on his side.

Raikkonen is one of the few key personnel to remain at Ferrari after last year's drastic internal overhaul. Whether his stay of execution remains temporary will unquestionably be down to whether he delivers on track in 2015.

It's time to see what 'The Iceman' is made of. ❧

“CRITICS WILL ARGUE THAT THE BEST DRIVERS SHOULD ADAPT. RAIKKONEN DOESN'T AGREE”



Conferring with Allison and the Ferrari crew



Raikkonen reckons SF15-T is "completely different story"

BARCELONA TEST KEY FOR FERRARI

The first test at Barcelona will give us a clear idea of whether Ferrari is genuinely in the hunt for race wins.

JONATHAN NOBLE explains why



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All eyes will be on Ferrari at Barcelona this weekend to see if the Maranello team's strong start to testing in Jerez was genuine progress or a flash in the pan.

With Sebastian Vettel and Kimi Raikkonen having been quickest on three of the four days at the Jerez test, there are indications that the Italian outfit has hit the ground running with its new car and engine package. But while no one believes that it is yet in a position to threaten the dominant Mercedes team, rivals are mindful that the red cars could be closer to the front than many had expected after its disappointing 2014 campaign.

Daniel Ricciardo, whose Red Bull team had its own share of troubles



Ricciardo was not so happy at Jerez test

THOMPSON/GETTY

in Jerez, is one who says that Ferrari's form has been a surprise.

"We are aware of the laps Mercedes did and the laptime Ferrari put down, which looked good," he said last week. "We expect nothing less from Mercedes, to be honest, but Ferrari looked like they came out pretty strong."

FERRARI WANTS ANSWERS ITSELF

Ferrari insiders say that the early feedback from the SF15-T at Jerez was encouraging. The car was responsive to set-up changes, and its improved traction and driveability were evident after those issues proved particularly troublesome last year.

Yet, despite this encouragement, there remain some question marks over what can be achieved. Of particular concern will be the fact that, despite being fastest overall on laptime, the Ferrari was still no match for the Mercedes in the speed traps.

Figures obtained by AUTOSPORT showed that Ferrari's top speed of 186.9mph was well short of the top Mercedes-powered cars which were recorded doing 191.1mph. That is why new Ferrari chairman Sergio Marchionne supports the view that Barcelona will deliver a clear picture



McLaren will hope for better reliability at Barcelona test

TEE/LAT

of where his team stands.

"I am encouraged by the performance of the new car, though it is one thing to do a quick lap, another to do an entire race," he told reporters in New York last week.

"I do not expect miracles, but it is important to see progress. At the Barcelona test, I expect the ultimate proof of what we have done so far."

WHY BARCELONA IS A BETTER INDICATOR

Single day lap times are rarely a good indication of form in the early stages of testing, as the huge variable of fuel weight can have a dramatic impact on the performance of the cars.

Even when Ferrari has struggled in the past, it has often managed to deliver a single stand-out lap in early testing. What was different this time, though, was the fact that

it was consistently fast throughout each day of the test – rather than opting for a one-off glory run.

Even so, Jerez is notorious for throwing up curveball indicators. The highly abrasive surface and cold temperatures are unique and the circuit does not have the high-speed aerodynamic demands of other venues.

That is why Barcelona is a much better indicator. Its mixture of high-speed and low-speed corners are much more relevant for gauging downforce levels.

Plus, the forces the track puts through the cars mean that long-run performances give a much better indication of tyre degradation, which is key to current F1 car performance.

As Ricciardo said: "Jerez is a place we don't race at, plus we never drive in conditions that are five-to-eight

Did Ferrari's form flatter to deceive in Jerez testing?



STALEV/LAT

degrees [temperature]. And the track is really, really abrasive. "They [Ferrari] look good but are they going to be the same once we start racing in race conditions? "I think Barcelona will get us a step closer to that. But not taking anything away from that, they have come out in good form."

RIVALS' FORM WILL IMPACT FERRARI

Closer analysis of the testing form in Jerez also suggested that what was on display was far from representative of real pace. Mercedes focused on long runs and reliability, Red Bull was slowed by Renault issues, Williams never consistently pushed for times and McLaren was stymied by Honda

woes. Each team's situation was a help in shuffling Ferrari forward – so Barcelona should give a much better idea of where things stand. It was clear from Jerez that Mercedes was obsessed with reliability, and was not worried about ultimate laptime. However, with mechanical updates set to be introduced this week, there will likely become a need for it to start ramping up its pace a bit. Renault knew heading into Jerez that it could not push things as hard as it wanted to because of reliability concerns – but its situation will be very different this time out. Renault's director of operations Remi Taffin said: "The energy store in particular was being run as aggressively as we could, but we

need to explore the limits of the parts in Barcelona to know how far we can push them. "Likewise, a water pump issue was due to a relatively young part we tested on track rather than running extensively in the dyno – we are conscious that we need to pull out all the stops. We have learnt a lot from the running and have now put in place measures to prevent any further problems of this nature going forward." Honda, too, has been working hard at its Milton Keynes and Sakura facilities, implementing fixes for the problems that hit the McLaren's running at the Jerez test. Eliminating the issues that kept it in the garage for a lot of Jerez should have been helped hugely

"It is one thing to do a quick lap, another to do an entire race"

Ferrari chairman Sergio Marchionne

by the team electing to use some of its filming day allocation in Barcelona this week. Although testing restrictions limit running to just over 60 miles per day, that was still more than it managed on occasions in Jerez when laps were unrestricted.

Williams too will be eager to find out more about the real limits of the FW37 after ticking off much of its checks in Jerez. Felipe Massa is well aware that, after the possibility of a false dawn for everyone in Jerez, things will get more serious this weekend if one team continues to dominate the timing sheets.

"I think maybe if these guys that were doing a quick lap time, like Ferrari, if they stay the same for Barcelona and impress with laptime, then maybe we start to think they are going to be there," he said. ❧



Susie Wolff will test Williams on day one

XPB IMAGES/LAT

BARCELONA TEST LINE-UP

February 19-22, 2015

TEAM	DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3	DAY 4
Mercedes	Hamilton	Rosberg	Hamilton	Rosberg
Red Bull	Ricciardo	Ricciardo	Kvyat	Kvyat
Williams	Wolff	Bottas	Massa	Massa/Bottas
Ferrari	Raikkonen	Raikkonen	Vettel	Vettel
McLaren	Button	Button	Alonso	Alonso
Force India	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
Toro Rosso	Verstappen	Sainz Jr	Verstappen	Sainz Jr
Lotus	Maldonado	Palmer	Maldonado	Grosjean
Sauber	Nasr	Ericsson	Ericsson	Nasr



Renault evaluating works team return

The French marque is reconsidering its whole Formula 1 strategy. **JONATHAN NOBLE** explains how and why

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Renault is evaluating whether it must rethink its entire Formula 1 strategy in a process that could result in the return of a fully-branded works team.

After a full review of its engine operations last year following a disappointing 2014 campaign, Renault Sport F1 has already comprehensively restructured its engine programme. But beyond the staffing and technical changes

already made to help push customer teams Red Bull and Toro Rosso up the grid, it is now also looking at whether or not its whole approach to F1 needs to change

Renault F1's managing director Cyril Abiteboul told AUTOSPORT: "We are here for marketing. So if from a marketing perspective we need to do things a little bit differently. We are open minded.

"There is no ego. The priority is to get the marketing messages that

we want to deliver in the sport in the most cost-efficient manner."

MAXIMISING BENEFITS

The push to re-evaluate how best to maximise its value from F1 is being led by Abiteboul.

The Frenchman, who rejoined Renault last year after a spell as Caterham's team principal, believes that with two years to run on its contracts with Red Bull and Toro Rosso the time has come to consider

its long-term game plan. One of the key factors influencing his thoughts is the widespread belief that Renault did not make the most of promoting its four consecutive world title doubles with Red Bull.

Part of the reason for this was that Red Bull had a tie-up with Renault's luxury car brand Infiniti in 2011, which expanded to become title sponsor from 2013. This limited Renault's ability to market the results as wins for its main brand.

Abiteboul has also questioned whether or not having its plans based solely around two Red Bull-owned teams is ideal – with last year's partners Lotus having switched to Mercedes and Caterham having dropped out of F1.

"2014 was very expensive for us," he says. "We moved from four customers including very good teams, including the relationship with Enstone, to having two teams both being under the ownership and control of Red Bull.

"It means that in effect that we only have one customer, and our priority is to satisfy that customer.

RENAULT F1 ENGINES IN NUMBERS

168
WINS

12 CHAMPIONSHIPS

213 POLES

168 FASTEST LAPS

6587.5
TOTAL POINTS

538 RACES STARTED

“We need to be a credible player and you gain credibility from both the money you invest and your technical ability”

CYRIL ABITEBOUL



“But it is a situation where we are fully dependent on Red Bull. Is it sustainable for Renault? That is a question mark. I am not saying yes and I am not saying no. Right now, we want to have a good relationship with them.”

RENAULT'S OPTIONS

The most obvious way for Renault to change its approach to F1 would be for it to go back to running its own team, or purchasing a current one outright – as it last did from 2002 until the end of 2011 (what is now the Lotus team was sold by Renault to Genii Capital at the end of 2010, but continued to compete as Renault the following season).

But Abiteboul has made it clear that there is no appetite within Renault to go this far.

“I don't think having our own team and dealing with the debt and so on, recruiting very expensive people, is the most cost-efficient

way of doing that,” he says. “I think we have in Red Bull and Toro Rosso two fantastic platforms that can allow us to do that. Will we be able to do that? I think that is a question mark for 2015.”

Though Renault may not go as far as buying its own team, its options include taking a shareholding in an existing team, or taking over a team's naming rights.

AUTOSPORT understands that former Mercedes technical director Bob Bell, who worked at Renault's F1 team during its title glory years in 2005/2006, is poised for a role in helping Renault evaluate its options. Abiteboul is clear, however, that Bell is not being lined up for a job within the engine department.

“Bob is a fantastic person,” says Abiteboul. “But Bob has no particular engine background – so I will not see Bob in our engine organisation at this point in time.”

When asked to clarify whether it is possible Bell could join in the future in another role, Abiteboul replies: “Yeah... the world is full of options and the future is unknown. The future is to be written.”

PERFORMANCE IS PRIORITY

Before Renault gives the green light to any change of its F1 plans, though, it knows that it must deliver more on track this season. For if it cannot challenge Mercedes at the front of the grid then there is little point in expanding its presence within the sport, especially with more changes possible for the 2017 season.

“Our priority is to get the engine right,” explains Abiteboul. “We need to be a credible player in the sport and you gain credibility from both the money that you are capable of investing and also your technical ability to perform on track. And this is the priority.

“Once this is sorted out and once we have a clear understanding of the evolution of the engine regulations, which is a little bit of an unknown at the minute, then we will be capable of developing further our road map for Renault in F1.”

A HISTORY OF RENAULT IN F1



1977

Renault made its F1 debut with a new turbocharged RS01 car at the **1977** British Grand Prix. The striking-looking machine earned the nickname 'The Yellow Teapot'.

The following year Renault scored its first world championship points, when Jean-Pierre Jabouille finished fourth at Watkins Glen.

1979



At Dijon in **1979**, Jabouille delivered Renault its first victory and, over the following years, its works team moved on to fight for the world championship.

Alain Prost came closest to triumphing in **1983** but lost out to Nelson Piquet's Brabham in the season finale at Kyalami.

1985



By the end of **1985**, Renault's management decided to close down the works team and focus on supplying customers.

But despite taking two wins with Ayrton Senna in **1986**, Renault withdrew from F1 completely amid the turbo clampdown.

1989



It returned in **1989** supplying engines to Williams for the start of an era that would deliver a spate of championships with the Grove-based team and Benetton.

However, it quit F1 again at the end of **1997** although the engines remained, rebadged as Mecachrome.

1997



Renault could not stay out for long, though, and after buying Benetton in **2001** it became the official works team the following year. The Enstone-based outfit would take titles in **2005** and **2006** and keep the Renault name until the end of 2011.

2002



At the start of **2007**, Renault began supplying engines to Red Bull – and after helping the team take its first win in **2009** it powered a sequence of four consecutive title wins from **2010** to **2013**.

2009



It lost out to Mercedes last year, but a restructuring of its programme has raised hopes of a more competitive **2015**.



Renault's engine facility has made world champions

LAST RIDE OF THE DRIVE FOR FIVE

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It has been a long wait for Jeff Gordon's fifth NASCAR Sprint Cup championship. **MARK GLENDENNING** asks if the legend, who has taken pole for the Daytona 500, can bag a farewell title

There's an art to the farewell tour; one that arguably was perfected by the NBA stars of the 1980s: first by the 76ers great Julius 'Dr. J' Irving, and later by LA Lakers icon Kareem Abdul-Jabbar.

Contemporary accounts in LA newspapers applauded Abdul-Jabbar's sign-off in 1989 for being less crassly commercial than Dr. J's, on the basis that the gifts he was lavished with as he visited each arena for the last time were chosen for their reflection of his personality rather than their monetary value: jazz CDs, a VCR, a fishing rod. That stance was undermined somewhat when his team-mates gave him a white Rolls Royce, but you get the point.

There will be no Kareem-style sign-off for Jeff Gordon as he completes his final lap of the NASCAR Sprint Cup calendar this year, although there will be accolades from peers, even if it is just in the form of ovations at drivers' meetings rather than expensive automobiles. And even that is an

ordeal that team-mate Dale Earnhardt Jr admitted last week that Gordon is "dreading".

"I want my focus to be on driving that race car to the best of my ability," Gordon says. "And I don't think that you can do that and try to have these retirement-type of festivities every weekend."

Instead, Gordon's focus is upon closing the circle in the right way. His Cup career began with at the 1992 season finale at Atlanta. That the same race also marked the final appearance by Richard Petty would in retrospect bestow that weekend with a kind of symbolic significance: one era of NASCAR ended, another began.

Even before you take the elements of NASCAR that Gordon helped to usher in (not least of which is six-time champion Jimmie Johnson, whom Gordon mentored), his own record makes for impressive reading. Four championships. Ninety-two wins. Seventy-seven poles. True, Petty once won 27 races in a single year, but in the pre-Winston era, NASCAR had a 64-race schedule. Getting within range of 100 wins with just over 30 races per season is a very different challenge. ▶



MEYERGETTY

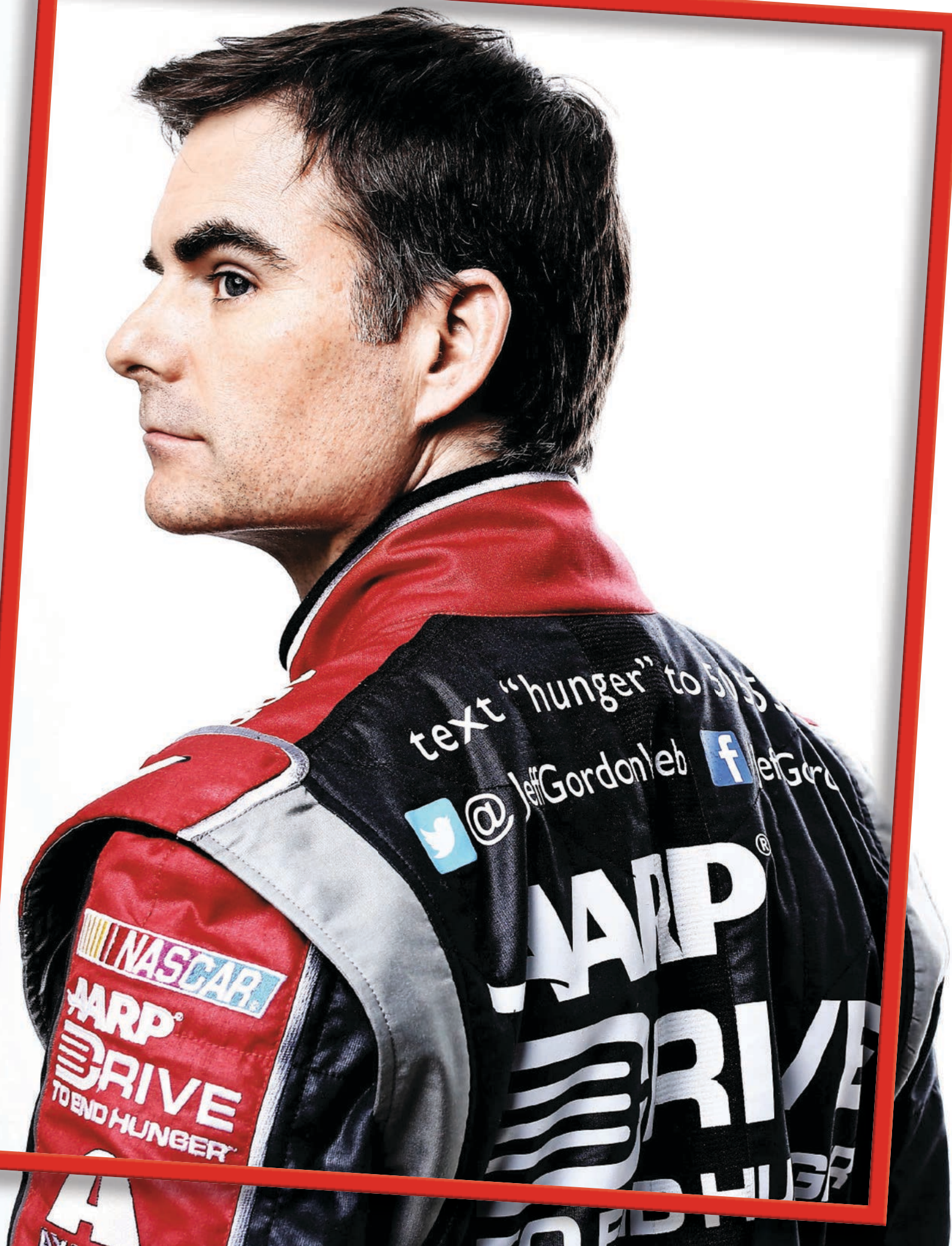


ANGER
LIVE TO END HUNGER
Real Possibilities

Hendrick
BOSCH
FREIGHTLINER
Rite Seat
MAC
TOOLS
SIEMENS

DAYTONA

APP Real Possibilities



FERREY/GETTY

Gordon showed he's still a contender with four wins in 2014



LYONS/GETTY

► So how does this record stand up across other categories? Michael Schumacher had 91 wins from about half as many starts, but during the German's most dominant years his immense talent was supplemented by a significant technical advantage and a compliant team-mate playing the role of domestique. Gordon had to beat a field that was almost twice as big, that was using more or less the same equipment, and without the benefit of Eddie Irvine running interference.

The only parting gift Gordon wants is a competitive final campaign. There's no cause to believe that he's being unrealistic, either. Just last year, he picked up four victories and finished sixth in the points.

But the hardest thing for any athlete to do is pick when to say goodbye, and Gordon insists that staying in NASCAR beyond 2015 places him at risk of joining the already-swollen ranks of those who hung around for too long.

"You're always trying to figure out when that right time to step away is," he says. "I always said I wanted to step away on my own terms if possible, and I want to be competitive out there, and I hoped I could do that all the way through my final year. This is the right time."

In part, that timing is a simple reflection of the natural order of things. Even the greatest champions are less potent at 43 than they were at 22. In Gordon's case, the issue of natural decline is amplified by the back spasms that have plagued him for over a decade, and which almost forced him to sit out last year's Charlotte race. As recently as last December, Gordon admitted to AUTOSPORT that the back problem was something that he was 'managing' rather than curing, and he says that this played a significant part in his decision.

"Yeah, the back thing played a role," he says. "I think that really more just confirmed things for me rather than anything else. The great stretch and the run that we had and how good we were last year confirmed things even more for me. I was like, 'this is all I could ask for is to be at this point in my career.'"

In a sense, the manner of his withdrawal from the sport is entirely consistent with the way that he competed in it. Gordon essentially helped to define modern-day NASCAR. It was after Rick Hendrick took a chance on Gordon that other teams began to look at young talent more seriously. True, Gordon tore up a lot of equipment during his first full season — his then-crew chief Ray Evernham reportedly once said that they had to replace more than a dozen noses on Gordon's car during 1993. But he was also a fast learner, and Hendrick's faith was repaid when Gordon won at Charlotte a year later. In his third year, he won his first title.

His influence has been felt in other ways, too: he was one of the main agitators for improving safety standards over the past 20 years, and has set an example through his philanthropic activities, including his eponymous children's foundation and work for charities such as Make-A-Wish.

And now he's redefining how to retire. Ironically,



Gordon celebrates winning 1995 title

TAYLOR/GETTY

Gordon won his last title back in 2001



FERREY/GETTY

by announcing his intentions a year ahead, he has neutralised the potential for the issue to become a distraction: talking about it now means that he won't weather as many questions about it during the season. And by doing it now, while his speed is still intact, he has hit that sweet spot in terms of timing — it's better to have people pondering how many races he still could have won in the future than how much better someone else could have done in his seat.

Gordon heads into his farewell season with some nominal targets still to aim for. He has never won a title under the Chase format, for starters. But while he insists that he'll still be pushing as hard as ever, he admits that 2015 is about the big picture; a chance to enjoy stock car racing for what it is before he steps out of the cockpit for the last time.

"I want to have a great year," he says. "Right now, I feel good about it because of the way we ran in '14, but if we don't, it's still a heck of a career. I'm going to try to go out and enjoy myself more than I normally do. Normally I just take it so darn seriously that sometimes no matter how we run, good or bad, I don't always enjoy it to the fullest. I want to enjoy this season to the fullest." ❧

AUTOSPORT'S CHASE PICKS

The first 24 races of the NASCAR season are all about making the Chase for the Sprint Cup.

MARK GLENDENNING picks the drivers he expects to make the cut for the title run-in

Last year, Ryan Newman almost won the NASCAR title. And depending upon where you stand, that was either a masterclass in exploiting loopholes, or an outrage of the highest order. Sunday's Daytona 500 marks the second running of NASCAR Sprint Cup with the latest Chase rules that will lead to 16 drivers (all race winners, with the number

completed by the highest-scoring non-winners) making it into the 10-round shoot-out.

NASCAR overhauled the Chase last year and ushered in a new elimination format, one that was supposed to place a huge premium upon race wins. The tricky bit is that Newman made it to the final four without finishing higher than third. And that place in the final showdown was earned by bumping Kyle Larson into the wall at Phoenix, moving Newman into 11th and earning him the point he needed to progress at the expense of Jeff Gordon.

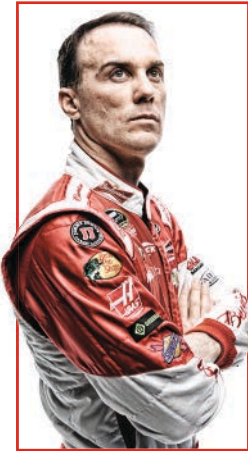
Newman actually gave a pretty good account of himself in the finale at Homestead, but that he was a contender in the first place, ahead of drivers like Brad Keselowski (who won six races, but who simply had a rare bad result on the wrong weekend), caused some rancour.

There will be no changes to the Chase format this time around. And while eventual winner Kevin Harvick and Keselowski proved that the most direct route through the new format is to win, Newman proved there is a side door. That won't have gone unnoticed...



OUR CHASE CERTAINTIES

The eight drivers we think will definitely make The Chase



KEVIN HARVICK

Stewart-Haas Racing #4 Chevrolet

STARTS **S 502** WINS **28** TITLES **2014**

The only surprise about Harvick being crowned as Cup champion last year was that it took so long: in his past five campaigns, he has only finished lower than third once. There was a certain irony in the fact that after coming close so many times in the past with Richard Childress Racing, he sealed the crown first time out with Stewart-Haas and crew chief Rodney Childers. If they had an Achilles' heel last year it was reliability, especially early on. But those were ironed out as the season progressed, and there's no reason not to expect Harvick to mount a stern title defence this time around.

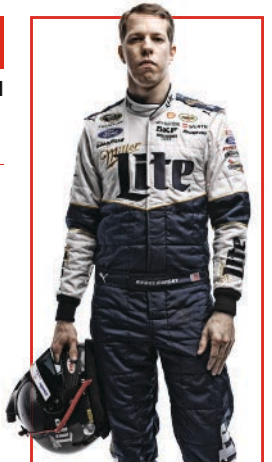


BRAD KESELOWSKI

Team Penske #2 Ford

STARTS **S 197** WINS **16** TITLES **2012**

Few NASCAR drivers divide opinion more than Keselowski. But equally few can match his record over the past few seasons, which is why he continues to serve as Penske's standard-bearer. If his relentlessness and aggression was a contributing factor in his being punched in the face by a Hendrick crew member at Texas, it equally helped him turn in performances such as the remarkable win at Talladega that enabled him to move on to the third round of Chase eliminations. Were it not for an untimely mechanical failure at Martinsville, Keselowski would probably have figured in the final title showdown.



JEFF GORDON

Hendrick Motorsports #24 Chevrolet

STARTS **S 761** WINS **92** TITLES **1995, 1997, 1998, 2001**

A strong campaign in Jeff Gordon's swansong season might seem like the stuff of fairytales, but there's no reason to expect that the four-time champion will be anything less than a solid contender in 2015. True, he has never won a title under the Chase format, but his form last year was excellent, and his eventual elimination was largely circumstantial: had Ryan Newman not clipped Kyle Larson and secured an extra point, or his tyre not been cut at Texas, things could have been very different. But the fact remains that he was a four-time race-winner last year, and his motivation to go out on a high is strong.



DENNY HAMLIN

Joe Gibbs Racing #11 Toyota

STARTS **S 326** WINS **24** BEST SEASON **2nd, 2010**

Denny Hamlin started 2014 by almost winning the Daytona 500, and ended it by almost winning the championship. Somewhere in between, he got a bit of metal stuck in his eye. All in all it was quite a season. Science is still yet to prove a link between motivation and speed, but when you consider that the only thing that stood between Hamlin and the 2014 title was one bad strategy call at Homestead, it's hard to imagine anyone else going into the 2015 Cup season feeling more strongly that they have something to prove.



PORTRAITS: TILTON/GETTY. ACTION SHOTS: LEVITT/HARRELSON/LAT



JOEY LOGANO

Team Penske #22 Ford

STARTS **\$ 219** WINS **8** BEST SEASON **4th, 2014**

There were a couple of lessons to be learned from Joey Logano's 2014 season. Firstly, it quelled any lingering doubts about whether Team Penske was really capable of fielding two competitive Cup cars. And second, it demonstrated that when Brad Keselowski's campaign faltered, Logano was more than up to the task of carrying the team's flag. Last season was a breakout year for the 24-year-old, and while his championship hopes were quashed by a tough outing at Homestead, the experience he gained from his first real title assault will stand him in good stead this time around.



JIMMIE JOHNSON

Hendrick Motorsports #48 Chevrolet

STARTS **\$ 471** WINS **70** TITLES **2006-2010, 2013**

Johnson is the only driver to have qualified for the Chase every year that the system has been in place, and that alone has to place him among the favourites to be somewhere in the mix again this year. That said, 2014 was a poor season by his admittedly high standards – it was the first time that the six-time champion finished outside the top 10 in the points, although he still managed to pick up four wins. He and crew chief Chad Knaus seem content to write last year off as a blip; until they give a reason to believe otherwise, it's reasonable to go along with them.



DALE EARNHARDT JR

Hendrick Motorsports #88 Chevrolet

STARTS **\$ 541** WINS **23** BEST SEASON **3rd, 2003**

Earnhardt had his best season in a decade in 2014; a season in which he opened his account with victory at Daytona and went on to add another three wins over the course of the year. His Chase campaign never really got off the ground, but as a whole the season served as a reminder that there's potentially a championship in him yet. Achieving it in 2015 will depend in part on how quickly he adapts to new crew chief Greg Ives, who steps into the gap left by NBC-bound Steve Letarte, but if that relationship gels it will give Earnhardt a solid foundation.

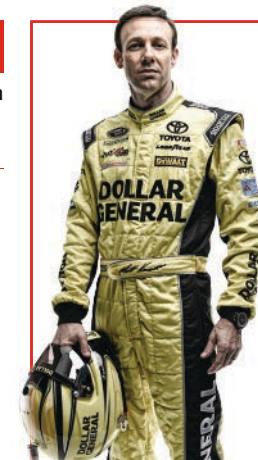


MATT KENSETH

Joe Gibbs Racing #20 Toyota

STARTS **\$ 544** WINS **31** TITLES **2003**

The 2014 season wasn't a great one for Kenseth by many yardsticks: having led the series in race victories during 2013, he failed to make a single visit to Victory Lane last year. And yet he still managed to find a way into the Chase and finish the season in seventh place, which is why he has to be considered once again this time around. Even when he and the team are struggling to find winning car speed on race day, as they did last year, Kenseth is still consistent enough to finish close to whatever his car's actual potential for that particular weekend is.

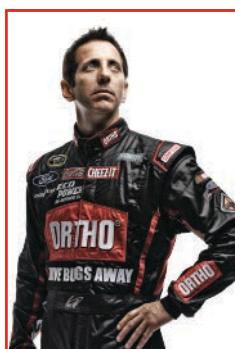


PORTRAITS: TILTON/GETTY. ACTION SHOTS: LEVITT/HARRELSON/LAT



OUR OTHER LIKELY QUALIFIERS

The other eight drivers we think will probably make The Chase (and, yes, Tony Stewart and Ryan Newman are not among our 16)



GREG BIFFLE

Roush Fenway Racing #16 Ford

STARTS **S 438** WINS **19** BEST SEASON **2nd, 2005**

The 2014 Sprint Cup season was a pretty poor one for Biffle, although he did manage to sneak into the Chase on points rather than through race wins. Consistency rather than speed is likely to again be the cornerstone of his 2015 campaign, but he's relishing his status as de facto team leader and will be looking to run up at the front more often.



CLINT BOWYER

Michael Waltrip Racing #15 Toyota

STARTS **S 325** WINS **8** BEST SEASON **2nd, 2012**

The winter cannot end soon enough for Bowyer, who endured a tough 2014 and ended up missing the Chase by just three points, consigning him to his worst championship result of his full-time Cup career. He basically treated the last few races as testing for 2015; now it's time to see whether that paid off.





KYLE BUSCH

Joe Gibbs Racing #18 Toyota

STARTS **S 365** WINS **29** BEST SEASON **4th, 2013**

Busch comes into the 2015 off the back of a strong year, and one that might have positioned him among the title contenders had he not been wiped out in a multi-car accident at Talladega. Nevertheless, he has established himself as a Chase regular over the past few seasons, and there's no reason not to expect more of the same.



AUSTIN DILLON

Richard Childress Racing #3 Chevrolet

STARTS **S 49** BEST FINISH **5th** BEST SEASON **20th, 2014**

A slightly controversial choice, perhaps – or is he? Finished a solid 20th in his rookie season last year, and rarely put a foot wrong. With a year's experience to lean on, the prospect of him picking up the extra positions he'd need to make the Chase seems entirely achievable.



CARL EDWARDS

Joe Gibbs Racing #19 Toyota

STARTS **S 373** WINS **23** BEST SEASON **2nd, 2008 & 2011**

Edwards booked his ticket into the Chase with an early win at Bristol last year, and added another later in the year at Sonoma. That would prove to be the last victory of his 11-year stint with Roush Fenway; now the job is to earn a ninth career Chase slot with his new team.



KASEY KAHNE

Hendrick Motorsports #5 Chevrolet

STARTS **S 396** WINS **17** BEST SEASON **4th, 2012**

Kahne made his third Chase appearance in a row last season, although the rest of his campaign was largely subdued. Hendrick's ongoing faith was proven with a three-year contract extension; now it's up to Kahne to repay them with a little more consistency on race day.



KYLE LARSON

Chip Ganassi Racing #42 Chevrolet

STARTS **S 40** BEST FINISH **2nd** BEST SEASON **17th, 2014**

The Ganassi rookie is one of the brightest prospects in years, and he looked increasingly comfortable amongst NASCAR's finest as the season went on – his three podiums in four races was a particular highlight. He just missed out on making the Chase on points last year.



JAMIE McMURRAY

Chip Ganassi Racing #1 Chevrolet

STARTS **S 438** WINS **7** BEST SEASON **11th, 2004**

Failed to win a points-paying race in 2014, although he consoled himself with a cool million dollars for his victory in the All-Star event. That lack of wins when it counted kept him out of the Chase, but Ganassi has been on an upward trajectory in the Cup for a couple of years now.



NASCAR SPRINT CUP ENTRY LIST

CAR	DRIVER	TEAM	MANUFACTURER
1	Jamie McMurray	Chip Ganassi Racing	Chevrolet
2	Brad Keselowski	Team Penske	Ford
3	Austin Dillon	Richard Childress Racing	Chevrolet
4	Kevin Harvick	Stewart-Haas Racing	Chevrolet
5	Kasey Kahne	Hendrick Motorsports	Chevrolet
6	Trevor Bayne	Roush Fenway Racing	Ford
7	Alex Bowman	Tommy Baldwin Racing	Chevrolet
9	Sam Hornish Jr	Richard Petty Motorsports	Ford
10	Danica Patrick	Stewart-Haas Racing	Chevrolet
11	Denny Hamlin	Joe Gibbs Racing	Toyota
13	Casey Mears	Germain Racing	Chevrolet
14	Tony Stewart	Stewart-Haas Racing	Chevrolet
15	Clint Bowyer	Michael Waltrip Racing	Toyota
16	Greg Biffle	Roush Fenway Racing	Ford
17	Ricky Stenhouse Jr	Roush Fenway Racing	Ford
18	Kyle Busch	Joe Gibbs Racing	Toyota
19	Carl Edwards	Joe Gibbs Racing	Toyota
20	Matt Kenseth	Joe Gibbs Racing	Toyota
22	Joey Logano	Team Penske	Ford
23	JJ Yeley	BK Racing	Toyota
24	Jeff Gordon	Hendrick Motorsports	Chevrolet
26	Jeb Burton	BK Racing	Toyota
27	Paul Menard	Richard Childress Racing	Chevrolet
30	Ron Hornaday Jr	The Motorsports Group	Chevrolet
31	Ryan Newman	Richard Childress Racing	Chevrolet
32	Bobby Labonte/Mike Bliss/Boris Said	Go FAS Racing	Ford
33	Ty Dillon/Travis Kvapil	Hillman-Circle Sport/RCR	Chevrolet
34	David Ragan	Front Row Motorsports	Ford
35	Cole Whitt	Front Row Motorsports	Ford
38	David Gilliland	Front Row Motorsports	Ford
40	Landon Cassill	Hillman-Circle Sport	Chevrolet
41	Kurt Busch	Stewart-Haas Racing	Chevrolet
42	Kyle Larson	Chip Ganassi Racing	Chevrolet
43	Aric Almirola	Richard Petty Motorsports	Ford
44	Reed Sorenson	Team XTREME Racing	Chevrolet
46	Michael Annett	HScott Motorsports	Chevrolet
47	AJ Allmendinger	JTG Daughterty Racing	Chevrolet
48	Jimmie Johnson	Hendrick Motorsports	Chevrolet
51	Justin Allgaier	HScott Motorsports	Chevrolet
55	Michael Waltrip/Brett Moffitt/Brian Vickers*	Michael Waltrip Racing	Toyota
62	Brian Scott/Brendan Gaughan	Premium Motorsports	Chevrolet
78	Martin Truex Jr	Furniture Row Racing	Chevrolet
83	Johnny Sauter/Matt DiBenedetto	BK Racing	Toyota
88	Dale Earnhardt Jr	Hendrick Motorsports	Chevrolet
98	Josh Wise	Phil Parsons Racing	Chevrolet

* Vickers will miss opening two races due to health problems. Waltrip and Moffitt will deputise at Daytona and Atlanta respectively

PART-TIME PROGRAMMES

21	Ryan Blaney	Wood Brothers Racing	Ford (18 rounds)
25	Chase Elliott	Hendrick Motorsports	Chevrolet (5 rounds)
29	Justin Marks	RAB Racing	Toyota (1 round)
66	Mike Wallace	Premium Motorsports	Toyota (1 round)
87	Joe Nemecheck	NEMCO Motorsports	Chevrolet (rounds TBA)
95	Michael McDowell	Leavine Family Racing	Ford (20 rounds)



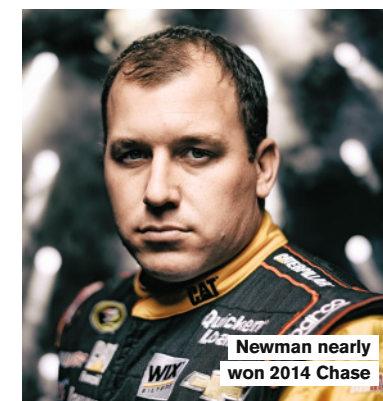
Bayne is heading into his first full Cup season

TILTON/GETTY



Stewart blamed new rules for 2014 form

MEYER/GETTY



Newman nearly won 2014 Chase



Truex will have a second year with Furniture Row

SULLIVAN/GETTY



Blaney will enter 18 races for Wood Brothers

PORTRAITS: TILTON/GETTY. ACTION SHOTS: LEVITT/HARRELSON/LAT

BMR'S BTCC

Colin Turkington and Jason Plato have joined forces for 2015, but the car is unproven and the team young. So how has this partnership come to be, and what should we expect? **SCOTT MITCHELL** asked them



SUPERTEAM



Golin Turkington hits the nail on the head. “Motorsport is such a funny business,” he laughs. “When we finished the season at Brands Hatch, never could I have imagined

I would be in a Volkswagen alongside Jason, my biggest rival!”

To those out of the loop, the prospect of last year’s top two British Touring Car Championship drivers leaving their respective, established front-running outfits to pair up in Team BMR-run Volkswagen CCs is little short of remarkable.

There is no doubting the scale of ambition held by Warren Scott and his fledgling tin-top outfit. After all, it brought series legend Alain Menu back to the BTCC, and the double champion has now been cast aside to make way for arguably the best BTCC line-up since the Yvan Muller-James Thompson Vauxhall pairing in the early noughties.

It would be easy to suggest they have washed up at BMR because better options were closed off. But that’s not fair. While the two best drivers from 2014 did not have free choice on where they could go this year and beyond, options were available. And it’s no coincidence that they have ended up together.

While Turkington made no secret of wanting to stay with West Surrey Racing, he was also in talks with teams inside the BTCC and elsewhere. And BMR was always on the table, especially since he had tested for the team at the end of 2013. As for Plato, his options have also been wide open.

“I started speaking to Warren in the middle part of last year,” says the 2001 and 2010 champion, whose three-year deal with MG came to an end after a 2014 season that, yet again, yielded several wins but no drivers’ title. “One of the things I was impressed with was Warren’s ambition for what he wants to turn BMR into and the style in which he wants to do it. It rang bells inside me. This guy looks like he could be building the next big thing.” ▶

Rivals in 2014 season are now team-mates



Turkington and Plato traded paint last season

► Certainly this feels like a deal that Plato has been working towards for some time, one that Turkington has become a part of along the way as options dwindled. But don't be fooled into thinking it's a forced marriage for Turkington.

BMR wanted him and, with WSR not an option, it was an easy decision to make – if not a simple journey to the eventual destination. The truth is that Plato and Turkington have a mutual appreciation for what Scott is trying to do at BMR. In fact, issued hours apart, their answers might well have been rehearsed.

"I feel it's the best option outside of WSR," Turkington insists. "You want to go somewhere you feel you have the chance to win. Given time, there will be the possibility to do that."

"Just from getting to know Warren, who is motivated and ambitious to succeed in the BTCC, I know I share his enthusiasm. Sometimes you've got to take a risk and step outside your comfort zone. Certainly that's what I've done."

"I always tried to keep my options open because I knew I was in a potentially very tricky situation [with WSR losing its title sponsor eBay; see panel on page 39]. I'd always kept in contact with Warren and in the end that just became the best option for me."

It's clear that Scott has had an impact on both, and neither is shirking away from the effort that is required to turn a podium-challenging, reverse-grid race-winning car into a title-chasing package. Turkington's short-term aspirations for the project are slightly more tempered with an extra hurdle to overcome in the transition from rear-wheel drive to front-wheel drive, but both share the same end goal: a third title.

"I don't feel any pressure to have to beat Jason straight away," insists Turkington. "That's not my immediate goal. I understand I've taken a brave step in coming across to other side."

"There were definite flashes of speed from the VW last year. The potential is there. But you know from the past you need to be consistent to win the title. I think that's something that might take a little bit of time."

Plato, unsurprisingly, is less reserved.

"I think we're in great shape," he muses, not with the arrogance he has been accused of at times, but more from months of pushing through a deal that has been much of his own making. "I think the other guys on the grid will have a little bit of a cold shiver run down their spine when they see what we've got."

"My plan is to go out and win at event one. We want to be popping it on pole and winning; anything less will be a disappointment. The level

of commitment is second to none and in a very short space of time we want to be ready to start as we mean to carry on. The title is what we're here for. We're not out to make friends."

There's a long way to go before that can happen, though the work started in earnest almost as soon as the 2014 season ended. Two leading engineers – Plato's from Triple Eight (Carl Faux) and Turkington's from WSR (Kevin Berry) – have already been recruited and Plato says that there is "a lot of time on the table" just by comparing the base set-up of the car, which is said to be the most aerodynamically efficient on the grid.

"One thing I have found is if you have the right engineering team – and these cars are a bit unusual – and plug in some world-class drivers, that car will win races," Plato continues. "Providing it has no inherent issues in the design or build process, and we know it hasn't."

"We came from nowhere with the MG, and turned it into the best front-wheel drive car on the grid in all conditions. Carl and myself were right in the middle of that. We know how it needs to be set up and what the VW has been like in the past, and there's a lot of time. Slowly but surely over the past six months the pieces have started to come together, and the decision for me to get involved just became easier and easier."

"It's a fantastic team of people, it's well-funded and it has the right ingredients. It has what it needs to bake the best cake there is!"

Unsurprisingly, Scott is delighted to have landed these heavyweights from a driving perspective. But like Plato, he's keen to stress the value of having the technical minds of Berry and Faux and team boss Alan Cole, because it means ►



Engineer Kevin Berry has joined from WSR

JACOB EBREY



EBREY/LAT

“My plan is to win. The title is what we’re here for. We’re not out to make friends” JASON PLATO



Warren Scott: looking to build the next big thing

JACOB EBREY



Plato and Yvan Muller made a potent force in 2001

LAT



Battle lines were drawn between FWD and RWD

► the inexperience of BMR as a team is not the hurdle it might immediately suggest.

“We’ve got two of the best engineers and drivers in the paddock and I think I’ve put together a good team that gives everyone confidence,” reckons Scott.

“We’re over the moon, the feeling in the camp has always been positive but now we couldn’t be more excited. Although we’re only a two-year-old

team, if you look at our years of experience we’ve got a wealth of it.”

With 10 tests planned before the media day, the first due to take place at Thruxton this week, Scott is also leaving no stone unturned in ensuring the package is readily prepared for the season opener at Brands Hatch. “With all the work we’ve done we want to make the best of it,” he points out.

It’s an approach that Turkington is particularly keen on, because he knows exactly what is required to turn potential into the real thing.

“It’s a similar scenario to where I was with the BMW in the first year,” he notes. “It isn’t the finished article yet but that’s the long-term goal.

“The potential is there. I know there’s been a huge amount of work to move the car forward over the winter, and there’s very good staff there.

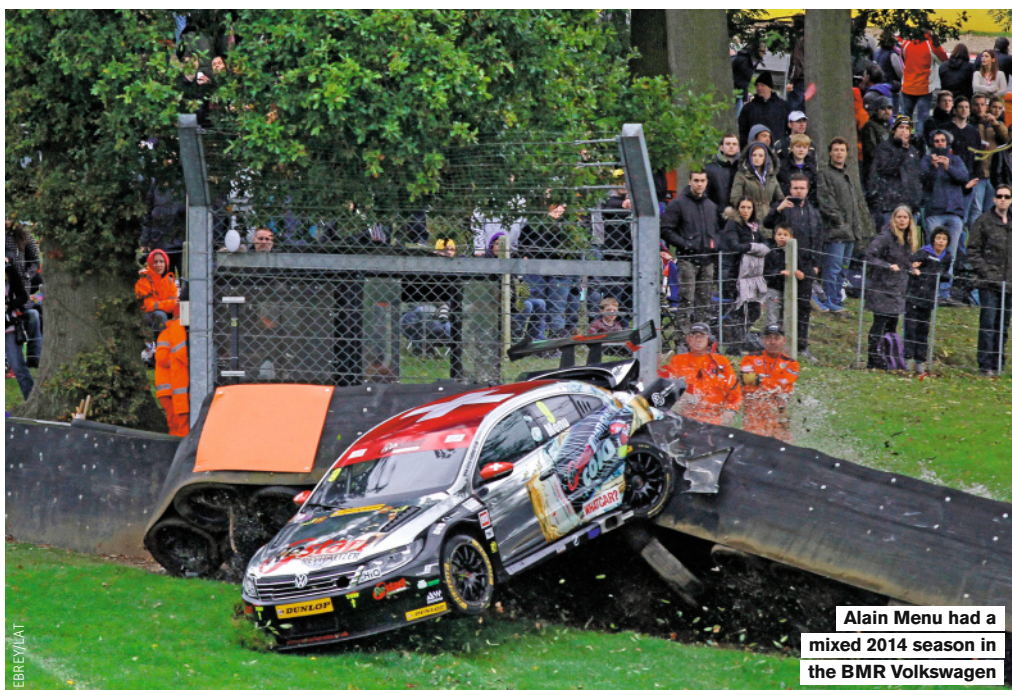
“It’s important to have the mileage before the season starts and get my brain flicked round to the front-wheel drive way of driving. Kevin coming over with me helps that process.”

Two happy champions then, for now. And for the fans, the prospect of two of the very best touring car drivers of this generation to go head-to-head in equal machinery.

Turkington and Plato warred over the 2014 title until the very last round, coming to blows a couple of times against a backdrop of off-track arguments about the BMW’s rear-wheel drive. That doesn’t mean it’s a relationship soured by animosity, but it means that each is eager to trump the other in equal machinery. It’s something Plato is relishing.

“Colin is a positive motivation for me, absolutely. If he outqualifies me by 0.7s at Oulton Park I’ll say the performance of the BMW was right last year, but it ain’t going to happen! I think there’s going to be a very healthy internal competitiveness. We need to make sure we have fun along the way, but no doubt we’ll cross swords at some point.”

While Turkington and WSR never adopted a number-one policy, there was enough between him, Rob Collard and Nick Foster to know where the team’s best chance of success lay. But in his



Alain Menu had a mixed 2014 season in the BMR Volkswagen

TURKINGTON AND WSR: HISTORY REPEATED

When Rob Collard was announced as the third WSR man alongside Andy Priaulx and Sam Tordoff, it's easy to see why unease quickly filtered through British Touring Car Championship supporters. What would happen to the champion? Surely he would not miss out on defending his title for the second time?

The reality was Turkington's title deal had already been signed on the dotted line. While others was lamenting his fortunes, the Northern Irishman was awaiting public confirmation of his bold new direction.

But it wasn't for a lack of desire from him, or WSR boss Dick Bennetts, to keep that title-winning partnership going. After all, Turkington knows very little about life outside WSR. He made his BTCC debut with the satellite Team Atomic Kitten outfit in 2002, has earned two titles and all but two of his 32 race wins with the team, and also dipped into the World Touring Car Championship with it as well.

"I've spent quite a few weeks not knowing if



All but two of Turkington's wins came with WSR



Bennetts lost title sponsor

I would even be racing at all," admits Turkington. "That was not easy to understand, having just won the championship.

"If you'd asked me at any stage last year where I'd be in 2015, I'd have said in the BMW. I hadn't expected that not to continue.

"eBay pulling out really set alarm bells ringing pretty quickly because it was exactly the same scenario as in 2009. I was pretty determined I wouldn't let that happen again."

Bennetts reiterated that the loss of eBay backing

had been the nail in that coffin – but has left the door open for a reunion with Turkington.

"Both parties tried everything to make it work but ultimately it became economically impossible following the announcement from eBay," he explains. "We have parted on very good terms and we're extremely grateful to Colin for everything he has achieved with WSR.

"We're always open to the possibility of working together again in the future but we wish him all the best in his new venture."

new home, especially with a team-mate like Plato, easily Turkington's toughest internal opposition in years, there is definitely no hiding place. But for his part, the champion is not worried.

"Where I've come from there were three equal drivers and the philosophy is the same at BMR," he maintains. "Everybody is going to get the same chance to win. I don't feel pressure to beat Jason straight away. That's not my immediate goal."

Perhaps the more pertinent question is not how the two new team-mates will square up against one another, but how the team will manage it. Is it really ready, in just its second year, to manage two powerhouses if they are on a collision course?

"I've got no worries about that at all," says team boss Scott, who completes the driving strength. "I think the team has coped extremely well with the steps we've taken so far."

This is easily the biggest in the team's fledgling history, though. Stripping it to the bare bones, Scott has managed to lure the current champion and an 85-time race winner to an unproven project with no manufacturer backing, a package that a driver of Alain Menu's calibre failed to make work.

It is, therefore, an indication of what Team BMR has offered Plato and Turkington that both have been willing to dive into the challenge of becoming the first VW driver to win the BTCC. And what it offers them goes beyond a good deal.

"In my young age, to have something that motivates me is important," says Plato. "It's a long-term thing, something quite serious that Warren has put together. He's not playing games.

"I think it's going to be mega, isn't it?" Then he supplies the answer to his own question. "It's going to be amazing." ❧

STATS	COLIN TURKINGTON	JASON PLATO
Debut	2002	1997
Starts	275	455
Wins	32	88
Poles	12	47
Podiums	92	194
Fastest laps	35	79
Titles	2 (2009, 2014)	2 (2001, 2010)

Ogier Steals the Show in the Snow

First Jari-Matti Latvala, then Thierry Neuville, and then Andreas Mikkelsen ran Sebastien Ogier close, but the title holder took a dramatic victory on the very last stage. By **DAVID EVANS**

Photography McKlein.de





Rally Sweden



World Rally Championship
Round 2/13
Karlstad (S)
February 12-15

RESULTS

21 STAGES, 191.391 MILES

1	SEBASTIEN OGIER (F)/JULIEN INGRASSIA (F) VW Motorsport Volkswagen Polo R WRC #1	2h55m30.5s
2	THIERRY NEUVILLE (B)/NICOLAS GILSOUL (B) Hyundai Motorsport Hyundai i20 WRC #7	+6.4s
3	ANDREAS MIKKELSEN (N)/OLA FLOENE (N) VW Motorsport Volkswagen Polo R WRC #9	+39.8s
4	OTT TANAK (EST)/RAIGO MOLDER (EST) M-Sport WRT Ford Fiesta RS WRC #6	+2m26.0s
5	HAYDEN PADDON (AUS)/JOHN KENNARD (AUS) Hyundai Motorsport Hyundai i20 WRC #8	+3m31.5s
6	ELFYN EVANS (GB)/DANIEL BARRITT (GB) M-Sport WRT Ford Fiesta RS WRC #5	+3m53.0s
7	KRIS MEEKE (GB)/PAUL NAGLE (IRL) Citroen Total Abu Dhabi Citroen DS3 WRC #3	+4m05.8s
8	MARTIN PROKOP (CZ)/JIAN TOMANEK (CZ) Jipocar Czech National Team Ford Fiesta RS WRC #21	+4m26.0s
9	YURIY PROTASOV (UA)/PAVLO CHEREPIN (UA) M-Sport WRT Ford Fiesta RS WRC #17	+5m32.2s
10	MADS OSTBERG (N)/JONAS ANDERSSON (S) Citroen Total Abu Dhabi Citroen DS3 WRC #4	+6m50.9s

OTHERS

12	JARI-MATTI LATVALA (FIN)/MIKKA ANTILA (FIN) VW Motorsport Volkswagen Polo R WRC #2	+9m11.9s
13	HENNING SOLBERG (N)/ILKA MINOR (A) Adapta Motorsport AS Ford Fiesta WRC #14	+9m32.7s
20	ROBERT KUBICA (PL)/MACIEK SZCZEPANIAK (PL) RK Motorsport Ford Fiesta RS WRC #16	+14m35.4s

DRIVERS' CHAMPIONSHIP

1	OGIER	53	6	EVANS	14
2	NEUVILLE	30	7	TANAK	12
3	MIKKELSEN	30	8	PADDON	10
4	LATVALA	19	9	MEEKE	10
5	OSTBERG	14	10	SORDO	8

MANUFACTURERS' CHAMPIONSHIP

1	VW MOTORSPORT	68	4	CITROEN TOTAL WRT	20
2	HYUNDAI WRT	55	5	VW MOTORSPORT II	15
3	M-SPORT WRT	32	6	JIPOCAR CZECH NATIONAL	10

STAGE TIMES

SS1 SSS KARLSTAD 1 (1.18 miles) FASTEST: Tidemand 1m32.1s Leader: Tidemand. Second: Ostberg +0.3s	SS12 RÄMMEN 1 (14.14 miles) FASTEST: Ogier 11m36.5s Leader: Mikkelsen. Second: Ogier +22.7s
SS2 TORSBY 1 (9.32 miles) FASTEST: Ogier 8m36.6s Leader: Ogier. Second: Latvala +2.0s	SS13 HAGFORS SPRINT 1 (1.16 miles) FASTEST: Ogier 1m51.2s Leader: Mikkelsen. Second: Ogier +20.8s
SS3 RÖJDEN 1 [Sweden-Norway] (11.81 miles) FASTEST: Ogier 9m59.4s Leader: Ogier. Second: Latvala +7.8s	SS14 VARGÅSEN 1 (15.30 miles) FASTEST: Ogier 13m34.1s Leader: Mikkelsen. Second: Ogier +1.7s
SS4 FINNSKOGEN 1 [Norway] (13.05 miles) FASTEST: Latvala 11m03.1s Leader: Ogier. Second: Latvala +6.2s	SS15 FREDRIKSBERG 2 (11.28 miles) FASTEST: Neuville 10m27.6s Leader: Mikkelsen. Second: Neuville +8.7s
SS5 KIRKENAER 1 [Norway] (4.45 miles) FASTEST: Ogier 5m26.7s Leader: Ogier. Second: Latvala +9.1s	SS16 RÄMMEN 2 (14.14 miles) FASTEST: Meeke 11m38.5s Leader: Mikkelsen. Second: Neuville +6.7s
SS6 KIRKENAER 2 [Norway] (4.45 miles) FASTEST: Protasov 5m34.4s Leader: Ogier. Second: Latvala +3.3s	SS17 HAGFORS SPRINT 2 (1.16 miles) FASTEST: Kubica 1m57.1s Leader: Mikkelsen. Second: Neuville +7.3s
SS7 FINNSKOGEN 2 [Norway] (13.05 miles) FASTEST: Latvala 11m04.3s Leader: Ogier. Second: Latvala +1.0s	SS18 VARGÅSEN 2 (15.30 miles) FASTEST: Neuville 13m24.4s Leader: Neuville. Second: Mikkelsen +1.5s
SS8 RÖJDEN 2 [Sweden-Norway] (11.81 miles) FASTEST: Mikkelsen 10m01.1s Leader: Ogier. Second: Latvala +2.9s	SS19 LESJÖFORS (9.32 miles) FASTEST: Ogier 9m05.8s Leader: Mikkelsen. Second: Neuville +3.8s
SS9 TORSBY 2 (9.32 miles) FASTEST: Neuville 8m40.4s Leader: Mikkelsen. Second: Neuville +19.7s	SS20 VÄRMULLSÅSEN 1 (9.86 miles) FASTEST: Latvala 8m14.1s Leader: Mikkelsen. Second: Ogier +3.0s
SS10 SSS KARLSTAD 2 (1.18 miles) FASTEST: Ogier 1m34.5s Leader: Mikkelsen. Second: Neuville +19.1s	SS21 VÄRMULLSÅSEN 2 (Power Stage) (9.86 miles) FASTEST: Ogier 8m05.6s Leader: Ogier. Second: Neuville +6.4s
SS11 FREDRIKSBERG 1 (11.28 miles) FASTEST: Mikkelsen 10m33.9s Leader: Mikkelsen. Second: Neuville +27.3s	

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SEBASTIEN LOEB COMING BACK FOR A MONTE thriller, the world's biggest car maker confirming its World Rally Championship return... the start to 2015 couldn't get any better.

Then Rally Sweden happened. Sublime? Nah, it was way better than that.

It had a Swede winning stage one, for a start, as WRC2 star Pontus Tidemand made the most of an early start position on the Karlstad superspecial to win the stage.

Did that mean it wasn't going to be as bad as Sebastien Ogier feared, running first on the road? Time would tell. Popping over the border for a Norwegian Friday, Ogier drove like a hero through

the first morning and led after SS5 by nine seconds.

The Frenchman was quietly satisfied with what he'd achieved, but at the same time he was well aware of what was to come. The crisp ice surface on to which the 1536 studs beneath his Volkswagen had happily grabbed hold would be gone as the rest of the WRC runners and the Rally Sweden Historic cars came through to chew the road up.

Had it been an advantage to be first in? "I don't know if it was an advantage, but I don't think it was a disadvantage," he smiled cryptically.

At that point, Jari-Matti Latvala was his nearest challenger, but the Finn was struggling to find confidence in his car in anything but the

Latvala's challenge hit the snow bank on SS8



Mikkelsen led Ogier
into the final stage



super-quick sections. Latvala's cause was about to be helped by a wiper problem for Ogier, which limited the French driver's visibility in the afternoon. Worse was to come after Ogier's bonnet flew up and cracked the bottom left of the screen. But he stayed out in the lead and, with one Friday stage remaining, he was still 2.9s clear of Latvala.

Remaining in Volkswagen's 2014-specification car, Andreas Mikkelsen was a further 8.6s down, with Mads Ostberg still gathering his thoughts after putting his Citroën off the road to avoid an inebriated spectator who decided to walk across the stage at precisely the wrong moment. He was 15.6s behind his fellow Norwegian countryman, but 11 of those had been lost avoiding the tanked-up fan.

Thierry Neuville hadn't had the best of days. His Hyundai's gearbox was struggling to cope with the wheelspin and not selecting ratios cleanly. Otherwise, he was doing all he could.

"It is what it is," he said with a shrug at lunchtime. "I am pushing and some of the time we are in the ditch. We could maybe go two seconds faster, but then we could also be even more in the ditch..."

Neuville hoped for more consistency from the surface as the day wore on. He got more than that. The second time through Torsby turned the whole rally on its head.

An hour or so after crossing the border back

into Sweden, leader Ogier careered into a junction way too quickly. A last-minute grab of the handbrake got the car turned in, with the apex almost being taken backwards. A right-rear impact with the snow fired the front-right of the car into the bank. Last year, he spent four minutes digging his Volkswagen out – this time it was only 30 seconds. But it was enough.

Two minutes behind him on the road – and unbeknown to him – Latvala had taken the lead. With no splits and no idea of the fate which had befallen his team-mate, the Finn kept on pushing.

Too quick into a fast right – one of the final corners of the day – he too was pinged into a ditch in true Swedish style.

Latvala kept the throttle wide open, hoping, praying that his Michelins would find some leverage. They didn't.

His extraction took eight minutes.

"I think," Latvala said solemnly, "I am the first victim of the rule changes for the split times..."

Naturally, he accepted the blame and offered a very lengthy, detailed and worthy explanation of how he'd ended up dropping 39 places in 9.18 miles. But it made little difference. Not even the solace of a considerably improved place on the road in round three in Mexico came as any consolation at this point.

So, step forward Mikkelsen.

His face was a picture when he was informed of his status at the top of the leaderboard at the

end of the day. "OK," he smiled, "that makes it more interesting..." By the time he reached Karlstad for the Friday night superspecial, he'd had a chance to think more about it.

And he decided not to think about it.

"I did that last year," he said. "I thought too much and it was a mistake. I'm not going to do that again. I'm just going to drive as fast as I can. There's still a hell of a long way to go."

Neuville was 19.1 behind in second, Ostberg another 0.3 down on him and Ogier 5.3 away from the podium and 24.7 off the front. Who was the one Mikkelsen would be watching?

"Seb never gives up," he said with a smile.

But Ogier would remain first on the road on day two and with the temperature warming further, the Swedish stages offered his studs little of the icy bite they'd enjoyed across the border 24 hours earlier.

Mikkelsen was bang on it through Fredriksberg, nudging his lead towards the half-minute mark. But he was right about Ogier, who hit back with a brace of scratch times of his own on the next two, easing his way past Ostberg and Neuville.

A spin from Mikkelsen in the most inconvenient of sections on Vargasen cost him 16s. "I couldn't get it turned around," he said. "We had to go about 50 metres back up the road to find somewhere to turn. It wasn't exactly calm in the car at that point..."

The podium fight was now a three-way scrap, after Ostberg clobbered a bank on SS11 and knocked the left-rear tyre clean off the rim. Fourth place beckoned.

Neuville, however, would not be budged quite so easily. Just as he did the day before, his speed built on a more consistent surface in the afternoon. And as he had in the morning, Neuville took two spares and fitted new covers for the final stage of the day. On Vargasen, second time through, he put them to very good use and flew. He certainly flew at Colin's Crest – the legendary jump named after McRae. In terms of miles per hour, the i20 just made use of a third figure on the speedo in time for wheels up.

Forty-four metres of Sweden were untouched before touchdown.

"It was a bit of a struggle to get it around the next corner," smiled Neuville. "It was a bit loose, but we made it."

And he barely lifted to the finish.

Fastest. The new leader – but not without a word from his co-driver Nicolas Gilsoul.

"He told me to calm it down a little bit," said the Neuville. "We were flat out in a place which was maybe not so flat out. We touched [the banks] a couple of times and he told me. It was a good idea from him! It's good to be here. Running five on the road, we never had the perfect road, but we also didn't have it so bad. We saw the condition got worse in the morning, but ▶





Neuville flew – literally, at Colin's Crest – to second

► improved in the afternoon – I would say it was more or less equal for us all. But I am the only one who didn't make a mistake yet. OK, some small things which maybe cost 15 seconds or something, but nothing big."

But could he win? Would he risk everything for the win?

"I haven't decided yet," he lied.

Of course it was all or nothing. And, at the end-of-day press conference, he'd come to his senses. "I want to win this rally."

Interestingly, Neuville identified Mikkelsen as the big threat, feeling he could manage Ogier with 9.6 seconds in hand and just shy of 30 miles left to run.

Like Latvala on the first day, Mikkelsen felt his Polo wasn't playing ball in the twisty sections on Saturday, so he elected to change the rear differential on his car overnight.

"I'll go back to the settings I used last year," he said. "I know they worked."

Ogier wasn't overly concerned about the gap between him and Neuville. They were in the same ballpark. And, crucially, the playing field in that ballpark would be level on Sunday.

"I expect equal conditions with the guy I am fighting with," said Ogier. "So I am very happy for that."

And so, to Sunday.

Ogier was fastest on the opener, while Neuville's progress was hampered by a problem with the intercom.

Mikkelsen admitted he might have been too cautious in the quick stuff through Lesjofors,

but the Norwegian's time was still good enough to move him back into the lead.

Despite winning the stage, Ogier remained third, but not for long. Fastest on SS20, he eased his way past Neuville and narrowed the gap to the leader to just three seconds.

With one stage remaining, the top three were split by just 4.6 seconds.

But, before they could get stuck into the second running of Varmullsasen, there was a trip back to Hagfors for service. That merely heightened the drama as the focus, somewhat inevitably, centred on the Volkswagens now running one-two.

For his part, Neuville was doing his best to engage in mind games, announcing: "The road has changed now, they have the pressure now. It will be difficult, but if I have to take more risks then I am happy to do that."

And so back to your corners...

And Ogier and Mikkelsen went to the opposite sides of the Volkswagen service park. The rally leader went into the hospitality area and relaxed with his management team, friends and family, while Ogier sat down and did the data in the team's technical area.

When it came to bolting the tyres on the cars, it seemed Volkswagen's freedom of information pact might have been broken as both sets of mechanics and engineers did their bit to hide what was going on.

When Ogier departed service, his car engineer Gerard Jan de Jongh wandered over to Mikkelsen's side, but was immediately hoofed out. He and Richard Browne, his opposite number on the Norwegian side of the squad, smiled at each other. Briefly. Three seconds was the gap with a shade under 10 miles to run.

And, 3.5 miles in, there was nothing to split them. Three miles further down the road and Ogier had stolen six tenths.

Ogier got to the finish. "I have done all I can," he said, looking slightly bewildered as he sought news of his rival.

At just that moment, Mikkelsen was being dug out of the snow. The dream was dashed. First was third, with Neuville moving back up to second.

Mikkelsen was stunned at the finish and devastated in service.

Ogier's genuine and heartfelt plaudits meant little to the man who had come so close.

But you couldn't take it away from Ogier. He was magnificent. Again. ❧

IN THE SERVICE PARK

DAVID EVANS
RALLIES EDITOR
@daviddevansrally



WHY, IF THE WINTER'S GONE FROM THE WRC's winter rally, am I on my arse? Again. Granted, the house-high drifts we've seen in these parts from time to time were absent, but there was still plenty of ice. Trust me...

And, when winter visits the Varmland roads – not to mention those on the far side of the border around the Norwegian town of Kongsvinger – it leaves its mark and turns them into the perfect World Rally playground. It's impossible not to love the place, provided you're North Faced to the hilt and still standing.

Watching the front corner of a World Rally car seemingly locked-on to a snowbank while the diagonally opposite end of the car sends up a 20-foot powder plume skywards in sixth gear has to be one of the finest sights in all of motorsport. And there was plenty of that last week.

Karlstad's river might not have been frozen as hard as it once was, but the atmosphere couldn't have been better; where else do you get offered a place by a complete stranger's open fire and a – cold – lager at eight in the morning? At least one of those two was gratefully accepted...

Sweden's a cool place. And last week it showed its magic and its majesty as the backdrop to what has to be one of the most exciting rounds of the World Rally Championship in history. Yes, Ogier won another rally, but he really worked for this one. And that only made it all the sweeter on Sunday night.



Warm welcome from the Swedes

He said he was going to kill me



Sebastien Ogier recalls team-mate Ola Floene's idea on the best way to beat him.

Tanak again impressed in the M-Sport Ford Fiesta





Ogier expects the title race to get harder after Sweden

Ogier prepared for championship struggles ahead

SEBASTIEN OGIER IS READY FOR the pain which will follow his 100 per cent winning start to this year's World Rally Championship next time out in Mexico.

The Frenchman's 6.4-second win in the snow took him 23 points clear at the top of the table after two rounds of the WRC, but he predicts a fight to maintain his winning run when he has to sweep the central American stages for two days next month.

"Thinking about the future, it looks not so nice for us, but what can you do?" he said. "I came here chasing the maximum

points, I wanted the win and I went flat out. I wanted the points and I wanted the lead. Now I know that I will have two or three rallies where I will suffer."

His team-mate Jari-Matti Latvala will run three places further back on the road after retiring from Rally Sweden at final service. That move will allow him to change parts on his VW Polo R WRC ahead of the next event.

Latvala said: "Last year I went with the lead [in the championship] to Mexico and I didn't win the title. So, hopefully, when I

go to Mexico without the lead then I will win [the title]. For me, when we get to Poland [in July] then you have to be close to the top fight because it will get more difficult after that; basically, you can do mistakes in the first half of the year, but not in the second half."

Ogier countered: "I wouldn't change this [result]. Jari-Matti is the one under pressure already because he is not allowed to do a mistake [in Mexico] or he is too far away [in the championship]. I took a good psychological advantage here."

Kubica pleased with Sweden

ROBERT KUBICA SAYS HIS RALLY Sweden performance was one of the best of his career. The Formula 1 race winner was classified 20th after a transmission problem and a five-minute penalty for a turbo infringement, but was delighted with his progress from last season.

"This was one of the best rallies for me," Kubica said. "It's a shame we had the [transmission] problem because without this we could have had a very nice and unexpected result. Coming here for the second time after last year's very negative experience, we could have been fourth or fifth fighting with [Ott] Tanak, or even in front of him – that's very good for us!"



Kubica was happy with his progress



Another Historic win for Solberg

A DECADE ON FROM A DOMINANT Rally Sweden win in the World Rally Championship event, Petter Solberg wrapped up his third straight victory on the Historic version last weekend.

Co-driven by wife Pernilla, Petter won every stage in his Ford Escort Mk II, eventually thumping Audi Quattro A1 driver Tom Axelsson by three minutes.

Solberg, who will defend his World Rallycross title this season, loved being

back in a rally car. "It's been incredible," he said, "so much fun and just amazing to see so many people out there watching us. We did quite a bit of work on the weight distribution and the differential on the car from last year and it's been fantastic to drive. We were flat out over Colin's Crest, absolutely flat!"

Solberg managed to match lower-order R5 times in the main field on every stage.

SPEEDING IN SWEDEN

Rally Sweden winner Sebastien Ogier was one of several drivers caught speeding during the recce for the event. Privateer Yurii Protasov was caught 18 times, Ogier and Lorenzo Bertelli seven times each. All received a suspended two-minute penalty from the stewards.

MEEKE HIGH AND LOW

Kris Meeke scored his first ever world championship fastest time on a snow stage last weekend. The Citroen driver's Rally Sweden was spoiled when he spent three minutes digging his DS3 out of the Finnskogen snow, but he bounced back to bag more experience from only his second time on the WRC's winter event.

CORSICAN ROUTE ROW

An outline route for this year's Tour of Corsica has been revealed and includes just six or seven stages of around 30 miles in length. At the moment, the route is linear and doesn't include a single service park, focusing the action around Porto-Vecchio, Bastia, Ajaccio and Corte. The route has split opinion and causes WRC Promoter significant issues in terms of producing television coverage – especially of the proposed rally-opening 35-miler, which is set to run in the dark on Friday, October 2.

HYUNDAI'S NEW SHIFT

Hyundai is expected to run a paddle gear shift on the i20 WRC for the first time at next month's Rally Mexico. Team leader Thierry Neuville says further upgrades are needed. "We know that everybody is doing their best in the team at the moment, but we need more improvements to be closer to the others."

ABBRING IMPRESSING

Hyundai's Kevin Abbring finished his first outing in a factory World Rally Car in 11th position. He and British co-driver Seb Marshall impressed the management of the Korean team on an event that also marked their snow debut.

KETOMAA'S WRC2 WIN

Jari Ketomaa got his WRC2 season off to the best possible start with a convincing victory in Sweden. The Finn's Drive DMACK Fiesta was the class of the field and he led Norwegian team-mate Eyvind Brynildsen home by 32.6 seconds.

PRAISE FOR EVANS

Elfyn Evans' sixth position was praised by M-Sport team principal Malcolm Wilson after the Welshman showed a significant increase in pace from 12 months ago. Evans was contesting a snow rally for the second time, and only had one problem, when he spent two minutes in a stage eight snow bank.



Kenseth crosses the line ahead of Truex and Edwards

NASCAR SPRINT UNLIMITED DAYTONA (USA), FEBRUARY 14

Kenseth avoids shunts to win Unlimited

AFTER TWO RED FLAGS AND ENOUGH incidents to wipe out just over half the field, Matt Kenseth emerged with the first NASCAR victory of the season in the non-points Unlimited.

Kenseth led most of the final third of the race, bar a lap when his new Joe Gibbs Racing team-mate Carl Edwards nosed ahead. A four-lap shootout after the last yellow meant the surviving dozen cars all finished within nine-tenths of a second, but Kenseth was able to hold off Martin Truex Jr and Edwards without drama to seal his win.

Truex led the most laps – an encouraging start to his second

season at Furniture Row after a 2014 short on highlights – and described the race as the most fun he'd had in a year and a half, though he admitted that people were even less likely than usual to remember who finished second when the event was non-championship. Kenseth successfully blocked Truex's attempt to pass him on the final restart, and with Edwards unsurprisingly unwilling to bumpdraft Truex into another run at his team-mate, the race was settled.

Paul Menard had drawn pole on the random grid and led the early running, but was among the victims of the night's biggest shunt, which

was triggered by Jamie McMurray spinning mid-pack and taking 14 cars with him, with Jimmie Johnson among those unable to continue.

Tony Stewart was central to the second red flag, though he came off better than those collected in his spin. Greg Biffle was sent spearing into the inside wall at high speed and then suffered another hard hit from the out-of-control Kurt Busch as he rebounded. Also eliminated in crashes were Brad Keselowski and late colliders Ricky Stenhouse Jr and Austin Dillon.

Despite all the shunts, there was little rancour, with most shrugging

the destruction off as an inevitable consequence of a winner-takes-all restrictor-plate race. But there was still one pitlane shouting match, as champion Kevin Harvick expressed displeasure to Joey Logano after being helped into the wall on the penultimate lap, leaving him 11th.

RESULTS

1 Matt Kenseth (Toyota) 75 laps in 1h22m59s; 2 Martin Truex Jr (Chevrolet), +0.291s; 3 Carl Edwards (Toyota); 4 Casey Mears (Chevrolet); 5 Kyle Larson (Chevrolet); 6 Joey Logano (Ford); 7 Jeff Gordon (Chevrolet); 8 Kyle Busch (Toyota); 9 Dale Earnhardt Jr (Chevrolet); 10 Danica Patrick (Chevrolet).

TOYOTA RACING SERIES MANFEILD (NZ), FEBRUARY 14-15 RD 5/5

Lance strolls to title and NZGP win

FERRARI ACADEMY DRIVER LANCE Stroll clinched the Toyota Racing Series title, crowning his achievement with victory in the New Zealand Grand Prix thanks to winning the third race of the event.

Indian Arjun Maini led the 35-lap main event from pole, but eventually Brandon Maisano and Stroll caught him. Maisano and Maini touched,

both getting out shape and allowing Stroll and Charlie Eastwood to pass them to take first and second.

"I got a gap and then I just had to look after the tyres," said Stroll.

Eastwood held second with Maisano third, but Maini had to pit for a new front wing.

Maisano won the first race of the meeting and finished second in

the championship, while American Santino Ferrucci's victory in race two helped him to third overall.

Scottish driver Sam MacLeod won the round overall thanks to placings of third, second and fourth. This lifted him to fifth in the points, behind Maini. Eastwood was sixth.

New Red Bull junior Callum Ilott recorded two fourths and a DNF, and came 16th in the series.

● Bernard Carpinter

RESULTS

Race 1 1 Brandon Maisano, 20 laps in 21m04.827s; 2 Arjun Maini, +1.156s; 3 Sam MacLeod; 4 Callum Ilott; 5 Santino Ferrucci; 6 Lance Stroll. **Race 2 1 Ferrucci**, 15 laps in 18m35.280s; 2 MacLeod, +0.428s; 3 Stroll; 4 Ilott; 5 Stefan Riener; 6 Sergio Sette Camara. **Race 2 1 Stroll**, 35 laps in 40m25.216s; 2 Eastwood, +1.138s; 3 Maisano; 4 MacLeod; 5 Ferrucci; 6 Artem Markov. **Final points 1 Stroll, 906;** 2 Maisano, 798; 3 Ferrucci, 765; 4 Maini, 732; 5 MacLeod, 684; 6 Eastwood, 535.



Stroll took a win and the TRS title

NZ V8 TOURING CARS

Australian driver Jason Bargwanna further increased his already large lead in the New Zealand V8 Touring Cars Championship by winning the penultimate round at Manfeild in his Toyota Camry. Kiwi Nick Ross was second for the round overall, driving his Nissan Altima, and remains second in the series.

NEW ZEALAND FF1600

Taylor Cockerton won the Manfeild round of the New Zealand Formula Ford 1600 championship with two victories and a second, and closed up on series leader Caleb Cross, who was disqualified from one race for driving behaviour. Both are rookies in the category and drive Mygales. One round remains.

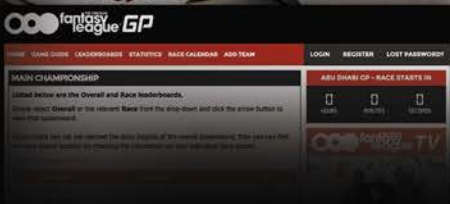
ARCA RACING SERIES

Grant Enfinger won the opening ARCA round at Daytona, pipping Daniel Suarez to victory in a close finish to a dramatic race in which 27 cars finished on the lead lap. Despite the tight finish, Enfinger led from lap 53 to the end.



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CAPE Workshops

CENTRE FOR ADVANCED PERFORMANCE ENGINEERING



CNC Machine allows 3D manufacturing

This year will certainly prove to be another significant period in the development and continued growth of the University of Bolton.

It has been confirmed that the University will receive a capital grant for the development of a new £10 million STEM Centre building, specialising in science, technology, engineering and maths.

These premises will house the University's new National Centre for Motorsport Engineering.

Students studying Advanced Performance Engineering will have access to the best and most contemporary equipment in a purpose built environment.

Engineering (CAPE) opened in 2013 providing students with an advanced engineering career experience which is second to none.

CAPE is the only centre that has a professional racing team, RLR M sport, based on campus. This gives students hands on experience from theory to practice, from the classroom to the workshop and then following the race team on the racetrack.

In addition CAPE is collaborating with Keating Supercars and Ginetta, and is the first owner of the new Ginetta-Nissan LMP3 which will race in the European Le Mans Series. This will further cement the University of Bolton as a leader in Advanced Performance Engineering, and make it a hugely desirable prospect to potential students.



The Centre for Advanced Performance

CENTRE FOR ADVANCED PERFORMANCE ENGINEERING



University of Bolton

CENTRE FOR ADVANCED PERFORMANCE ENGINEERING

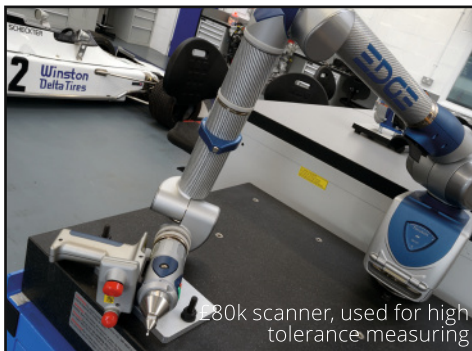


Students working trackside with RLR Msport

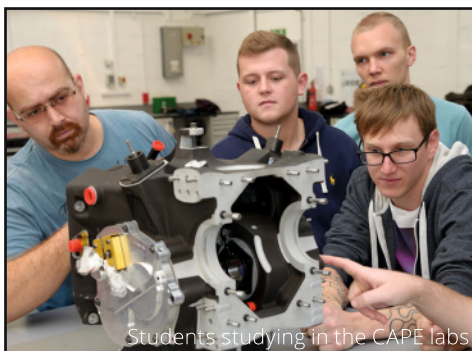


The University is the first owner of the new Ginetta Nissan LMP3

VISIT OUR OPEN DAY ON SATURDAY 14 MARCH 2015



30k scanner, used for high tolerance measuring



Students studying in the CAPE labs

The University of Bolton will host an open day at CAPE on Saturday March 14, from 10.30 am until 2.30pm

Former F1 driver, Mike Wilds, will deliver a keynote speech on 'what the industry wants from motorsport graduates and the impact of hands-on experience on their employability'.

Following this, a panel discussion with Mike Simpson, official driver for Ginetta, Nick Reynolds, owner of RLR Msport and Tony Keating, owner of Keating Supercars, will be chaired by renowned journalist and TV presenter, Gordon Burns.

The panel will discuss how the University is meeting demands by creating new engineering jobs and through its work with world renowned

car manufacturer Ginetta and Keating Supercars.

Networking opportunities with lecturers and VIP guests over lunch, and tours of the CAPE facilities, provide the perfect introduction to anyone wishing to kickstart their career in the motorsport industry.

To find out more and to book your place at the open event please visit our website: www.bolton.ac.uk/capeopenday

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**WHAT'S
THE
WORLD'S**

BEST TIN-TOP SERIES

Touring car racing remains one of the most crowd-pleasing forms of motorsport, with a plethora of series operating nationally and internationally. But which is the best? And how do you define the best anyway? This is what AUTOSPORT is attempting. What follows is an analysis of the eight biggest touring car series currently active. We have decided to split this analysis into five different categories in order to give a well-balanced perspective on the relative strengths of the World Touring Car

The world is blessed with a wide variety of touring car championships. It's difficult to make direct comparisons, but how do they stack up against one another? AUTOSPORT's correspondents take a look

MCKLEIN/DE

Championship, the DTM, the European Touring Car Cup, the British Touring Car Championship, Australian V8 Supercars, Argentinian Super TC2000, the Scandinavian Touring Car Championship and Brazilian V8 Stock Cars.

The categories we will appraise them on are entertainment, competition, cars, prestige and variety. These are the main components of the appeal of any series, covering the appeal to spectators and the overall commercial value that underpins success.

There are other championships we could have chosen, and categories beyond the five we are appraising them on, but we believe this offers us a manageable and digestible analysis of the most significant tin-top series in the world. ▶

Closely fought action brings big crowds to BTCC



<p>BTCC</p> <p>RATING 9/10</p> <p>There's a simple reason the BTCC can attract upwards of 40,000 through the gate on race weekends: the spectacle. Close racing is one of the hallmarks of touring car action and the BTCC can provide this in spades, although a crackdown on driving standards meant that last year there were a few more processions than normal. Rubbing is racing, and usually the BTCC delivers.</p>	<p>DTM</p> <p>RATING 6/10</p> <p>The DTM has the right ingredients for great racing – top drivers, sexy cars, cool circuits – but it could be better in the excitement stakes. For example, the manufacturer support is crucial for the series' survival, but the politics often leave question marks over just how level the playing field is. The aerodynamic dependency of the cars also makes door-to-door racing difficult.</p>	<p>ETCC</p> <p>RATING 5/10</p> <p>The drivers aren't top-liners, but there's sufficient ability behind the wheel to provide some hard racing – and enough ambition to lead to some overzealous antics! Furthermore, the class structure – there were four different divisions in 2014 – means there's usually an entertaining battle to be found even if things have become a little bit processional at the front.</p>	<p>STCC</p> <p>RATING 6/10</p> <p>Reversed grids for the first race of each event have produced some very hard fights and often some surprise winners, including new, young faces. The favourites tend to dominate the second races, often in processions, but there is usually close racing among the backmarkers. Big crowds in Gothenburg and Stockholm suggest the formula is right.</p>	<p>SUPER TC2000</p> <p>RATING 8/10</p> <p>In general, the races produce plenty of changes of lead and in the positions down the order, although there's not so much of the argy-bargy seen in other tin-top divisions around the world. The exception is on the street circuits that have been employed over the years, in which case it usually turns out to be a bit of a procession thanks to the lack of passing.</p>	<p>V8 STOCK CAR</p> <p>RATING 8/10</p> <p>In 2014 the series switched to a new format of two races per weekend for most rounds. The first races tended to be strategic, with the second – from a top-10 reversed grid – quite wild and run over just 20 minutes. This year, both races are being lengthened, but there's no reason to expect the cars not to bear the scars of battle thanks to the close racing.</p>	<p>V8 SUPERCARS</p> <p>RATING 8/10</p> <p>It has powerful, aggressively styled cars plus tracks such as Mount Panorama, Phillip Island, Adelaide and Surfers Paradise in its favour, but not every event is a surefire stunner, particularly the sometimes coy early races in the triple/quadruple-header weekends. Jamie Whincup's dominance can take the edge off too. Those are essentially quibbles, though.</p>	<p>WTCC</p> <p>RATING 6/10</p> <p>The WTCC can serve up racing comparable to any rival tin-top series, as exemplified by events at Moscow Raceway and Macau last year. But drivers often engage in excitement-limiting risk-management in the opening race of a weekend, to preserve their machinery for the second. The championship has arguably suffered from domination by Citroen and Chevrolet.</p>
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COMPETITION

The quality of the entry, in terms of drivers, teams and strength in depth

V8 Supercars can boast great tracks such as Bathurst

KALISZ/GETTY



BTCC
RATING
9/10

Teams of the calibre of Triple Eight, Team Dynamics and West Surrey Racing, and no repeat champion since 2010, show this series operates at a very high level. Winning a race here is probably one of the toughest tasks in tin-top racing. The style of racing is unlike any other and the NGTC regulations ensure the performance spread is at a minimum.

DTM
RATING
10/10

The series offers a viable alternative to F1, in that a driver can be well-paid and manufacturer-aligned, with the chance for a long career with Audi, BMW or Mercedes. It's hard to win, because the depth is huge; and there is a perfect mix of career DTM drivers and young mega-talents trying to earn a living on the way to F1 rather than tipping millions into GP2 or Formula Renault 3.5.

ETCC
RATING
4/10

Most of the competitors have come from Eastern European lower leagues of tin-top racing, and the same goes for many of the teams. That doesn't mean to say that they are lacking in talent, but you wouldn't put your money on them against the engineering might of Citroen or JAS, or the driving talent of Yvan Muller or Rob Huff. It's fair to say that there are few well-known names competing.

STCC
RATING
5/10

Fields average between 13 and 16 cars, with six teams involved in the series. The factory Volvo team – run by Polestar, which competes in Australia – is tough to beat, but BMW dealer-backed West Coast Racing is always in contention and there are importer teams from Kia and Dacia. The Bjork, Fredrik Larsson, Fredrik Ekblom and Richard Goransson are strong drivers.



V8 Stock Car has attracted the likes of Rubens Barrichello

SUPER TC2000
RATING
9/10

Super TC2000 attracts the cream of Argentina's driving talent, and these leading drivers in turn are swept up by the division's five works-supported teams, some of them boasting up to four cars, and by the several works-satellite and privateer squads. Competition is fierce at the top for drivers and teams. Winning a race, let alone the title, is far from easy even for top drivers.

V8 STOCK CAR
RATING
9/10

With four ex-F1 drivers (including reigning V8 champion Rubens Barrichello) and other stars in the field, don't think that the domestic talents are overshadowed. Caca Bueno is a multiple champion, Daniel Serra and Thiago Camilo are blindingly fast and Valdeno Brito has the spirit of a bullfighter. All of them are incredibly closely matched in grids topping 30 cars.

V8 SUPERCARS
RATING
8/10

V8s' domestic strength – helped by teams of the quality of Triple Eight and Prodrive – lures plenty of drivers good enough to shine globally but who faced economic obstacles in establishing European careers. Recent international envoys have made little impression, though that was largely because specialised experience counts hugely.

WTCC
RATING
6/10

Heady financial commitment is required from manufacturers to win at WTCC level. Multiple WRC champion Citroen arguably raised standards of preparation to new levels on its entry to the series last year. All of the factory teams boast world-class driving talent on their books, but few would suggest the series equals the DTM for outright strength in depth.

CARS

How fast and spectacular the cars are

BTCC
RATING
6/10

The NGTC regulations serve a purpose in bringing the running costs down and have played a key role in its recent resurgence. But the current crop of BTCC cars is not inspiring. There's a lot of negative feedback on what they're like to drive, and they're a far cry from the racing thoroughbreds in other series. Again, that's a means to an end, but it's still a blot on the copybook.

DTM
RATING
10/10

DTM cars look cool. All that aero may not be great for the racing, but it looks fabulous. Don't be fooled, though; these aren't touring cars. They are open-wheelers with a roof. And that makes them fast. The only issue is that they aren't all that spectacular. The aerodynamics keep them firmly planted on the track surface, so there's not much powersliding or wild driving.

ETCC
RATING
4/10

The cars at the front are recycled from the previous two generations of WTCC machinery, which never really got anybody's heart racing even when Yvan Muller was behind the wheel. Not far behind – and often ahead in the wet – can be found machinery from the old SEAT Leon one-make series that used to entertain on the WTCC support card, with 1600cc Fiestas bringing up the rear.

STCC
RATING
7/10

Since 2013, the STCC has used the mid-engined Solution F car that came from the rival TTA series. Powered by a 3.5-litre, 400bhp Nissan/Renault V6 engine, the chassis is then clothed in whatever body shape the team desires. The cars are noisy and fun to drive, but poor visibility makes for frequent contact, and it's hard for spectators to identify the cars and drivers.

SUPER TC2000
RATING
8/10

It's considered to be Latin America's most technologically advanced division, as the European drivers who have competed in selected rounds can confirm. The cars, based on locally manufactured models, sport spec V8 engines belting out 430bhp. On the Rafaela oval in 2012, that led to a top speed of 190.37mph and average of 164.55mph.

V8 STOCK CAR
RATING
7/10

They're beasts, weighing 1300kg and powered by 5.7-litre American V8 engines that are electronically limited to 460bhp, or 530bhp with the push-to-pass button, driven through six-speed Xtrac gearboxes. The chassis are made by JL Motorsport and cloaked in Peugeot or Chevrolet aluminium bodywork, which is carefully painted by specialised artists.

V8 SUPERCARS
RATING
9/10

Even as other series make efforts to 'sex up' their cars' looks, the V8s are still a benchmark for how you want a racing saloon to look, sound and handle. Five-litre V8 engines kicking out 600bhp-plus and reaching 185mph are hard to dislike. It's not all flame-spitting and kerb-hopping – they would lag behind DTM pace, but match the GT3 lap times in Australia.

WTCC
RATING
8/10

A criticism of the WTCC's previous-generation S2000 cars was their inherent lack of drama, despite often providing thrilling race action. The introduction of TC1 machines has addressed many of these concerns. Power from the 1.6-litre, four-cylinder, turbocharged engines has risen from circa 320bhp to 380bhp, while the cars are more aggressive in appearance.



DTM cars have more in common with single-seaters

STCC cars are mid-engined with spec chassis



WELAW/TEAMBILD

PRESTIGE

How important the championship is globally, and how glorious its history is

BTCC
RATING
8/10

The BTCC's status and credibility took a hit in the mid-2000s with a post-Super Touring hangover. But you cannot argue with the history of a championship that was first run in 1958. That story boasts the glory of eras such as Group A and Super Touring and it remains the best-supported series in Britain, attracting big names and creating new ones too.

DTM
RATING
10/10

The DTM, particularly in the modern era, is worth winning. Despite still being essentially a national series, the quality of the field and investment from the three makes involved give it a very international feel. And seeing your name on the same list as Bernd Schneider and Hans-Joachim Stuck must be nice, especially for a young German driver.

ETCC
RATING
3/10

Even the most ardent reader of AUTOSPORT would struggle to put a face to the name of reigning champion Nikolay Karamyshev, although he is a talented driver who would be worthy of a decent WTCC shot. No doubt there's more prestige attached to the series in its heartland, but as far as the west is concerned it registers little more than a blip on the radar.

STCC
RATING
7/10

The Swedish Touring Car Championship (from which the Scandinavian emerged) replaced Formula 3 in the 1990s as the country's top series, with a mix of hardened tin-top veterans and junior up-and-comers including Mattias Ekstrom. Series initiator Jan 'Flash' Nilsson won the first two titles for Volvo and brought in TV, leading to Audi and BMW factory efforts too.



FIA recognition gives WTCC top-drawer touring car status

SUPER TC2000
RATING
8/10

As an evolution of TC2000 (dating back to 1979), Super TC2000 is without doubt Argentina's blue-riband touring car division. Of all the Automovil Club Argentino's categories, Super TC2000 heads the polls by far, with sponsors forming queues to have their names and brands adorning the cars. Spectator attendances and TV ratings also top the charts.

V8 STOCK CAR
RATING
8/10

Big stars such as Chico Serra, Ingo Hoffmann and Paulo Gomes (a protege of Carlos Pace) popularised the series in the early days. And the first race, in 1979, was won by Raul Boesel on his way to F1. Now GM and Peugeot are involved, plus big sponsors. All 12 rounds are shown live, with 10 of them on cable channel SporTV with commentary by AUTOSPORT's Lito Cavalcanti.

V8 SUPERCARS
RATING
8/10

What is effectively the Australian Touring Car Championship has a heritage dating back to 1960, creating legends such as Peter Brock, and is the number-one form of motorsport in its homeland, a status underlined by the \$241 million (AUS) TV deal it has just secured. Its international profile is healthy and growing, with the rest of the racing world well aware of V8s' strength.

WTCC
RATING
9/10

Carrying FIA World Championship status, the WTCC could claim to be officially the summit of the tin-top tree. Following a reboot in 2005, perceived prestige perhaps declined following a number of manufacturer withdrawals. Solid foundations and nurturing from Eurosport Events should see it emerge from its current transition phase to TC1 in good health.



ETCC heartland is Central and Eastern Europe

PHOTO-4/XPB IMAGES

VARIETY

The range of different cars, teams and circuits involved

BTCC
RATING
10/10

You could argue that its pretty rigid calendar is something to detract from the BTCC in this area, but it still visits the best (appropriate) circuits in Britain. What has greater substance is the 11 different types of car on the grid, for which each row looks markedly different. Plus, 11 race winners last year and four champions in four seasons show it is never stale at the sharp end either.

DTM
RATING
7/10

Having three manufacturers involved suits the DTM well. The Mercedes v Audi era felt shallow, but having three German car giants doing battle creates a nice dynamic. As for circuits, well, having the Norisring, Zandvoort and Moscow Raceway on the same calendar creates diversity – even if there are two trips to Hockenheim each season.

ETCC
RATING
8/10

Old Super 2000 machinery from Chevrolet, BMW, Alfa Romeo, Honda and SEAT does battle in the leading classes, which is a decent smattering of makes. The calendar is also attractive, with the Slovakia Ring, Brno, Paul Ricard, Zolder and the Hungaroring on the 2015 schedule. The format is the tried-and-trusted two sprint races per round.

STCC
RATING
5/10

The spec-chassis formula has led to a downturn in manufacturers, though Volvo, BMW, Dacia and Kia remain. Each round runs to the same format, with two races, one with a reversed grid, but with full points given for qualifying. There's a good variety of circuits, with proper racing venues such as Knutstorp and Mantorp Park and temporary tracks in Gothenburg and Stockholm.



BTCC boasts a full grid with great diversity of cars

EBREY/LAT
SUPER TC2000
RATING
9/10

The local subsidiaries of the Chevrolet, Fiat, Peugeot, Renault and Toyota are represented by 'official' teams, with privateer efforts running VW and Ford, leading to grids of nearly 30 cars. Most rounds consist of two heats and a final, and there's the annual 200km enduro, a 'night race' on the streets of Santa Fe, and at least one crossing into a neighbouring country.

V8 STOCK CAR
RATING
5/10

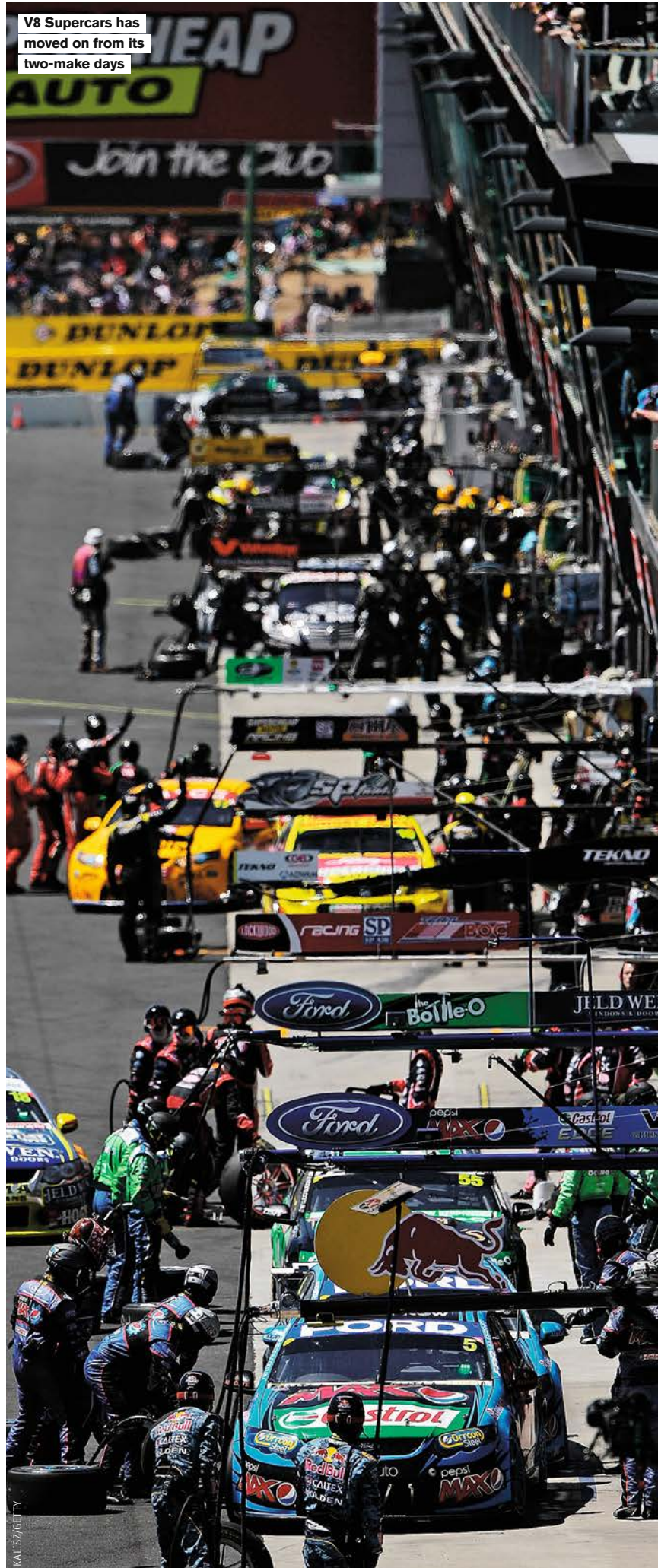
There are only two different cars – the Chevrolet Sonic and the Peugeot 408. Race format varies, with nine double-headers plus three single events: the opening round, where international drivers join the regulars; the One Million Reais; and the double-points finale. Of the circuits, Interlagos and Curitiba are well-known while Taruma and Cascavel are fast and reward guts.

V8 SUPERCARS
RATING
9/10

The 'New Generation' machines include plenty of control components, but such is the global touring car trend. Engine and aero differences ensure it's far from a one-make field. The series format is particularly diverse – circuits range from Bathurst's epic to tight city street tracks, and race lengths from half-hour sprints to the showpiece 1000km enduro.

WTCC
RATING
9/10

Whereas the DTM has frequently opted to run on truncated circuits, and the BTCC is constrained by the availability of tracks in this country, the WTCC has a history of bold choices for its venues. Macau may be off this year's calendar, but the addition of the fearsome Nurburgring Nordschleife and madcap Vila Real street race go a long way to recompense.



V8 Supercars has moved on from its two-make days

THE RESULTS ARE IN...

What really hits home is just how strong a crop of championships there are in the world. The DTM just wins our rating, but only by a point, and the decisive factor in that is its international prestige.

Close behind are three outstanding national championships, the British Touring Car Championship, Australian V8 Supercars and the less well-known Argentinian Super

TC2000 series. It's a reminder to those in this country who lament the old days of Super Touring in the 1990s that the BTCC has rebuilt itself into a hell of a championship, and its high score for entertainment highlights just how good it is to watch.

As for the rest, the World Touring Car Championship is not as strong as it was a decade ago in terms of strength in depth, even though the cars are better to watch than the S2000 machinery that populated the series then.

Brazil's V8 Stock cars is also fine, but like the Scandinavian series loses out a little from being silhouette touring cars.

As for the European Touring Car Cup, it's a valid series using hand-me-downs from other categories, but it doesn't tick all the boxes.

WTCC
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V8 SUPERCARS
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V8 STOCK CAR
37

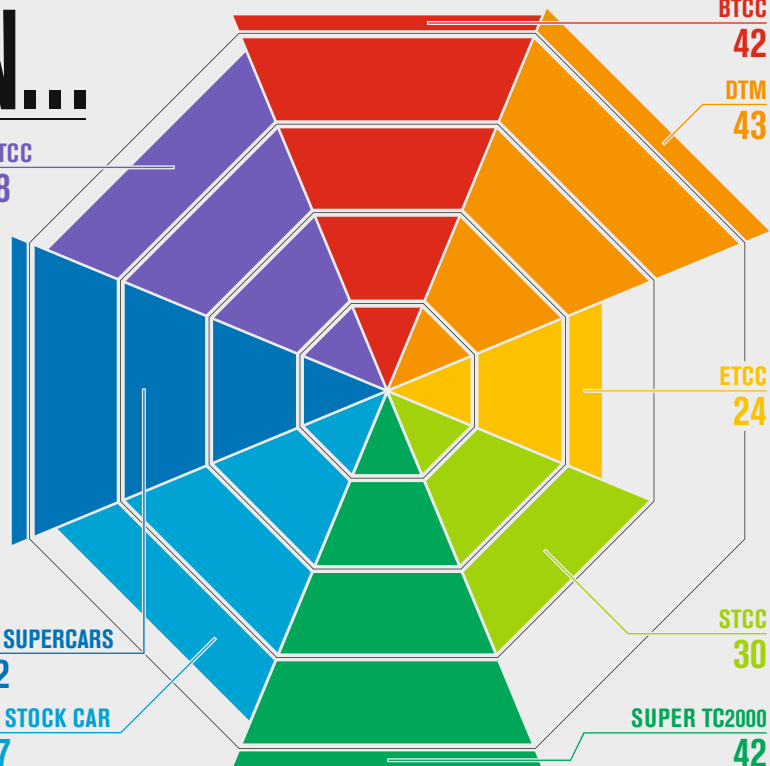
BTCC
42

DTM
43

ETCC
24

STCC
30

SUPER TC2000
42



RESULT

DTM	43
BTCC	42
V8 SUPERCARS	42
SUPER TC2000	42
WTCC	38
V8 STOCK CARS	37
STCC	30
ETCC	24

WINNER: DTM

RUNNER-UP: BTCC

RUNNER-UP: SUPER TC2000

RUNNER-UP: V8 SUPERCARS



COMPILED BY Marcus Simmons, Scott Mitchell, Andrew van Leeuwen, Matt Beer, Edd Straw, Lito Cavalcanti and Tony Watson

TCR concept could spread to many new territories



THE NEW PRETENDER: TCR

In many ways, the natural successor to the old days of the Super Touring category's pan-global influence is GT3 – just as in the two-litre tin-top days of the 1990s, there are numerous models of cars that can be raced in national and regional series around the world.

But the new TCR concept spearheaded by ex-WTCC boss Marcello Lotti is conceived to offer a stable set of touring car regulations to many different countries and regions. Designed as a pyramid of affordable two-litre touring car competition, it is topped by the inaugural TCR International series, the first round of which will support the Malaysian Grand Prix.

For 2015 this is joined by the Asian championship and the Portuguese, as well as Italy, Russia and the US, with these three countries running TCR cars as a class within existing championships before going it alone in 2016. A Benelux series has been planned for '16, with a one-round 'preview' event in '15, and a Central American calendar is also scheduled for next year. Other nations represented at a recent TCR Working Group meeting include China, Germany, South Africa, Spain, Thailand and Venezuela.

No races have been run yet, so we did not include it here, but this is definitely one to watch.

SO, HOW DOES AUSSIE STRAIGHT-



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EXHAUST NOTES

To avoid a Formula 1-style noise problem, V8 Supercars' vision for the future stresses the need for the new-generation cars to be as loud as the current cars – regardless of the configuration of the powerplant they are running.



MARKET RELEVANCE

The road-going counterparts of the racing cars must be on sale in Australia, be front-engined, and right-hand drive. The racing cars must be rear-wheel drive, and the visual link between the showroom and the race model has to be clear.



COMMON PLATFORM

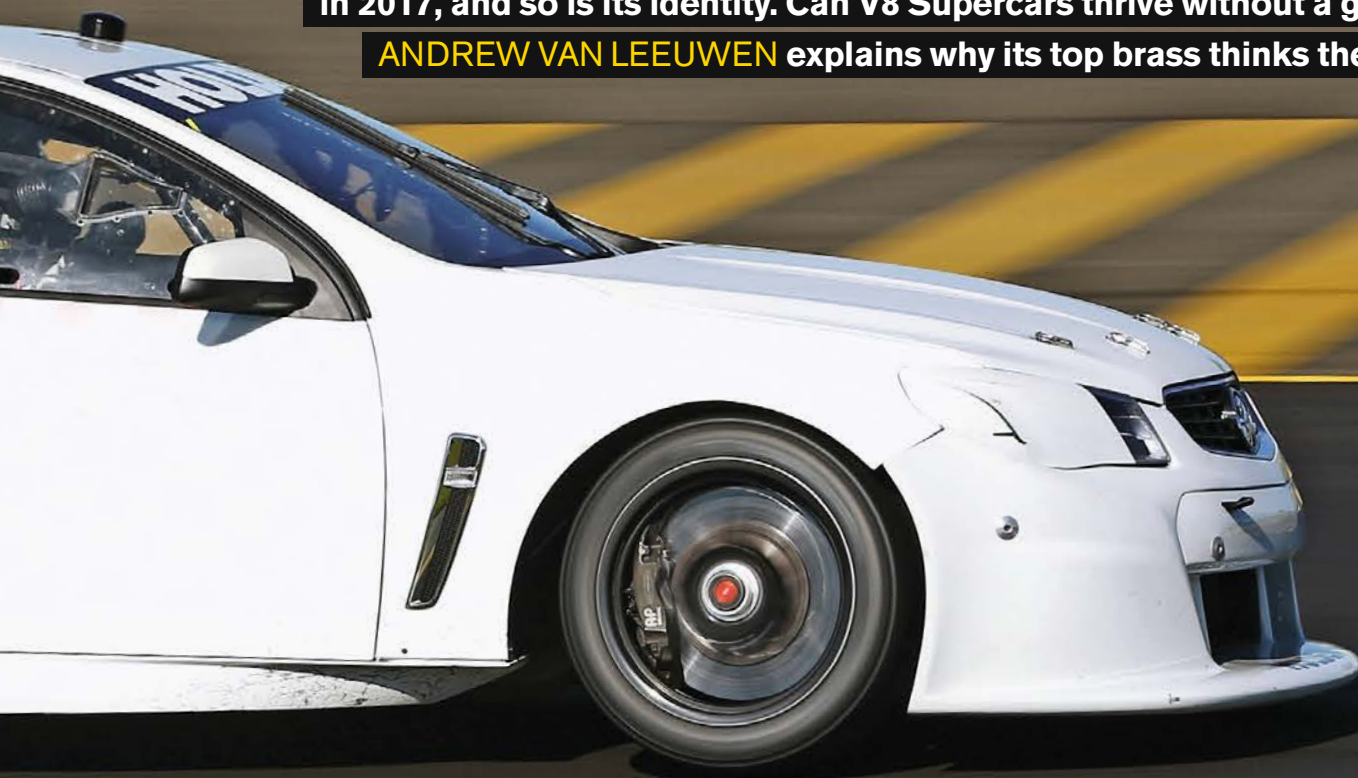
The cars will continue to be built around the Car of the Future regulations, introduced for the start of the 2013 season. Includes a standard chassis, gearbox, and control uprights and wishbones for the independent rear suspension.

FOUR SUPERCARS

SOUND?

Australia's premier tin-top racing championship is set for a complete overhaul in 2017, and so is its identity. Can V8 Supercars thrive without a grid full of V8s?

ANDREW VAN LEEUWEN explains why its top brass thinks the answer is yes



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BODY SHAPES

New generation cars won't need to be based on a four-door model, opening the door for smaller, sportier body shapes to come and play. The base model still needs to be a four-seater in road-going configuration, though.



POWER EQUALITY

Strict parameters will be put in place to make sure engines of different size and induction compete on a level field, not just in raw power, but in power delivery, torque and fuel economy, which is crucial for the endurance races.



ENGINE FREEDOM

By far the biggest of the changes: the championship's regulations won't specify the requirement of V8 power. Teams and makes will be able to choose what they want to run, be it a V8 or a turbocharged six or four-cylinder engine.

The reality is that we're now a very different country than 20 years ago

Triple 8 Australia boss Roland Dane

V8 Supercars. It's all in the name. Purpose-built racing cars, based on production models, powered by V8 engines. It's a simple formula, and one that's been incredibly successful in Australia since it was introduced in 1997.

But times are changing in both the automotive and sporting worlds, and even a series with long-lasting success such as V8 Supercars isn't immune. Put simply, that's why a radical new set of rules purposely removed from the all-V8 model are set to be introduced in 2017.

In no way is a major technical reshuffle a new thing to motor racing, but in the case of V8 Supercars it's a bigger shift than it would be with almost any other series. The word V8 is literally part of the series' identity, which results in a much bigger risk on the marketing and promotion side than it would for, say, the DTM, or even Formula 1. So why do it?

"The V8 formula is currently 22 years old, and there is a risk associated with leaving it," admits Triple Eight Australia boss Roland Dane, a man who has been instrumental in developing the new regulations.

"The reality is that we're now a very different country than 20 years ago. The car market is hugely different. Australian-built cars, let alone V8-powered Australian-built cars, now form something around seven or eight per cent of the market. If you go back 20 years ago, Australian-built cars were 70 per cent of the market, before Nissan closed their factory here in the early 1990s.

"So there's a massive change in the market, and the demographic of this country is changing. We've got 33 per cent of the population of Australia that were either not born here or are first generation, and they haven't grown up with a V8 'ute' in the backyard.

"We've got to respond to those people, we've got to try and embrace the changing demographic and people's different perceptions of what a performance car is as we move forward."

The logic behind it is solid. Just as was the case for Formula 1's V8 units, building a series around outdated technology – such as a five-litre



Roland Dane thinks formula must reflect current car market

pushrod engine – just won't cut it in the modern era. That's particularly true if you want manufacturers to come and play.

Manufacturer involvement has been key to V8 Supercars for its entire existence. And since the introduction of the Car of the Future regulations – essentially a common frame to which different body shapes can be fitted – Nissan and Volvo have both joined Ford and Holden with a works presence, while Mercedes has begun a customer involvement through the Erebus team.

But that influx alone isn't enough to future-proof the sport. Ford has now announced it's soon on the way out of the category, and the higher-ups at Volvo have been making negative noises about the brand's motor racing programmes around the world.

And the powerplant is a big part of the problem; how can you expect a company to pour millions of dollars into a project that is centered around technology that no longer has much relevance in the real world?

"If we stay with the V8 formula, we will become a non-manufacturer category," says Dane.

"Manufacturers will not be involved, that's the bottom line, if they have to run a V8. And the problem is, once you don't have manufacturers you lose credibility, and you lose marketing opportunities, and in this country, touring car racing has a long history of manufacturer/importer involvement over a 50-year period."



CIANFLONE/GETTY



HYUN/GETTY

The proposed change, outlined in a recently released 'white paper', has the potential to shake up Australian motorsport in a big way. It will allow manufacturers to bring any format of powerplant they like, providing it fits in with certain performance and economy parameters. Those freedoms will allow manufacturers to avoid situations such as Nissan having to re-engineer a truck engine into a race engine, or Volvo having to use a Yamaha-built V8.

Todd Kelly knows all about the challenges of adhering to the current engine regulations without using a pushrod Chevrolet or Ford. Aside from being one of the series' most experienced drivers, he's also a major cog on the technical side of Kelly Racing, which runs Nissan's V8 programme in Australia. He has spearheaded the development of the VK56, a 5.6-litre quad-cam light truck engine that the Kellys had to turn into a race engine. That was no mean feat, costing significant time and money over the past three years.

"We took on a fresh project, because the engine comes out of a Nissan Titan in America and a Nissan Patrol here in Australia," Kelly explains. "So it's probably the furthest removed specification of engine that you would dream of using in a race application.

"What that involved in terms of R&D for us was massive, and we're still pushing heavily on our



THE BACKGROUND



Top-flight touring car racing has a somewhat complicated history in Australia.

It dates back to 1960, when the first Australian Touring Car Championship was held as a single race in Orange, not far from Bathurst in rural New South Wales. In 1969 the ATCC switched from a one-race format to a multi-race series, with a major technical shake-up in the form of locally designed Group C regulations coming four years later.

Those regulations lasted until the 1985 season, when the more internationally accepted FIA Group A regulations came into play. The era was a good one in terms of variety, but the big loser was Holden, who struggled to compete with the likes of the BMW M3s, Ford Sierras and Nissan Skylines with a heavy, rear-wheel-drive car.

Holden's reprieve came in 1993, when the international demise of Group A rules led to Australia developing its own Group 3A regulations, which favoured Australian-built, five-litre V8-powered cars. It forced Ford to go back to racing Falcons, and laid the framework



Championship was dominated by Holdens and Fords

for the structure that still prevails today.

The concept of an all-V8 battle between Ford and Holden was formalised in 1997, with the formation of the Australian Vee Eight Supercar Company (AVESCO), and the adoption of the V8 Supercars moniker. That was the start of the Tony Cochrane era, one that saw the sport expand and the V8 Supercars brand evolve into what it is now. In 1999, the switch from the Australian Touring Car

Championship to V8 Supercar Series was complete, the ATCC name being dropped altogether. That year the Bathurst 1000 became a championship round for the first time.

V8s continued to be solely a Ford versus Holden battle until the introduction of the Car of the Future regulations in 2013. This opened the door for Nissan, Volvo and Mercedes to participate in V8 Supercars.



“If we’d had the option, it might have turned three years of work and millions of dollars into a few weeks and not much money”

Kelly Racing driver Todd Kelly

► R&D, and spending a lot of money to try and get the engine up to what the allowable maximum horsepower is.

“It’s been huge. It’s been a two or three-year process to get the engine to where it is now, with a lot of bespoke parts, and a lot of different designs that we’ve done in-house to modify it. We’re at the point now where we’ve got a pretty good engine, close to what the benchmark is.

“If we’d had the option of bolting a turbo V6 in and winding the boost up, it might have turned three years’ worth of work and millions of dollars into a few weeks on the dyno and not much money at all.”

That is why V8 Supercars is risking its identity with this new direction. While Nissan was happy to invest in developing an engine that has no use outside of the V8 Supercar programme, most manufacturers wouldn’t be. And the series organisers know that, because meeting with every manufacturer and importer in Australia was part of the study that led to the white paper.

“It’s been quite a lengthy process from V8’s point of view,” says Kelly. “They engaged all of the manufacturers and discussed what they want out of the category, and how they see their own business moving forward – and see how that could work with Australian motorsport.”

“This is set against a backdrop of the changing local conditions, with manufacturers no longer making cars here from the end of 2017,” adds Dane.

“I started to float the idea immediately after the introduction of the current car two years ago that we should be looking at the next steps, in particular in relation to power units given the changes going on in the automotive sector – and the gradual, unfortunate but real disappearance of V8 engines from normal everyday life.

“That’s a trend that’s only set to continue and accelerate. So we had to decide where we were going to be in terms of trying to keep the category as exciting and as fan-friendly as it has been, but also to not disenfranchise manufacturers who

maybe have been a big part of the past but weren’t planning on having V8 product.”

While the reasoning and research behind the proposed changes is solid, there will be challenges applying it to the real world. Balancing the horsepower figures between a V8 and a turbo V6, for example, is relatively straightforward.

But horsepower is only one aspect of engine performance. The challenge will be in measuring and matching torque, power delivery, drivability and, of course, fuel efficiency. “It’s a complicated set of parameters, and we’ve set ourselves a hard task,” Dane admits. “We know that. But that’s what we have to do. We have to come up with a formula that gets everyone to as close to technical parity as is possible.

“We’re already doing some of those steps right now. We have two years’ experience with different sorts of V8 engine, and I mean very different. The Volvo engine is effectively Japanese-designed by a motorcycle manufacturer, so it’s a very small V8 aluminum engine, with overhead camshafts. And

A 2015-SPEC V8 SUPERCAR



The current V8 Supercar's DNA is based on a reasonably simple formula: the standard 'Car of the Future' chassis and gearbox, a V8 engine, rear-wheel drive, and a four-door body with relatively little aero.

While the current engine regulations specify that a V8 engine has to be used, there is still variety among the five different 640-odd bhp powerplants that are used across the grid. The two original V8 Supercar models, the Holden Commodore and the Ford Falcon, are both powered by five-litre pushrod V8 engines with iron blocks and aluminum heads. Nissan, meanwhile, uses a 5.6-litre quad-cam engine derived from a Patrol four-wheel drive, Erebus runs a five-litre Mercedes V8, while the Volvo runs a 4.4-litre quad-cam V8 designed and developed by Yamaha.

In terms of the make-up of the cars, 'Car of the Future' – put simply – means a standard chassis design and dimensions, to which bodies are then modified and fitted (the Falcon and Commodore are both shortened to fit, while the Nissan Altima is lengthened). Then there is a standard transaxle with a centrally mounted sequential shifter, an independent rear suspension system with control uprights and wishbones, 18-inch wheels, polycarbonate windscreen, and a more central, improved safety cell for the driver. All of that is likely to be retained post-2017.

While exact budgets vary up and down the grid, running costs are estimated to be somewhere around the \$2 million per-car-per-season mark.



Todd Kelly has spearheaded Nissan's effort

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then there are the iron-block pushrod V8s from Ford and Holden

“So they’re very different, and that’s why we worked really hard over the past two years to make sure our current parity is as good as possible. It’s been complicated, with centre of gravity issues, with overall weight issues, with fuel economy issues, but we have ended up with a parity that has never been better.

“We have to continue to enhance it and get ourselves ready for even bigger challenges. There will be the possibility that we have a car that performs much better at Phillip Island

than at Winton. If there’s a bit of give and take over the season, in my mind, that’s not the end of the world.

“Our biggest challenge, though, is to ensure that when the cars go to Bathurst, that where it matters – economy and top speed – the cars are as similar as possible.”

So, how will V8 Supercars, or whatever they will be called, look in a post-2017 world?

“I would expect that we’ve got cars that are size-wise closer to the Nissan and the Volvo than the current Commodore and Falcon. So slightly smaller,” says Dane.

“They’ll still fit on the same platform, but that’s one thing we’ll almost certainly see.

“In terms of power units, there’s every chance that we will have several V6 turbo-powered cars, and we may even still have several V8-powered cars. There’s nothing to stop someone running a V8 if they want to. There will be a variance in powerplants.

“And we want to maintain the look of the cars in relation to their street counterparts. I believe we’ve managed that better than any other touring car category by a massive margin, because our cars do not have silly bits of aerodynamic stuff all over them, they do not rely on massive aero, they don’t have crazy wheel arches.

“Frankly, I think the smaller touring cars around the world, as well as DTM cars, have departed too far from the look of the [road] cars. We’ve tried to maintain that. All of the time I’ve been here we’ve worked hard as an industry and as a sport to try and maintain the absolute visual linkage with the road cars, apart from having a sexy-looking front splitter and a rear wing.”

“Our category in Australia is going even more towards being able to walk into a showroom, and point out actual parts in a dealership that are used on the racecar,” adds Kelly.

“I think that’s pretty cool, because the racecars aren’t getting any slower, and they have some meaning in terms of the end product.

“It will be interesting looking at things in the very near future, like the potential for us to have a Nissan GT-R engine in our car, a V6 twin-turbo. That could be just around the corner.

“Five years after, as the planet and motoring evolves, whatever it is, we’ll be racing it.”

Technical parity makes for close racing in current era



CIANFLONE/GETTY

INTO JAPAN

Heikki Kovalainen has accepted that Formula 1 is over for him and will this year forge a new career in Japanese Super GT. **EDD STRAW** spoke to the Finn

Heikki Kovalainen was not a happy man at the 2013 Brazilian Grand Prix. He had just finished his two-race stint subbing for compatriot Kimi Raikkonen at Lotus and, in a dark paddock several hours after the race, admitted that he had “underestimated” the challenge of scoring points as a stand-in after spending much of 2013 on the sidelines.

Tony Fernandes, then-owner of Caterham, had indicated that Kovalainen was set to return to a full-time seat after spending 2013 with only occasional Friday drives for the squad. But that decision was later reconsidered. Fernandes admitted that the Lotus performances were a factor in the Finn missing out on an opportunity that had once seemed certain to be his, and with alternative drives requiring the kind of backing Kovalainen didn't have access to, it was game over as far as Formula 1 was concerned.

So it was time to find an alternative. While in F1, Kovalainen had suggested he had no interest in other forms of motorsport, save perhaps

rallying. But once the 2008 Hungarian Grand Prix winner's opportunities dried up, like so many before him, suddenly there were many more interesting avenues outside F1.

His focus was always on a manufacturer-affiliated deal, so as a first step his recently announced move to race for the Team SARD Lexus squad in Japanese Super GT is a positive one. Other than the possibility of doing some test work for the SARD/Morand LMP2 project, nothing has been talked about with Toyota in terms of other programmes, so the plan is to impress in Super GT and see if that opens

other doors with the company.

“I'm very pleased to be back racing,” says Kovalainen. “I never wanted to stop, but there were a few mistakes that I probably made and some wrong choices towards the end of my F1 career that mean I haven't raced much at all recently. Last year, I didn't really do anything, I wasn't involved with racing, which was very painful. It's not nice, but sometimes you have to trust that things will go the right way, move on, plan for the next chapter and try to make the most of your career.”

Chief among those mistakes was probably having a little too much confidence that Caterham (which he joined in its Lotus Racing guise in 2010 after being dropped by McLaren) would establish itself as a regular points-scoring outfit before the ownership's patience ran out. Kovalainen was a busted flush when he joined the team after spending two difficult years as Lewis Hamilton's team-mate, but he did partially rebuild his reputation.

“It's easy to look back with hindsight, but if I really wanted to move on with my F1 career I needed to do it [leave Caterham] a few years earlier,” he says. “I had some offers from ▶



HEIKKI KOVALAINEN



► competitive teams but I stayed loyal because I was promised the team had the necessary funding and the plan was to grow. That was probably my biggest mistake. But it's better late than never and I'm over it now. F1 was great, but it's time to look for another challenge."

So to Super GT. While it ticks the boxes in terms of being manufacturer-aligned and at a high level, it will also be hugely difficult for Kovalainen to make an immediate impression. He got on well with the Lexus RC F during a recent three-day test at Suzuka, even though the car was 20 seconds slower, 60 per cent heavier and several hundred horsepower off the kind of F1 machinery he has been used to.

But given the number of hugely specialised and experienced drivers he will be up against, there is no foregone conclusion he will thrive. Ex-F1 drivers don't just breeze into seriously competitive championships and win without breaking a sweat.

"Once I get there, I will try to perform well straight away and get results, but it's a competitive series and it's going to be a big challenge," he says. "Everything has to go well to get the results; I have to understand the car, how to get the best out of it, to be competitive.

"The test was a nice experience. The car was better than I was expecting and had quite a lot of grip with what you could call old-fashioned aerodynamics – the floor is quite big with skirts on the side and the tyres are very sticky. The old-school Bridgestone tyres have a very good performance level, so there is a lot of grip and I enjoyed driving it.

"It's very difficult to drive and quite tricky when right on the edge. To get to that edge and stay there is not easy. There's a lot of grip up to a point, when you can lose the car suddenly. So to go there and be on that limit is going to require work."

This is the rub for Kovalainen. Yes, he's manufacturer-affiliated and yes, Toyota has other racing programmes, notably the LMP1 project, that he's now at least on the extreme periphery of, but he's not the only one. He's one of 16 drivers linked to the marque in Super GT. Five of those have won titles in the category, notably triple champion Juichi Wakisaka, while he's also up against fellow European emigres Andrea Caldarelli and James Rossiter. And that's without even thinking about the

"THE LEXUS IS VERY DIFFICULT TO DRIVE AND TRICKY WHEN ON THE EDGE"

line-ups fielded by Honda and Nissan.

Add to that the fact that Kovalainen has never raced this kind of machinery – beating Michael Schumacher in the stadium-based Race of Champions driving a Ferrari 360 Modena over a decade ago doesn't count – and there is a real mountain to climb. But perversely, it

could be that what happened to Kovalainen during his F1 career is an advantage.

Why? Because often it's the drivers who feel they have something to prove after an unfulfilled stint in F1 who go on to achieve the greatest things outside of grand prix racing.

It's not always the case, but Kovalainen certainly has the desire to make his sportscar switch work. It's not just about topping up the pension or keeping his hand in because he lacks the imagination to do anything else.

It's difficult to argue that Kovalainen's grand prix career was a real success. Yes, he won a race – at the Hungaroring in '08 – which is far more than the vast majority achieve. Yes, he drove for a couple of top teams in McLaren and Renault.

Yes, he will have earned some reasonable money along the way. But given that he started racing at the top level in 2007 with a CV that boasted wins in multiple categories (including a title near-miss in GP2 – losing the inaugural series to a certain Nico Rosberg) and the drivers' championship in the Nissan World Series, forerunner to the Formula Renault 3.5 category, a return of that sole victory and just three other podium finishes was underwhelming.

There were flashes at McLaren. Early in 2008 he drove some strong races, notably the Turkish GP when after a puncture he drove well enough to have won the race without the delay. But there were too many times when he struggled, with tyre management and qualifying pace among the weaknesses.

Perhaps the defining race of that period was the 2008 Italian Grand Prix. He was second on a mixed-up grid, behind only Sebastian Vettel in the unfancied Toro Rosso, and Kovalainen was expected to win. But he couldn't, and Vettel won with relative ease. That missed opportunity counted against him heavily at McLaren, and only served to underline the team's justification in building itself around his team-mate. Yes, he was the number two, but there were too many times when he failed to deliver to that level.

"I could have done things differently and prepared myself differently," he says. "I wasn't

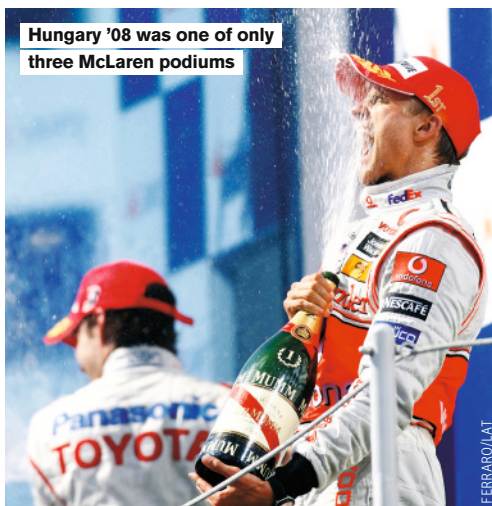


FERRAR/LAT



No GT experience, but won 2004 RoC using 360 Modena

FERRAR/LAT



Hungary '08 was one of only three McLaren podiums

FERRAR/LAT



TEE/LAT



Sole F1 win came for McLaren, Hungary '08

ready to get the results at McLaren that everyone was expecting and that I was expecting. I don't want to blame anyone in the team, they were very good, but I didn't get the results with them.

"The game wasn't over after those seasons. At Caterham, I was able to restore some of the promise of when I was younger. If I moved on, I would have been able to get the results and perform. Things would have been different."

All Kovalainen can do now is take that experience and turn it into a successful sportscar career. It's an idea dozens of other single-seater converts want to make work, and doing so could be almost as difficult as making it to F1 in the first place. But if he adapts well to Super GT, it could open doors, especially with the potential of an intermediate step with the SARD/Morand LMP2 team, even if he can't make a spectacular enough impression to force his way into the LMP1 line-up. And, as a left-field possibility, Toyota's return to the world rally championship means that he could even try to force his way into a discipline that, as a Finn, he inevitably has a soft spot for!

"Who knows what's possible," says Kovalainen. "I've got my own idea of where I want to be heading and my priority is to do the maximum job in Super GT. After that, we'll see where we go. The fact I am with Toyota is the number-one priority for me at the moment."

Kovalainen testing the BMW DTM car last year



FLIRTING WITH THE DTM

We heard very little about Heikki Kovalainen in 2014. But the one exception was in August, when he turned up to test a Schnitzer BMW M4 DTM car at EuroSpeedway Lausitz.

Inevitably, this gave rise to rumours of the Finn heading to the German-centric tin-top series, but he insists this was never a serious possibility.

"BMW invited me to test for half-a-day because of a regulation that a driver outside the championship was allowed to," he says. "They contacted me in the middle of the summer to ask me if I wanted to test and have a look.

"They were a great team and it went well, but we never came close [to a deal] or even talked about the future. I had already set my plans."

The lack of other action behind the wheel meant that, along with fitness work, he also had a lot of time to devote to golf. He managed to get his handicap down to 4.2. For the uninitiated, that's seriously good.

"Last year, I was forced to play a lot of golf because I wasn't racing," he said. "I got my handicap down, but I think I will make more money racing outside of F1 than I could ever make in golf!

"If I wanted to be a professional, I should have started that 30 years ago. I'm not so interested in golf that I would spend as much time as I would setting up a racecar or studying the data to find a tenth of a second."



Persevering with the Lotus/Caterham backmarker team

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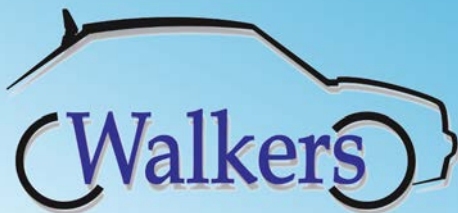
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Reference, HR017

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Cammish won on series debut as a guest driver

EBREY/LAT

Cammish leads Porsche influx

Tom Sharp and Nicholas Latifi also confirm Carrera Cup campaigns

FORMER BRITISH FORMULA Ford champion Dan Cammish will contest the Porsche Carrera Cup GB this season.

Cammish switched to GT racing last year in the British GT4 class, driving a Porsche 911 for Team Parker Racing. He also made his debut in the Carrera Cup GB with the team at the Brands Hatch finale driving the championship's guest car, taking a double pole position and winning the first race.

The 25-year-old will now contest the full Carrera Cup season with the Redline Racing team, which ran rookie Josh Webster to the title last year.

"To be honest, it was never on my radar as I didn't feel I could achieve a drive in the Carrera Cup due to lack of finance," he said.

"But [former Carrera Cup champion] Tim Harvey

approached me at Brands and with the aid of a sponsor he is connected with, it became more of a reality."

"A title challenge has to be done. I've never had a learning year, there are lots of good drivers coming in but I feel I can challenge and win from the outset."

Porsche factory driver and Carrera Cup GB race winner Nick Tandy, whose JTR team ran Cammish to the 2013 FFord title, said he had been helping him break into the series since the end of 2013.

"I wanted to help him because I think he is good enough to really do something in this sport," said Tandy. "From my point of view he's such a good driver that it's worth paying attention to him."

Nicholas Latifi, who finished 10th in European F3 last year, will partner Cammish at Redline Racing after the team revealed the Canadian, who is

contesting a full Formula Renault 3.5 campaign, will return to the team after a guest outing at Rockingham last year.

Former Ginetta ace Tom Sharp has also switched to Carrera Cup. He moved into British GT in a customer G55 alongside Colin White in 2013, but myriad reliability issues stymied his two years in the category.

His car could be entered by the same self-run set-up with which he finished second in the Ginetta GT Supercup in 2012.

"I'm looking forward to getting back into a one-make series," he said. "It's not that I didn't enjoy British GT, this just looked the best option for me. I'm hoping to be fighting at the front."

"The competition is probably way higher than anything I've experienced before."

SCOTT MITCHELL
FEATURES
EDITOR

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ALL CREDIT TO THE PEOPLE

behind the scenes at Porsche GB: the upturn in fortune for the Carrera Cup has far exceeded any expectation built up over the past few seasons.

Porsche was always adamant that its new car would help stop the rot that had eaten away at the championship in recent years. Last year that was achieved so far as numbers were concerned, with double figures a regular thing (not something that could be said for 2013). But the strength in depth was lacking, and it was only rookie sensation Josh Webster's topping of Michael Meadows that prevented another dull season.

Sprint GT racing always risks being something of a procession but if the action is not going to be fierce you at least have to be watching several good drivers on the limit lap after lap. In Dan Cammish and Tom Sharp the series has two excellent drivers striving to prove themselves in GTs, while Nicholas Latifi is an added bit of international flair.

Add to that the already-confirmed Dino Zamparelli, returning champion Josh Webster and other race-winning drivers coming back for more and this season could well be a vintage year for the Carrera Cup GB.

It's a far cry from where the series was a couple of years ago, and the sheer force of will to get it firing again looks set to be richly rewarded.



Sharp will make debut

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Britcar's envisaged V8 class would run within the Trophy

Britcar Trophy

Britcar plans V8 class for new Chevrolets

BRITCAR HAS UNVEILED PLANS to launch a V8 category within its Trophy series, after more than 20 Chevrolet Lumina's were brought into the country from the Middle East.

The Lumina CR8, built by the late Tom Walkinshaw's Holden Special Vehicles concern, is available in both 6.2-litre and 5.7-litre form.

Eight SC06 and 11 SC09 models have been purchased from the Bahrain International Circuit, which ran the Supercars Middle East Championship, with three more SC06 cars available to be converted to race specification.

Resolve Motorsport has one of each car at its Towcester base, with the others complete and in storage.

"They were cheap and have got everything," explained Tucker, who says the cars and entries will come to less than £30,000 for a season.

"They are still very impressive, look very good and make a wonderful noise."

"They are in the UK and running. We hope to get some on the grid for the first round."

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AERO	Adjustable rear wing
OTHER	Power steering; 80-litre fuel tank; Pirelli tyres

Renault Clio Cup UK

Jeff Smith's son Brett joins Pyro for Clio Cup assault

BRETT SMITH, SON OF BRITISH Touring Car regular Jeff, will compete in the Renault Clio Cup UK this season for reigning champion outfit Team Pyro.

Smith, runner-up in the Mazda MX-5 Championship in 2013, raced for the Leicestershire-based team in the Clio Cup

Race Series last year, finishing fifth in the points with one race win at Donington Park to his credit.

After testing Pyro's Clio at Donington last week, Smith has admitted that he has high expectations for the year ahead, saying: "I'm coming in to win races and go for the title; I'd be very disappointed if I'm not in the top three."

"Mazdas got me used to having lots of cars in close proximity which is something that you need to be able to handle in the Clio Cup – I'm up for a bit of a fight."

Pyro team principal Mark Hunt added: "It's clear Brett is not here to make up the numbers and we certainly aren't. We really want to defend our title, and I expect him to be at the sharp end."

Smith has tested Pyro's UK car



WALKER

Silverstone 24 Hours

Beechdean to race GT4 Aston in Silverstone 24-hour event



Beechdean Aston won British GT4 crown

EBREVILAT

THE BRITISH GT TITLE-WINNING

Beechdean Motorsport squad will contest the revived Dunlop-backed 24-hour Race at Silverstone in April.

Andrew Howard's team will field the Aston Martin Vantage taken to last year's British GT4 title by Ross Wylie and Jake Giddings in the Britcar-organised event, which last ran as a 1000km race in 2013.

Howard said: "We've had good history at this event, which provides us with great seat time. We are quietly

confident of a strong result."

Meanwhile, saloon racing stalwart Craig Davies will contest the twice-round-the-clock enduro in a SZ Motorsport-run Seat Leon Supercopa alongside 2011 Silverstone 24 Hours winner Sean McInerney, Paul Smith and James Thorpe.

● Team CHF500 is running a Porsche 968 in the race in aid of the Children's Heart Foundation, the objective being to raise a total of £24,000 through sponsorship for the charity.



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MG Trophy

Bray may rethink sabbatical as Luti drops to ZR170 class

REIGNING MG TROPHY CHAMPION

Chris Bray could race in the series' 170 class this year after long-time rival Paul Luti confirmed he will make the step down from the 190 class.

After clinching last year's title by a single point, Bray had intended to sit out

2015 to allow Australian champion Cody Hill to race his ZR190, but may contest selected rounds in a ZR170 after Luti's decision to switch to the lower class prompted him to reconsider his plans.

"I've been trying to convince Chris to switch too," said Luti. "I called him out of courtesy when I made the decision as we've been main rivals for years."

Explaining his own decision to eschew the 190 class, Luti added: "The number of 190s racing in the series has steadily decreased; I don't want to be the quickest car, racing around on my own."

"Conversely, in the 170 class there will be a group of over 20 which I can have a ding-dong with. The running costs between the two classes are very similar."



Bray and Luti are long-time MG rivals

WALKER

Formula Ford 1600

Geva lines up UK races

GEVA RACING MAY ENTER A PAIR

of Kent-powered Mygales in selected Formula Ford 1600 events this season.

The Dutch outfit's converted GV14-K chassis debuted at the Formula Ford Festival last October in the hands of Chris Middlehurst, who took the car to fifth in the final of the Walter Hayes Trophy event a week later.

Geva has now also completed the build of a 2011 ex-Duratec chassis, which Middlehurst has purchased, and

plans to run this alongside its existing car.

"We'll run both cars at the first round of the Super Series at [Belgian track] Mettet," said Geva's Nelson Valkenburg.

"After that, we're looking at races like the Star of Mallory, Jim Walsh Trophy at Silverstone and BRSCC National Series.

"We've revised both cars over the winter and stripped another five kilograms out. We've also got new Bold engines, so we're expecting both cars to be faster than ever."



Geva ran Middlehurst at the end of 2014

JONES

British Rallycross

Scott to return to British RX

ANDY SCOTT'S ALBATEC RACING

squad will field two Supercars in the British Rallycross Championship this year alongside its international programme.

Scott, who placed 12th in World Rallycross in 2014, will race a Peugeot 208 Supercar in the British series alongside an as yet unnamed team-mate.

"I have unfinished business in Britain; I'm aiming to go one better than in 2011 when I just missed the title," said Scott. "This is not the end of the team's European or World RX challenge, just the first phase of our exciting plans for 2015."

The 58-year-old feels the team's presence at home will help the British series, saying: "Running a two car team in

Britain should hopefully help raise the profile of the championship. Rallycross is on the up worldwide, so I feel it's important for drivers to support their domestic series as we strive to further raise global awareness of our sport."



Scott raced his 208 in World RX last year

McKLEIN/LAT

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The John Pope Special is being restored

Hybrid saloons once again on the rise with the CSCC

Club racing in my youth, and through the 1970s and '80s, was a very different scene to today's engineering-led equivalent, an era in which the ingenuity of car builders led to some extraordinary home-brewed hybrids. Long before computer programmes defined vehicle design, intrepid drivers used old-fashioned 'seat of the pants' feel – often in league with cast-off tyres – and burned the midnight oil to tame their steeds.

One of the iconic breed of Super Saloons which always caught my eye was the John Pope Special, a road-legal twin-turbocharged Aston Martin V8-engined Vauxhall Magnum which the farmer exercised regularly at Silverstone. Forty years on, it's being restored by AM specialist Geoff Harris for the Classic Sports Car Club's wonderful Special Saloon and Modsports retrospectives – jaw-dropping treats for today's fans who have been weaned on endless one-make categories.

Roll the clocks forward about 15 years from the 'JPS' to the end of the '80s and you might remember Mike Wilson's Mazda RX-7 in Thundersaloon events. Designed and built by the late Jim Morgan, it was a work of art. Powered initially by a 3.4-litre Ford GA V6 engine, it reappeared with Rod Birley up and 2-litre Ford YB turbo motivation.

Unseen for several seasons, the sleek machine has been acquired by long-time Special Saloon Skoda ace Tony Dickinson, who is currently treating it to a comprehensive rebuild. The combination of handling and reliable power should make the Mazda a formidable tool in CSCC events, the big focus of which this season will be the unmissable Mallory Park nostalgiafest in August.

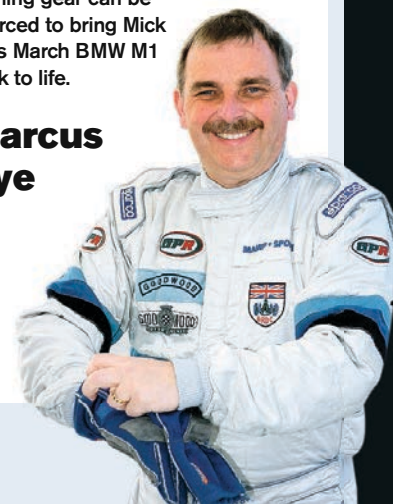
Several more 'blasts from the past' are due back too, including Paul Chase-Gardener's ex-Gerry Marshall Vauxhall Firenza 'Old Nail', the Minton brothers' long-serving Ford Escort RS2000 'droop snoot' (back with BDG power, with Steve's son Dan sharing driving duties), Simon Allaway's re-chassis'd Lotus Esprit V8, former MiniJem ace Ian Hall's Darrian Wildcat T9 and Paul

"Special Saloons are jaw-dropping treats for those weaned on one-make series"

Lawrence's Ford Sierra XR8.

Also lurking in the wings are Jonathan Mann's Mike Pilbeam-designed Vauxhall Calibra V8, Peter Moffat's Ford YB-engined Escort Mk1 and the Toyota Celica Supra turbo of the indefatigable Terry Nicholls (who raced Minis at Goodwood in the early '60s), while Imp man Kevin Cooper has acquired an ex-IMSA Nissan 280Z as a stopgap solution until a chassis and running gear can be sourced to bring Mick Hill's March BMW M1 back to life.

Marcus Pye



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Ex-Marshall Firenza is among entries for Phillip Island Classic



In brief

Gore to defend title

Adam Gore will return to the Lotus Cup UK in 2015 to defend his Production-class crown behind the wheel of a brand new turbocharged V6-engined Lotus Exige (above). Gore, who also won the Lotus On Track Elise Trophy last year, will once again have his machine run by ex-Clio and Mazda MX-5 racer Rob Boston, and may also make appearances in GT Cup later in the year.

Clucas bags Kia drive

Sometime British Formula 3 National Class driver Ben Clucas will race a factory-backed Kia Optima in the Pirelli World Challenge this year. The 31-year-old, who has focused on sportscars since his single-seater career ended, joins the Kinetic Motorsports team alongside Canadian Mark Wilkins in the United Sportscar Championship support series, replacing team boss Nic Jonsson.

Historics

Baby Bertha goes down under

PETER WHITEHAD'S AUSTRALIAN Grand Prix-winning ERA R10B and the Vauxhall Firenza V8 'Baby Bertha' with which Gerry Marshall dominated the UK Super Saloon racing scene in 1975 will be among the star turns at next month's Phillip Island Classic.

The two cars, owned by Paddins Dowling and Joe Ward respectively, are among seven cars being sea-freighted from Europe to the Victorian Historic Racing Register's annual festival on

March 6-8. Boasting more than 600 entries, the Phillip Island Classic is by far the southern hemisphere's largest historic racing gathering.

Whitehead enjoyed many expeditions with his cars, but his Australian GP win was particularly notable as the race marked the inauguration of Bathurst's celebrated Mount Panorama circuit.

Ward's hybrid also has an Australian connection since it was originally raced with an F5000 Holden Repco engine

before it was replaced with a Chevrolet.

Also en route are Andrew Wareing's Brabham-Climax BT11, the Chevron sportscars of David Carrington-Yates (B16) and Tim Cousins (B23), the Gotcha team's newly-built Shelby GT350 for Germans Marcus Graf von Oeynhaus and Rhea Sautter, and Australian Russell Kempnich's returning Porsche 962. Brit Andy Newall, who has co-ordinated the trip, left his Formula Ford 1600 Palliser there last year.

Smith took three wins from three at Manfeild in NZ



Formula 5000

Smith takes F5000 sweep

TRIPLE MSC FORMULA 5000 Tasman Revival champion Ken Smith's trifecta of victories at last weekend's Manfeild finale completed nine from nine on New Zealand's North Island.

Missing the season opener at Sandown and the penultimate meeting at Christchurch cost the Lola T332 driver a title shot, however, allowing Steve Ross (McRae GM1)

to claim his third crown.

During Manfeild's New Zealand Grand Prix meeting, top qualifier Smith lowered the lap record in Sunday morning's second heat, having been beaten away by Ross.

Andrew Higgins (Lola T400) bagged a pair of seconds in Saturday's preliminary and the final as the trio completed a podium lock-out.

Ginetta GT4 Supercup

Wrigley to join Ginetta GT4 grid

KUMHO BMW CHAMPION TOM Wrigley will contest his first full season in the Ginetta GT4 Supercup this year.

Wrigley notched up a pair of top-10 finishes in a one-off outing in the BTCC support series last October at Brands Hatch driving for his own team.

The 22-year-old said: "I fell in love with the Ginetta G55 from the first time I drove it, so here's hoping we can bring home some silverware in it."

Wrigley raced at Brands last year



Fiestas will get their own class this year



CSCC Tin Tops

CSCC creates Fiesta class

THE CLASSIC SPORTS CAR CLUB has announced the creation of a new class in its Tin Tops series for the 2015 season, catering for the Ford Fiesta.

Last year, the Mk6 Fiesta ST was one of many cars eligible for Class A, but Tin Tops organisers have now decided to

give the Fiesta its own category, Class C, in a bid to prevent Class A from dominating the series' entry lists.

The CSCC has also revealed its 2015 calendar, which comprises nine race meetings, including a first visit to the Rockingham circuit for several years.

Caterhams get live TV

Caterham's flagship Superlight R300 series is to receive live television coverage this season, with Motors TV broadcasting live the rounds at Silverstone and Brands Hatch, when the series features on the British GT support bill. The Freeview channel will show highlights of every round of the series, while terrestrial broadcaster Channel 4 will also air highlights after each event.

Chadwick stays in GT5

Ginetta GT5 Challenge runner-up Ollie Chadwick will remain in the championship in 2015, extending a partnership with Xentek Motorsport that yielded six race victories last season. The 19-year-old, whose sister Jamie competed in the Ginetta Junior series, is hoping to combine his second season in the British GT support category with a number of endurance race outings.

Bird joins Juniors field

Frank Bird, the son of Superbike team owner Paul, will contest this year's Ginetta Juniors series. The 15-year-old, who joins the returning Jonathan Hadfield at the R & J Motorsport team, has no prior racing experience, and has been testing at Donington Park under the tutelage of former British Touring Car champion Chris Hodgetts as he prepares for his debut race weekend.

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THIS WEEK

LETTERS • ON TRACK • TV PICKS • FROM THE WEB • AUTOSPORT.COM

What you think of the motorsport news of the past week



Honda's not shone on its F1 return, but it sounds good

LEPAGE/LAT

Honda sets the noise standard

A simple question: having heard the Honda V6 during recent testing and loved its aggressive growl, why can't the other engine manufacturers make their engines as noisy?

I actually like the sound these V6s make. Instead of an all-pervading

scream of the V8s, now you can hear gears whining, exhausts chattering, brakes and wheels locking up and tyres actually squealing during cornering! Heaven.

Plus, my dentures don't rattle out onto the floor when they go past!

Derrick Holden, Marlow

Does anyone else think that Motors TV's daily WRC highlights strikes the wrong balance when it comes to showing the action?

What's great about rallying is the mind-blowing images of cars at high speed in adverse – and diverse – terrains. While a daily highlights programme is great, surely three seconds of a car flashing past followed by a 30-second interview with a driver saying the same thing as he did after the previous stage, doesn't do it justice? More action, please!

Mark Paulson
By email

Ron Dennis's recent comments are starting to annoy me. First, his Ron-speak 'size zero'. So in other words you've designed something

brand new with a new manufacturer that has no space for flexibility on the car, so it'll keep breaking.

He then says he's focused on making a quick car, not a reliable one. Well it's neither yet and this is the opposite to what the dominant world championship winning team are saying themselves. Maybe he could learn something there.

He then argues that there is no point making the car a pretty colour just to appease someone in the team. Well what about the fans? AUTOSPORT wrote about Red Bull and how liveries stir the emotions of the fans, and maybe the backers...

He now says that F1 budgets are too expensive to attract a single large backer. Therein lies the problem: it's not a budget if you can't balance it out, is it? He is touting a fundamental business

flaw as if it's now normal practice. The money you spend needs to be equal to or less than the money you are bringing in. F1, you are spending too much money! Sort yourselves out!

Gary Williams
Peterborough

In the last couple of years or so

I've noticed a trend in your magazine towards the eradication of the words 'twice' and 'double', replaced instead by the awful 'two time'.

Now I know that you are not the only offenders regarding the adoption of this irritating phrase, but it seems far worse when leaping from the pages of my otherwise great weekly read. It's sending me mad, please stop it now!

Steve Bodrog
By email

BIG NUMBER

9 Number of Daytona 500 winners in this year's field: Dale Earnhardt Jr, Jimmie Johnson, Matt Kenseth, Trevor Bayne, Jamie McMurray, Ryan Newman, Kevin Harvick, Jeff Gordon and Michael Waltrip.

MILESTONE

1999 Jeff Gordon won pole for Sunday's Daytona 500 for the second time, 16 years after his first. Ominously, he won the race in 1999.



TAYLOR/GETTY

WHAT'S ON TRACK



MILLER/LAT

NASCAR Sprint Cup season opens with the Daytona 500

DAYTONA 500

NASCAR Sprint Cup
Rd 1/36
Daytona, Florida, USA
February 22
nascar.com

NASCAR XFINITY SERIES

Rd 1/33
Daytona, Florida, USA
February 21
nascar.com



TILTON/GETTY

Trucks also kick off at Daytona

NASCAR TRUCK SERIES

Rd 1/23
Daytona, Florida, USA
February 20
nascar.com

MY FAVOURITE DRIVER

DAMON HILL

There are those who maintain that the one-time motorcycle courier lucked in to his drivers' title with Williams. **EDD STRAW** begs to differ

WHEN DAMON HILL LANDED the Williams drive for the 1993 season, I was outraged. At this point I should add the caveat that when his deal was done, I was only a 12-year-old; but as far as I could see, a driver with a couple of grand prix starts, a string of DNQs and no F3000 wins had stolen a drive that should have gone to Martin Brundle, my British driver of choice at the time.

Exactly how Hill managed to rehabilitate himself as a credible driver in my eyes has been lost in the mists of time. But by the time he was halfway through his first full season, Hill had converted me.

Perhaps it was losing his maiden grand prix victory in consecutive race weekends in the British GP (to an engine failure), and then the German GP (tyre blowout) that convinced me? Perhaps it was the tenacity he showed in turning himself from a driver perceived as being in a car well above his station into a world champion? Perhaps it was the dignity and professionalism he brought to the role?

Realistically, at that age, it was probably just as much about getting caught up in the England-versus-Germany sporting narrative that overtook his rivalry with Michael Schumacher.

After it, when Hill sensationally took the lead and then almost won the 1997 Hungarian GP in a mostly recalcitrant Arrows-Yamaha, it was Schumacher who was on the receiving end of the overtaking move.

Then there was that sensational victory with Jordan at Spa a year later, a reminder that Hill was a driver capable of producing results that far exceeded what you would expect of one unfairly characterised by some as a journeyman who lucked in. But it was this perception that made him the rarest of things – the



Hill won fans in first full season

LAT

underdog who was in the best car. And when he picked up Williams and came close to winning the 1994 world championship following the death of Ayrton Senna, echoing what father Graham had done at Lotus in the wake of Jim Clark's death in 1968, he earned huge respect.

As a professional journalist (not to mention an adult less prone to hero worship than I once was) I've always found Hill to be a thoroughly decent

"Perhaps it was the dignity and professionalism he brought"

person to deal with, not to mention an interesting and insightful observer of grand prix racing. He's a character who, from my experience, far from having the ego you might expect of a former world champion, seems pleasantly surprised that anyone would be interested in his analysis.

A worthy world champion, a great ambassador for the sport, and a winner of more grands prix than all but a dozen of the most successful drivers F1 has produced.

And after all, how many drivers have squandered opportunities in great machinery? ❧



LAT

FROM THE SOFA

WHAT'S ON TELEVISION

Q&A

COLIN CLARK WRC LIVE REPORTER

@voiceofrally

AUTOSPORT: You haven't always been in broadcasting...

Colin Clark: No, not at all. I was in the right place at the right time to land the best job in the world. I got involved in rallying when I worked for BAT and 555 sponsored the Subaru World Rally Team. It was my responsibility to look after that deal, but I had no background, no history in the sport. Monte Carlo 2002 was my first event and I was bitten by the bug immediately. David Richards offered me a seat in Prodrive's helicopter and I spent an afternoon with Paddy Hopkirk flying up and down the Col de Turini stage; we were flying up and down the stage largely because we couldn't land. The pilot tried to put us down in a field, but an old woman came out and chased the helicopter away with a broom! When our sponsorship ended, I took redundancy and went out to watch the Cyprus Rally as a spectator. I had this idea about recording and selling World Rally Car sounds for ringtones and somebody put me in touch with [radio reporter] Greg Strange. Greg was happy to help me record the sounds, providing I went to the end of the first stage and reported on it for him!

AS: In at the deep end then?

CC: Totally! It was carnage at the end of that first stage and it was like somebody flicked a switch for me. It was the smell of the cars, the atmosphere, the adrenalin in the car. It was incredible. Forget ringtones! That was 10 years ago and I've been talking about the WRC ever since and I absolutely love it. There's



Drive in an M-Sport Fiesta R5 rally car was "pretty epic"

"Monte Carlo 2002 was my first event and I was bitten by the bug"

nothing like the places we go, the people we meet and the action we get to talk about. It's completely unique and utterly, utterly stunning.

AS: The passion's still the same?

CC: Absolutely. You couldn't do this job without being hugely excited by this sport. I realise I might get a bit over-excited every now and then,

but we're broadcasting for 12 or 14 hours a day and if you're not genuinely passionate about this thing then you can't do it. I'm fortunate in that I have a great relationship with Beccs [Williams, WRC Live studio reporter] and we manage the fine line of entertaining and informing really well.

AS: What's been your highlight?

CC: Sebastien Loeb winning his seventh title in front of the town hall in Hagenau, surrounded by his people. The hairs go up on the back of my neck just thinking about that. Murray Walker once said the greatest privilege in his job was being able to stand at the shoulder of sporting giants and proclaim their greatness to the world. We did that in a small way in France that day. As well as giving me access to the most talented drivers in the world, this job has also afforded me some amazing opportunities to drive and be driven in some very special cars. Having Malcolm Wilson invite me up to M-Sport to drive his Ford Fiesta R5 was pretty epic as well.

Colin Clark was talking to David Evans



Speculative trip led to Clark landing his dream job

TV pick of

Edited by Matt Beer



DAYTONA 500 - LIVE

Premier Sports
Sunday 1800-2330

Don't get hung up on the fact that the first 199.5 of its 200 laps won't be too relevant to the result, NASCAR's biggest event is an extraordinary spectacle and a great launch for the Sprint Cup season. It's a race all 43 drivers are desperate to win – and they probably all have a genuine chance under restrictor-plate rules. Be prepared for a marathon – storms, holes in the track and exploding jet-dryers have all caused interruptions in recent years.



TOYOTA RACING SERIES

Motors TV
Saturday 1855-2000 + repeats

The highly-competitive winter single-seater championship in New Zealand is proving to be a real treat this year, albeit sometimes a chaotic one, as Ferrari's teenage protege Lance Stroll fights BRDC Formula 4 star Arjun Maini for the title. And the highlights packages on Motors TV are top-notch too, with tight editing that captures all the action without feeling duty bound to show every minute of every race, and well-judged interviews giving some insight into the range of personalities in the series.

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THE FIRST MORNING OF A

Formula 1 pre-season test is always the most interesting. For the technically savvy (or just interested) F1 fan, there's always that sense of anticipation that someone's car could exit the garage sprouting a new development of some sort.

There's also the intrigue of how quickly all the garage doors will come up for the first time, and this year in particular that means keeping a close eye on McLaren-Honda. Most of the teams tend to try to make a statement by logging an

installation lap as close to 9am as possible, so as the clock creeps round any car that has not appeared instantly becomes the subject of more attention. Teams can get away with long spells in the garage later in the day, but there's something about not nosing out into the pitlane at the start of play that catches the eye.

As you're reading this – hopefully on Thursday morning! – testing is up and running at Barcelona. Check out our live coverage on autosport.com – we promise we'll have a man in the pits with all the details.

the week



F1 TEST COVERAGE

Sky Sports F1

Thurs-Sun 2100-2130

The 2015 Formula 1 field is back in action at Barcelona this week, after an opening test that posed plenty of intriguing questions. Just how fast will Mercedes be when it unleashes its true pace? Is Ferrari's promising speed genuine? Does the McLaren-Honda partnership have too big a mountain to climb? Has Renault done enough to satisfy Red Bull? Where does Williams fit in? Sky's F1 channel offers a 15-minute highlights round-up followed by Ted Kravitz's observations each night.



GP2'S 2014 FLASHPOINT

Sky Sports F1

Sat 1900-2030/Mon 1845-2000

Jolyon Palmer and Felipe Nasr's 2014 GP2 title battle had its fraught moments, and things really kicked off at the Hungaroring, where clashes in both races prompted the rivals to throw accusations of dangerous driving at each other during the podium ceremony. It all features in Sky's recap of last year's GP2 action this week. And while Palmer and Nasr tripped over each other, Stoffel Vandoorne started his late-season march by finally grabbing his second win.



BAHRAIN GRAND PRIX 2014

Sky Sports F1

Tuesday 2200-2300

Sky Sports F1 is building anticipation for the start of the new F1 season next month by reshowing highlights from the 2014 title chase through February and March. The pick of the early-season bunch is, of course, the Bahrain Grand Prix. It wasn't just Lewis Hamilton and Nico Rosberg's astounding lead fight (and associated team radio soap opera) that thrilled. The rampaging pack behind was just as wild, and Esteban Gutierrez found himself upside down – with help from Pastor Maldonado – along the way. One to record for posterity.



LUCAS OIL OFF ROAD SERIES

Motors TV

Thursday 1445-1550

Never heard of the Lucas Oil Off Road Series? You've clearly never turned into Motors TV at the right random time. It's not something you'll have read about in AUTOSPORT either, but don't let that stop your indulgence, for this sort of mad concoction transcends traditional fandom. It's a spectacle, with big grids of powerful off-road machines providing explosive wheel-to-wheel entertainment – the sort of Pickup racing-meets-motorcross collaboration that only America can deliver.

HOT ON THE WEB THIS WEEK

YouTube **MERCEDES ROAD TO 2015**



SEARCH FOR: Road to 2015 Mercedes

This multi-part documentary plots the progress of the Mercedes team towards 2015 (pictured is Nico Rosberg taking a look at his new car in the factory before the first test). Well worth a look for those wanting to see behind the scenes.

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HAVE-A-GO HERO

When drivers crop up in unexpected places



Coronel's Audi 'payback'

After failing to get in the Gulf Audi R8 at Le Mans in 2001 thanks to the car's early bath, Tom Coronel landed a consolation race at Estoril

The multi-talented Tom Coronel might be best known for his giant-killing antics in the World Touring car these days, but in 2001 he had a shot at outright victory in the Le Mans 24 Hours. The Gulf-sponsored Audi R8 he shared with Stefan Johansson and Patrick Lemarie was a private entry, one of two that year running as a complement to the pair of factory Audis, but it was operated by the very able Arena Motorsport squad of veteran Mike Earle under the Johansson Motorsport banner.

"I remember everything!" says Coronel. "As a driver you're always hunting for a good seat, especially for a big event like Le Mans. I was in the Gulf Audi with Stefan and Patrick, and I had the feeling like Alex Wurz did with the Porsche [WSC 95, winner in 1996], 'Now I have the chance, now I can do it.'"

But the 2001 24 Hours would enter infamy as the wettest in history, and Johansson was one of many drivers caught up in the chaos when torrential rain enveloped the circuit less than 15 minutes after the green flag. Repairs cost just three laps, thanks to the safety car, but then the electrics cut out during the third hour while Johansson was still at the wheel.

"I never even drove," says Coronel. "I directly packed my stuff and went back home. I was more than disappointed. But Mike Earle straight away said, 'Tom, don't worry, we'll make it up to you.' And then he said, 'Can we offer you a drive at Estoril in the Gulf Audi as well?' I thought, 'Why not?'"

Thus Coronel found himself at the former Portuguese Grand Prix venue a month later, driving one of just two prototype entries in the

1000km fourth round of the inaugural European Le Mans Series. Since the only other LMP900 entry was a Pescarolo-Puegot C60 driven by Jean-Christophe Boullion, Laurent Redon and Boris Derichebourg, the chances of victory were that much greater.


"So there we were in Estoril," says Coronel, "in the lead by almost a lap, and I was behind – what was his name? Derichebourg. I said on the radio, 'He's running P2, I'm behind him – so we lap him, what do you think?' They said, 'Of course – lap him.'"

"So I passed him on the straight, no problem. I'd been sitting behind him for six laps and we were a second and a half faster. Maybe he was trying to be a hero – he just tried to outbrake me or something. He hit me in the rear, I went up in the air, and I hit a marshal post.

It could have been really bad.

"I walked back to the truck and my phone was ringing. It was Laurence Pearce, who I was driving for at Lister at the time. He'd been watching it on TV. 'Tommy! Tommy! Are you OK?'"

I said, 'No problem – you know Tommy survives everything.' He said, 'Don't talk like that! It could have been a really bad one. You've been really lucky. Anyway, good to hear your voice. Bye.' Boom! That was Laurence..."

The Pescarolo drivers were then disqualified, handing victory to a Saleen S7R driven by Chris Goodwin, Ian McKellar Jr and Bruno Lambert. But with Derichebourg claiming a 'long' brake pedal, the Pescarolo was reinstated thanks to a procedural error relating to the stewards' hearing. 

Stuart Codling

NEXT WEEK

Formula 1 testing latest

Plus: We tell the full story of British Formula 3

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