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MOTORSPORT NEWS



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F1'S NEWEST STARS ON THE YEAR AHEAD P20

Rivals fear Japanese car's pace in 2019 contest

TOYOTA READY TO FLY IN WRC



Meeke: New Yaris man

By David Evans

World Rally Championship teams fear Toyota could dominate this year's series – with the Japanese manufacturer already working on a series of upgrades for its Yaris WRC.

The manufacturer title-winning team will field a largely unchanged car for this month's season-opener in Monte Carlo, but from then on the Yaris will evolve quickly.

Toyota dominated the second half of last season, winning four of the last six rounds.

Full story, p2-3

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WRC RIVALS



Competitors look enviously at Japanese marque's prospects



Toyota suffered some poor fortune during 2018 season

FEAR TOYOTA WHITENWASH

IN 2019



New recruit Kris Meeke is focused on the job at hand and helping Toyota get back to the front



Tommi Makinen says he is impressed with progress on the Yaris

By David Evans

Toyota starts this year chasing back-to-back manufacturer World Rally Championship titles for the first time in 25 years – and its rivals fear the Japanese giant's domination of this year's series.

Drivers and team principals from all corners of the service park point to Toyota as the team to beat this season, with world champion Sebastien Ogier summing up everybody's feelings.

"They are so strong," said Ogier. "When you see what they could do last year, especially in the second half of the year – we all have a lot of work to do to stay with them."

Asked if Toyota were favourites going into 2019, Ogier was unequivocal, saying: "For the teams' [title], I would say for sure."

Team principal Tommi Makinen did little to allay those fears, telling *MN* there was more to come from his team in the coming year. Asked what he thought about the label of pre-season favourite, Makinen said: "I'm not so sure about that, yet. Look at last year and, yes, we had so many fastest stage times – but we did not have as many good results as we should have. We need more good results from the rallies."

"We have some work coming with the car, we have some [homologation] jokers which we will be using, but maybe we don't need to do too much with the car [in terms of performance]. I would say the consistency is the important thing for us to find."

How Toyota intends to dominate

Driver line-up

There can be absolutely no denying the excitement that accompanies a driver line-up including the trio of world rally winners that is Ott Tanak, Jari-Matti Latvala and Kris Meeke. Each of those three drivers starts the season with the ability, pace and knowledge to win every round of the championship. Between them, they have 378 WRC starts and 29 wins. The bulk of those statistics comes from Latvala, but Tanak and Meeke have both been around long enough to know what's needed. Interestingly, the Estonian has one more world rally start (92) and one more win (six) than Meeke.

The only possible fly in the ointment comes in the management of three strong-willed crews, each of whom will only have eyes for one step of the podium.

Transmission development

This is where the homologation jokers are really going to come in to play as the team looks to source more traction and more driveability from revised front, centre and rear differentials.

Toyota's chief engineer Tom Fowler explained: "Changing the specification of the transmission is a difficult and long-winded process. Once you've homologated the original diffs, you have to go through a joker process to change each one. And, if you get that

wrong, you have to go through a further joker to rectify it or go back to the old set-up. We've been working on the ramps in the diffs since 2017, but now we're more on the internals in the front and centre. This is aimed at improving the driveability of the car and helping with the way we put the torque down onto the road. This is aimed more at the gravel events, but it's possible we will be able to learn more from this for asphalt."

Engine's on song

When the Yaris WRC first turned a wheel in competition almost two years ago, rivals immediately noticed the strength of the engine – especially the power output. Engine development is completed by Toyota Motorsport in Cologne and the fruits of Germany's ongoing labours were seen in Finland last season, when TMG delivered an upgrade in time for Tanak to win in Jyväskylä.

The combination of engine and transmission is where Toyota will score well this year – with improvements to both offering more feedback and confidence to the drivers. The engine now gives more torque than ever, allowing the drivers to use the motor to pull themselves out of trouble, especially in tricky conditions where grip is compromised.

Time to toughen up

Plenty was made of Toyota's fragile front end last season, with radiator and engine damage ruling the team

out of plenty of points. It's these issues Makinen is talking about when he speaks of the need for more consistency.

Despite those issues, when it came to the really tough test – Turkey – then Tanak delivered another win for the Yaris. Fowler admits, however, that rough rally pace needs significant attention for this season.

"If you ask me," said Fowler, "which rally I was most disappointed with last year in terms of performance, I'd have to say Turkey. OK, we won the rally, but we weren't there in terms of pace. Everybody broke their suspension except us – maybe you could say we were quite fortunate that we didn't hit any of the bigger rocks. But look at the first day and we were sixth, without the other cars having problems and some mistakes we might have stayed there. We've seen this as a trend last year, in the rougher sections of stages, when we're down to bedrock, then they're tough for us. In Turkey we traded protection for performance and we knew when we started that rally out outright speed wasn't there."

"We've worked hard to pick up traction in the slower, looser sections and that was one of the car's big gains last year – but that's come to the detriment of protection in the suspension, which meant we couldn't carry the speed through the rough places. We need to work on this, we need some time testing on rough gravel – trouble is, there aren't many rallies where you need that. It means

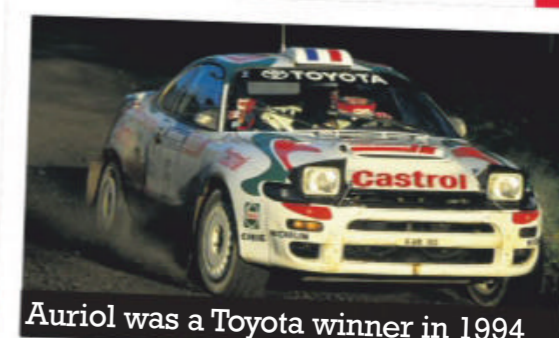
devoting time to a set-up and car fairly specific to one rally. Generally, rallies are getting easier on the cars which has meant more of a focus on performance."

The overview

Chassis and suspension development is ongoing with Toyota and the drivers are known to be far happier with the feel and feedback from the Yaris than they were 12 months ago.

The only visible change to the outside of the car for 2019 is expected to come around the front of the rear wheel arch, which will have a minor aero tweak to help the natural airflow for cooling. There's a feeling the car could still shed some weight, but otherwise it's getting close to the optimum current specification World Rally Car.

Toyota Gazoo Racing's other strength is undoubtedly the support from the parent manufacturer in Japan. Toyota chairman and CEO Akio Toyoda is a personal supporter of Makinen's work and is regularly seen on events cheering on the Yaris WRCs. That support is reflected in the budget, with Toyota the best-resourced squad in the service park.



Auriol was a Toyota winner in 1994

RACING NEWS

F1 ROUND-UP

Can McLaren win?

Carlos Sainz Jr is hopeful McLaren will "remember" how to win again because he has "a lot of trust" in Formula 1's second-most successful team. McLaren has won 182 races, second only to Ferrari (235 victories) in the all-time list, but has suffered six winless seasons and not scored a podium since the 2014 opener in Australia. Sainz joins in 2019 from Renault alongside Formula 2 graduate Lando Norris.

Honda eyes step-up

Honda technical director Toyoharu Tanabe believes Toro Rosso's use of a complete Red Bull rear end in 2019 will be a "big advantage" for Honda as it prepares to supply two Formula 1 teams again. Red Bull is switching to Honda engines this year after its junior team's successful first campaign with the Japanese manufacturer in 2018. As both teams will run Honda engines they will share a complete rear, unlike last year when Red Bull was supplied by Renault.

Ricciardo fail

Red Bull Racing boss Christian Horner believes that his team did "everything that we possibly could" to retain Daniel Ricciardo. After weeks of discussions the Australian was expected to sign a new contract shortly after the Hungarian GP. However he opted instead for Renault. "He actually said this – he did the classic break-up – it not you, it's me! And I think he just genuinely wanted to take on a new challenge," explained Horner.

Haas surprises itself

Haas has admitted that it surprised itself this year to be able to fight with Renault for a top four place in the constructors' championship. Having only entered F1 three years ago, the American-owned outfit challenged Renault for fourth in the constructors' championship with drivers Romain Grosjean and Kevin Magnussen, ultimately missing out by 29 points. "I think we surprised a lot of people," said team boss Gunther Steiner. "We were aiming for sixth, we were fighting for fourth and we finished fifth. So yes, it's a bit of a surprise."

Happy Hamilton

Lewis Hamilton's ability to perform at such a high level in Formula 1 is down to him having found happiness in his life off track, reckons team boss Toto Wolff. Having delivered his fifth world title this season, Hamilton was able to twin success with the launch of a Tommy Hilfiger fashion collection line. "I think that what is happening is that he constantly develops, there is no stand still," said Wolff. Hamilton apologised for referring to Stevenage as a "slum" at the BBC Sports Personality of the Year awards.

LONDON MAYOR: CITY F1 RACE A POSSIBILITY

Sadiq Khan behind potential capital grand prix plans



F1 held an event in London in 2017

By Scott Mitchell

The prospect of a London grand prix has been boosted by the city mayor believing it "should be possible" and Formula 1 targeting a grand prix on the capital's outskirts.

A grand prix in the English city has been little more than a pipe dream for several years but it is an option F1 owner Liberty Media has continued to explore.

The future of the British Grand Prix is under threat because current host Silverstone has activated a break clause in its contract with F1 that means the 2019 race will be its last without a fresh deal.

However, F1 has made it clear that it wants to maintain its presence in Britain, if not grow it, and it has emerged that a new option to race

in London is being considered.

While a London grand prix has numerous logistical challenges, city mayor Sadiq Khan is said to consider it realistic.

A spokesperson for the mayor's office said: "London is always open to hosting the world's biggest and best sport events – from the final of UEFA Euro 2020 to the NFL, and the Cricket World Cup to Major League Baseball. "The mayor believes that it should be possible to organise a race in London in the future and has asked his team to explore options with F1."

F1 held a demonstration on the streets of the capital in 2017 ahead of the British GP, the first such event since one in '04.

However, a full-on race was recently labelled "inappropriate" by David Richards, chairman of Motorsport UK, the country's governing body.

Formula E held races in London in its first two seasons, but the electric single-seater series only used a circuit built within Battersea Park.

F1 is pushing for more street races and Vietnam will join the calendar in 2020 with a Hanoi city event.

In an interview with London newspaper the *Evening Standard*, F1 sporting director Ross Brawn said that a race on the city's outskirts is the best option.

"I think because F1 is a week-long activity minimum, the disruption it would cause in the centre of London would be unacceptable," said Brawn. "I don't think Londoners really need to worry about us taking over the centre of London for a week.

"But there are things on the periphery that are being explored – not slap-bang in the centre of London but Greater London."

There has not been any public progress on Silverstone negotiating a new deal, although the British Racing Drivers Club has dismissed a report that an offer had recently been presented to F1.

Before the end of the 2018 season, F1 commercial chief Sean Bratches hinted that it had options beyond Silverstone for the British GP.

However, Brawn said that F1's efforts to pull off a race in London would not necessarily come at the expense of Silverstone, which has been the British F1 host since 1987.

"We'd like to see London complement Silverstone, not replace it," said Brawn.

"We could see ways we could make it work both sides.

"London is an iconic city with a massive history in the sport and there's huge enthusiasm here."

Trebling budget wouldn't have improved 2018 FW41 car – Claire Williams

Claire Williams believes her Formula 1 team's 2018 car was so flawed that it would have been difficult to improve "even if we had tripled" the budget.

Williams finished 10th and last in the constructors' championship in 2018, the team's worst result in its long history.

Both Lance Stroll and Sergey Sirotkin struggled to get to grips with the underperforming FW41 last season and were only able to score points on

two occasions, in Azerbaijan and Italy.

"I think the problems were related to the global car, if you like – we've had issues front to back," deputy team principal Williams told *MN*.

"So to try and make changes to bring performance to a car that was like that was always going to be difficult.

"We tried and we tried hard. It wasn't through a lack of hard work, energy, motivation, I suppose it was just the

flaws were too fundamental to rectify halfway through a season."

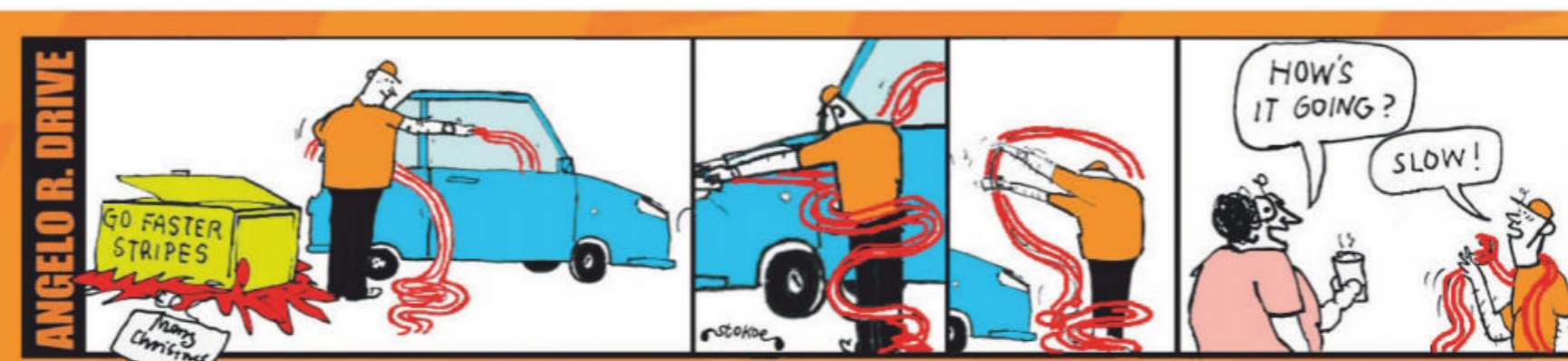
Chief technical officer Paddy Lowe added: "It's been a very tough season for the team, but also for me personally, I would say one of the toughest years that I'd had in F1. But on the good side I think we found the bottom of the trench in terms of performance. That is actually a healthy process for the team to go through for the long term."



Claire Williams (l), Paddy Lowe (r)

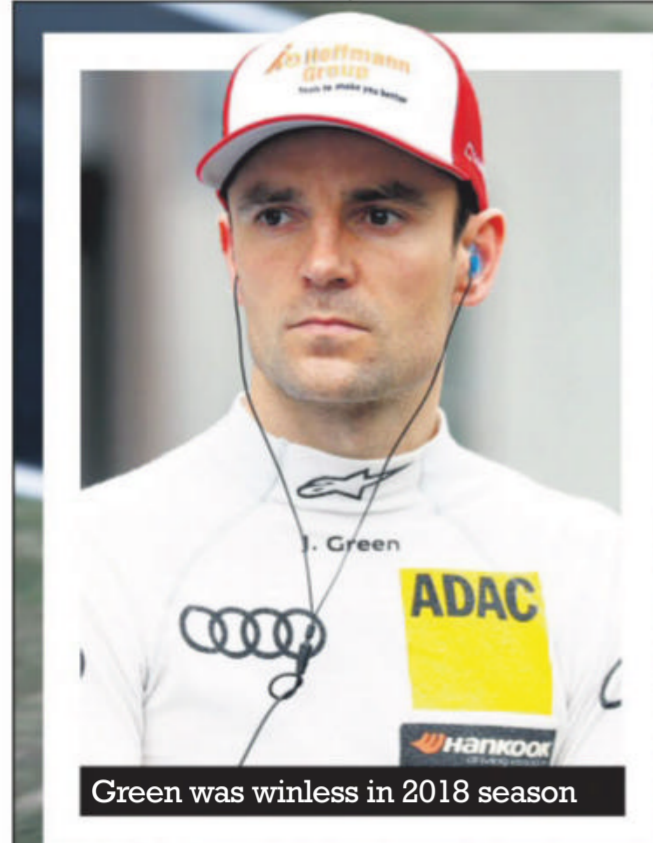
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Photos: LAT, DTM, Chris Owens – IndyCar



Green was winless in 2018 season



Title escapes Green as he starts 14th year

GREEN RETAINS AUDI DTM SEAT

Jamie Green has been re-signed at Audi for DTM in 2019, ensuring that Britain will be represented in the German tin-top series as reigning champion Gary Paffett departs the series and Paul di Resta has no confirmed seat. Green, 36, has 177 starts and 16 wins in the series, while a title still eludes him after a best finish of second in 2015. The Leicester driver was hit hard by the new rules in 2018, which aimed to reduce aero, which Audi had an advantage in. He failed to win a race and finished last in the standings while Team Rosberg team-mate Rene Rast took seven wins –

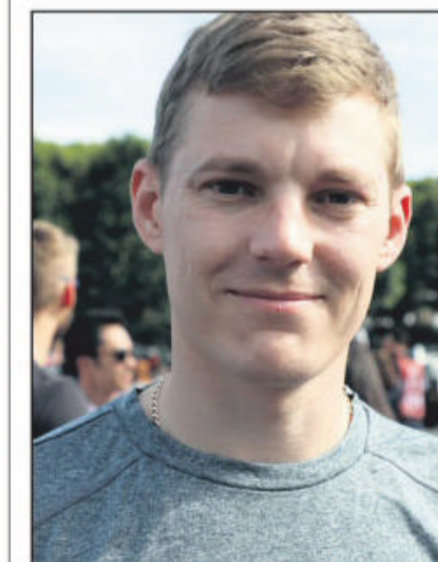
more than his title winning year in 2017 – and second in the championship. “We already had an extremely strong driver squad in 2018,” said Audi’s head of motorsport Dieter Gass. “In my view, they’re the right six for Audi Sport. All of them have the potential to battle for the DTM title. “Aside from that, they again proved to be extremely good team players last season. “In the past, we changed the team compositions from time to time. “However, in the current pairings, the drivers complement each other

perfectly so that we didn’t see any room for improvement in this respect.” This season will be the first that Paffett hasn’t started in DTM since 2002, making 185 starts, taking 22 wins and two championships in 2005 and 2018. He has confirmed that he would like to drive in the series next year in a one-off outing. “I actually mentioned it to Uli Fritz [HWA boss] after Hockenheim that I want to come and do a guest race next year just so I can race with a #1 on my car,” he said. “He did consider it, but maybe not... But I think if I push hard enough

something good can happen.” That appearance would have to come in the Aston Martin team – new for 2018 and run by the same HWA outfit that ran Mercedes’ DTM entry – and that is also a potential landing spot for di Resta. The Scot finished third in the championship with Mercedes last season, and is one of a number of drivers linked with the Aston seats along with out-of-work Formula 1 driver Sergey Sirotkin. Red Bull F1 reserve Jake Dennis, GP3 driver Jake Hughes and Porsche junior driver Thomas Preining all tested with HWA in Jerez last year.

Karting and sportscar ace Hanley to IndyCar

Multiple karting champion and sportscar regular Ben Hanley will contest a partial season in IndyCar this year, including the Indianapolis 500, after the DragonSpeed team with which he contests the FIA World Endurance Championship announced its expansion to the US open-wheel series in December. The 33-year-old Mancunian hasn’t raced a single-seater since 2010 in the football-based Superleague Formula championship, but has kept his hand in conducting tyre development work with Formula 2 and GP3 in recent seasons. Both driver and the DragonSpeed team, run by former British Formula 3 racer Elton Julian, will be new to IndyCar and oval racing, but Hanley told *Motorsport News* that his familiarity with the team and extensive test mileage in single-seaters will help shorten the learning curve. “I’ve done a lot of mileage in the background and the experience that you gain when you’re doing tyre testing and car development is massive,” he said. “We all know each other and we all know each other’s roles, so when we get to that first test, we’ll just focus on the car and getting to familiarise ourselves with the car as opposed to forging new relations on the engineering side, so it’s a big positive to have that continuation.” The first test gets underway at the Circuit of the Americas in Texas next month.



Hanley is with DragonSpeed

QUICK LAPS THE FASTEST NEWS ROUND-UP

Despite having said it would be “highly unlikely” to be on the World Endurance Championship grid in 2020/21, McLaren has confirmed it could field a car under the new Hypercar rules. “It is definitely something we are evaluating, although I wouldn’t call it a plan yet,” said McLaren boss Zak Brown... Formula E could

increase the power awarded for its ‘attack mode’ for the next round at Marrakech on January 12. Last time out in Saudi Arabia was the debut for the system, which is activated by slowing down and going off line before receiving a power boost. Drivers criticised its initial placing on the circuit, before it was modified prior to the race... Fans of Formula 1

will get the first chance to meet Brit Lando Norris in his role as a Formula 1 driver, as he and 2019 McLaren team-mate Carlos Sainz will be unveiled at the Autosport International show. Ex-Renault driver Sainz and Formula 2 runner-up Norris will open the show on the Saturday, and will be interviewed on the Autosport stage.



Norris (above) joins Sainz at Autosport show

Kristoffersson drives a VW TCR



Kristoffersson swaps World Rallycross for a full-time WTCR seat

Reigning World Rallycross champion Johan Kristoffersson will compete in WTCR full-time in 2019, after Volkswagen pulled its support for the PSRX World Rallycross team he won the last two World RX titles with. Peugeot, Audi and VW have all pulled out of World RX for this season, with the series facing an uncertain future over the details of its proposed

switch to electric power. That forced the 18-time winner – over just two seasons – to look for other options, and he already had experience with the formula having won the TCR Scandinavia title last season. “After four years of rallycross, 2019 will be my first full touring car season on the international stage since ‘13,” said Kristoffersson, who will compete

in a VW Polo TCR. “Most of the circuits are entirely new territory for me and therefore represent a huge challenge. “I’m also looking forward to working with my new team-mates, especially touring car world champion Rob Huff. “What’s more, Sebastien Loeb Racing is an experienced team and I’m delighted to be moving within the Volkswagen family.”

IndyCar legend Mears: New aero rules will suit not hinder Alonso’s Indy 500 victory chances

Indycar legend Rick Mears says the more difficult new-for-2018 Indycar will suit McLaren’s Fernando Alonso better in his second attempt on the Indianapolis 500 in 2019. Alonso led laps in his first Indy 500 back in 2017, driving for an Andretti Autosport-supported McLaren entry, before an engine failure prevented him from being a factor in the race-deciding late laps.

The two-time Formula 1 world champion adapted quickly to the car in the Month of May, aided by Andretti’s dominance during the downforce-heavy manufacturer aerokit era – a point Sebastien Bourdais made earlier this year. In 2018 Indycar reduced the downforce dramatically and changed the Indy 500 from a pack-like race into a more single-file style event, with the lack of aero grip leading

several star names to spin out and crash during the race. But Mears believes the radical change will not impact Alonso. “I actually think the current cars will suit him better,” said three-time Indycar champion Mears who works with the Penske team. “From listening to our drivers and others, this car gives better feel, better feedback, which should help someone with

less experience. “Yes, it’s harder to drive now, more twitchy, more difficult in traffic, and so on. “But Alonso is one of the great racers: he’s like a Mario [Andretti], Parnelli [Jones], A.J. Foyt – you know he’s going to step into any racecar and be quick.” McLaren has confirmed that it has opened negotiations with Alonso to have him test its next F1 challenger for 2019.



Alonso has already tested the new-spec IndyCar aero last year

RACING NEWS

Photos: Jakob Ebrey

McLAREN'S GT JUNIORS REVEALED

Dorlin, Collard and Smith join scheme



Juniors will drive 570S GT4s in '19

McLAREN'S NEW DEVELOPMENT DRIVERS

James Dorlin

Dorlin was perhaps a little unfortunate to see the Renault UK Clio Cup title slip from his grasp in the courts last season. The mid-season run of form that helped him claim five wins on the bounce offers a tantalising look at what the versatile 19-year-old – who also has experience in historics – can bring to GT racing.



Jordan Collard

In his first season out of Ginetta Juniors, the youngest son of British Touring Car Championship veteran Rob Collard impressed in the Mini Challenge JCW class by finishing as top rookie in third overall, taking a win at Silverstone. Still only 18, eschewing the single-seater route pursued by brother Ricky could pay dividends.



Josh Smith

The Cumbrian's dramatic victory in last year's Formula Ford Festival after a battle with Niall Murray and Ollie White showed the 19-year-old's steel under pressure. After a tough 2015 in F4, he rebounded to win the 2017 BRSCC Northern title, but the switch to GTs will pose an altogether new challenge.



By James Newbold

McLaren Automotive has signed Renault Clio runner-up James Dorlin, Formula Ford Festival winner Josh Smith and Mini Challenge front-runner Jordan Collard to join Lewis Proctor in its Driver Development Programme for the scheme's second season.

The quartet will pair up in two McLaren 570S GT4s in a yet-to-be-confirmed series, although it is expected that they will contest

the British GT championship.

The three teenaged drivers were chosen after an extensive interview process including fitness tests, engineering knowledge and qualifying simulations, overseen by McLaren factory driver Rob Bell. All will benefit from mentoring from McLaren staff in matters ranging from on-track performance to sponsorship and PR and data analysis.

"It's a pleasure to welcome three bright young talents to the

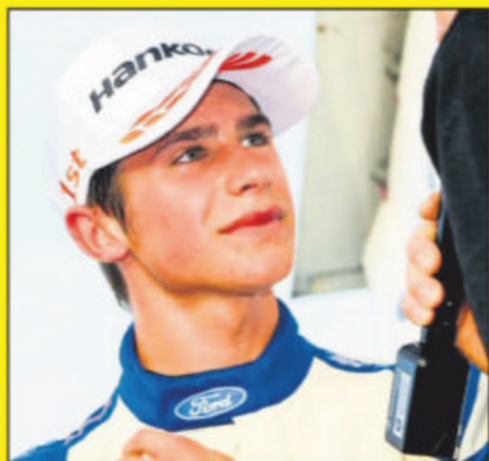
McLaren Automotive Driver Development Programme for 2019," commented Dan Walmsley, McLaren Automotive director of motorsport.

"Following a successful inaugural season for the programme, which saw two of the four drivers challenge for the GT4 class title in the British GT Championship, we're looking forward to further successes for the second year of the programme."

Programme graduates Michael

O'Brien – who has been placed at Balfe Motorsport – and Charlie Fagg finished within two points of the British GT4 title last year for Tolman Motorsport and have been promoted to the newly established Junior Performance Academy. Fagg's 2019 schedule with a McLaren customer team is expected to be announced soon.

The third graduate, Jordan Albert, will continue his involvement with McLaren through its Pure McLaren trackday events.



Priaulx switches from British F4

Priaulx couldn't turn down professional switch from single-seaters to Multimatic Mustang British GT4 seat

Seb Priaulx says the prospect of becoming a professional driver was too good to turn down after signing a deal to race a Multimatic Motorsports Ford Mustang GT4 in British GT next year.

The 17-year-old showed flashes of promise in his first season of single-seaters in British F4 this year for TRS Arden, finishing seventh in the standings with two wins, but has followed his father, multiple touring car world champion Andy, into sportscar racing after impressing Multimatic

boss Larry Holt in a test at Snetterton.

Priaulx, who had also tested for McLaren, told *MN* that the prohibitive cost of climbing the single-seater ladder combined with the opportunities for growth within the Multimatic organisation – which built the Mustang GT4 and runs Ford's FIA World Endurance Championship team – made his decision a formality.

"I see a very bright future in Multimatic, Ford and in GT racing, it's a great step for me to be a professional driver," he said.

"I'm only 17, so it's a dream come true for me. There's always some routes to go higher in single-seaters, but it costs a lot of money to get to Formula 3 so to be a professional driver with a manufacturer is the best option for my career."

Priaulx already has a good working knowledge of Multimatic having seen his father racing in the WEC at close quarters, so is confident that the team can make up for its lack of experience on the British tracks with the Mustang, which will be making its UK debut.

"I'm always expecting to win, that's my main goal, and the car is definitely capable of it," he added.

"I don't think [the lack of data] will affect me too much because I have good team-mates in Scott Maxwell and Billy Johnson who know what they're doing and I can feed off them. They've got a lot of experience of GT racing which I haven't at the moment but I'm very confident that we've got a great car and the guys are amazing, they work very hard."

British GT turns down "wacky" Donington night-race, format stays the same

British GT will replicate the two-hour, single race format of its Donington season finale for its additional visit to the Leicester circuit in June, having dismissed the possibility of a "wacky" night race format.

Championship manager Benjamin Franassovici told *MN* in August that an 'into the night' race was among the options being considered for the extra Donington round, which fills the vacancy left by Rockingham on the calendar, but was wary of taking unnecessary risks.

"We did look at doing something different, wacky, but it had to make sense," he said. "It needed to be packagable. We really had a good think and the issue was there was no point in doing something for the sake of doing something."

Franassovici cited a 1900hrs curfew for track activity as a critical factor against a night race, and said that teams had "generally accepted" the proposal.

He added: "I'm not closing the door to introducing something interesting if it makes sense, like having the Am

finishing the race which would be different to the end of season finale."

The championship has 30 fully-paid entries, but Franassovici said he was prepared to keep the door open for any new GT2 cars that are built by the end of this year.

"If someone has a car and wants to try it out during the season then we will be happy to look at it and see how we could accommodate it for one or two events," he said. "If we have space on the grid, we will do our best to see if it can be fitted in without disrupting what we have."



British GT raced into the night at Donington Park in the 2011 round



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Series will stop at end of 2019

It's been a great proving ground for drivers

Clio Cup was TOCA mainstay

DISAPPOINTMENT AS CLIO CUP COMES TO AN END

Renault UK Clio Cup teams are “frustrated” and “disappointed” that the popular series will be axed at the end of the season.

It was confirmed shortly before Christmas that the manufacturer would not continue to support the series beyond the 2019 season. That coincides with the planned introduction of the new fifth generation Clio as well as when the category’s deal to appear on the British Touring Car Championship support bill ran out. *MN* understands that the timing of the new car’s launch was a critical factor with the championship potentially ending sooner if the new model was introduced at an earlier point.

The series has been a mainstay on the TOCA support bill for decades and has been a proving ground for countless future tin-top stars.

The news was a surprise to some of the Clio teams, while others feared that Renault would pull out.

“It’s disappointing really,” said Westbourne team boss Richard Colburn. “It’s just a shame after such a long heritage [the series originally began in 1991]. It’s had some great races over the years and I’m sure they’ve sold many cars [off the back of it].”

Matrix Motorsport team principal Dave Hayes, who first began working in the Clio Cup as a 16-year-old in 2000, added: “It was not something we were expecting. It’s one of them where everything comes to an end at some point.

“Some drivers are like ‘why would I do it because it’s the last year’ but on the other hand it’s the one to win because everybody is going to remember the last races.”

WDE Motorsport was considering quitting the series for 2019 but is now set to remain for the category’s final season.

“I could see it coming a mile off,” admitted team boss Wayne Eason. “There was no commitment and nobody looking to renew a contract would leave it until now.”

Westbourne still plans to run up to four cars this season, while Matrix has reported a good level of interest in the series too.

Renault Sport Racing sporting manager Tarik Ait Said explained that it wasn’t an easy decision for Renault UK to bring the category to an end. “We had meetings with Renault UK to work out what would be the future,” he told *MN*. “There’s a new Clio coming out in 2020 so we had a lot of discussions with Renault UK on

how to position the Clio Cup UK.

“The environment has changed. For Renault it’s very important that it makes sense from a marketing point of view. It was a compromise on what the best thing to do with the budget that we have.

“Even if it’s got a good grid of 20 to 25 cars, financially speaking a good grid would be above 30. They were putting a lot of money in it and need to have a return on the investment.

“If you rate it from a TV point of view, it’s fantastic with the public. From a marketing point of view, with the new car coming and all the things that would be required, it was hard for them to see how the Clio Cup would fit in 2020.”

● *For a look back at the most successful drivers in the Clio Cup, turn to page 24.*

IN BRIEF

Carlin Japanese F3
Carlin could become involved in the Japanese F3 championship this year. Carlin sent technical staff and Ferrari junior Callum Iloft out to the pre-Christmas two-day official test at Suzuka to help the OIRC Team YTB squad, which has just bought two of the team’s cars. Iloft – who competed at the Macau Grand Prix with Carlin – is not in contention for a seat, as *MN* sources report he has signed with Charouz Racing System for Formula 2 this year.

Porters unite

A second generation of the Porter family will take on the Mini Challenge when teenager Josh Porter joins the Cooper Am Championship grid for 2019. He has been lured into Mini racing by his father, Tim Porter, who was a regular in the Cooper S championship with the Oakfield Motorsport team.

Prize test

Classic VW Cup Class B frontrunner Alex Kite enjoyed a prize test in a latest-spec Volkswagen Racing Cup Team Hard-run Golf last month. Kite, who regularly competes in a Vento VR6, got a taste of more modern machinery around the Brands Hatch circuit. As well as the run in the car, Kite also received media and sponsorship advice.

Karter to Italy

Red Bull-backed British karter Jonny Edgar will race in the Italian Formula 4 Championship this season with the Jenzer Motorsport squad. The teenager, who finished 14th in the OK World Championship final last year, will also compete in selected rounds of the German series too. “I’m now training hard and looking forward to a new chapter and to the challenges that 2019 will bring,” he said.

Piastrri to Europe

Oscar Piastrri will compete in the Formula Renault Eurocup in 2019 with reigning champion R-ace GP. The 2017 British F4 runner-up finished eighth in the standings last year with Arden but steps up to the frontrunning squad for his sophomore year.



Hutchison will drive Audi R8 LMS GT3 car run by Phoenix Racing

Blancpain GT Series move to Phoenix Racing for British GT race winner Hutchison

British GT race winner Finlay Hutchison will compete in the Blancpain GT Series this season for Phoenix Racing in an Audi R8 LMS.

The 18-year-old took victory in the British GT season finale last year at Donington Park aboard a McLaren 570S GT4 run by Equipe Verschuur, as well as

wins in the GT4 European Series.

He has already tested the Audi R8, which will be run by former DTM and GT3 European Championship winners Phoenix Racing, in Portimao at the end of 2018.

“Everything went very well in the test and the car was awesome,” said Hutchison.

“It’s absolutely fantastic to be stepping up into the Blancpain GT Series in GT3 this year, especially with such a successful and experienced team as Phoenix Racing, and it’s great to have the opportunity to race an Audi R8 which is a proven car at this level. It’s a really solid car, a proper race car.”

Students to take part in UK’s first closed road electric race

Hull will host its first closed-road race this year with all electric races aimed at encouraging young children and students to get involved in motorsport.

Three categories of races will be held; Formula Goblin (9-11-year-olds) will include drag and slalom challenges, Formula 24 (11-16-year-olds) will be two 90-minute endurance races and Formula 24+ (16-25-year-olds) will have a one-hour race.

The event will take place on April 28 in Hull city centre and has been organised by the Greenpower Education Trust – which was set-up to inspire young people into STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) – and Green Port Hull, lead sponsor of the event supported by the Regional Growth Fund.

Paul van Veggel, CEO of Greenpower Education Trust, said: “Greenpower

sets a challenge for young people covering the ages of 9 to 25: work together as a team to design and build your own car and race it against other teams as equals, no matter what your background is.

“As well as inspiring them to undertake technical education subjects leading to real, rewarding careers, they also learn so much about working together, overcoming challenges, resilience and fair play.”

National FF1600 season for Macpherson

Scottish teenager Michael Macpherson will make his British Racing and Sports Car Championship National Formula Ford 1600 debut this year after signing with Kevin Mills Racing.

Macpherson, 17, graduated to cars from karting in 2017 when he competed in Scottish FF1600 for Graham Brunton Racing, finishing fifth in the standings.

The Highland driver sat out last season due to budget constraints but raced in the Festival for GBR before competing in a one-off

Champions of Brands meeting with KMR, recording a best finish of third.

KMR took Mazda Road to Indy shootout finalist Michael Eastwell to second in last year’s National championship, while Michael Moyers claimed a second successive Walter Hayes Trophy win for the team.

Team boss Kevin Mills said: “After finishing third on his debut, it became a priority for us to keep Michael [for] 2019. Here’s hoping he can get the same results as the other Michaels we’ve had in our team!”



Macpherson (16) driving for KMR

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RACING NEWS

MOTORSPORT UK REVEALS RANGE OF DISCOUNTS

Competitors and volunteers to benefit in first major change since MSA rebrand

Photos: Steve Jones, LAT

MOTORSPORT UK BENEFITS

- Complimentary personal accident cover with JLT
- Discounts on competition and road car tyres, at Protyre, the fastest growing chain of fast fit and mechanical garages in the UK
- 10 per cent off competition insurances and 15 per cent off road car insurance with Adrian Flux
- 10 per cent off in-store at Halfords
- 10 per cent discounts off Grand Prix Racewear's branded personalised overalls
- 10 per cent off outdoor apparel and equipment at the UK's leading independent outdoor and mountain sports retailer, Ellis Brigham
- Discounts on ferry travel to the continent with DFDS



Club racers to benefit

By Jack Benyon

Motorsport UK has revealed its first major change to help competitors and volunteers after its rebrand from the Motor Sports Association, announcing a range of discounts.

When the governing body was relaunched in November, chairman David Richards stated that "we are going to behave differently from now on", and promised new benefits.

Motorsport UK's new membership programme is part of its plan to offer

incentives to people signing up to take part in motorsport.

Discounts on personal accident cover (JLT) and competition and road car insurance (Adrian Flux), and deals at Halfords, Protyre, DFDS Ferries, Grand Prix Racewear and outdoor retailer Ellis Brigham have been confirmed. All 2019 competition licence holders will be automatically enrolled in the programme.

"Perhaps in the past we have been guilty of not doing enough to put our licence holders front and centre of the

organisation and taken for granted their annual licence renewals," said Richards.

"This is the next logical step following our change in name and identity, helping ensure that we deliver on our promise and deliver tangible benefits to our customers.

"Additionally, I am delighted that we are able to extend this programme to all our volunteer marshals and officials as our way of saying thanks. Without them our

competitors would not be able to enjoy the sport we are passionate about."

The move comes as the organisation aims to stimulate grassroots participation in motorport, with

Richards and new chief executive officer Hugh Chambers wanting to focus more on customer service. Visit motorsportuk.org/Membership/Join-Us for more information.

Richards: Licence holders to the fore



Three-time RGB champion Higginson to Caterhams

Multiple RGB champion Matt Higginson will contest the British Racing and Sports Car Club's Caterham 420R Championship this season.

Higginson, who won the 750 Motor Club's RGB overall title three times in 2013, '14 and '16, will drive a car prepared by two-time 420R champion Danny Winstanley's team, having made sporadic appearances in the Civic Cup last season.

"The championship seemed to fit the right levels for me," said Higginson.

"Everyone has the same car, I know the guy sat next to me on the grid is in the same car which is a problem with other race series I've done. It's also a step up in level of driver.

"I'm hoping to do it straight away [challenge for the title], I wouldn't be doing it just to drive around.

"I drove the car already and it felt very similar to a car [AB Performance Arion] I drove in RGB.

"It's such a tight championship, if you miss a corner you'll be back in the middle of the pack."

Formula Ford 1600 racer Richard Morris will make the switch to RGB for 2019 with Spire Sports Cars.

Morris will be driving reigning double champion Billy Albone's 2018 car. "It's been something I've been wanting to do for a while now to move my career towards sportscars and sports prototypes," Morris said.



Higginson was a RGB frontrunner



American-style sprint car has Ford Duratec engine

New Wildcat Sprint Car revealed for 2019

The first car for the new Wildcat Sprint Car series for the US-style racers has been revealed.

The series has been created by Pickup Trucks boss Sonny Howard and the new category will join the trucks and Super Silhouettes as part of his 'Power of Three' package this season.

The rear-wheel-drive sprint car will feature a two-litre Ford Duratec engine along with a four-speed Quaife sequential gearbox. Its bodywork is made from glass-reinforced plastic.

"It will be exciting because it breaks all of the moulds - but it still fits in with what we're doing," said Howard. "It will be a sight

to behold and with the short exhaust system, because they come out of the side, they will be spitting flames out the exhausts.

"This is a race car that can be worked on at home - it's not a huge car and you don't need to have a race workshop. The concept was created to run at the Rockingham Oval but it never got to see the monster oval and then it had to be converted to circuit racing."

Howard added that the focus will be on providing entertaining racing and he expects to see the cars "four abreast" at times. He is particularly hoping to attract younger drivers into the series.



Series is being masterminded by Pickup Trucks boss Sonny Howard

M3 Cup and BMW 330 Challenge to disappear as 750 Motor Club focuses on BMW Car Club series

The 750 Motor Club's M3 Cup and BMW 330 Challenge categories will be amalgamated into the BMW Car Club Racing Championship for 2019.

The two series shared a grid last year but still struggled to get more than 15 entries combined.

Now the club has decided that

rather than running dedicated championships for these cars, they can move to the popular BMW Car Club series.

This has achieved championship status for its second season this year and the regulations have been written to make sure cars from the

other categories can easily fit in.

"We're not going to run M3 Cup and 330 Challenge [individually] and instead will focus on running one very strong BMW Car Club Racing Championship," said 750MC competitions secretary Giles Groombridge.

"We have written the regulations in such a way that the M3 Cup cars will have an ideal place in the M2 class. Also the Class 6 is for six-cylinder non-M3 powered cars and the 330s will be ideally placed to be competitive in that. It makes sense and we hope to have 30+ car grids."



M3 Cup suffered as competitors moved to Club Enduro

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HISTORICS

DOWN THE PUB WITH

ANDY DEE-CROWNE

New CEO at HSCC
Age: 66 Lives: Buckinghamshire

He was once a karter

"I raced karts when I was very much younger when serving as a policeman in Essex. There was a big karting track in Tilbury where I was stationed and I was also involved in Seaxes, a police motorsports club. Then I got married, had a family and a succession of race cars. I got the interest and time back in about 2005 and looked for a suitable challenge."

Tour Britannia grabbed his attention

"I dabbled with the Jaguar Enthusiasts Club but in 2008 Tour Britannia came along and I did that as well as the E-type Challenge. I also raced with U2TC and Masters. I've raced at Le Mans Classic three times, as well as the 2015 Le Mans Legends support race."

He's just starting as HSCC boss

"Through Tour Britannia I got my clerk of the course licence and then the opportunity to work with the HSCC. I said back in about 2009 that I'd love to have the job of CEO for the HSCC and now I have the chance."

Is there too much racing?

"I think there is so much choice in historic racing that people are tending to cherry pick. We need to continually strive to make our offering different. Price is important, but that's not the only factor. It's about the event as a whole. Racers are there for a weekend and are in the car for around an hour. So what do you do for the rest of the time?"

Meeting competitor needs

"At one end of the spectrum we have competitors with motor homes and at the other end we have people who bring the race car in a box trailer and then use it to sleep in overnight. We need to cater for both and ensure the whole experience is safe and enjoyable. For instance, some of our partners like the GT and Sports Car Cup and Historic Grand Prix Cars Association have superb hospitality for their competitors."

Circuit hire is a challenge

"The cost of the race is not just the cost of the track time divided by the number of cars on the grid. There are all of the administration and staff costs to be factored in."



HSCC boss: Dee-Crowne



Pescarolo drove the car at Thruxton in '73

MOTUL F2 CAR SET FOR CIRCUIT COMEBACK

French single-seater will make a racing return in 2019

By Paul Lawrence

A famous Motul M1 Formula 2 car will return to racing this summer after several decades away from the track.

Historic racer and preparer Stephen Worrard has just started restoration of chassis 206, which was used by Henri Pescarolo to win the European Formula 2 round at Thruxton on Easter Monday 1973.

It is believed that nine of the Motul F2 cars were built in period, with a 10th as a spare tub and chassis 206 one of the most successful. Pescarolo and Tim Schenken both raced the Ray Jessop-designed car for the Motul Rondel Racing team of former Brabham mechanics Ron Dennis and Neil Trundle.

However, the cars only had one season of racing in Europe as the Rondel team folded at

the end of the year when Motul's sponsorship was withdrawn in the face of the oil crisis. American race car importer Fred Opert bought several Motuls at the end of 1973 and sold them as Formula Atlantics.

Chassis 206 was sold to Chris O'Brien and raced in Formula Atlantic in Canada and was later owned by Randy Zimmer. UK historic racer Martyn Donn eventually bought

chassis 206 from Zimmer and brought it back to the UK several years ago before selling the project to Worrard.

"The very original tub came with a Hewland FT200 gearbox, bodywork and wheels and I'm aiming at a racing return in the Historic F2 races at the Silverstone Classic in July. We could run it in Formula 2 or Formula Atlantic specification," said Worrard.



The MG Metro is for sale

Hardly used Metro 6R4 to go under the hammer at Autosport show

A 1985 MG Metro 6R4 rally car, which has covered just 175 miles, will be offered for auction at Autosport International at the NEC, Birmingham on January 12.

The effectively unused car has spent much of its life at the Conference Centre and Grand Prix Collection at Williams Grand

Prix Engineering and is expected to sell for between £180,000 and £200,000. When the 6R4 project was abandoned after Group B rally cars were banned at the end of 1986, unused 6R4s were sold off for as little as £13,000.

As one of the 200 cars built, chassis 6R4-111 was purchased

by the marketing department of Williams Grand Prix Engineering in 1988. It remained at Williams until 2005 before being purchased by The Tifosi Garage, and then sold to the current owner in 2015.

It has recently been recommissioned by BGM Sport.

French tour to challenge racers

The route for Tour Auto Optic 2000 will take crews from Paris to a finish on the north coast of France after five days of races and closed road rally stages.

Tour Auto is Europe's biggest race and rally tour for period cars and regularly attracts an entry of 200 cars to the start at the Grand Palais in Paris on Monday April 29. The event already has over 160 entries from cars of the type that took part in the original Tour de France between 1951 and 1973.

Races at Dijon-Prenois, Magny Cours, Charade and Le Mans Bugatti will be supplemented by 10 special stages before the finish on Saturday May 4 at Deauville.



Entrants will tackle days of closed road stages and races

Three-hour race for Donington Park

The Equipe 3-Hour Classic Relay, one of Britain's longest races for classic cars, will return at Donington Park over the weekend of July 20/21.

New for this year's event will be the removal of the three-litre engine capacity limit, which opens the race up to Jaguar E-types, AC Cobras and TVR Griffiths. Once again, the race will run to a handicap format, giving the less powerful cars an equal chance.

John Pearson, from race promoter Equipe Classic Racing, said: "The third running of this event promises to be bigger again than the hugely enjoyable 100-car, 150-driver relay successfully held last year."

IN BRIEF

Tour goes British

Early British entries for the 2019 edition of the French Tour Auto include two AC Cobras for Shaun Lynn/Kevin Kivlochan and James Cottingham/Andrew Smith. Lynn and Kivlochan have won the event three times in the last decade, while Cottingham and Smith won in 2017 in a Ford GT40. A late retirement cost them a repeat win in last year's event.

Lurani missing

The European-based Lurani Trophy for Formula Junior will not visit the UK in 2019. The six-event schedule, managed from the UK by Duncan Rabagliati, will start at Hockenheim in April and finish at Estoril in October, taking in races at Most in the Czech Republic at the end of June. There will also be non-championship Formula Junior races on the street circuits of Pau and Copenhagen.

Photo memories

Motorsport images from some of the sport's top photographers will feature in a display at Autosport International at the Birmingham NEC in January. The works of photographers including Rainer Schlegelmilch, Ercole Colombo and Giorgio Piola will be presented in Hall 1, stand 1330, along with the March 701 used by Jackie Stewart to win the 1970 Spanish Grand Prix.

Donington work

Extensive work on the paddock entrance at Donington Park will be completed ahead of the start of the new season. The old concrete wall has been removed and a new pedestrian access has been created to the right of the existing entrance, allowing pedestrians and cars to be kept apart. The Historic Sports Car Club (March 30) and the Donington Historic Festival (May 4-6) are key early season historic dates.

Imp for sale

A famous Hillman Imp from Irish sprints and hillclimb events in the 1970s is now being offered for sale less engine. The Dingos Jeans-backed Imp, as used to great effect by Noel Dickson, is now for sale through Montgomery Motorsport in Co Tyrone, Northern Ireland.

Bicester grows

The Bicester Heritage site, home to an ever-growing cluster of classic car-based organisations, is set for further expansion after gaining planning permission for another 70,000 square feet of buildings to be known as the Technical Site. The space will allow 10 more companies to locate there and would suit those involved in classic and historic motorsport.

HRCR gets busy

The Historic Rally Car Register will mark its 35th anniversary year with a two-day Clubmans Rally on June 15/16. The event will be limited to 60 cars and will be based at the Tillington Hall Hotel, Stafford. One day will use a route to the west of the M6 and the other day will run to the east of the motorway. The event will take in special tests, regularity sections and time controls.

RALLY NEWS

Photos: Red Bull Content Pool



Sainz has a strong desert experience

LOEB AND SAINZ FACE TOUGH DAKAR CHALLENGE

Champions fear epic desert battle in Peru

By David Evans

World Rally champions Carlos Sainz and Sebastien Loeb have admitted they are up against it in their pursuit of Dakar success next week.

The first Dakar rally to run wholly within one country begins from Lima on Sunday and finishes back in the same place 10 days later. While the event is two days shorter than normal – with a total distance of 3,100 miles, 1,860 of which is competitive – it's the amount of time spent in the Peruvian sand dunes that could cost the rally stars.

Defending Dakar champion Sainz and his former Peugeot team-mate Loeb have both excelled on Chilean and Argentinian roads more similar to the ones they used while they were competing in the WRC.

Sainz said: "I prefer the WRC stages, because it is where my life has developed, it is where I can best defend myself. But I think I also already have a lot of experience in the Dakar and I think we also defend ourselves in the sand."

"The great difficulty of running even if they are stages of 350 kilometres [217 miles] is that in the sand, you can get lost at any time. In any situation, after any dune there may be a hole and you can stay there for many minutes,

therefore the peculiarity of the desert sand is that: surprises can be there at any time. Two metres to the right or left [of your driving line] is enough to fall into a hole or get stuck and lose the race. That is the difficulty of this type of land and you need to have that little luck factor."

Two-time Dakar winner Sainz has more experience than Loeb in these conditions – which is part of the reason the Frenchman's talking down his hopes of a maiden win on the marathon event.

"How do I approach dunes?" said Loeb, "Still, I don't know, that's the problem! We have to face it with humility, keeping in mind that the objective is to cross it and not get trapped. In sand dunes, you can win two minutes, but also easily lose nearly one hour by doing small mistakes. So, we have to take our time."

"On the other hand, we have cars that don't specifically allow us to



Carlos Sainz took the win in '18

slow down in dunes, because we get sucked in; we have to keep the momentum, and the decision process are not always simple. The ground awareness, it's something that 'Peter' [Stephane Peterhansel, 13-time Dakar winner] or others have for several years, and this point is lacking for us, so it's difficult for me."

Loeb's other difficulty comes with his car and private team. After three years running at the forefront of a multi-million pound Peugeot effort, the Alsatian starts on Sunday as a privateer in a two-year-old car.

"Effectively, it's a private programme," Loeb told MN. "I will race with a Peugeot car, but there is no support from Peugeot. It's an initiative of mine, but it's also a slightly different challenge. We face things in our own way, we are not driven by a factory team with all the limits and advantages. Here we're more relaxed, but we can't prepare the race as we did in the past. I think I did five three-day tests in Morocco plus two rallies [in the last season as a Peugeot factory driver], while this time I have just one [test] day. For sure it's different, but I have the experience from the past which will help us to get more rapidly in the rhythm."

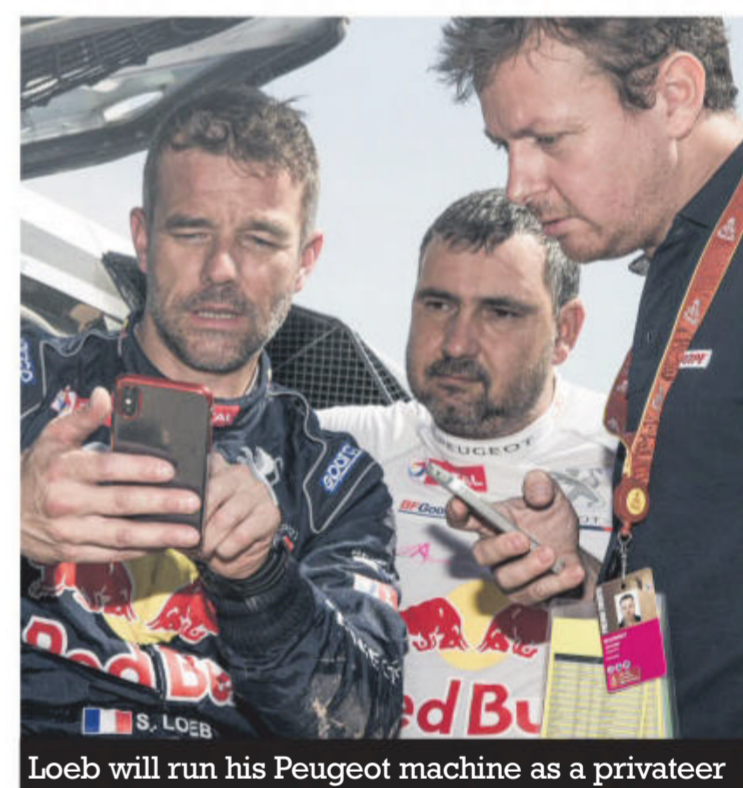
Asked about his chances of breaking his Dakar duck, Loeb

added: "First of all, I go for it to compete. To win... honestly, I find it difficult to predict a race like this. Given that I'm running a two-year-old car, I have no idea of the level of this car compared to factory cars. Then, on a route like this one, with stages of 350km [217 miles] composed of 100 per cent sand, it will be really random."

Loeb's running Peugeot's older 3008 DKR because its 2018-winning 3008 DKR Maxi doesn't comply with updated regulations for the event. His former Peugeot team-mates, Sainz, Peterhansel and Cyril Despres have all moved to the X-raid Mini team and will drive similarly configured rear-drive buggy-style machines. These cars are more suited to desert-style racing than WRC-style stages, but the X-raid squad will be better prepared and resourced than the PH Sport outfit behind Loeb.

Among the other crews to watch over the next fortnight will be Toyota Gazoo Racing pair Nasser Al-Attiyah and Giniel de Villiers, both previous Dakar winners.

The star names are, however, just the tip of the iceberg one of the season's biggest motorsport events – this year's entry list boasts 334 competitors, with 126 cars, 167 bikes and 41 trucks. Splitting the start and finish in Lima will be a January 12 rest day in Arequipa.



Loeb will run his Peugeot machine as a privateer



The dunes caught out the WRC star last time he entered

MEET BRITAIN'S LATEST GRAND PRIX HOPEFULS

PAGE 20



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Sporting Scene news, p29



M-SPORT RETURNS AND SIGNS EVANS AND SUNINEN



L-R: Evans, Suninen and Tidemand

M-Sport pressing on despite no full 2019 WRC budget yet

M-Sport has committed to this year's World Rally Championship – but Malcolm Wilson has warned there is still work to do to find the team's full 2019 budget.

Despite the financial concerns, Wilson refused to turn his back on the extensive development work carried out by his team and its principal partner Ford. He was also reluctant to halt M-Sport's 22-year unbroken run of full-time WRC participation.

"We have been working night and day to put together the pieces of the jigsaw that go to make a WRC team for 2019," said Wilson.

"It is true that we don't have 100 per cent of the details in place as we speak, but with the huge amount of development work that has been going on with the car in recent months – working with our team partners in Europe and the US on engine, suspension and aerodynamics. Every element has been reviewed and updated and I felt we had to make a commitment to see all this hard work by all of the extended team out on the stages next year.

"We are going to rely on the support of the whole WRC community to piece together

the missing pieces, but we are confident we have the tools to do a good job and so we are making the decision now to push forward."

M-Sport confirmed Elfyn Evans will drive for the squad for a sixth season with Finn Teemu Suninen also committed for all 14 rounds. Twenty-eight-year-old Swede Pontus Tidemand – the 2017 WRC2 champion with Skoda – joins the team for the first two rounds in Monte Carlo and Sweden.

Tidemand said: "In Monte Carlo, focus will be on the experience, to get a feel for the car and get to know the team before Rally Sweden,

where I really want to be as well prepared as possible."

Craig Breen's co-driver Scott Martin moves over to co-drive Evans this year. M-Sport's announcement means Breen is seatless for 2019 with no obvious option for the Irishman.

Evans's former co-driver Dan Barritt will return to work with Toyota junior Takamoto Katsuta.

A further M-Sport change for 2019 will be Richard Millener stepping up to team principal – allowing Wilson to devote more time to the commercial side of M-Sport as a business.

Ogier excited by Autosport launch

Sebastien Ogier has told fans he's looking forward to seeing them at the World Rally Championship launch at Autosport International on Saturday, January 12.

The six-time world champion was pivotal in the decision to move the launch from Thursday's opening day of ASI to a weekend, when more spectators could get into Birmingham's NEC.

Ogier, his co-driver Julien Ingrassia and their fellow WRC drivers and navigators will open the show on January 12 to kick-start the WRC's very own 'Super Saturday' at Autosport International.

Ogier told *MN*: "This is great news. Last year it was a good event to launch the season, to have everybody together. And if there's going to be even more fans there this year then it's going to be even better.

"Without fans our sport would not exist. We need them and the launch is always an exciting time when you come to discover the new liveries.

"It's going to be great to see lots of fans joining us – see you soon guys!"

Tickets for Autosport International, January 10-13, are available from: autosportinternational.com/buy-tickets.



SsangYong heads for Dakar Rally

SsangYong to make its first attack on epic Dakar Rally

SsangYong starts Sunday's Dakar with its first ever purpose-built rally car, the Rexton DKR.

The all-new T1 class car is the Korean firm's step up from the Tivoli-based machine it used to finish 32nd in the car category

last season. The Rexton is a purpose-built Dakar rear-drive buggy racer with a 450bhp V8 petrol engine.

Spanish crew Oscar Fuertes and Diego Vallejo return for SsangYong's first significant

effort at the 10-day South American marathon. Based on the firm's Rexton SUV the DKR has been developed by SsangYong Motorsport in Spain. It will run a six-speed Sadev gearbox, AP brakes and King suspension.

Pastrana seeks WRC comeback in 2019

American action sports star Travis Pastrana is chasing a return to the World Rally Championship.

The Subaru Rally Team USA driver, who tackled three P-WRC rounds in 2007, is busy with Nitro Circus and rallycross commitments, but has revealed he would love to tackle and commit three years to conquering Finland's epic WRC round.

"For a long time American rallying was just show up, get your notes, and go," said Pastrana. "It's not even the same sport to what the guys are doing in the world



Pastrana last drove in the WRC in 2007 in a Subaru Impreza

championship so if I went to Finland, [I'd] go back three years in a row to the same route. If I can take one event that I love and just keep going back, keep refining the notes and really try to, in three years' time, even if

that's not going for a win, if it's whatever my best is, I think it would be really cool."

Pastrana is David Higgins' team-mate at Subaru USA and finished second to the Manxman in the 2017 American series.

GROUP RALLYING EDITOR

DAVID EVANS

"All the ingredients for a stunning title battle"



Some things never change. Forty years ago, rally fans were genuinely full of fever for the first ever Drivers' World Rally Championship title fight. It had been a long time coming.

Prior to this the governing body had realised there was a need to recognise the drivers' input into the sport by running the FIA Cup for Drivers – an award won by Sandro Munari and Markku Alen. But the drivers, understandably, weren't terribly impressed and wanted their own world crown.

And, in 1979, they got it.

But, guess what, the start of that '79 season was mired in controversy as the manufacturers and the powers that be argued over how many rounds they wanted to contest. Like I said, some things never change.

Back then, 12 was the new 11, with the new event coming in being New Zealand. It wasn't hard to see the economic angle on the European-based manufacturers' point. Equally, recently elected FISA president Jean-Marie Balestre would doubtless have argued the case for the word 'world' in the World Rally Championship.

It stayed at 12 for 1979 and no manufacturer would contest all rounds – the governing body, in fact, lowered the required number of scores to count from nine to seven in an effort to bring more teams.

That first year, right from the very start courtesy of Bernard Darniche's debatable Monte Carlo win (rally leader Bjorn Waldegaard hit rocks mysteriously left in the road and lost the victory by six seconds), was full of controversy and intrigue. We will, no doubt, investigate that further as the season passes.

But, for now... Happy New Year and welcome to what's going to be another absolute cracker of a WRC season. There's so much to talk about, so much anticipation for the year ahead.

Sebastien Ogier's back at Citroen. How's that going to work? Can he fix Citroen's return to WRC's top table?

Our French friends will provide the answers to those questions as the season unfolds.

One thing is sure, however, Ogier won't be far away. Sure, he's never really been confronted with a car which was anything less than fit for the ultimate purpose, but let's not forget what he managed in VW's 2012 learning year. He and Julien Ingrassia used a Skoda Fabia S2000 to embarrass countless World Rally Cars. They won a stage and finished in the top 10 overall on seven of 12 outings. And, how on earth can we possibly ignore Ott Tanak's speed from the second half of the season. He's the man. Has to be. Unless his colleagues Kris Meeke and Jari-Matti Latvala are the ones to watch – they've got the same metal, same motivation.

Then again, 2019 has to be Hyundai's year, doesn't it? Especially with nine-time champion Sebastien Loeb in the squad – after 18 seasons in PSA Group Peugeot and Citroen machinery – freed and supporting its bid.

And let's not forget M-Sport and the Ford Fiesta WRC: it is a potential winner.

As was the case 40 years ago, the winner of this year's drivers' title is anybody's guess.

Have a good year.

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GUEST COLUMN

Photos: mcklein-imagedatabase.com, ERC Media

TOYOTA GAZOO WORLD RALLY TEAM CO-DRIVER



SEB MARSHALL

READY FOR MY BIGGEST YEAR

"Everything just clicked and felt pretty natural straight away"

More often than not, it's the minutiae that bring things home to you. The small things that shout the loudest. Seeing my name on the entry list for the Rallye Monte Carlo in a Toyota Yaris WRC seemed strange. Stranger still, alongside Kris Meeke. Strange, but in a very good and very exciting way.

So here we are in 2019 and I'm about to embark on what promises to be the biggest year of my rallying career thus far. A new chapter for me and, I guess, for Kris. But before I start writing this new chapter, I want to rewind a little bit. I want to say a big thanks to Hayden Paddon and a lot of friends at Hyundai Motorsport. That was the team that gave me my big break when I was with Kevin [Abbring] from 2014, and it was with Hayden that I stepped up another level again in 2017.

Of course, Paul [Nagle, Meeke's former co-driver] has left some very big shoes to fill after first competing with Kris 11 years ago, but his words of advice have been really helpful in this transition period. Hopefully I can continue on his great work.

So, the new chapter. I'll be honest, as nice as it was to receive the many messages of congratulations on my new job alongside Kris, I feel like I've not yet done anything to justify the plaudits. Though of course that's something that I hope won't be too long in coming!

As I'm sure a few of you will be aware, Kris and I tested together for the first time just before Christmas. With Kris living in Andorra and me on the right side of the Pennines – Yorkshire of course, naturally – our discussions about working together had been done over the phone. We agreed it would be a good plan to get together and get out in a car before the first test, so I flew out to see him for a couple of days.

Obviously, I'd spent a fair amount of time watching his onboards to see how his notes worked, what sort of speed and rhythm he liked them called at. He'd done the same with me, listening to my delivery and tempo, that kind of thing. That really helped, we had a very good idea what to expect when we drove his road car down the first piece of road to make some notes together.

Kris's system is similar to Hayden's and to almost everything I've done for the last 10 years, with 'six' being a fast corner. I learnt a few new phrases and dreamt up some new symbols for the notes, but these were just nuances, nothing untoward.

The next time I saw Kris was the night before the first day of the Monte Carlo test. There were a few butterflies, but I knew what was coming from one of the current generation World Rally Cars. The only thing was that I hadn't been on Tarmac in one for almost 16 months – so the first run was a little bit of an eye-opener, but I was soon back into the swing of things.

Talking of eye-opener, this will be my first Monte... The opening round is one of three WRC rounds I've



Marshall has clicked with Meeke



Peugeot with Abbring



Duo replace Lappi at Toyota

never competed on before, the other two being Mexico and Argentina. Fortunately, I have done a pre-event test for the event before [with Paddon in 2017] and I'm no stranger to the rally either: last year was the first Monte I've missed in nine years. I've done ice notes, co-ordinated, weather crew, everything except co-drive. It's nice that that's finally set to change in a couple of weeks.

The test itself was great. We had some nice, dry consistent conditions on the opening day, which helped settle us in. Kris has used this road for the last three years, so he knew it quite well and that helped him feel comfortable in the Yaris WRC pretty quickly. It's amazing how that confidence translates into a relaxed and straightforward atmosphere in the car. It's hard to describe, but everything just clicked and felt pretty natural straight away.

Just as well really, because the second day brought proper Monte conditions. We were just west of Sisteron and with freezing temperatures on the ground, the rain that fell overnight settled as solid, packed ice on the test stage.

It was straight on with the studs – and they stayed on throughout the morning and until after lunch! The feeling and sensation in the car is incredible when you're on those studded tyres in such icy conditions. Honestly, you could barely stand up on the road!

As the ice thawed, we were able to work on a whole

range of tyre options, crossing tyres and trying lots of variations. On top of that there was plenty of damper and diff evaluations going on to fine tune the set-up.

As the afternoon progressed, the road evolved into a wet and muddy stage, both of which are conditions we're very likely to encounter later this month and that provided more really useful mileage, experience and data. The only thing we were missing was some time in full snow. But, the weather had been generous to us and given a real wide variety of the kind of conditions we can expect to see on the event itself. And now, well just I can't wait to get back out there and get the season started.

Kris's feedback on the car has been so positive already. The thing everybody talks about for Monte Carlo is having a balanced car that gives confidence to the driver and can be a good base across the ever-changing road and grip levels. It feels like we've got that.

Those first two days were pretty full-on and, being a test, we met only a small part of the whole team. I'll meet a few more guys at the season launch at Autosport International next week, and then plenty more new faces when we get to Gap. If my initial impressions and welcome are anything to go by, I'm sure we'll settle in just fine. My first Monte as a member of the defending world champion team! Who's interested in the shallow end, anyway...

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*'Peugeot Challenge
celebrated at Stoneleigh'*
Celebration of 30 years, p17



Photos: Lindsay Photo Sport, Eddie Kelly Photography, RallySport Media

CONVERTED R5s GET BRC BOOST



Right-hand drives
can score points

The British Rally Championship will allow right-hand-drive converted R5 cars to score points towards its overall championship this season after a change to the regulations.

No current R5 manufacturers have a homologated version of the machines, but companies such as Dom Buckley RSC and Philip Case Rally Sport have built variants of the car to suit competitors who prefer to drive from the right-hand seat.

These cars are not homologated and previously breached BRC regulations for its top class, but now the series will change that to open the category up.

BRC championship manager Iain Campbell said: "We're permitting homologated R5 cars that have been converted to right-hand drive. Does that get us one, two, eight entries? I don't know. But what it does do is remove an excuse to not enter our championship.

"There's so much conjecture about these R5s, but actually no one has put up their hand and said 'I'm coming to the BRC with one of these cars'. I know the Irish Tarmac

Championship are trying to do the same thing as well: neither of us had a particularly fantastic year in terms of R5 entries."

Donnie MacDonald (Ford Fiesta R5, RSC) and Alan Carmichael (Hyundai i20 R5, PCRS) have rallied right-hand-drive conversions in competition.

Campbell adds though, that the cars will be evaluated and permitted into the championship on a case-by-case basis to protect competitors using the left-hand-drive homologated cars.

"We will, as a championship, need documented evidence of how the build was done, we will have to see the original homologation papers of the car, and only then will we make a decision on whether the car will be accepted," he added.

"We have to ensure that nothing has changed in terms of the mechanics or the performance of the car, just the position of the driver and the steering wheel on the dashboard. We want to ensure the engineering integrity as well as the original homologation as much as possible."

No double points for BRC finale

The British Rally Championship has dropped its double-points finale format which it has used since 2016.

The new season finale, the Galloway Hills Rally replacing Wales Rally GB, is a one-day event only.

"Galloway Hills is only one day, and it isn't possible to split the event into two points-scoring opportunities," said Iain Campbell, championship manager.

"We have nothing against the double-points

scoring format, it just didn't work for the final round this time. Apart from West Cork and Ypres, all of our events are one-day anyway."

BRC regulations have been released, and Campbell said he is working on "some exciting prizes for the juniors". The BRC will not launch as part of the Wales Rally GB stand at Autosport International this year, as neither has a stand presence at the January 10-13 event.



Galloway Hills Rally is BRC one-day decider



Escort 1400cc for Rix in BTRDA '19

MN regular Rix to switch to gravel in unique Escort

Motorsport News Circuit Rally Championship regular Aaron Rix will step up to the BTRDA and gravel rallying this year in a unique Ford Escort Mk2.

The car, originally intended for Rix's mother, Clare, is a 1400-spec car built with a standard gearbox and a Vauxhall engine for the 1400S class.

Rix has only done one closed-road rally, on asphalt, after driving a 1400cc Ford Ka in the MN series last year.

"The car is new, gravel is new and hearing proper

notes will be new," said Rix. "It's a new challenge but I've always wanted to go forest rallying as it's more traditional. I don't want to knock myself down but this is going to be a learning year going into something completely new. I want to build up through the year and see where we get to.

"The car is a bespoke thing but we're in a good position because the company that dad [Ian Rix] has got specialises in making Escort parts. That gives

us a bit of an upper hand.

"The 1400S class in the BTRDA is competitive. It's a Vauxhall engine, it's what the Corsa and Novas run. It seems to be reliable and give good power."

Rix did not compete regularly in the second half of 2018 as he looks to build the car up ready for the Malcolm Wilson Rally.

He will miss the BTRDA opener and compete in his father Ian's Gp 4 Historic Escort Mk2 at Snetterton in the MN Circuit Rally Championship on February 16.

HRX prize for Welsh Championship challengers

Two bespoke made to measure overalls will be on offer to the winner of the Welsh Rally Championship's Two-Wheel-Drive Challenge this year.

The championship has partnered with retailer Lightning House, which will offer HRX suits to the series' champions worth £1500. Co-drivers will also be able to win HRX gloves.

The Welsh Championship recently revealed that Onthepacenote.UK will take over providing the organiser's notes for the championship, with British Championship winning co-driver Craig Parry and World

Rally Championship competitor Killian Duffy providing a pre-event briefing having previously recce'd the stages.

Lightning House's Brynmor Pierce said: "Being current competitors in the Two-Wheel-Drive Challenge in our Fiesta ST, based within Wales and huge fans of the steps the series has taken over the past few years, the fit is ideal. In putting this together we wanted those who perhaps have never considered bespoke racewear or have never been able to try it to really benefit. That's where the Two-Wheel-Drive Challenge ticks all the boxes."



Max Utting won two-wheel-drive title last season

GROUP NATIONAL EDITOR

JACK BENYON

**"Converted R5
move opens up
BRC future debate"**



Sense! Sense has been achieved. Or at least a movement towards sense.

News that the British Rally Championship will accept right-hand-drive R5 conversions makes perfect sense.

The calendar has moved back towards the Irish Tarmac Rally Championship this year with the addition of the West Cork Rally, and that too makes sense as there's only a set pool of R5 cars in the UK and Ireland. Why not make the BRC as attractive as possible to those competitors too?

Such is the importunate of offering right-hand-drive options in Ireland, the process of switching a car from left to right is nicknamed 'Irishing' in some circles, and the process has been undertaken as far back as any rally preparation firm can remember.

As long as the process is properly policed and the converted cars aren't getting a performance advantage, then surely it makes perfect sense and there's no reason to exclude cars like that, especially when the series is struggling to attract R5 entries.

And could that open the discussions on a better future for both championships? Discussions should start this year on what becomes of the British series and how it develops.

The fact that a non-homologated car will now be able to fight for the overall championship and compete side-by-side with homologated cars, proves there's absolutely no need to stipulate homologated cars are the top class in the BRC.

I don't back a return to a one-make or front-wheel-drive series at the top of the order, it would alienate many of the country's drivers who don't want to make a step back. Would some sort of rear-wheel-drive format keep those more experienced drivers interested? That's something Mark Higgins has backed heavily when speaking on the Absolute Rally podcast earlier this year.

Surely the time has come to move on from R5? I'm the biggest fan of what I've seen achieved on the stages in R5 cars over the past few years and I'm certain in 20 years' time people will be talking of the brilliant Manx finale of 2017 or Elfyn Evans phenomenal run in 2016. But rallying is cyclical like all motorsport. People become disinterested and move on, run out of money or target new challenges. Switching the BRC format would help with that for 2019.

The bone of contention with R5s is the cost. Not only the £200,000 it will cost to get a new one on your drive, but the five-figure engine rebuild costs, the expensive dampers, etc. You're looking at well north of £350,000 for a year in the BRC, and with outside interest in rallying at an all-time low, trying to persuade sponsors and manufacturers to back that is unlikely.

The next year should be a year of forums and discussions. What is the way forward for the BRC? For all the despicable people who use any sign of negativity to spout off in forums, why not constructively debate the future of our national rally championship. It has one that has led the world in producing top class drivers. Why shouldn't it lead in innovation and come up with a blueprint to safeguard its future?

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RALLY NEWS

Photos: Kevin Furber, LAT, Conor Edwards, chasingthecars.com

CELEBRATION FOR PEUGEOT CHALLENGE

Huge 30th anniversary commemoration alongside Race Retro



Burns was a Peugeot Challenge regular (above)



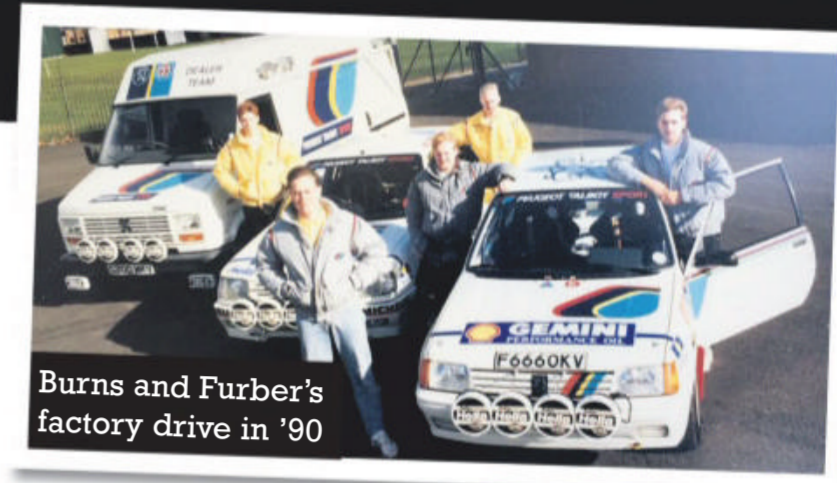
By Jack Benyon

The championship which helped to launch the careers of Richard Burns and Kris Meeke, the Peugeot Challenge, will celebrate its 30th anniversary with on and off track activities in February 2019.

Starting in 1989, the series has had many big names, guises and cars, but its peak was the original challenge from 1989-1991 with the Peugeot 205. The likes of Richard Burns, Mark and David Higgins and Jonny Milner graced the championship which regularly attracted over 120 entries between its senior and junior classes.

While not always called the Peugeot Challenge, it has had many guises and another popular era was the early 2000s with the Peugeot 106, when champion Mark Fisher was given a 206 WRC for the then Network Q/RAC rally as a prize drive for his 106 success.

A team of drivers and people who took part and organised the championship have joined together to create the February 23 anniversary event, with on stage demonstrations at



Burns and Furber's factory drive in '90

Stoneleigh Park – at the same time as Race Retro is taking place – in association with enthusiasts club 'Rallying With Group B'.

Challenge winners Milner, Paul Frankland and Kevin Furber will all attend, with Milner and Furber using original period machinery for the on-track display.

"It's so exciting that we've got some of the original cars and drivers from the Challenge's history," Furber told *MN*. "We'll put on the biggest display of Peugeot Challenge cars together, at the same time, that the UK has ever seen."

"There's period machinery to be demonstrated on track, or for those not wanting to drive or to put miles on their cars, there's the static displays."

"The first ever Peugeot Challenge co-ordinator Keith

Baud and long-time co-ordinator Stella Boyles will also be there."

In the evening, a dinner to mark the anniversary will take place at the Woodside Hotel in Kenilworth, where legendary Peugeot UK boss Des O'Dell would take drivers to sign their contracts, including the likes of Henri Toivonen.

The list of drivers to compete in the challenges is endless, with Justin Dale, Rich Stoodley, Ryan Champion, Barbara Armstrong, Garry Jennings, Stuart Jones, Rory Galligan, Jason Sharpe and Martin Rowe all among the names competing.

A year before the challenge was introduced, O'Dell tested the concept with Peugeot 309s, and Colin McRae was one of the drivers chosen, meaning the Scottish icon was also a part of the Challenge's history.

New closed-road rally in Herefordshire

Cheltenham Motor Club, organiser of the Get It Sideways Stages at Down Ampney, has revealed plans to hold a closed-road stage rally in 2019.

The Three Shires Stages will run "mainly on closed public roads" in Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

It will be based at the Eastnor Deer Park near to the town of Ledbury, with more details being revealed in the coming months.

Entries open at the end of April, with the event due to run on September 7. It is awaiting its permits from Motorsport UK and the Highways Agency.

A number of closed-road rallies are set to run this year in England. The first to run since a 2017 rule-change making it easier to obtain permits, the Rally Tendring and Clacton, runs in April, while the North West Stages in Lancashire is set to use at least a majority of closed-road tests. The Riponian Rally in February has taken advantage of the new laws to run longer forest stages in North Yorkshire.

Hunter swaps new Fiesta for Focus WRC, heads to Ireland

Hugh Hunter has switched to a Ford Focus WRC05 for 2019, and could compete in Ireland regularly for the first time since he won its national championship in 2014.

Hunter did BTRDA and Motorsport UK Asphalt Championship rounds in a Ford Fiesta RS WRC last year, but has bought a WRC05 which has spent most of its life competing on asphalt, in Belgium.

"It's been scurried away in Malcolm's [Wilson, M-Sport] garage for a few years, I heard about it and we've done a deal with them," said Hunter of his new car. "It's just being fettled and looked after now."

"I'm not sure on our exact schedule. It's a flip of the coin between the [Motorsport UK] Asphalt Championship and the Irish National Championship. I'm away for the first round

of the Irish. I'm definitely going to the Manx. I've told Rob [Fagg, co-driver] it's Ireland mainly."

Hunter won the 2014 title in a Subaru Impreza WRC with Harry Marchbank on the notes. The Welshman has fond memories of the time spent there.

"I loved it in 2014 when we went to Ireland, we had our year there and it was fantastic," he added.

"The car is an old car so I wouldn't imagine we will be overly competitive against the likes of Declan [Boyle] and Donagh [Kelly] and the Moffetts [brothers Sam and Josh], those boys are on another level really."

After campaigning his Focus WRC05 for the first time in three years, asphalt regular Damian Cole also looks set to switch from a newer Fiesta to the Focus for the 2019 season.

Both drivers' cars are run by P&R Benn.



Hunter drove a Focus for two BTRDA rounds in 2017



Galway returns to the Irish Tarmac Rally Championship in '19

Galway returns with new one-day format

The Galway Rally returns on February 10 after a forced year out in 2018, with a new one-day format.

The event, the opening round of the Irish Tarmac Rally Championship, hit financial issues last year and had to cancel, shortening the ITRC calendar.

Won by Garry Jennings for the last two times it ran in 2017 and 2016, the Athenry-based event takes on a one-day format. The maximum stage mileage for a one-day event in Ireland is 120kms (74.56 miles), and *MN* understands the 10-stage event will be close to that figure.

Some new stages have been

introduced, while many return from the 2017 event.

Gary Leonard returns as clerk of the course, taking the title for the fourth time, and already confirmed for the event is David Bogie who will start both the ITRC and British Championships in his Skoda Fabia R5.

Declan Boyle and Donagh Kelly, both Irish Tarmac champions, haven't challenged for the title since it switched to R5s scoring points towards the outright title for 2016 and have continued to rally WRC cars. Both have stated a switch to R5 for 2019 is likely. Kelly last won the rally in 2015.

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FEATURE

All of these battled the odds to achieve success in 2018

NATIONAL RACING'S TOP UNDERDOGS

There are some people, teams, series and clubs in the world of national motorsport that you would expect to succeed. And they often do. But the far better stories come from those who are a little under the radar, battling the odds to triumph.

Motorsport News wants to celebrate such people and highlight some of the achievements from the plucky underdogs battling bigger, more established rivals.

From across the UK motorsport spectrum – right from the British Touring Car Championship to the MG Car Club – we've picked out some of our best-performing underdogs of last year.

But what do you think? Who would be your top underdogs from the 2018 season? Let us know by emailing letters@motorsport-news.co.uk

Entries by Matt James, Graham Keilloh, Matt Kew, Stephen Lickorish, Stefan Mackley, Marcus Pye and Ian Sowman



BCV8

Many would have questioned the ongoing viability of a 40-year-old multi-class championship with just 15 cars on the grid for its 2017 finale at Snetterton but, 12 months on, more than twice as many entered the concluding MG Car Club BCV8 Championship round at the same venue.

Thanks to the sterling work of long-time co-ordinator Pam McCarthy, with added promotional impetus from established competitor James Wheeler, grids surged from an average of 17 in 2017 to 27 for the 2018 season – an increase of around 60 per cent.

With the cars dating from the 1960s and 1970s the category benefits from a historic bounce, and the roaring full-race V8-powered machinery in the top class makes it one of the most spectacular championships around. The memorable decider – which had five contenders with a realistic chance of the title – was run in changing conditions, but Russell McCarthy did enough to retain his title. **IS**

BMW CAR CLUB RACING



There was no little mirth around at 2018's outset when BMW Car Club Racing was set to be the latest addition to the club calendar. There's hardly a shortage of BMW championships, said the conventional wisdom. So much for conventional wisdom. The series established by the UK's only officially-recognised BMW Car Club carved out quite a niche, living up to its mission of providing fun and affordable racing that would tempt in those who had previously only done trackdays.

Its grids astonished, starting with 21 at Castle Combe and peaking with 31 at Silverstone in May. There have been plenty of those driving novices among them, yet they have been blending with experienced racers such as Mike Cutt, Kirk Armitage and Rick Kerry. Series coordinator Neil McDonald admitted the debut year was "absolutely incredible; it's exceeded expectations". And it's to become a points-paying championship for its second season. **GK**

CHRISTOPHER 'CHIPPY' WESEMAEL

Christopher 'Chippy' Wesemael stunned on his car racing debut, immediately taking pole in the high-quality RGB Sports 1000 Championship's 2018 season-opener at Donington Park. Yet that he couldn't use it as the meeting then got snowed-off was an omen, as it heralded a first part of the year wherein he was always fast,

bagged several poles, but could not convert them into victory.

Unreliability was part of it, particularly fuel issues that took a time to resolve. But Mittel MC-53 driver Wesemael admits "rookie mistakes" cost him too, such as stalling on Croft's grid as he wasn't familiar with the starting procedure. Yet with accumulated

experience, as he adapted from karting, his pace eventually got its due, first with a crushing Silverstone win then he took double victory in Snetterton's finale. It let him pinch second in the table; "something that seemed mathematically impossible, wasn't," he concluded. He's now plotting a 2019 title challenge. **GK**



CLASSIC SPORTS CAR CLUB

The Classic Sports Car Club may be far from the largest club but exemplifies national motorsport done correctly, and that's why it achieves capacity grids for the vast majority of its race series.

If it was televised or of higher profile, there's a fair chance the club would be bemoaned for a number of contrived regulations.

Instead, all of its categories run as series and not championships, so there's not dogged title fights. Race winners are slapped with 30-second penalties which can, and do, turn an obvious race result on its head. But, for club competitors, that's on the money.

It means many have a chance of winning, and dialling back

the competitive stakes means the CSCC enjoys some of the cleanest driving standards in UK motorsport.

Add in 45-minute races plus reasonable entry fees and it starts to look like good value. Diverse grids of Porsches, Lotuses, TVRs and more means there's plenty for spectators too. **MK**



Photos: Mick Walker, Gary Hawkins, Richard Styles, Steve Jones, Jakob Ebrey, Dan Bathie

TOM INGRAM



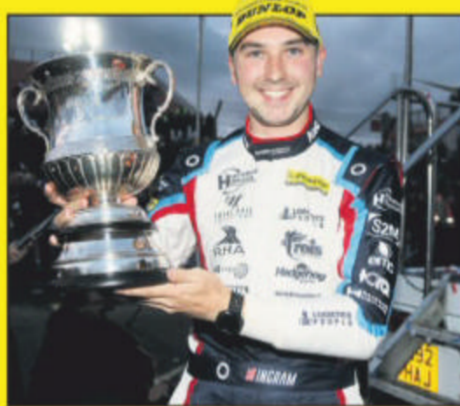
The British Touring Car Championship is just about as competitive a series as you can find, and success is measured in fractions of a second. That means investigating data to unearth those final hundredths can be crucial.

However, the 2018 runner-up did all of his work on his own. His single-car Speedworks Motorsport Toyota Avensis operation was the ones that had to put in the hard yards away from the track without the benefit

of two cars gathering vital feedback.

Although the Avensis was a well-known proposition for the team and driver, developments made over the winter months meant there were elements of the car that still needed refinement.

The fact that Ingram was the only other driver in with a shout of overall glory at the final round of the championship at Brands Hatch in September along with Colin Turkington was a real sign of the effort the crew had put in. **MJ**



MORGAN LEWIS

A 16-year-old with next-to-no experience of any driving making their racing debut in an ultra-competitive series, while juggling GCSE studies, would have already been an achievement.

Yet Morgan Lewis did all this with the added challenge of having talipes – more commonly known as club foot – for which she's had five operations in her lifetime. Following in the footsteps of father Jonathan, who has extensive racing involvement, Morgan's racing ambitions were

undimmed and last year she took part in two Mini Se7en rounds in a car with specially-adapted pedals, seat, steering column, rollcage and gearstick for the 4ft 7in driver. "I can't heel and toe like everyone can," she explained. "I call it a Riverdance [on the pedals]."

She twice brought the car home safely on her Snetterton debut, even though in race one she faced a new challenge of wet conditions, and repeated the performance at Thruxton, taking a best result of 16th. **GK**



TEAM CUPRA



The Birkett Six Hour Relay race is an eclectic, run-what-ya-brung affair and, while the handicap prize is the coveted main award, there has been increasing competition for scratch race honours.

Unsurprisingly, rear-wheel-drive cars have dominated down the years, and a saloon car-based team hasn't come out on top since the race became a Silverstone Grand Prix circuit fixture in 2010 – Radicals winning more often than not.

But the stars aligned for the 68th running in 2018. TCR machinery provided a rapid, robust and reliable basis for Team Cupra, with TCR UK regulars Stewart Lines and Carl Swift being joined by multiple club racing champion brothers Shayne and Lee Deegan in a trio of SEATs. Although Radical teams, and a squad of Sakers, set the pace initially, as conditions turned wetter so the front-wheel-drive cars gained the advantage, and Lines held off Wade Eastwood's SR3 on a thrilling final lap to win by half-a-second. **IS**



SLIDESPORTS

Redline Racing, Team Parker Racing and JTR. Three incredibly successful national racing teams. But despite their combined experience and impressive history, it wasn't a driver from one of these squads that took the Porsche Carrera Cup GB title last year. Instead it was Slidesports that powered Tio Ellinas to the crown.

This was a smaller operation in just its second season in the competitive category, while

Redline and Parker have been there since day one, 15 years ago.

That a Slidesports driver was able to take the overall crown really is some achievement and demonstrates that new teams can more than hold their own against established rivals.

Ellinas described the result as a "bit of a miracle" given the team's background. "It was a hard fight but I was the most consistent out of all of them," he said. **SL**

BENN TILLEY

Jumping from Historic Sports Car Club Historic Formula Ford 1600 – in which he landed regular podium finishes in 2016-'7 – to Classic FF1600 brought the deserved breakthrough for Benn Tilley in 2018 against stiff competition.

The Lincolnshire lad, who turned 19 in October, dominated the Pre-'82 championship with nine wins from 14 races in Mandie Hadfield's Merlyn Mk20, his success mirroring father Stuart's Pre-'74 title in 1992.

"Part of the reason for switching was cost," said 2017 FJunior

standout Tilley. "Fewer rounds meant less cost, but it was still hugely competitive. Particularly against Rick Morris; at 71 a very tough cookie to crumble."

Supported by his incredibly hard-working parents, lifelong racing nuts Benn and his dad spent their shoestring budget wisely, preparing the car themselves. Stuart also helped ex-BRM apprentice Paul Fisher keep the engine sharp.

Their quandary is how to progress in 2019. "There are options but sponsors, absolutely vital to us, want TV coverage!" **MP**



WARREN GILBERT



It's one of the most recognisable cars in UK motorsport, with its lime green livery and thunderous Corvette seven-litre V8.

And despite it being more than 20 years old the outdated Marcos Mantis run by Topcats Racing continues to challenge for class wins against newer machinery.

"It's got no traction control, no ABS, no flat shift, no paddles, and no electric diffs," says Warren Gilbert, owner of Topcats who

drives the car and acquired it in 1997.

"It's got a sequential box but you still have to pull it back and forwards on a lever. [The only driver aids are] power steering and a sequential box and that's it."

Despite a lack of driving aids the car, which has competed in more than 500 races and is dubbed 'Big Green', finished third overall in this season's GT Cup Championship with Gilbert, Mick Mercer and Jon Harrison at the wheel. **SM**

BRITS IN F1

Three UK-born aces look to impress world motorsport in 2019. By **Jack Benyon**

BRITAIN'S THREE NEW F1 HO



Russell, Albon and Norris were all F2 race winners

How Russell clawed his way back into F2 title contention after a strong start from McLaren understudy Norris

George Russell took a dominant Formula 2 title victory by the end of the season, but it so easily could have gone someone else's way after his nightmare start to the year.

A low start from second in the season opener, taken out in Baku while leading, an engine expiring in practice in his first visit to Monaco and a clutch issue in Paul Ricard meant he spend the first half of the season in the shadow of Lando Norris, at which point Norris was rumoured to be wanted by Red Bull for Toro Rosso and

by his employers McLaren.

But an ace run by Russell mid-season, with excellent wins at Paul Ricard, Red Bull Ring and a second at Silverstone helped him edge clear.

Norris failed to win again after the Bahrain season opener which had fuelled his hype, and a pointless weekend in Sochi after a pitstop error meant he was mathematically out of the championship equation heading into the last round. Auditioning for an F1 seat with FP1 runs in Spa and Monza must have made it difficult to remain

focused on his F2 bid.

Alex Albon, with four wins and three poles to his name, was the only one with hope of stripping Russell's lead in the Abu Dhabi finale, but could only qualify eighth and then stalled in the first race. Russell bagged the title and, after the sprint race, Norris capitalised on Albon's issues to retake second in the championship.

All three overcame problems with the new F2 car, which was plagued with clutch and start troubles, and engine issues with

its new turbocharged unit. There were some positives though as the halo device got its first chance to shine when it saved Tadasuke Makino from being hit by the wheel of Arden driver Nirei Fukuzumi's car.

While the top three were all British born, only two other countrymen took part in the season. British-South Korean driver Jack Aitken partnered Russell at ART but had a nightmare year finishing 11th. Double Macau winner Dan Ticktum made a one-

off appearance at Abu Dhabi with Arden International where he suffered gearbox trouble, and duly signed for a season in Super Formula for 2019 instead.

Surrey squad Carlin, thanks to Norris and his strong team-mate Sergio Sette Camara, took the teams' championship by 33 points, while Norfolk-based Russian Time took fourth with Artem Markelov and Makino. Arden struggled with rookies Fukuzumi and Maxi Gunther and finished ninth out of the 10 teams.

Britons

F2 stand	
POS	DRIVER
1	Ge...
2	La...
3	Al...
4	Ny...
5	Ar...
6	Se...



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FEATURE

Photos: Richard Styles, Jakob Ebrey

A new Touring Car Trophy contest for saloons in 2019 is attracting attention. By **Matt James**

BRIDGING THE TIN-TOP GAP



Ex-BTCC cars will find a new home in 2019



Two-litre turbo cars will be eligible for TCT

For a country with such a strong heritage in touring car racing, the headline British Touring Car Championship is naturally firmly in the spotlight. As it goes from strength to strength, the pathway for drivers aspiring to the category is not quite so well defined.

There are the categories on the BTCC support bill, such as the Renault UK Clio Cup, the Porsche Carrera Cup GB and the Ginetta GT4 Supercup, and there is also the JCW Mini Challenge and the VW Racing Cup on the F3/GT package.

Drivers have graduated to the BTCC from each of these classes with varying degrees of success, but the leap up to a 330bhp plus top flight tin-top is still a big jump.

There have been moves to bridge this gap. There was an aborted scheme to start a series for older-spec British Touring Car Championship machines in 2015, which was tabled by several team owners in the category. However, despite initial interest, that competition never got off the ground.

But now there is another plan which has gathered some momentum. The Touring Car Trophy has been devised for 2019 and it aims to collect together older BTCC cars, two-litre turbocharged machines and SEAT Leon Supercopa 2 cars. The MotorSport Vision Racing-run series has revealed a five-meeting calendar which kicks off at Donington Park in April.

The series is the brainchild of Stewart Lines, himself a former

BTCC racer. Lines has a successful background in operating race categories through his involvement in the VAG Trophy and with the VW Racing Cup. He has previously raced in the Mini Challenge and the Renault UK Clio Cup, as well as the VW contests.

"I have been through the ranks and I have made it to the BTCC level, but the jump to the BTCC is just something else," says Lines. "In lower level formulas, you have a small group of guys who are on the pace, and then everyone else. In the BTCC, everyone is competitive and there is nowhere to hide. The commitment you need as a driver is matched by the financial commitment you should make to stay competitive in that arena. "There is no real stepping stone. VWs and Renault Clios aren't as close to the BTCC pace as they should be to give you a leg-up, and there needed to be a step in between. We hope this will be provided by the Touring Car Trophy."

The expected budget for the category is in the region of £50,000, and Lines believes he already has seven people committed to take part in the series in 2019. Among them is Henry Neal, who will be run by his dad Matt's BTCC squad Team Dynamics in a Honda Civic Type R (see sidebar).

Team Dynamics team manager James Rodgers says: "The Touring Car Trophy is a fantastic series that has been created by Stewart, providing a perfect stepping stone for young drivers who don't have the budget to extend into the BTCC but want to move on from junior formulae. It also allows for people who have invested in and have

mothballed touring cars to get them back on track and race head-to-head with old and new technology, it has the potential to make for some awesome racing."

Britcar racer Alex Day has also confirmed that he will take part in the series in an ex-Rob Austin Audi A4, christened Sherman, which will be run by HMS Racing. HMS is a race-winning team in the BTCC and is taking a sabbatical from the top-flight with its modern Alfa Romeo Giulietta, but it has the potential to run other cars in the TCT, with its BTCC Toyota Avensis available.

HMS boss Simon Belcher says: "TCT is a great stepping stone to the BTCC, and at a fraction of the cost. It's fantastic to have Alex on board in Sherman and we look forward to working with him. Alongside the Audi, we're also looking at the possibility of offering our Avensis, in full current RML specification, if we can find a suitable driver."

"Although we switched to the Alfa Romeo in the BTCC in 2018, our Toyota is one of the newest BTCC cars around having been built new in 2016. It offers a great opportunity for a driver to compete in the latest specification BTCC car, but at a significantly reduced budget in TCT."

Budget is one of the key selling points for the TCT. Lines adds: "There is nothing like seat-time in the British Touring Car Championship, and it is hard – and expensive – to get. Testing is restricted in the BTCC and the minimum requirement for drivers to join is 200 miles in a car. That's nowhere near enough."

"There are several drivers who are in the position to move up, but they just will not get the experience or

mileage to do the job they want to do and that can ruin careers. The TCT platform offers this. I think, if someone drops out of the top-flight BTCC halfway through 2019, whoever is running at the front of the TCT will be in prime spot to graduate."

As well as HMS and Team Dynamics, other BTCC teams are keen to get involved. Aiden Moffat Racing has kit that is eligible for the new division.

Moffat, a three-time race winner in the BTCC, says: "We have recently acquired the two ex-Support Our Paras Infiniti Q50 machines and we would certainly look at the TCT. It would be a perfect fit for the cars."

Team Hard boss Tony Gilham has Toyota Avensis machines that would fit the series too, and he might even consider driving himself. "Well, I am 40 years old in 2019 so I need to do something special," he says. "But we have the kit here and this is a category where drivers can move up and learn about the BTCC. We are looking at it closely. What a great stepping stone."

Lines says that the first season will be the initial steps. The cars will be equalised through a Balance of Performance assessment across the whole grid, which is something that has been a hit in the VW Racing Cup.

"We are starting at a manageable level with five meetings and the competition should be close," says Lines. "We will look ahead if it is a success, we would look to go on something like the F3/GT package – that is the kind of place that we need to be. We will have a live stream of the races this year, but we want to grow."

If the interest turns into solid entries, then the seeds will be sown for a competition that could fill a void in the national racing structure. ■

CALENDAR

Touring Car Trophy 2019

RND	TRACK	DATES
1/2	Donington Park	April 13/14
3/4	Donington Park	June 22/23
5/6	Brands Hatch Indy	July 6/7
7/8	Brands Hatch Grand Prix	Aug 31/Sept 1
9/10	Snetterton	Oct 19/20



Henry Neal will be on TCT entry list

Neal Jr to step up with Team Dynamics assault

One of the most high-profile names signed up for the Touring Car Trophy is Henry Neal, son of three-time British Touring Car Championship winner Matt Neal.

Henry has taken part in the JCW Mini Challenge since 2016 and was fifth in the points in 2018. He will now make the step to a touring car in the TCT with a Team Dynamics-run 2017 Honda Civic Type R.

The 23-year-old will benefit from the experience of his father's top-line team in his maiden season in a touring cars.

Neal Jr said: "I can't wait to get out there having just recently driven the car, it's a natural progression from the Mini Challenge I have been competing in for the past three seasons."

"It has sequential gearbox, limited aero and big brakes; I'm excited. I think, with the equalisation rules, it is going to make for a great spectator sport with some really close racing."

Dad Matt says that the format of the series fitted in perfectly for the family and for his race team. "With the BTCC grid now full and capped, what Stewart Lines has created with his TCT is perfect for us and others," he said. "Its fixture list is not overbearing and will give Henry some valuable seat time in a high performance touring car. The Mini Challenge ladder has been great value for money with good racing, but it was his time to move on."



Aiden Moffat Racing has the Infiniti Q50s and they could appear



Stewart Lines has seen a gap in the market for a tin-top trophy

RETRO

After Renault UK's shock announcement that the Clio Cup is in its last season, we reflect. By **Matt James**

THE CLIO CUP: TWILIGHT FOR A

Renault UK's decision to stop the Clio Cup at the end of 2019 was a bombshell. The one-make series for the French hatchbacks has been a crowd-pleaser for almost three decades, and it will be sorely missed on

the British Touring Car Championship support bill.

It has launched the careers of hundreds of tin-top stars and has always provided thrill-a-minute racing.

Motorsport News has spoken to every driver who is in the top 10 list of the most successful racers in terms of outright wins, and we have asked them for their reflections on the category.

1 PAUL RIVETT



Wins: 49 Years in the series: 2001-2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010-2018
Rivett: "I never had the budget to graduate to the British Touring Car Championship, and because I didn't have enough, I didn't want to make the step up and be at the back. That meant I was always happy to stay in Renault Clios. I was able to run at

the front, and nothing else at that level offers the value for money it provides. The exposure is great and it has always been attractive to backers.

"Because I was coming back to the championship time and time again, I think I had a big target on my car for the new racers that were coming in, and that target

only got bigger the longer I stayed in the category. It was hard too, because I could only disappoint people. If I won it, people would say 'well so he should'. If I didn't, people felt let down, so that was a tricky situation to be in. But I love the category and I just hope that it is able to come back in some shape or form in the future."

ALL-TIME CLIO CUP WINNERS

All-time Renault Clio UK Cup races: 387

POS	DRIVER	WINS
1	Paul Rivett	49
2	Jonathan Rivett	18
3	Stefan Hodgetts	17
4	Mike Bushell	16
5=	Danny Buxton	14
5=	Ant Whorton-Eales	14
6	Tom Onslow-Cole	13
7=	Dave Newsham	12
7=	Ed Pead	12
8=	Lee Brookes	11
8=	Phil Glew	11
9	Ben Winrow	10
10	Josh Cook	9

2 JONATHAN ADAM

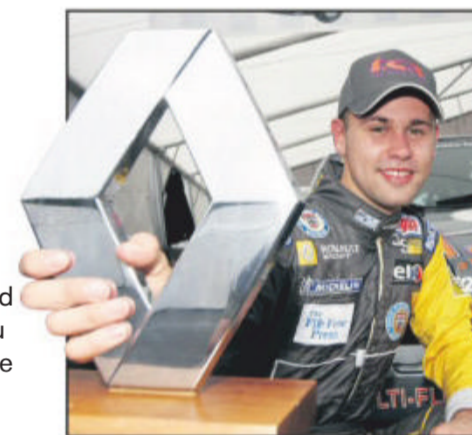


Wins: 18 Years in the series: 2004-2005

Adam: "Any one-make series on the BTCC support series is hard to win, and the Renault UK Clio Cup is one of the hardest of them all.

"Most guys coming into it – Paul Rivett aside – are relatively new to racing so there is a lot to get your head around, but the education it gives you in terms of racecraft is second to none – that is why you see guys come out of Clios and they are able to slot into the BTCC quite comfortably.

"When I started, I was third in my first year but I think I got through three bodyshells that season, but I finished third and then went on to win it in 2005. That was a sensational result for myself and for TCR – and that is another thing.



The teams at the top level of Clios prepared a young driver well. They are all expert and as a first stepping stone and you work with data. It is all part of an education, and just look at the names who have come from Clios."

3 STEFAN HODGETTS



Wins: 17 Years in series: 2007-2012 (sporadic appearances)

Hodgetts: "I loved the 182 and 197 versions of the Renault UK Clio Cup race cars – they were a great piece of kit. It was a difficult car when it came to the handling. It was right on the edge and could be twitchy, but it had a proper sequential gearbox and taught you so much about car control.

"My first year in 2007 was really

successful – I won five races – but after that I was just brought in when people needed to fill a seat, so I never really got a proper shot at it, although I won four races with SVR for Danny Buxton in 2012.

"It was all a bit dramatic with the racing so qualifying was important – you needed to be out of the trouble, because nine times out of 10 there would be a safety car at the end of the opening lap. Mind you, I might have caused a few of those!"

4 MIKE BUSHELL

Wins: 16 Years in series: 2012-2014, 2016-2017

Bushell: "I remember always watching the British Touring Car Championship and the support races and the guys who I had been karting against were in Renault Clios. It seemed like the natural way for me to go as I had been racing Ford Fiastas for a season.

"I joined in 2012, and it was a baptism of fire: I wrote off two cars in my first three rounds. It was like pinball!

"The racing was so tough. When I won my first title in 2014, there was so much competition. I was with Pyro and the team taught me a heck of a lot. Then, when I came back to the series in 2016, it was another learning process again. The level of competition was so high that I had to up my game against all the new drivers that were there and had brilliant racecraft.

"If I had to stop racing tomorrow, I would look back on the two Renault UK Clio Cup trophies I have and be very, very proud."



NATIONAL RACING TREASURE

RENAULT UK CLIO CUP WINNERS

YEAR	DRIVER	CAR
1991	Steve Waudby	Renault Clio Mk1
1992	Matt Johnson	Renault Clio Mk1
1993	Alastair Lyall	Renault Clio Mk1
1994	John Bintcliffe	Renault Clio Mk1
1995	Lee Brookes	Renault Clio Mk1
2000	Jim Edwards Jr	Renault Clio Renaultsport 172
2001	Danny Buxton	Renault Clio Renaultsport 172
2002	Paul Rivett	Renault Clio Renaultsport 182
2003	Jonathan Fildes	Renault Clio Renaultsport 182
2004	Paul Rivett	Renault Clio Renaultsport 182
2005	Jonathan Adam	Renault Clio Renaultsport 182
2006	Tom Onslow-Cole	Renault Clio Renaultsport 182
2007	Martin Byford	Renault Clio Renaultsport 197
2008	Ben Winrow	Renault Clio Renaultsport 197
2009	Phil Glew	Renault Clio Renaultsport 197/200
2010	Dave Newsham	Renault Clio Renaultsport 200
2011	Paul Rivett	Renault Clio Renaultsport 200
2012	Jack Goff	Renault Clio Renaultsport 200
2013	Josh Files	Renault Clio Renaultsport 200
2014	Mike Bushell	Renault Clio Renaultsport 220 Turbo EDC
2015	Ash Sutton	Renault Clio Renaultsport 220 Turbo EDC
2016	Ant Whorton-Eales	Renault Clio Renaultsport 220 Turbo EDC
2017	Mike Bushell	Renault Clio Renaultsport 220 Turbo EDC
2018	Paul Rivett	Renault Clio Renaultsport 220 Turbo EDC

5 = DANNY BUXTON



Wins: 14
Years in the series: 2000-2003
Buxton: "It was one heck of a series to learn in. When I did it, there was an influx of single-seater drivers like Tim Mullen, Andrew Kirkaldy and Rob Huff who were all seeing saloons as a pathway to a career and they came in."
 "They were technically

excellent drivers and they really made me look at my own performance and try to raise my game to match them. On some days, you had to admit that you simply weren't as fast as them – and, through that, I learned how to be consistent and how to put together a title challenge. At that stage of a drivers' career, that is a big lesson."

5 = ANT WHORTON-EALES

Wins: 14
Years in series: 2011-2016
Whorton-Eales: "I suppose you could say that the Renault Clio has taught me most of what I know about racing. I really enjoyed the older-spec car that we ran up until the end of 2013, because they felt like proper race cars."
 "When the newer cars came, the

220 Turbo, it seemed to me like it had a little too much in the way of electronics on it. It had a paddleshift gearbox, and you couldn't shift down always when you wanted because the ECU wouldn't let you."
 "Despite all that, the racing was fantastic and we had some really good battles. I have very good memories of it."



6 TOM ONSLOW-COLE



Wins: 13
Years in the series: 2003-2006
Onslow-Cole: "I joined the series halfway through 2003, because I had to wait for my 16th birthday before I could join in. I remember being so nervous before my first test at Rockingham that I was 15 minutes late joining the session because I was throwing up. It was quite a baptism, because the next youngest

guy to me on the grid was 24. "I think, after that, it became something of a younger person's championship, and I like to think that I started that trend! I worked hard for my title, I had some very physical scraps with Paul Rivett but managed to grab the title with TCR. It was a superb feeling, and a competitive baptism for a career."

7 = DAVE NEWSHAM



Wins: 12
Years in the series: 2008-2010
Newsham: "I came to the Renault UK Clio Cup straight from Scottish Legends, and it was quite a move. It was on the BTCC support package and the grids were full up, so it was very competitive. I did a one-off at the end of 2008 and finished third, and I just

took it straight away. I had 15 poles from the 20 rounds, which was a record, and I took the most wins in a season with 12. Because I was above a certain age, I won the Masters division for older racers at most rounds, so I came away with bundles of silverware. I think I spent a lot of budget on expanding the trophy cabinet at the end of that season."

7 = ED PEAD

Wins: 12
Years in the series: 2002-2007
Pead: "It was a really competitive series. You knew it had credibility within racing: if you could win in Clios, people knew you were at a good level. Also, it was achievable in terms of budget. You would be able to scrape together some budget and go and do a deal with a team. The entry fees have quadrupled since those days though..."

"It had a reputation for being full of damage, but that was down to the level of it as some of the less experienced drivers tried to keep up with the top boys and they would get it wrong! The level was very high, and people certainly paid attention to it. I loved my time racing those cars."



8 = LEE BROOKES



Wins: 11
Years in the series: 1993-1995
Brookes: "I jumped straight into the Renault UK Clio Cup from karting, so it was really an eye opener for me. It was a competitive series even then with some very strong drivers in there. I finished fourth in my first attempt at the championship and then third the year after – but there had been some incidents with the champion John Bintcliffe."
 "It was just as hard in 1995. At the start of the year, we had a good offer from Harlow Motorsport, which was the top team then, but my dad and I decided to run the car ourselves. We managed to beat them all, which was certainly memorable."

8 = PHIL GLEW



Wins: 11
Years in the series: 2008-2009
Glew: "I still look back at the 2009 season, when I won the Renault UK Clio Cup, as one of my fondest memories in racing. I think we had some of the best racing around – these days, you can drive the newer cars at 90 per cent and still get something out of them. Back then, you had to be totally on the edge all the time. I managed to get 11 wins in that title-winning season and beat Alex MacDowall and it certainly prepared me for touring cars."
 "I am really going to miss commentating on it for ITV4 Sport as well. It has provided some of the most exciting racing on track over a BTCC weekend."

9 BEN WINROW



Wins: 10
Years in the series: 2005, 2007, 2008
Winrow: "I remember my title-winning year in 2008: it was my first year with Pyro, and I was the team's first champion. I really have to thank Mark Hunt, the team boss, who took a punt on me."
 "We had some testing before the start of the year – which was the first time I had ever had such a privilege. That meant we were able to hit the ground running. I managed to get nine wins, and I was only off the podium once before I wrapped up the title at Silverstone with a meeting to go. We were relying on sponsorship, and the Clio was totally the best option for us because of the crowd and the coverage that it got."

10 JOSH COOK

Wins: 9
Years in the series: 2012-2014
Cook: "When I had my main championship assault in 2014, it was the first year with the new Renaultsport 220 Turbo EDC car, so everyone was on a pretty even footing. The racing was so intense, and we fought all the way to the end with Mike Bushell. In the end, I had six wins and four other podiums, but three DNFs along the way blunted my charge."
 "It is a real shame that the series is ending, because it has been a constant on the BTCC support package for such a long time. It is interesting, because I always stop to watch the Clio races even when I am in touring cars, and you often see the BTCC team managers come and look at the timing screen too. They will look down the list and you can work out who they have been talking to for the season ahead..."



REVIEW: SHORT OVAL

With no quarter asked or given, the action on the ovals was relentless in 2018. By **Colin Casserley** and **Graham Brown**

THE HEADLINE ON THE SHORT OVALS

The short oval scene is in rude health, and the season just gone provided some truly memorable moments in the National Hot Rod and BriSCA F1 scene. There were returning champions and a new World Final winner crowned in National Hot Rods to cap a remarkable 12 months. Our experts cast their eye over the highlights of the campaign just gone. Remember, the chase for the 2019 crowns has already started so head to an oval venue near you to see the leading players out their credentials for the big prizes of this year to come.

Since he took the sport's biggest prize in 2012 it has always seemed inevitable that Glenn Bell would one day again carry the gold roof of World champion. It looked as though that day had arrived with last year's World Final.

When qualifying finished Bell had pole position, not by much, but the entire grid was covered by only 0.62s, so 0.04s was significant.

It was no surprise that the polesitter spent most of the 75 laps gradually easing away from the battles behind. Quite a tense battle that was too, with Billy Wood having to keep 2013 World Final

winner John Christie, top Scot Rob McDonald and triple champion Chris Haird at bay.

But then it all fell apart. Less than 20 laps from home, a puff of smoke from Bell's car signalled a problem.

The throttle had jammed open and, though he bravely carried on for a few laps by slowing the car on the ignition switch, it was effectively all over.

He eventually spun into the wall with another car but his lead was already gone by then. Wood staved off a determined attack by Christie to head for the chequers.

WHAT: NATIONAL HOT ROD WORLD FINAL WHERE: FOXHALL HEATH, IPSWICH WHEN: JULY 8, 2018

WOOD'S WIN, BELL'S HEARTACHE



WHAT: BRITISH CHAMPIONSHIP WHERE: BELLE VUE, MANCHESTER WHEN: JULY 1, 2018

SMITH JR LANDS THE BIG ONE



Stuart Smith Jr's 2018 was one of triumph and tragedy. For much of the season, Smith was the man to beat and, at one stage in the season, it looked as though he might become the first driver in the history of the series to win the World, European, British and National Shootout titles all in the same season.

The British was the first title up for grabs. Smith trailed race leader Mat Newson, who had taken the initiative from the green flag, by a couple

of car lengths going into the final turn. Smith barged Newson wide and won the drag race to the line.

Smith said: "Newson had the faster car, his car was the best it had been all day in the final and mine was not as fast as it had been. I just had to do it; I am not one for settling for second, I never have been."

"The fans come here to watch good racing and it is down to us to entertain them, that is something that I always have in the back of my mind."

-MAKERS

WHAT: NATIONAL HOT RODS ON SHALE WHERE: NORTHAMPTON INTERNATIONAL RACEWAY WHEN: SEPTEMBER 30, 2018

The decision to return to Northampton on a shale surface for the first time in 60 years made huge sense in economic terms, with the track earning much of its income from BriSCA F1. There was a need to reengage drivers and fans from the dirt track-loving Netherlands, and the potential to attract spectators and maybe some dates from the recently closed Coventry must also have played a part.

There was just one little problem: the asphalt NIR was greatly loved by the National Hot Rods. It has also been their number one test track for many years. The original plan called for the shale to be lifted after the summer months but,

once settled, the dirt was in to stay.

That meant that the National Hot Rods September fixture had either to be moved or go ahead on the loose surface. Incarace took the bold decision to press ahead with the meeting, despite it being more than 20 years since NHRs last ran on shale and many teams point blank refusing to race.

Come the day, the weather was kind, those who'd elected to race (just eight) mostly had a grand time drifting the turns and trading places. Shale racing proponent Dick Hillard fittingly took heat and final honours. It remains to be seen if the experiment will be repeated.

NATIONALS PLAY DIRTY...OR NOT



WHAT: EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP WHERE: NORTHAMPTON INTERNATIONAL RACEWAY WHEN: SEPTEMBER 16



SMITH LOSES OUT TO A RAMPANT HARRIS

Stuart Smith Jr was on course to make stock car history at Northampton in the European Championships.

The race was originally scheduled for July, but heavy rains then forced the event to be rescheduled.

Smith took the lead at the drop of the green flag and looked to be heading towards his second major title in two days, and his third major of the season.

However, in the latter stages of the race Tom Harris closed the gap and the duo exchanged bumpers several times, both cars clattering the fence and

both receiving some damage before Harris was able to open up a few car lengths advantage to record the win.

Harris seemed to drive his car similar to the way he races in the USA (where he has contested several outings), flicking the car sideways going into the corner and keeping up the momentum. It was certainly fun to watch.

"It was a great race, and great to win a championship," said Harris. Hiding his disappointment with a smile Smith Jr said: "My tyres went off towards the end, but that was a proper stock car race."

WHAT: HOT RODS POINTS CHASE WHERE: FINISHED AT ALDERSHOT WHEN: JUNE 10, 2018

THE POINTS CHASE – WOOD GAVE DUE WARNING

Those unfamiliar with National Hot Rods would undoubtedly find its points championships somewhat perplexing. Uniquely in the world of motorsport, due to the series also determining who will qualify for each year's World Final, the battle to be points champion always spans two years. Points garnering begins directly after each year's big July race and ends shortly before the next.

So in England, the first half of 2018 was all about finishing the 2017 season. Somewhat unusually, the same driver had been out front ever since round three, that driver being Billy Wood. He gave warning that he was quite likely to be a world championship contender once he'd wrapped up the points. He may have needed a bit of luck to grab the World Final but that points

title showed it was no fluke.

Equally tough to win is the equivalent Northern Irish title. For almost all the first half of the season it was Derek Martin who led. But by round six, Adam Hylands had taken over and stayed in charge till the end.

Rob McDonald in Scotland and Jeff Riordan (Republic of Ireland) had rather easier championship victories.

It follows that we are now at the mid-point of the 2018-19 series. In England, no obvious frontrunner has emerged, the lead changing hands at almost every round. Presently top is McDonald, (back in the English series since July) while over the Irish Sea, John Christie has a scant lead over Glenn Bell. Billy Bonnar and Riordan are in charge in Scotland and Ireland respectively.



WHAT: NATIONAL SERIES SHOOT OUT WHERE: 10-ROUND SERIES WHEN: AUGUST TO NOVEMBER



WAINMAN GETS BACK TO WINNING WAYS

With the one-off races out of the way, Stu Smith Jr set his sights on retaining his National Series title.

He scored consistently in the first three rounds before winning the final in round four at Sheffield. A third place in round five at Skegness opened up his advantage over Frankie Wainman Jr.

However, Wainman Jr was able to reduce the advantage by winning round six at King's Lynn. Round eight at Northampton turned out to be a disastrous one for Smith Jr as he was involved in a hard crash during his heat race which left his car with

significant damage.

On returning home after the meeting Smith Jr became unwell and was rushed to hospital where internal injuries and a broken bone in his neck were diagnosed.

The following week, Wainman Jr won round nine of the series before wrapping up his unprecedented 14th National title at Belle Vue.

Wainman said: "I am delighted to win the title, it is superb. It's been a tough series and there has been some hard racing. It's a shame Smith Jr was unable to race the last couple of meetings – I am sure it would have been a great battle between us."

WHAT: ANGIE ROWE MEMORIAL TROPHY WHERE: HEDNESFORD HILLS RACEWAY WHEN: NOVEMBER 4, 2018



ANGIE ROWE MEMORIAL – A NEW 'MAJOR'

Memorial trophies in oval racing are not uncommon. Some, like the Tom Pitcher race for F2 stock cars, have taken place continuously for many years.

What is unusual is to have two races in a year dedicated to the same person. But after long time NHRPA race director Angie Rowe lost her battle with cancer in May, Spedeworth supremo Deane Wood decided to dedicate this year's World Final to her memory.

A measure of the esteem in which she was held is that driver Shane Bland then decided to sponsor an entirely new perpetual trophy, the Angie Rowe Memorial, raced for this year at the final round

of the English series.

The first running could hardly have been a more fitting event. Drivers came from all over the UK to race at Hednesford with 34 cars coming under starter's orders, although this figure could have been higher still if rumours about drivers like Matt Simpson and Malcolm Blackman trying to borrow cars had reached fruition.

Angie's great friend Carl Boardley made the event in a loaned Ginetta but, after an afternoon of intense three- and four-wide competition which left even 40 year veterans of the sport raving about the racing, it was Jason Kew in another Ginetta who became the first person to lift the magnificent silver cup.

FEATURE

Photos: Williams, Colin Casserley

Robert Kubica's number one at Williams is a short oval winner. By Neil Randon

WILLIAMS MECHANIC MAKING A SPLASH IN BRISCA F1



Ben Howard took his biggest victory at Birmingham last November



The Gala Night win was dominant

On his first day in Abu Dhabi preparing for the final grand prix of the Formula 1 season, Ben Howard walked down the pitlane to a hero's welcome.

"All my friends in other teams called out 'How are we doing champ?', 'Well done mate!' and they were all shaking my hand," says Howard. "It was mega."

The previous Saturday, the number one mechanic on Sergey Sirotkin's Williams FW41 had achieved a lifetime's ambition. Racing at the Birmingham Gala meeting in November, Howard led from flag-to-flag to take his first race win in a BriSCA F1 stockcar and with it the Dave Leonard Memorial Trophy.

When the 37-year-old pulled up in front of the start-finish line after the race he sat in his car, head in his hands.

"I didn't know what to do," Howard admits. "I had to take a minute to compose myself."

Howard was born and bred in Rochdale, where he still lives, a town renowned as home to one of BriSCA F1's greatest stock car dynasties, the Smith family.

Stuart Smith blazed a trail in the series from 1969, the year he won his first of six World Finals. Sons Andy and Stuart continued the legacy. Howard can now add his name to the list of Rochdale race winners.

"My dad was very good friends with Stuart Smith Sr," says Howard. "And as a teenager I became friends with Stuart Jr – not on the racing side, but socially."

"I got into stock cars when I was at school. There was a small garage opposite to where my dad worked in Rochdale. I used to often hear a car in there and it was the BriSCA F1 of

Craig Howarth. I approached Craig to see if I could do work experience there. After school on a Thursday I would go down to the garage and at the weekends I'd go racing with them.

"And so that really got me the stockcar bug. But when I got a job and went to college it kind of stopped. But I always followed it."

Having left school after his GCSEs Howard took up a four-year apprenticeship at college as a motor vehicle mechanic.

His third-year college placement led him to a garage where the owner restored historic sports cars. When the owner sold his equipment to a company in Lisbon and retired, Howard was offered a job in Portugal.

"I was 18 and so I packed my bags and my toolbox and went to Lisbon," he says.

Three years later Howard returned to Rochdale and worked at a garage where a customer owned a 1982 Tyrrell 011 F1 car.

"The owner used to race in the same series as the one I was involved with in Portugal," says Howard. "I worked on this car and we would do eight to 10 events a year around Europe. It was good racing."

As a 25-year-old, Howard was nurturing his skills as a mechanic, but was unaware his father had secretly sent his CV to a number of F1 teams.

"One of them rang me out of the blue," says Howard. "Super Aguri asked me to come down to Oxford. So I bought my first suit and off I went."

After an hour-long interview at the Leafield Technical Centre, he got the job. "Super Aguri was a team full of people who had never worked in F1 before," he says. "By the third year we were beating the works team, and it was then Honda pulled the plug."

"Everyone knew Super Aguri wouldn't be around by the end of the season so I put some feelers out

to some team managers. I got a month's contract with Prodrive and Aston Martin and we won Le Mans with the DB9 – so that was a nice one to tick off the box."

It was while at Le Mans Howard took a phone call from the Williams F1 team. "It was with about four hours to go in the race when I got a phone call from Williams and was asked if I could stop off at the factory on my way back home," he explains. "I've now been there 11 years."

Howard was promoted to number one mechanic three years ago. "There's a number one with each car," Howard explains. "And you have five number two mechanics, so it is a team of six mechanics on each car. Now I am number one mechanic working on Robert Kubica's car."

Howard, for his part, began his short oval racing career in BriSCA F2 in 2016, hiring a car from local driver Rob Mitchell.

"I won my first final at Sheffield," he says. "As good as it was hiring cars I wanted something to do at home so I bought one. I did a couple of meetings in 2017 – and it became a massive project. I ended up stripping the car down to chassis legs and a rollcage and rebuilt it out of my garage and raced it last season."

But competing in BriSCA F1 was the ultimate ambition. Having had a brief outing at the final Coventry meeting in 2016, Howard took part in the following season's Gala event in Birmingham, hiring the Tarmac car of Ricky Wilson.

"I started at the back and plodded round just to get a feel for it and then I did the Sunday afternoon meeting of the Skegness Speedweekend last year and had another play from the back."

"And that was it really, that was my season done for the year. But then a friend at work wanted to have a go in a BriSCA F2. I suggested the Gala meeting and I was going to go along with him to be a support. I wasn't down to race at the meeting because Ricky had trashed his car a couple of weeks before at Buxton."

But on the Thursday before the meeting Howard got a message from BriSCA F1 driver Mark Sargent, who offered him a car.

"I turned up on the Saturday ready for practice and the car was there ready and Sarge told me to jump in. I was just going to get in with my jeans on to check the seat fitted OK and was comfortable with the pedals. But Sarge said, 'no, no, get your suit and helmet on, you're straight out

for practice.' I finished third. I got loads of confidence from that going into the final."

Before the final Howard sought some advice from his all-time favourite BriSCA F1 driver, Andy Smith.

Howard was never headed in the final, and ended up pulling away from the pack. "With three laps to go I looked in my mirrors and I was actually pulling away. With two to go I was thinking 'I'm going to win a final!'"

"Then it went through my mind 'what do you do when you win?' I thought 'I'm just going to give it the big beans and come out of the corner sideways smoking the tyres', but I went a bit too early and I nearly lost it!"

Howard reveals a number of friends in F1 follow stock car racing: "Everyone looks at a BriSCA F1 stock as a lump of steel with a massive engine inside it but I've had people come with me to meetings and they have been really impressed. These guys build their own cars and are so clever and dedicated. The engineering is amazing. It's special really."

And even some of the F1 drivers have also shown an interest. "Kubica is really keen and always asks how I've got on throughout the year and Felipe Massa always keeps in touch," says Howard.

As the 2019 season approaches, Howard hopes to continue racing both in BriSCA F1 and F2.

"Whatever shale meetings are on when I'm home I'll be racing my BriSCA F2 but if there aren't any shale F2 meetings on I'll be hunting for a drive in a BriSCA F1 on either shale or Tarmac," he says.

"I really want to do some shale surface meetings next year, but if anyone has a car spare I will be straight in." ■



Howard will be the number one mechanic for Robert Kubica in '19

SPORTING SCENE

Photos: fiaworldrallycross.com

DTM ACE SCHEIDER REJOINS WORLD RX CHAMPIONSHIP

German to race a SEAT with Munnich Motorsport squad



Scheider will rejoin the World RX field

By Hal Ridge

World Rallycross regular and 2008-'09 DTM champion Timo Scheider will compete in a full World RX campaign with the Munnich Motorsport squad this season.

Scheider will race a new SEAT Ibiza Supercar for the Friedersdorf-based team, having driven in selected outings in 2018 in an older version of the car.

"It's no secret that I was bitten by the rallycross bug a long time ago," said Scheider. "Consequently, I am more than happy to be entering my first full season as a member of Rene [Munnich]'s strong squad. We have slightly restructured the team and are preparing for the new challenges with the utmost diligence and ambition."

Scheider made his rallycross debut with the same team in 2015, and contested a full season for the MJP Racing squad in 2017, driving a Ford Fiesta. He finished on the podium in the opening round in Spain and wound up 10th at the end of year.

"I'm very pleased to be taking my involvement in the rallycross scene to the next level," he said. "For me too, this very special discipline is the perfect arena for tough, spectacular motorsport – and



DTM champion in 2008, '09

that goes for the fans and drivers in equal measure."

Team owner and driver Rene Munnich drove an updated specification version of the Ibiza last year, with developments now being carried over onto the new car. Munnich himself will continue to race in selected rounds.

He said: "Despite the withdrawal of some manufacturers, I firmly believe in the future of the World Rallycross Championship, because for private teams it provides a massive opportunity to showcase themselves on a global and professional platform with a huge following."

"I am delighted that Scheider will be contesting the full season in parallel with his commitments as a BMW works driver. I feel confident that we have a very good overall package and that we will be genuine contenders for top positions."

RX2 machines to be permitted into the Supercar class of British Rallycross series

The single-make Supercars Lites machines used in the RX2 International Series that supports the World Rallycross Championship will be allowed to race in the British Rallycross Championship's Supercar class this year.

The cars, which must comply with the RX2 technical regulations, will be eligible in every British RX event in a bid to give British drivers racing in RX2 an opportunity to also

drive the cars in home events.

British Rallycross Championship manager Tim Whittington said: "RX2 has become established as a proven stepping stone for young career racers, at the same time as that the cars can appeal to the traditional owner-driver who may not have the technical ability or budget to maintain a modern Supercar."

"I don't expect to be overrun with RX2 cars, this is more

about providing an option for those who might consider International events in RX2 to also race that car at home, and to open the opportunity for young racers to get into four-wheel-drive cars that are more manageable than a Supercar."

The spaceframe chassis, four-wheel-drive cars use rear-mounted 2.4-litre naturally aspirated engines with 310 horsepower, around half that of a modern Supercar.

Built by Swedish team OlsbergsMSE, the Supercar Lites are used in World RX, RallyX Nordic and ARX events.

British RX Supercar champions Dan Rooke and Nathan Heathcote both graduated to the World RX support class in the last two years having won the British RX title, Rooke claiming victory in the Swedish round in 2017. A number of British drivers are known to be looking at RX2 as a future career option.

RX2 cars will be seen in the UK



Ostberg tested a Skoda Fabia

World Rally refugee Ostberg samples Skoda Fabia Supercar and considers race outings in World Rallycross

Sidelined Citroen World Rally Championship driver Mads Ostberg is considering a partial campaign in the World Rallycross Championship this season, alongside his rally programme.

Ostberg tested ES Motorsport's Skoda Fabia Supercar at Mettet in Belgium before Christmas, his first time driving a Supercar. He completed three four-lap runs in damp, low grip conditions.

"It was a lot of fun to be honest, I really enjoyed it," Ostberg told MN. "I've seen events and I've been on a few [rallycross] tracks but always with a rally car, so this was the first time I drove a Supercar. But OK, the WRC cars these days are quite fast as well so it was not such a big difference as it probably would have been five years ago."

The 31-year old says he could drive in selected rounds with the team this season,

but that a full campaign is unlikely.

He said: "It was an invitation I didn't want to say no to. I'm not ruling out the possibility of doing some [World RX] events but to do the full championship might be difficult. It's completely depending on my plans in rallying, maybe we can find a combination. I would be honest and say that rally is still my target for the next years to come but it was my first experience of rallycross

today and I really loved it so I'm not ruling out anything."

Ostberg was joined at Mettet by the squad's test driver, Kevin Abbring, while former Ford and Audi World RX driver Andreas Bakkerud also completed a day of running with the team behind closed doors. Although heavily linked with Nasser Al-Attiyah, ES Motorsport is yet to confirm a driver line-up for 2019.

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MN SAYS...

The beginning of a new era

Three of this country's rising talents have a platform to shine

As you will have read in Jack Benyon's excellent feature in this week's *Motorsport News*, Britain will be well served in grand prix racing in the season to come. George Russell, Lando Norris and Alex Albon are three of the brightest talents on the radar at the moment, and they are all being given the chance to shine throughout 2019.

The skills of Russell and Norris have been well documented through success in the lower categories of motorsport, while Albon was not mentioned in the same bracket originally, his performances in Formula 2 last season meant he put himself in a place where he was impossible to ignore. And, as Benyon points out, Albon probably has the plum seat out of the three drivers. Russell at Williams and Norris at McLaren: both have to help drag their teams out of the doldrums which their squads have been in during recent seasons, while Albon can build on the progress that Toro Rosso made in 2018.

Whatever the outcome, there is plenty to be excited about and, alongside Lewis Hamilton, there are good times ahead.

Matt James, Editor (Twitter: @MattJMNews)



LETTERS



Motorsport News, Dec 19/26, 2018

Keeping it simple

When I was competing it was in London Counties Association Motor Club, Association of Central Southern Motor Club and Association of Eastern Motor Club Road Rally Championship rounds in the 1970s and 1980s.

Back then, it was suggested that if you regularly finish in the top five you should organise an event as your way of putting back into the sport some of the enjoyment that you took out.

I was clerk of the course each year from 1975 to 1989 on multiple regional championship rounds and, by that time, we had a simple formula for running an enjoyable and competitive event even at an average speed of 30mph without the need for difficult navigation.

By 1990 we couldn't make the event viable as entries went down to about 20 and many of the motor clubs folded so numerous events were canned.

I have been the route liaison officer for Northamptonshire for over 40 years and two years ago took on Leicestershire as well, but I still had the passion for maps and putting together routes for championship road rallies.

We couldn't get enough organisers together in 2018 to do it justice, but for 2019 we have put together a team of three new recruits and nine of us old lags, and the enthusiasm appears to be growing again.

The motto is back to basics: about eight to 10 miles of unsurfaced roads. It was dead simple and varied navigation, no tricks, plenty of codeboards around grass triangles and muck heaps, in gateways, and on old roads.

There were no tests as these have to be run at 30mph on private land anyway and require lots of time and manpower. Turn them into regularity sections and run them timed to the second. The winner only needs to drop a few seconds and you've got a good result.

We need to make everything reasonably cheap, simple and user friendly and have a web master who can keep all the updates flowing and I'm quite sure the message will get through that proper road rallying is on the path to recovery.

Nigel Evans
Via email

Who is important?

Further to *Motorsport News*'s feature on the Top 10 Most Important People in British Motorsport (November 28, 2018), can I suggest widening the list to include the top 25 people as you did three or four years ago.

I managed to list over 30 names last week when I attempted to put some names together, and six appeared in your list, including the top four.

Tim Bendelow
Via email

YOUR PICS



LETTERS@MOTORSPORT-NEWS.CO.UK

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

ART EDITOR MIKE STOKOE'S
FAVOURITE OF
THE WEEK!



Richard Salisbury was in the right place to capture this flying Ford Escort Mk2



It's all uphill for Duncan Stephens in this shot



Graham Lomax braved the cold...



...and he managed to snap this too



Chris West at Knockhill, from Garrick Collier



Dean Chilvers was pleased with this unusual F1 angle



Mike Bouts was at the Rockingham Stages event

GOT AN OPINION?

LET US KNOW: LETTERS@MOTORSPORT-NEWS.CO.UK

GAME REVIEW **GEAR.Club UNLIMITED 2**



Game is out now for £54.99

The arrival of the Nintendo Switch in 2017 was a game-changer, bringing portable gaming back but at a much more powerful level than seen before. Uptake from developers outside of Nintendo's own franchises has been a slow-burner, which meant there was a wide-open goal for a racing game to steal an early march.

Unfortunately, Microïds' *Gear.Club Unlimited 2* hit the post twice before blasting the shot over the crossbar after its first attempt with Switch. The biggest criticism is that the game plays like a low-budget mobile title, to the point that an offering such as EA's *Real Racing* is vastly superior to the Switch game, despite being played on a touchscreen smartphone.

The fact *Gear.Club* has noticeable performance struggles in handheld mode, and lags to your control input, makes it unplayable on the go. In short, it feels like a poor mobile game on a high-end console.

The chief gripe with the game is a poor handling system, although it could be argued that the Switch's dual-sticks lack the precision of an Xbox One or a PlayStation 4. But regardless, races were spent deciding where

was best to side-swipe a wall and lose minimal time, having given up all expectation of braking properly. Even the art of tapping the brakes and pre-loading the car before applying the full stopping power into a corner was a wasted effort.

It's clearly a problem because even the pre-set driving aids are flummoxed. It's even tried to apply braking in wheel-to-wheel combat, but it ends up being the biggest hindrance to overtaking by continually slamming the brakes on when drafting. You have to turn all aids off if you want to compete in this game.

A racing game lives and dies by its feel, whether it's arcade or a simulation style racer, and *Gear.Club* falls short to the point it detracts heavily from the positives.

The most impressive element of the game is the design, with races through European-flavoured towns, mountain ranges and deserts managing to cleverly look as though they are living and breathing despite the Switch's graphical limitations.

The enjoyment in this game will come through range, with a claimed 1800 miles of track and 250 competitive events, given variety by mixing the

format between races, sprints and time trials.

It's so good it deserves a fully open world, which the game teases with its maps but never lets you experience.

There's a lot to be said for a racing game attempting to incorporate a story of sorts, something *Motorsport News* argues should be considered more by developers.

But this one hits every cliché possible: earning a shock chance in a racing team, impressing a doubtful boss and competing in a series of races in a linear, dot-to-dot



Most impressive element of *Gear.Club Unlimited 2* is the design

style progression.

The fact the story is told through comic-book style images and speech bubbles makes the story of little interest. Fans of *TOCA 2*'s drama, turn away now. Slow loading times make you all the less likely to persevere as well.

Car selection is sizeable, although the motorsport offering is small – a surprise, considering the story is centred around a racing team.

Customisation is decent, with a range of performance-based updates and vinyl wraps to make your motor stand out

from the crowd – not that there's any multiplayer option for others to see your work.

If you're one of the adopters of the Switch and need your racing fix, it would appear 2019's re-release of *Grid* is the next chance for a racing game to make it big on Nintendo's console.

Considering *Gear.Club*'s mobile roots have barely been disguised, asking over 50 quid for the game is daft considering more mobile-esque offerings on the Nintendo eShop are less than half the price of that.

Tom Errington

CHRISTMAS QUIZ ANSWERS

General Knowledge: 1 Corolla; 2 Skegness and Buxton; 3 2011 and 2013; 4 Stuart Smith Jr; 5 Third; 6 For repeatedly cutting corners; 7 Techeetah; 8 2014 Bahrain GP; 9 Tora Takagi; 10 The Pope.
Multiple-choice: 1 B) 8; 2 A) Lando Norris; 3 B) Mads Ostberg; 4 B) 17; 5 A) 111; 6 C) 4. **Crossword down:** 1 Fifth; 2 Torrent; 3 Wood; 4 Gallacher; 6 Techeetah; 7 Thruxton; 10 Oulton Park; 12 Schumacher; 14 Cambrian; 15 Hugh. **Across:** 5 Fifteen; 8 Toyota; 9 Hypercar; 11 Twelve; 13 Esteban Ocon; 16 One; 17 Sebastian Loeb; 18 Hubert; 19 Higgins; 20 Matt Edwards.

NEXT WEEK

OUT WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 9



Autosport International Show Guide 2019

How Elite reached the pinnacle of junior racing



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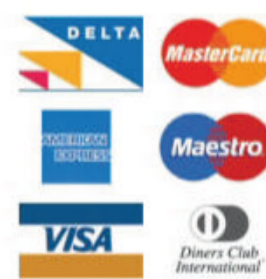
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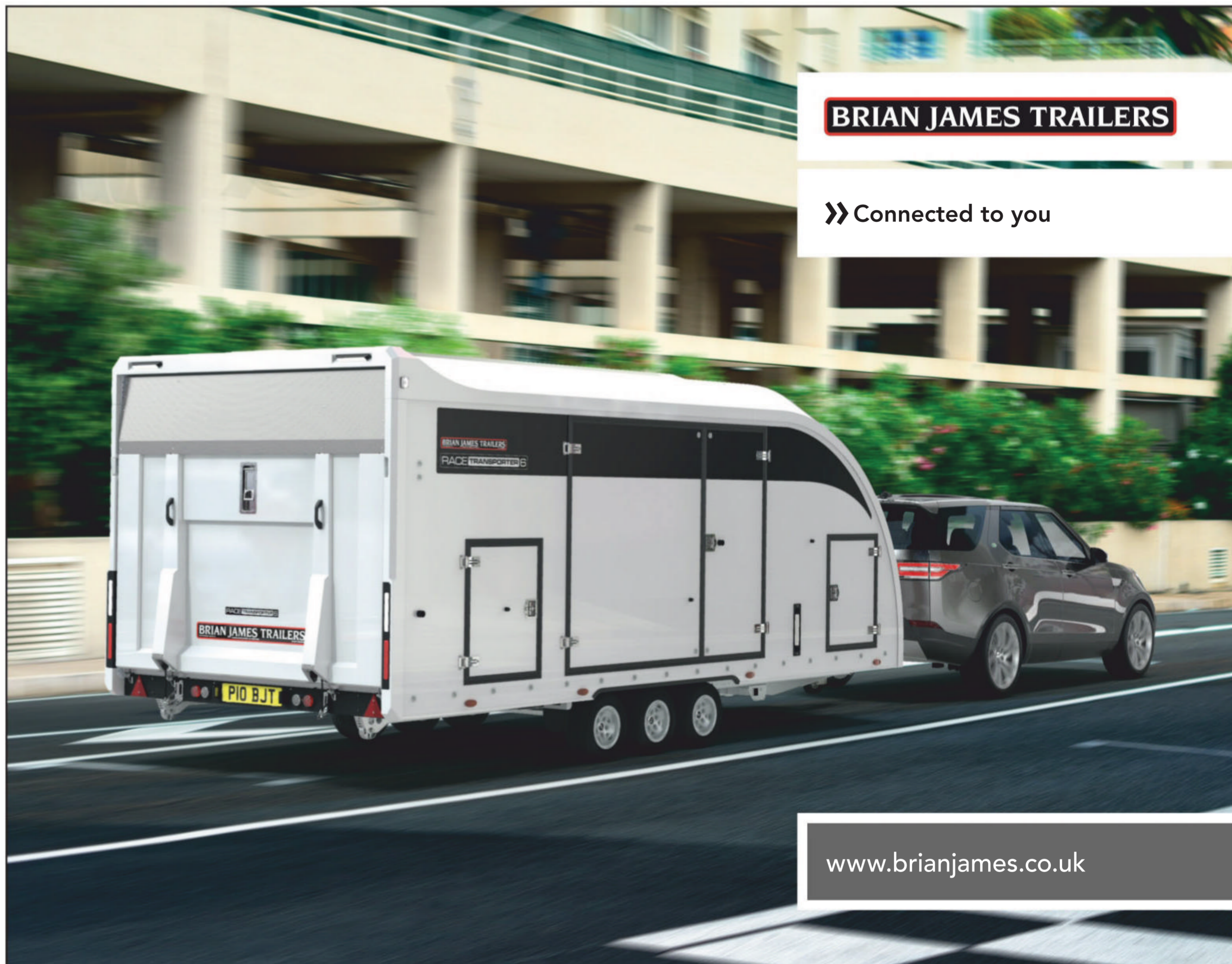
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