A SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT FROM AUTOSPORT 18 DECEMBER 1997

AUTOSPORT

F1 Review

Villeneuve v Schumacher
The whole dramatic story



JACQUES ATTACK!

PLUS!
HILL TO CLIMB: THE CHAMP'S YEAR



F1'S NEW BREED: FOCUS ON THE YOUNG GUNS



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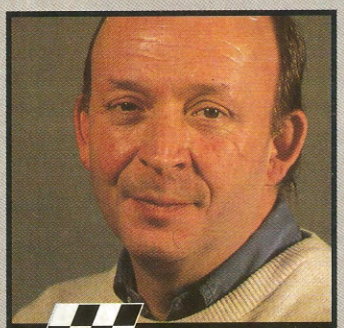


Congratulations

To all those who made it to the top in 1997

HERBERT • FONTANA • PANIS • NAKANO • FISICHELLA • R.SCHUMACHER
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Lessons to be learned



NIGEL ROEBUCK

In the end, it came down to a matter of one point, with one race to go. Might have been scripted that way. Prior to the European Grand Prix, Jacques Villeneuve and Michael Schumacher had between them won all but four of the season's races, and while Jerez was singularly inadequate, as a venue, for the settling of a World Championship campaign, still the atmosphere that Sunday afternoon lacked for nothing.

Nor the race, either, until Schumacher attempted his professional foul. The battle to that point had been wholly absorbing, and now all the pit stops were done, and it was a straight race to the flag between the championship protagonists. Perfect.

Looking back, it turned out well in the end, insofar as the biter got bit, and Villeneuve, hard but invariably clean, not only became World Champion, but did it by virtue of a superb passing manoeuvre. It deserved to come off, and, despite Schumacher's unconscionable move, it did. The atmosphere in the press room afterwards was very different from that at Adelaide some three years ago, when virtue did not get its own reward.

The main criticism invariably aimed at the FIA Stewards of the Meeting was their lack of consistency, race to race. On occasion, they respond to some misdemeanour – even one quite trivial – like Rottweilers on speed, but in Jerez their lack of action was not only shameful, but also inexplicable. In the interests of its own credibility, the FIA must urgently address this problem.

In general terms, though, it was a fine season of Formula1 – on the track. But those who do not hold with the notion that all publicity is good publicity were increasingly dismayed through the season that the sport was too often making the papers for the wrong reasons; we tired of the endless rows in the paddock, all of which essentially concerned... money.

One way and another, Grand Prix racing thrives today as it has never done, and public interest has perhaps never been higher. At the same time, though, its image has been damaged in a number of ways in 1997, and repair work is an urgent necessity if its growth is to be maintained. The man in the street is interested in cars and drivers; he cares nothing for flotations, Concorde Agreements and tribunals, and the powers-that-be would do well to bear that in mind. ■

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CONTENTS



8 VILLENEUVE VICTORIOUS AS WILLIAMS SWEEPS BOARD
Canadian star claims his first World title, following a titanic battle with Michael Schumacher, and all amid the 'controversy' of Jerez

16 BEST OF THE BEST
Grand Prix editor Andrew Benson unveils his top 10 drivers of the season, and reveals who's earned the coveted No1 spot

26 WHAT DO POINTS MAKE...?
For all you stattos out there, the definitive spread of facts, figures and graphs telling all you need to know about the 1997 season

28 ROCKING THE ESTABLISHMENT
Young guns Fisichella, Schumacher jr, Trulli, Wurz *et al* were the rookies looking to make an impact in '97. We assess them

35 GIVING YOUTH ITS HEAD
Grand Prix teams should be prepared to take a gamble on promising kids, for the long-term good, argues Andrew Benson

36 TOP OF THE PREMIERSHIP
Yet again, Williams emerged as the top outfit, claiming both drivers' and teams' titles. It was a struggle at times, though

40 SCARLET FEVER
Ferrari, courtesy of Herr Schumacher, re-emerged as a real force only to fall agonisingly short of championship glory

50 KNOCKING ON THE DOOR
Jordan, Arrows, Stewart and Prost all enjoyed sporadic moments of success this year, to serve notice of intent for '98



Pictures by LAT

20 DAMON SUFFERS THE SLINGS AND ARROWS OF MISFORTUNE
Both Hill and Arrows hoped for much from their new alliance, but, aside from a glorious drive in Hungary, the '96 World Champion endured a trying year

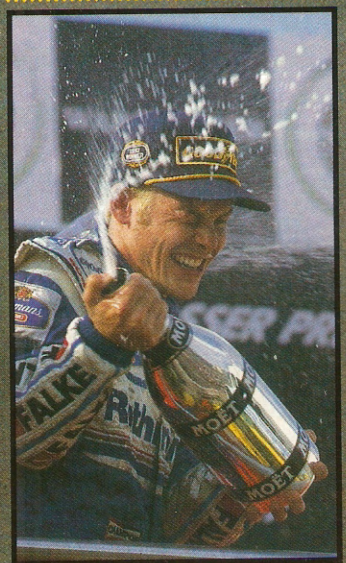
56 BATTLING AGAINST THE ODDS
Sauber, Tyrrell and Minardi had their struggles this season, yet all three showed glimpses as they fought to upset the big boys

58 BREAKING NEW BOUNDARIES
Formula 1 embraced a host of technical innovations this year. We spotlight the 'X-wings' and uncover those airbox secrets

62 I REMEMBER WHEN...
Grand Prix editor-at-large Adam Cooper gets all nostalgic and recalls his most memorable moments of the campaign just gone



44 LEADING LIGHTS HEADING IN DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS
McLaren, after a period in the wilderness, re-entered the winners' circle, while Benetton, despite a victory, resembled a team in chaos

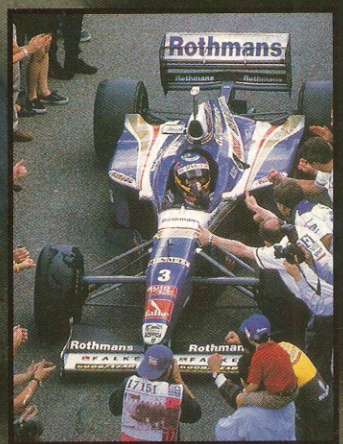


Everyone stop, I've got it in my eye



Villeneuve's narrow win over Eddie Irvine in Argentina came despite illness

Jacques takes the Michael



All hail the conquering hero



Jonny Herbert tells Jacques the one about the Ferrari driver and the battering ram

A moral champion

At times, Jacques Villeneuve made it look harder than it perhaps should have been, but he still claimed the Formula 1 World Championship at only his second attempt this season.

In the end, after being cast early in the season as the 'rebel without a cause', the hero of Canada emerged as the good guy, the moral victor as well as the champion. He also finally brought home the title that his father would dearly love to have won.

By the end of the season Jacques had also, to a certain extent, silenced the critics who had suggested during his mad month – when he made a simple mistake on the first lap in Canada and performed poorly in France – that he couldn't handle the pressure; that when his car advantage was gone he was vulnerable.

When the pressure was really on at the final race in Jerez, Jacques proved that he was more than capable of doing the job with the ultimate pressure on his shoulders. It was a testament to the man that he should do it with the frustration of his exclusion from the Japanese Grand Prix fresh in his mind.

Schumacher blows it all



Five wins took Schuey's total to 27



While Villeneuve made the headlines mid-year, Schuey remained focused

Flawed genius

Hero or villain? Michael Schumacher was both during 1997. To the legion of *tifosi* he was promoted from demi-god to full deity status after sublime wins in the rain of Monaco and Spa, and total domination against all expectation in France.

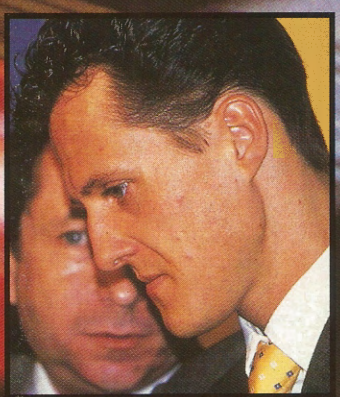
Those races, as well as the brilliant recovery from the stop-go penalty to score a point in Austria, marked him out once again as the finest driver of his generation. Few who saw his team mate Eddie Irvine struggling in the Ferrari F310B doubted that Schuey's immense talent was the factor that made the Prancing Horse into winners again.

However, having built up his image to such a degree that his error-free style was labelled more machine than man, he proved that he was human after all at Jerez.

In that moment when he realised Jacques Villeneuve was on his way through to the title, he reacted just as many of us would; he panicked. The backlash against him was as vicious in his own country as anywhere, but it owed much to the fact that many people felt they'd been duped into believing the former world champion was the messiah.



After the highs of salvaging his title-attack in Japan...



...came the low of Jerez and beyond

JUSTICE FOR J



Jacques Villeneuve took the title after a controversial final race. Nigel Roebuck says the right man won

At around half past three on the afternoon of Sunday October 26, my emotions were in a jumbled state. On the one hand, I was in high spirits, for in the press room sweepstake I had predicted – with an accuracy most untypical – that Michael Schumacher would complete 47 laps of the European Grand Prix, and he had unwittingly obliged me. Therefore I was elated on two counts: first, his seedy tactics had rebounded on him; second, the sweepstake organiser was throwing high-denomination peseta notes in my direction.

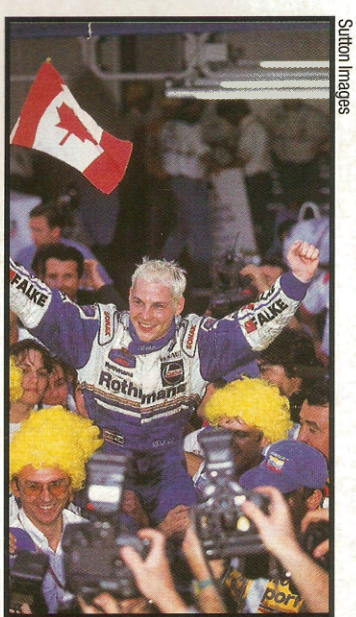


LAT

Men of the season... Villeneuve, Schumacher and McLaren's David Coulthard

The flip side was a feeling of disgust that Schumacher, the most gifted racing driver on earth, had resorted to a stunt as cheap as this. Until that moment, his had been a sublime season, one in which his genius had regularly been given full rein; now, in an instant, he had wiped the memory. The German press contingent, which had been rooting strongly for him, led the booing and condemnation of this clumsiest of low punches.

That was only the start of it. First we had to endure the tension of the remaining 21 laps, fervently hoping that Jacques Villeneuve's Williams had not – like Damon Hill's at Adelaide in 1994 – been mortally damaged by the *wunderkind's* last ditch assault. As it was, Jacques made it, so that was okay. They did the podium ceremony, then the press conference,



Sutton Images

JV: Canada's first World Champion

R JACQUES



The 'Jerez Incident'... Michael Schumacher's Ferrari and Jacques Villeneuve's Williams clash in the defining moment of the 1997 Formula 1 season

Egmound/Sutton Images

Sutton Images

and now it was a matter of waiting for the stewards to deliver their verdict on Schumacher.

They had to hammer him, we felt. If a business with as questionable a reputation as big-time boxing could deal trenchantly with Mike Tyson, then surely no 'sportsman' was too big to avoid censure. And has not the Jockey Club more than once shown no mercy to Frankie Dettori for his over-use of the whip?

We waited. And after several hours, after 'study of the video evidence,' the stewards declared that the collision between Schumacher and Villeneuve had been 'a racing incident,' and warranted no further action. Uproar. Had not FIA President Max Mosley that very morning promised draconian punishment for misdemeanours of this kind?

Perhaps the press reaction to this farcical decision took the governing body by surprise. Next morning, newspapers everywhere screamed their condemnation, and nowhere was it more vociferous than in the land of Maranello, where a couple of journals suggested that Ferrari should immediately fire their superstar. 'Schumacher – a genius, but a disgrace,' ran one front page headline.

Within hours, the FIA had announced that he had been summoned to appear before the World Motor Sport Council, and one wondered why, at the same time, its own Stewards of the Meeting were not directed to seek the ▶



A forlorn Michael Schumacher is left to rue the error of his ways at Jerez...

Empics

Year at a glance

AUSTRALIAN GP - MAR 9
David Coulthard took a surprise victory to give a jubilant McLaren team its first win since 1993. Jacques Villeneuve and Johnny Herbert were taken out in a first corner accident triggered by Eddie Irvine, leaving Heinz-Harald Frentzen in the lead. Coulthard got ahead at the stops, while Frentzen spun out when his left brake disc failed. Michael Schumacher picked up a handy second place.
1 David Coulthard (McLaren-Mercedes)
2 Michael Schumacher (Ferrari)
3 Mika Hakkinen (McLaren-Mercedes)
4 Gerhard Berger (Benetton-Renault)
5 Olivier Panis (Prost-Mugen Honda)
6 Nicola Larini (Sauber-Petronas)

BRAZILIAN GP - MAR 30
Jacques Villeneuve won, but needed a lucky break to achieve his win. He went across the gravel trap at the first corner, but a multiple tangle and Rubens Barrichello's stalled Stewart brought out the red flags. Villeneuve easily passed Michael Schumacher at the restart, who was struggling on hard Goodyear tyres. Gerhard Berger finished a strong second from Olivier Panis's Prost – the latter giving Bridgestone its first podium.
1 Jacques Villeneuve (Williams-Renault)
2 Gerhard Berger (Benetton-Renault)
3 Olivier Panis (Prost-Mugen Honda)
4 Mika Hakkinen (McLaren-Mercedes)
5 Michael Schumacher (Ferrari)
6 Jean Alesi (Benetton-Renault)

ARGENTINIAN GP - APR 30
Jacques Villeneuve managed to win despite a stomach upset. Michael Schumacher crashed out at the first corner after tangling with Rubens Barrichello, so it was left to his team mate Eddie Irvine to chase down Villeneuve. Ralf Schumacher scored his first podium in Jordan's 100th Grand Prix, but controversially took out his team mate Giancarlo Fisichella on the way.
1 Jacques Villeneuve (Williams-Renault)
2 Eddie Irvine (Ferrari)
3 Ralf Schumacher (Jordan-Peugeot)
4 Johnny Herbert (Sauber-Petronas)
5 Mika Hakkinen (McLaren-Mercedes)
6 Gerhard Berger (Benetton-Renault)

Sutton Images



Irvine gets all the luck in Argentina

SAN MARINO GP - APR 27
Williams new boy Heinz-Harald Frentzen took a fine maiden victory, holding off Michael Schumacher who pressured him hard. Jacques Villeneuve again started from pole position and led, only for gear selection problems to force him into retirement. Eddie Irvine was third, while Giancarlo Fisichella took his first points with fourth.
1 Heinz-Harald Frentzen (Williams-Renault)
2 Michael Schumacher (Ferrari)
3 Eddie Irvine (Ferrari)
4 Giancarlo Fisichella (Jordan-Peugeot)
5 Jean Alesi (Benetton-Renault)
6 Mika Hakkinen (McLaren-Mercedes)



> **"One didn't know whether to giggle at the absurdity, or weep for a sport losing its way"**

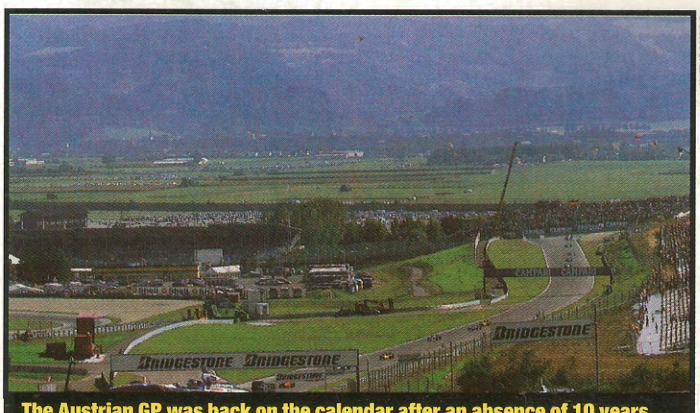
◀ services of an optician. At least until a spine donor could be found.

That day in Colnbrook, November 11, one didn't know whether to giggle at the sheer absurdity of it all, or weep for a sport that was losing its way. Mainly, though, one felt outrage, not merely because Schumacher had got away with it, but also because one's intelligence was being insulted, and that never goes down well. The explanation put before us was very clever, very plausible – until you gave it a few seconds' consideration. What it amounted to was this: *if* Villeneuve had failed to finish the race, then Schumacher's punishment *would* have been severe.

As Jacques did make the flag, though, despite his rival's best efforts, and did take the title, Schumacher's 'punishment' was illusory, and utterly the wrong message was sent out to every kid in the world with aspirations to become a racing driver. Why, he even kept his 1997 results.

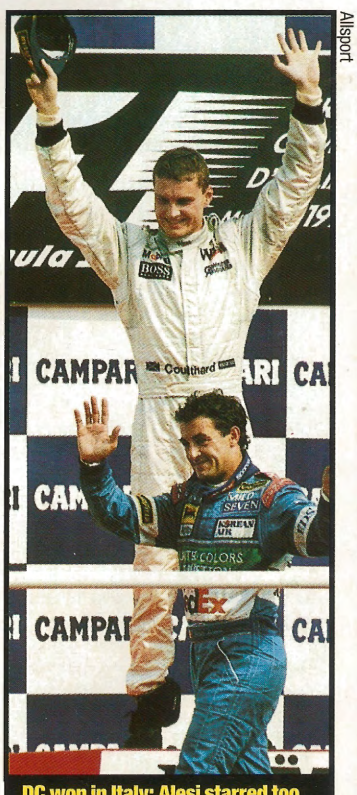
When OJ Simpson returned home after his trial, he found his neighbours had erected a large sign nearby: 'Warning!' it said. 'Murder is legal in this county.'

I don't know what made me think of that, but one thing I do know is that Grand Prix racing needs swiftly to rid itself of the widespread public perception that it is increasingly a business with little regard for anything save self-interest. And while I have not the slightest sympathy for Michael Schumacher, I do tend to agree with those who suggest that these days the pressures involved in winning the almighty World Championship are too great, particularly if one's integrity is frail.



Coates/LAT

The Austrian GP was back on the calendar after an absence of 10 years



Allsport

DC won in Italy; Alesi starred too



Jacques Villeneuve usurps Michael Schumacher at the start of the Japanese Grand Prix; the Williams driver was racing under appeal following a practice transgression

Tee/LAT



Saturday in Suzuka... Villeneuve faces the press after the yellow flag incident

Tee/LAT



A livid Michael Schumacher watches his Argentinian GP hopes turn to dust

LAT

Year at a glance

MONACO GP - MAY 11
Michael Schumacher was amazing in the treacherous wet conditions, blitzing the field. He took the lead at the start and simply drove away. Rubens Barrichello scored '97 debutant Stewart's first points with an incredible second place, while Eddie Irvine made the podium again despite a lowly grid position. Williams drivers Jacques Villeneuve and Heinz-Harald Frentzen started on slicks – the wrong decision – and both failed to finish.
1 Michael Schumacher (Ferrari)
2 Rubens Barrichello (Stewart-Ford)
3 Eddie Irvine (Ferrari)
4 Olivier Panis (Prost-Mugen Honda)
5 Mika Salo (Tyrrell-Ford)
6 Giancarlo Fisichella (Jordan-Peugeot)

SPANISH GP - MAY 25
Jacques Villeneuve bounced back to win comfortably from pole, despite many of his fellow Goodyear runners suffering from excessive tyre wear. Williams team mate Heinz-Harald Frentzen and David Coulthard both dropped back. Olivier Panis benefited from his Bridgestone rubber to rise from 12th on the grid to second, while Jean Alesi finished third.
1 Jacques Villeneuve (Williams-Renault)
2 Olivier Panis (Prost-Mugen Honda)
3 Jean Alesi (Benetton-Renault)
4 Michael Schumacher (Ferrari)
5 Johnny Herbert (Sauber-Petronas)
6 David Coulthard (McLaren-Mercedes)

Sutton Images



Canada brought one of '97's lows

CANADIAN GP - JUN 15
Michael Schumacher claimed a somewhat fortunate second victory of the season in sad circumstances. David Coulthard was leading when he came in for a tyre stop on lap 52. At the same moment Olivier Panis suffered an horrific crash and broke his legs. The race was unsurprisingly stopped with Schumacher, now leading, declared the winner. Jean Alesi picked up second and the in-form Giancarlo Fisichella took his maiden podium.
1 Michael Schumacher (Ferrari)
2 Jean Alesi (Benetton-Renault)
3 Giancarlo Fisichella (Jordan-Peugeot)
4 Heinz-Harald Frentzen (Williams-Renault)
5 Johnny Herbert (Sauber-Petronas)
6 Shinji Nakano (Prost-Mugen Honda)

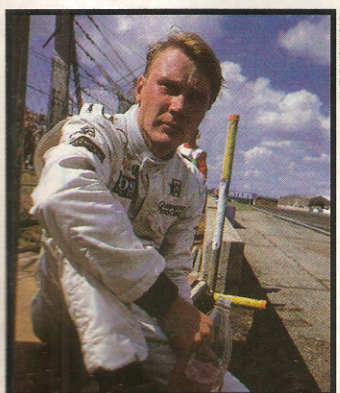
FRENCH GP - JUN 29
Michael Schumacher took pole again and dominated the race, leading from start to finish. Rain fell in the late stages and Michael briefly slid into a gravel trap. He extricated himself to finish well ahead of Heinz-Harald Frentzen. Jacques Villeneuve caught Eddie Irvine on the last lap, but spun at the final corner; however, he recovered to take three crucial championship points.
1 Michael Schumacher (Ferrari)
2 Heinz-Harald Frentzen (Williams-Renault)
3 Eddie Irvine (Ferrari)
4 Jacques Villeneuve (Williams-Renault)
5 Jean Alesi (Benetton-Renault)
6 Ralf Schumacher (Jordan-Peugeot)

At one time the title of World Champion was primarily an honour, a symbolic thing. Its importance was always overstated – how much could it mean when Stirling Moss never won it? – but its worth was of little financial consequence. In the caring '90s, though, everything comes down to gelt, and while it may be agreeable for drivers – even those unlikely ever actually to *win* anything – to travel by private jet, say, so everything has its price, and in this case it is what we used to call 'sport'.

For me, the Schumacher affair has been the dominant issue of 1997, because it actually concerned motor racing, rather than commerce. Through the year the rows rumbled on about the flotation of Formula 1, the Concorde Agreement (to which Williams, McLaren and Tyrrell were not signatories), and so on, and many of us became frankly fed up to the teeth with it all. If one had wished to be a lobby correspondent, after all, one would have gone into political journalism; increasingly motor racing began to appear on the City pages, too, which interest me about as much as the Common Agricultural Policy.

So if you'll forgive me, at this point we will abandon political issues, including the controversies surrounding tobacco sponsorship, which have occurred too recently to warrant going over again.

Returning to racing, therefore, the season was essentially a good one, with the World Championship see-sawing between Villeneuve and Schumacher ▶



Mika Hakkinen: 'robbed' in Britain

Bloxham/LAT



Formula 1 proved as popular as ever with the fans, who couldn't get enough

Coates/LAT



"Some believe Fisichella is headed for greatness... my suspicion is Trulli will be better"

◀ from the first. It was not a surprise that, race for race, a Williams-Renault once again turned out to be the thing to have, but for the first time in quite a while there were weekends, notably at Hockenheim, when the team collectively failed to get it together. And when this happened, it was merely inevitable that some cynics would murmur anew about the wisdom of replacing Hill with Frentzen. 'If Damon were still there,' they suggested, 'he'd already be on his way to another championship...'

My own view, for what it's worth, is that if Hill had been at Williams in 1997, Villeneuve would still have won the title – indeed, I believe he would have won it rather more conclusively than he did, for he would have benefitted from the calming effect of Damon's experience. Yes, I appreciate that their tastes in set-up are very different, but a lot of time-wasting blind alleys might have remained unexplored had Hill still been around.

Williams went through an untypically uneven patch mid-season, and while they did so Schumacher made hay. Often Ferrari was very quick this year. Surprisingly so on occasion, thought some – including one J Villeneuve, who is an observant lad, and was close at hand.

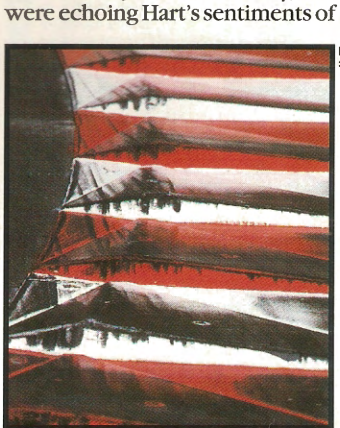
In general terms, though, the Ferrari was inferior to the Williams, not least because it took a lot more out of its tyres. As Jean Todt, Eddie Irvine and others said (*ad nauseam*, in fact), no one but Schumacher could have won five races with the F310B, and throughout the season – until that moment of truth in Jerez – one was lost in admiration for him.

When Ayrton Senna turfed Alain Prost off the road at Suzuka in 1990, a lot of people couldn't quite take in what had happened. A couple of hours after that race I ran across Brian Hart, one of Ayrton's keenest fans. 'The guy's a genius,' Brian muttered. 'Why the hell does he have to do something like that?' There isn't the affection for Michael that there was for Ayrton, because he is far less interesting, but after the Jerez controversy, folk were echoing Hart's sentiments of



LAT

Schumacher Sr's title hopes were not best helped at the Nurburgring by Ralf



LAT

It was Goodyear 17, Bridgestone 0



Giancarlo Fisichella flew in more ways than one this season. The Italian, tipped as a future World Champion, starred in Germany and emerged as Jordan's best hope

Allsport



LAT

The Canadian GP was marred by Olivier Panis's horrific leg-breaking accident

some seven years earlier.

One of the greatest passing manoeuvres I have ever seen was by Schumacher on Jean Alesi, for the lead of the European Grand Prix at the Nurburgring in 1995. Remember it? The timing and execution were exquisite, but the move was also quite ruthless, Michael putting Jean in a position where he either put two wheels off the road to give him room, or the pair of them had an accident. Alesi gave him the room.

He behaved instinctively, in fact. Recognised he had lost the corner, and avoided an accident. According to the World Council of Motor Sport, sitting in judgement, Schumacher's taking aim at Villeneuve was also instinctive, and therefore apparently worthy of some clemency. Seems to me that we should worry about a driver who *instinctively* tries to run another off the road, but there we are...

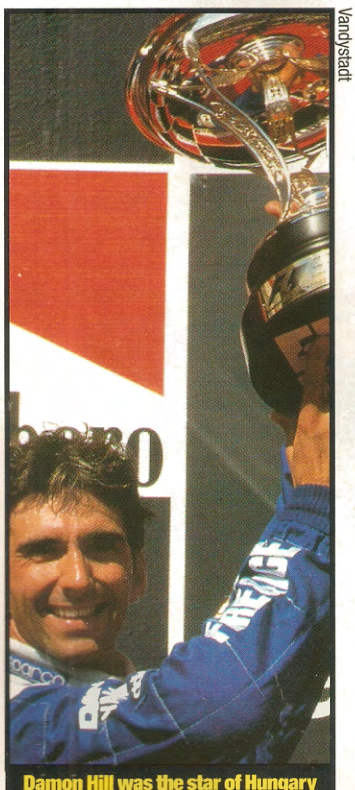
On ability, though, Schumacher clearly stands alone. Jackie Stewart believes that the driver who will ultimately edge Michael from his throne is not yet in F1, and I would go along with that. Some believe that Giancarlo Fisichella is headed for real greatness, and they could be right, but my suspicion for now is that Jarno Trulli will be better yet. We'll see.

I thought it a fine thing that Stewart and Alain Prost, true greats both, came back into Grand Prix racing in 1997, now as team owners. These are people of some standing, after all, ultra-professional as in their driving days, yet still available for conversation without a prior application in writing. They had their tribulations, of course – Alain was without his number one driver, Olivier Panis, for half the season, and Jackie was very much at the mercy of Cosworth's camshaft chains – but each served notice of serious intent, as we had expected.

Were we not now facing rule changes so major as to introduce a whole new breed of Grand Prix car, the prospects for 1998 would have been mighty enticing. Williams you could take for granted, of course, and Ferrari, too, so long as Schumacher was around, but McLaren, too, really hauled themselves back this year, and Jordan, after so many empty promises, sometimes touched the hem of greatness. Fisichella, I feel, they will much miss, but a freshly remotivated Hill should be in there; Schumacher Jr, too, if he can temper that exuberance with a dash of common sense.

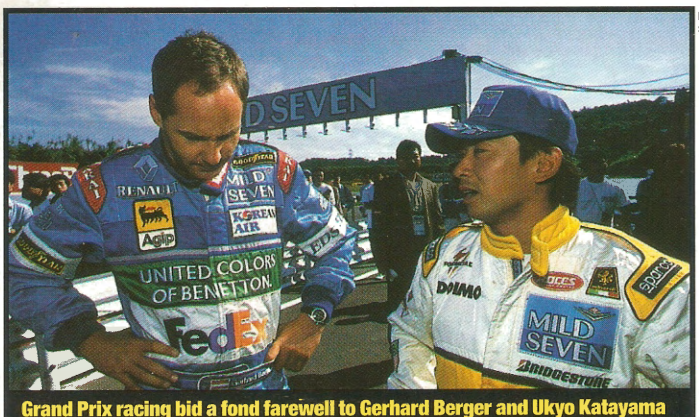
For Benetton, everything changes. Flavio Briatore is gone, and in charge of operations now is a man who knows something about motorsport, David Richards; in place of Gerhard Berger and Alesi, drivers of experience, the team now runs a youthful combo, Fisichella and Alexander Wurz, both of whom have already made the podium.

Prost and Stewart we have already mentioned; remember, too, that Mika Salo will be in a Barnard-designed Arrows next ▶



Vandystadt

Damon Hill was the star of Hungary



LAT

Grand Prix racing bid a fond farewell to Gerhard Berger and Ukyo Katayama

Year at a glance

BRITISH GP - JUL 13
Jacques Villeneuve lucked in to claim Williams's 100th Grand Prix victory. The Canadian led, but a slow first pitstop dropped him down the order. Then, in a bizarre twist affecting those who led, Michael Schumacher suffered a rear wheel bearing failure, and Mika Hakkinen's engine blew up, leaving Villeneuve clear. Damon Hill scored his first points for Arrows with an heroic sixth place – much to the crowd's delight!
1 Jacques Villeneuve (Williams-Renault)
2 Jean Alesi (Benetton-Renault)
3 Alexander Wurz (Benetton-Renault)
4 David Coulthard (McLaren-Mercedes)
5 Ralf Schumacher (Jordan-Peugeot)
6 Damon Hill (Arrows-Yamaha)

GERMAN GP - JUL 27
After missing three races suffering with a sinus problem, Gerhard Berger returned to record a fairytale win for Benetton. He led from the start as Heinz-Harald Frentzen and Eddie Irvine clashed at the first corner. Giancarlo Fisichella looked set for a brilliant second, only for a puncture to rob him. Jacques Villenuve spun out and Michael Schumacher emerged to take second place.
1 Gerhard Berger (Benetton-Renault)
2 Michael Schumacher (Ferrari)
3 Mika Hakkinen (McLaren-Mercedes)
4 Jarno Trulli (Prost-Mugen Honda)
5 Ralf Schumacher (Jordan-Peugeot)
6 Jean Alesi (Benetton-Renault)



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Coulthard was not short of admirers

HUNGARIAN GP - AUG 10
Damon Hill almost pulled off a dramatic, giant-killing victory for the hitherto struggling Arrows team, a gearbox hydraulics problem dropping him to second within sight of the chequered flag. Jacques Villeneuve crucially benefited to close to within three points of Michael Schumacher in the championship. Heinz-Harald Frentzen cannily chose hard Goodyear rubber only for a fuel tank valve to fail him.
1 Jacques Villeneuve (Williams-Renault)
2 Damon Hill (Arrows-Yamaha)
3 Johnny Herbert (Sauber-Petronas)
4 Michael Schumacher (Ferrari)
5 Ralf Schumacher (Jordan-Peugeot)
6 Shinji Nakano (Prost-Mugen Honda)

BELGIAN GP - AUG 24
Rainmaster Michael Schumacher scored another superb victory in the wet at Spa. The race started behind a pace car – for the first time ever in a Grand Prix – because the track was awash, yet Schumacher began on intermediates. He still blitzed the field as the gamble payed off with the circuit drying. Giancarlo Fisichella finished second for his best F1 result. Mika Hakkinen came third, but was excluded for a fuel infringement.
1 Michael Schumacher (Ferrari)
2 Giancarlo Fisichella (Jordan-Peugeot)
3 Heinz-Harald Frentzen (Williams-Renault)
4 Johnny Herbert (Sauber-Petronas)
5 Jacques Villeneuve (Williams-Renault)
6 Gerhard Berger (Benetton-Renault)



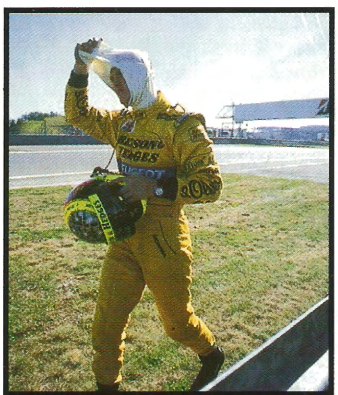
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Johnny Herbert was lucky to escape this high-speed shunt at Monza after his Sauber was taken out by Ralf Schumacher



Tee/LAT

Giancarlo Fisichella milks the applause after a fine, if fruitless, run in Germany



LAT

Ralf Schumacher was fast if erratic

Seasonal survey

Year at a glance

ITALIAN GP - SEP 7
David Coulthard capitalised on slick pit work to take the lead and win. Polesitter Jean Alesi had led until the single stop, but emerged second and could do nothing about the McLaren. The Ferraris were off the pace, while Jacques Villeneuve also struggled.
1 David Coulthard (McLaren-Mercedes)
2 Jean Alesi (Benetton-Renault)
3 Heinz-Harald Frentzen (Williams-Renault)
4 Giancarlo Fisichella (Jordan-Peugeot)
5 Jacques Villeneuve (Williams-Renault)
6 Michael Schumacher (Ferrari)

AUSTRIAN GP - SEP 21
Jacques Villeneuve benefited from Ferrari's slump in form to win Austria's first GP for 10 years and close to within a point in the championship. Mika Hakkinen had led, but his Mercedes engine soon blew, leaving the impressive Jarno Trulli in the lead, but his engine ultimately failed too.
1 Jacques Villeneuve (Williams-Renault)
2 David Coulthard (McLaren-Mercedes)
3 Heinz-Harald Frentzen (Williams-Renault)
4 Giancarlo Fisichella (Jordan-Peugeot)
5 Ralf Schumacher (Jordan-Peugeot)
6 Michael Schumacher (Ferrari)

LUXEMBOURG GP - SEP 28
Jacques Villeneuve got lucky as both McLarens retired within seconds of each other. Poleman Mika Hakkinen was leading David Coulthard when both Mercedes engines blew. Michael Schumacher's race had essentially ended at the first corner when he was hit by his brother Ralf.
1 Jacques Villeneuve (Williams-Renault)
2 Jean Alesi (Benetton-Renault)
3 Heinz-Harald Frentzen (Williams-Renault)
4 Gerhard Berger (Benetton-Renault)
5 Pedro Diniz (Arrows-Yamaha)
6 Olivier Panis (Prost-Mugen Honda)

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Hakkinen took pole for Luxembourg

◀ year. I could be wrong – it's been known, of course – but I also feel that Alesi and Sauber could thrive together.

To some degree, though, much of this is now hypothetical, because we are back at base camp, with every team trying to make the new cars work, and, as Ron Dennis has pointed out, major rule changes inevitably work in the favour of the big teams, because they have not only the expertise, but also the wherewithal, to progress more quickly. At the last race of the season, the first three qualifiers set the same time – to the thousandth – and if the racing itself was generally unsatisfactory, given the near impossibility of overtaking, no one could dispute the closeness of the competition.

Now it is a matter of waiting to see what the new cars produce. Almost to a man, the F1 designers and engineers feel that the FIA has gone the wrong way on rules, but they must accept at least some of the responsibility for that, for it was they who proposed the 'narrow' car in the first place. Most now feel that it would have been preferable to retain 'standard size' F1 cars, perhaps with bigger slick tyres, but with downforce not merely reduced, but as nearly as possible obliterated.

Too late, though, to speak of such things now. The new 'Petit Prix' machines may look hideous, but if they produce better motor racing in time they will be forgiven that, at least to some degree. If they don't, F1 is in trouble.

When, at Monaco, the FIA confirmed that the changes were going through, Max Mosley said that he hoped the resultant speed reductions would permit the retention of such great corners as remain on the F1 circuits of the world. That being so, why the changes to turns one and two at Estoril? Slower cars are something with which we can live, particularly if they should prove more spectacular to view; slower circuits, though, should be emphatically resisted.

Most of all, though, my hope is that some of the acrimony and dissension in the paddocks will dissipate. Emerson Fittipaldi, who came to Hockenheim, was bemused by the atmosphere he found. 'Why,' he said, 'are Gerhard and I the only people smiling?' ■



LAT

Game over... New boys Lola failed to qualify in Oz, or to even practice in Brazil

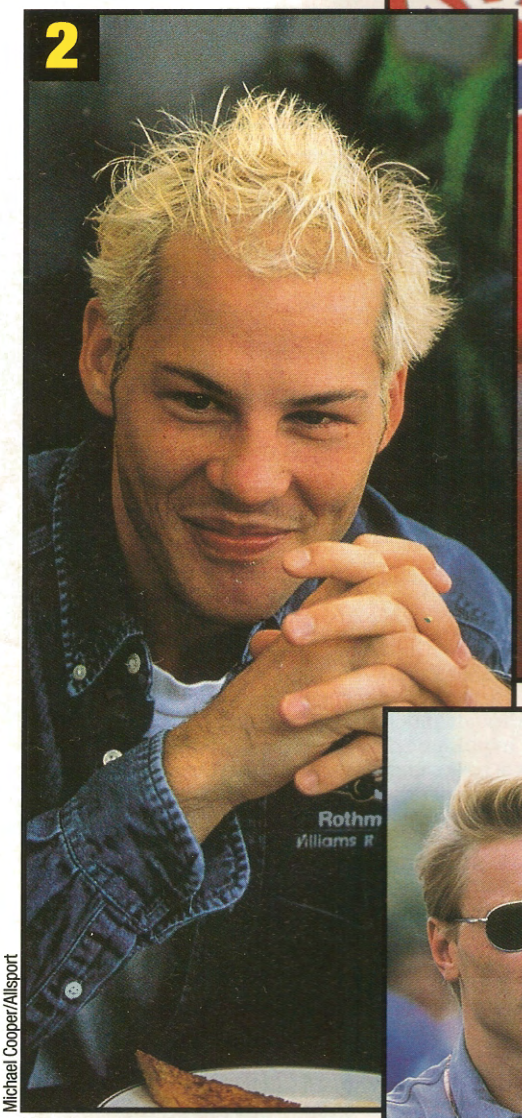
JAPANESE GP - OCT 12
Michael Schumacher won as Jacques Villeneuve raced under appeal – later rescinded – after overtaking under a yellow flag in qualifying. Eddie Irvine starred for Ferrari, leading the race before gifting Schumacher the win.
1 Michael Schumacher (Ferrari)
2 Heinz-Harald Frentzen (Williams-Renault)
3 Eddie Irvine (Ferrari)
4 Mika Hakkinen (McLaren-Mercedes)
5 Jean Alesi (Benetton-Renault)
6 Johnny Herbert (Sauber-Petronas)

EUROPEAN GP (SPAIN) - OCT 26
The title was decided as Jacques Villenuve tried to take the lead from Michael Schumacher. The pair clashed, Michael was out, but Jacques carried on to win the championship. Mika Hakkinen took his maiden GP victory in a one-two for McLaren
1 Mika Hakkinen (McLaren-Mercedes)
2 David Coulthard (McLaren-Mercedes)
3 Jacques Villeneuve (Williams-Renault)
4 Gerhard Berger (Benetton-Renault)
5 Eddie Irvine (Ferrari)
6 Heinz-Harald Frentzen (Williams-Renault)

BRAVO ONE-ZERO

Rating the best drivers of the season is no easy task. Andrew Benson puts his head on the block





Michael Cooper/Allsport



1 MICHAEL SCHUMACHER

Let's be clear about this: this article is not about which driver has the highest morals. It is about trying to give an impression of which drivers did the best job with the equipment at their disposal in 1997. And on that score, there can be only one number one. Brilliant victories at Monaco and Spa-Francorchamps underlined the sheer scale of Michael Schumacher's talent, but he was consistently excellent throughout the year. And, until Jerez, there was only one significant mistake – a few hundred metres of madness at the start of the Argentinian Grand Prix, when he tried to shove off Olivier Panis and then collided with Rubens Barrichello. That move in Spain – dreadful, shocking, dirty and inexcusable though it was – does not change all that.

2 JACQUES VILLENEUVE

In the emotional tide that swept over the climax of the World Championship, and Jacques Villeneuve's brilliant drive at Jerez, it would be easy to put the Canadian in the number one slot. But the season as a whole tells a different story. At his best, Villeneuve was brilliant – his qualifying lap in Australia and intelligent treatment of his tyres in Barcelona both spring to mind as examples. He has coolness and determination in spades, demonstrated when he delivered wins when he had to in Austria and the Nurburgring. He is also a brilliant racer. But there was a flipside. He made unforced errors, showed a tactical weakness when making improvised decisions on the grid, is unconvincing in the wet, and lost his focus around the time of his summons before the sport's rulers in June. But this was only his second full season, and he can only get better. He's already very, very good indeed.

3 MIKA HAKKINEN

There were times in 1997 when people began to wonder if Mika Hakkinen would ever win a Grand Prix, so bad was his luck when in the lead in Silverstone, Austria and the Nurburgring, and it is somehow unjust that when he finally did win his first race, it was handed to him on a plate in controversial circumstances. Hakkinen is a truly fast driver, and has impressive consistency. His technical ability remains open to question, but his natural speed seems to be more than enough to see him through.

4 DAVID COULTHARD

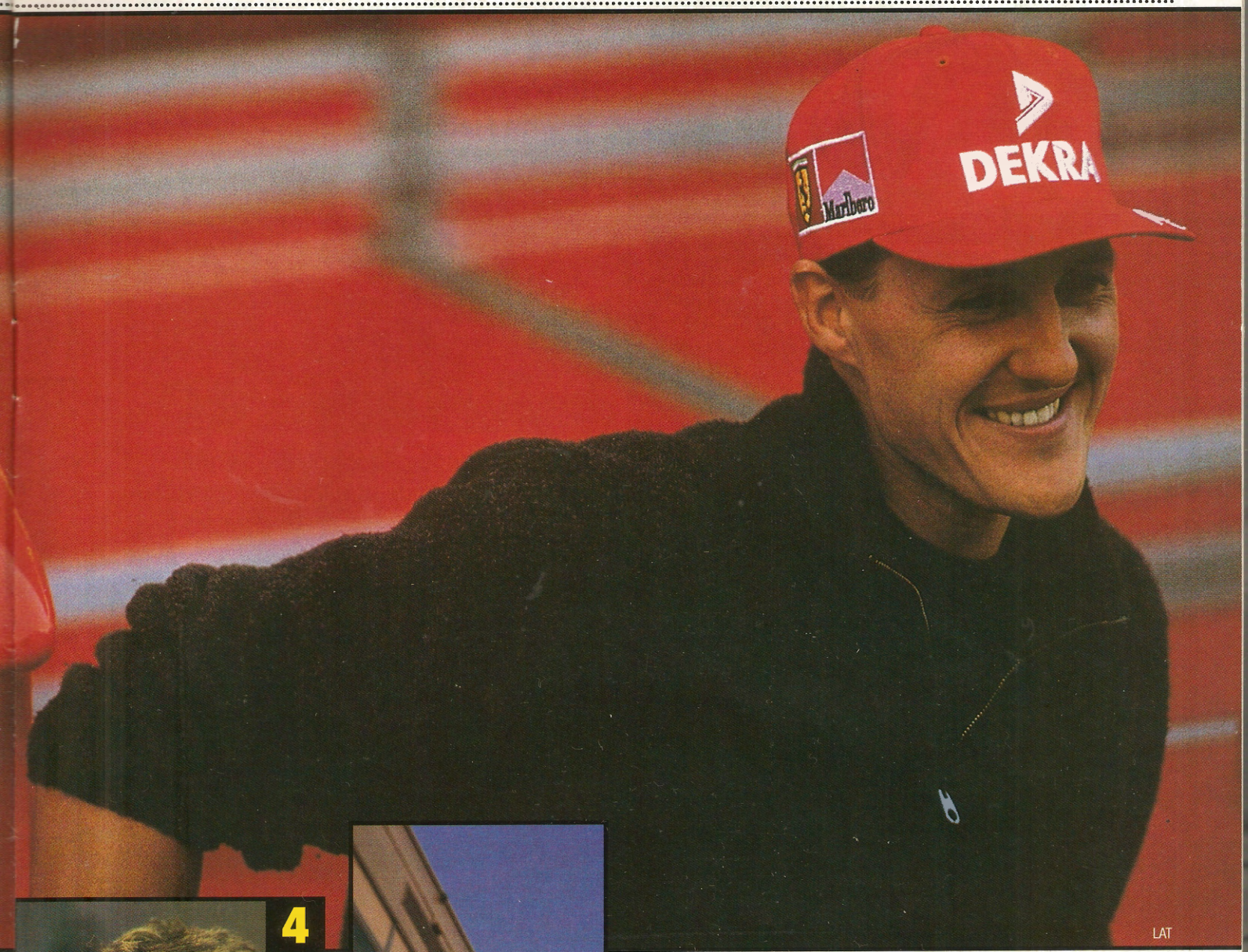
When David Coulthard is on song, he is excellent, as he proved with two classy victories in Australia and Monza, and a superb drive in Canada. It also says a great deal for him that he out-qualified Hakkinen six-two in the first half of the season, although he was never to do it again. But Coulthard struggles slightly if the car is not to his liking. Nevertheless, the Scot is a superb racer, made less mistakes this year than in the past, and has proved more than enough that he, like Hakkinen, is World Championship potential in the right car.

5 HEINZ-HARALD FRENTZEN

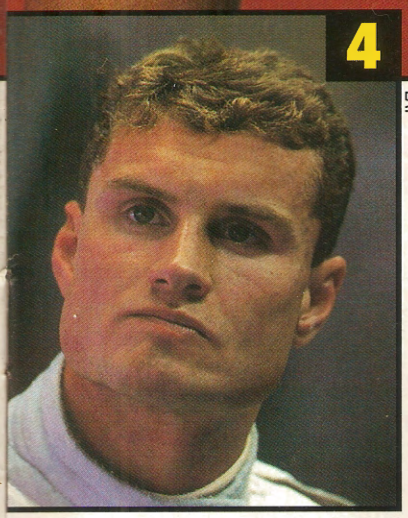
Putting Frentzen this high up may surprise some, for he won only one race in the best car in the field. But in some ways that is an unfair reflection of his season. He struggled early on, and his indecision on set-up drove technical director Patrick Head mad at times. But he slowly learnt his lessons and from France to Monza was generally more convincing than Villeneuve, and he would have won a brilliant tactical victory at Hungary had his car not let him down. Nevertheless, more will be expected of him in 1998.

6 GIANCARLO FISICHELLA

At times this year, after a slow start, Giancarlo Fisichella looked potentially great. The German Grand Prix was the highpoint, his pursuit of the lead underlining a dramatic talent. But there were other composed, classy performances, too – like Canada, Spa (where he was excellent in the wet) and Monza. His season tailed off, and at times he seemed to fall asleep in the sec-

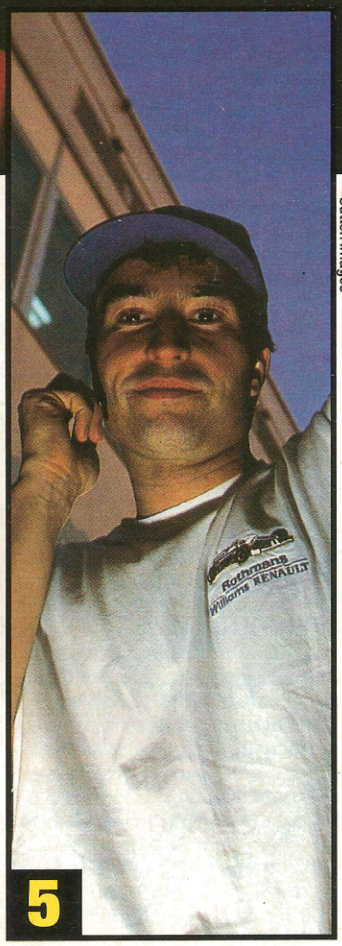


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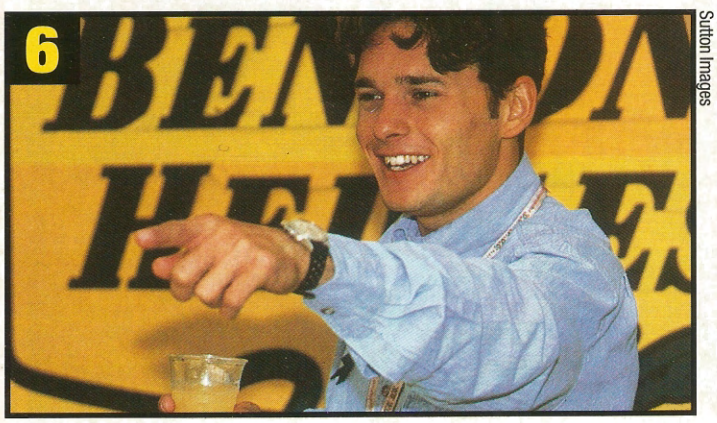
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ond half of races, but he has a great future, provided the pressure of being at Benetton so early in his career does not prove too much for the highly-rated Italian.

7 RUBENS BARRICHELLO

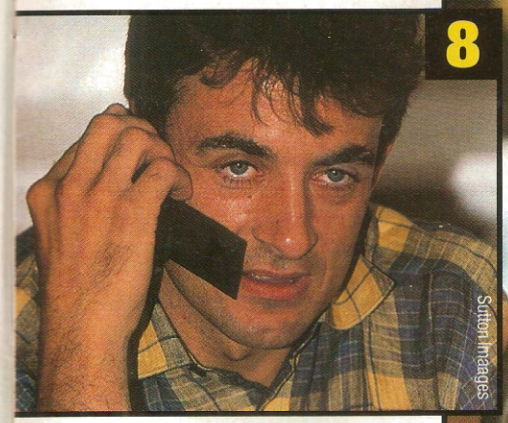
A man reborn. There has never been any doubt Rubens Barrichello has a precocious talent, it's just that he did not always seem to use it. However, this year was different. Motivation sky-high, Barrichello put in some excellent performances for Stewart Grand Prix, most noticeably in Monaco, Argentina and Canada, and, unlike in the past, kept his focus and commitment when the going got tough. Some, though, still wonder how Barrichello will react if Jan Magnussen, now fully up to speed, starts to do more often what he did only at the final race of the season – beat him.

8 JEAN ALESI

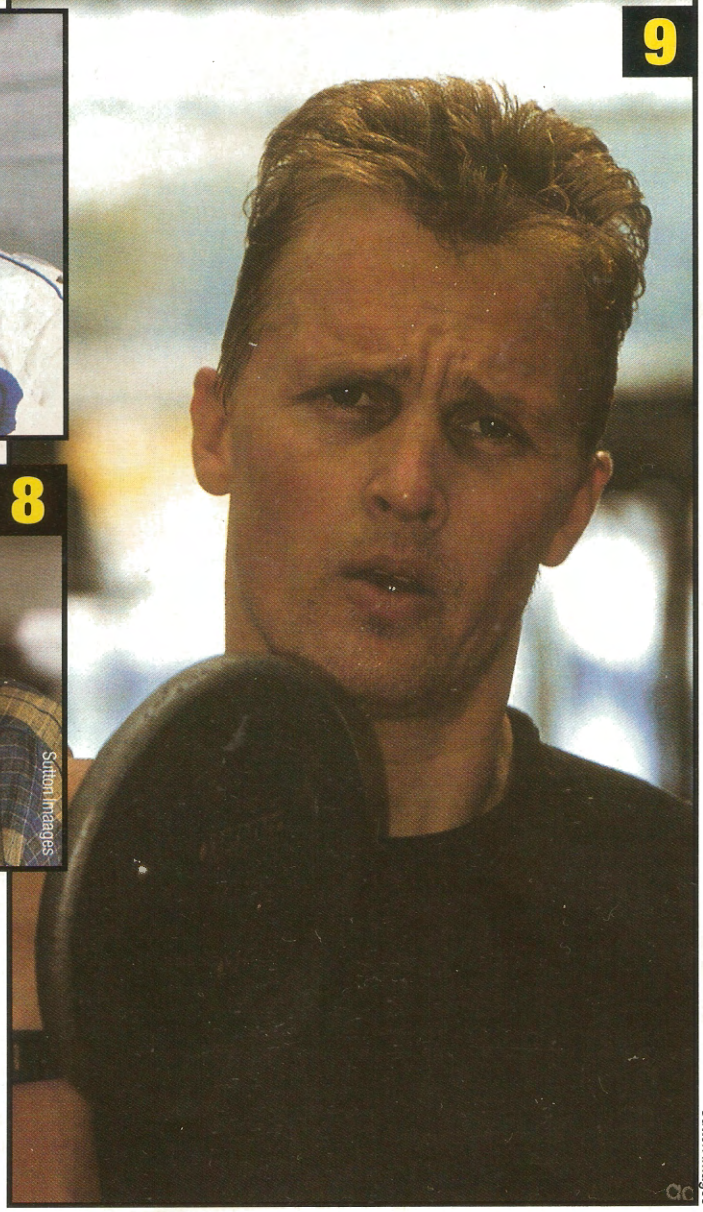
Jean Alesi remains one of Formula 1's biggest enigmas. At times the Frenchman is capable of crass stupidity, like running out of fuel having missed his pit stop in Melbourne. But he is, nevertheless, one of the sport's most consistent performers. Throughout most of 1997, he was dogged and solid in races – although he seemed to go off the boil mid-season – and ▶



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◀ undeserving of his wayward reputation. But whether, following his move to Sauber, he will ever have the chance to be a front-runner again is another matter.

9 JOHNNY HERBERT

Johnny Herbert remained his irrepressible self throughout 1997, despite watching his team make virtually no progress. Herbert could have been forgiven for thinking he was in for a good year when he qualified seventh in Melbourne, but Sauber fell back progressively. But Herbert, almost certainly the most popular man in the pitlane, continued to drive superbly all year, and was often a serious factor in the top six in races.

10 MIKA SALO

It was the nightmare situation for Mika Salo: a back-of-the grid car and a quick team mate. Many suspected that Salo would be out-paced by Jos Verstappen but would score more points, so it says a great deal for the Finn's pace that he outqualified his team mate 10-seven. He remained, as ever, fast, calm, consistent, unflappable and totally reliable in races, despite his thankless position, and was superb in his non-stop drive to fifth in Monaco. A driver of great talent who deserves a better chance.

THE REST

This was a difficult year to pick a top 10, for cases could be made for many other drivers to be included.

Eddie Irvine was superb in Suzuka and very consistent at the start of the year, but his year was too up and down, even if he is still the team mate who has been closest to Michael Schumacher in qualifying, an impressive enough feat in itself.

Gerhard Berger was brilliant upon his return from illness in Hockenheim, but was lacklustre at other times, even if he did have the excuse of not being totally fit. Many at Benetton wondered, if he could drive like he did at Hockenheim, why he did not do it more often. They felt he was too lackadaisical. And Austria, where he qualified 18th, started from the pits and spun at the second corner, was inexplicable.

Olivier Panis would have made the top 10 if he had done a full year. He was very good indeed before his accident, and a consistent podium challenger, but his up-and-down qualifying performances continue to count against him. However, **Jarno Trulli**'s form when he replaced him suggested this was more team than driver, and Trulli, another very impressive newcomer, put his case eloquently with a fine drive in Austria. They will make a strong team next year.

Ralf Schumacher started with a bang, but too many of them on the track took the shine off his season. He needs to calm down and keep his head to fulfil obvious potential.

Jan Magnussen's season was the reverse of Ralf's. He took a while to get into his stride, not helped by a loss of confidence after several pre-season mechanical failures, but he came on strong at the end of the year, and will be worth watching in 1998 if he keeps it up.

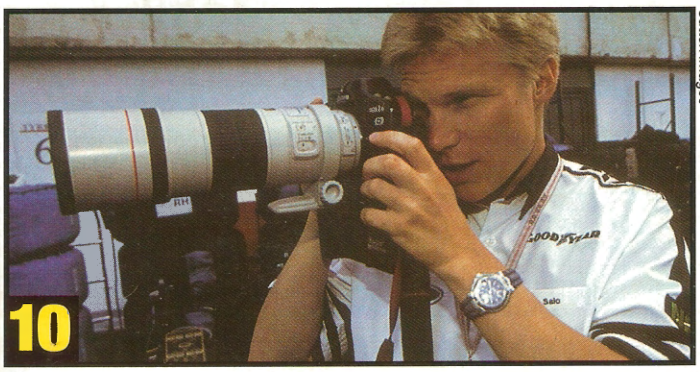
As this was written, it was unclear whether **Jos Verstappen** will even get a drive next year. If he does not it would be a tragedy, for he possesses speed and talent in abundance, even if he does make a few too many mistakes.

Damon Hill's season is examined elsewhere (see page 20), but **Pedro Diniz**, still not regarded that highly, impressed by outqualifying him three times and running him very close elsewhere.

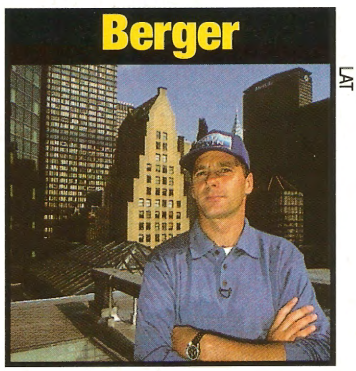
Alex Wurz did well for Benetton when he replaced Berger. Clever technically, it remains to be seen whether he is a strong talent blossoming late, or if he was flattered by Alesi under-performing.

The rest were insignificant. All three Sauber number twos, **Nicola Larini, Gianni Morbidelli** and **Norberto Fontana**, are better than they looked. All claimed their poor performances were down to the team concentrating on Herbert.

Finally, at Minardi, **Ukyo Katayama**, motivation having left him, bowed out quietly, and **Tarso Marques**, who looked good in his two races in '96, blamed bad luck and over-driving for a poor year. The team, which expected more, blamed his inexperience. ■



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A good idea at the time

As a reigning World Champion, joining Arrows was not the obvious choice. The move did not work for Damon Hill, as Andrew Benson explains

At the very end of the final race of the 1980 Grand Prix season, Jody Scheckter, the out-going World Champion, stood up in the cockpit of his Ferrari and looked quickly around him. The South African, who in 1979 had beaten team mate Gilles Villeneuve to the title, had scored just two points throughout 1980. The previous weekend, he had failed to qualify for the Canadian Grand Prix, and a week later, the final race of his career, he trailed home 11th at Watkins Glen.

Scheckter stepped forward on to the fibreglass nose of his Ferrari and walked down it until it bent under his weight. Satisfied at having suitably demonstrated his feelings for his recalcitrant car, he stepped off it, to be embraced by his cheering mechanics.

It is a feeling that Damon Hill would probably have identified with in the early, dark months of his 1997 season with Arrows, although in his case the structural strength of modern Formula 1 cars would have ensured the satisfaction levels of the gesture were low.

But then that would have been something he was well used to, for Hill could barely have chosen a less appropriate manner in which to defend his World Championship than signing for Arrows-Yamaha.

Hill, though, would not agree with this conclusion. Throughout the year – even when his car was breaking down as often as the Irish peace talks, or chugging around towards the back of the field for most of the first half of the season – he maintained that he was happy with his lot, that he had never once regretted his decision. And if you didn't believe him, he complained about how everybody in F1 was too cynical, too keen to look for a hidden agenda.

> **"Hill could barely have chosen a less appropriate manner to defend his title"**

'Arrows has allowed me to see what can be done from a low starting point,' he said at the Italian Grand Prix in September. 'And we started from the bottom. I think we even went backwards. But since John Barnard turned up (in May as technical director), fortunes have improved enormously. The sense of satisfaction of what we did at Hungary was immense. We could have won the race.'

True enough. Hungary gave him a chance to remind everyone that he can drive like a true champion, and he grabbed it with both hands. But it should hardly have surprised Hill that his insistence that he was happy with his lot for most of the year was met with the odd raised eyebrow. After all, as he said himself at the start of the season: 'There's no way I'm going to be happy to run in the midfield, or anywhere less than at the front.' You can't have it both ways.

The arrangement started with

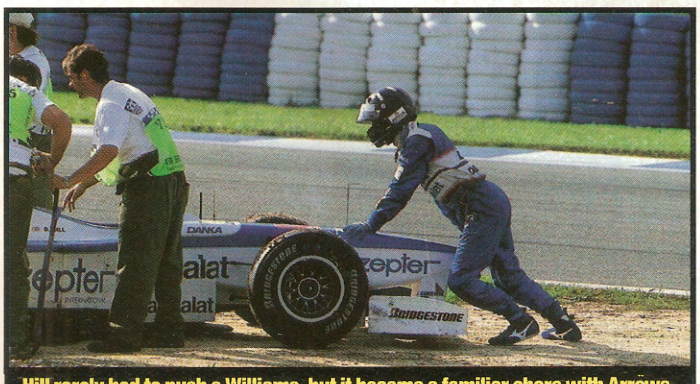


Damon Hill prepares for action once again during his troubled title defence with Arrows

All photos: LAT



Despite some tense moments, Walkinshaw and Hill did manage some smiles



Hill rarely had to push a Williams, but it became a familiar chore with Arrows

optimism aplenty. 'I think next year's car is going to surprise a few people,' he said at the announcement of his deal with Arrows. He was right, too, but not in the way he had hoped, for no one expected Arrows's initial form to be so poor.

It did not take long for Hill's frustration at being both uncompetitive and unreliable to boil over. After colliding embarrassingly with Shinji Nakano while battling for 17th place in the San Marino Grand Prix, he said: 'I wasn't going to chug around at the back of the field. I don't feel I should be doing that.'

Indeed not. As the race in Hungary proved, Hill deserves a lot more than that, but it would be fair to say that 1997 was not altogether positive for his reputation.

He was utterly brilliant in Hungary, proving beyond doubt that there was much more to his world title than the fact that he had been driving a Williams FW18, and that he had had a significant role to play in the revival that Arrows went through in the second half of the year, after Barnard had come on board and, insiders said, marshalled the team superbly.

The sheer quality of Hill's ▶

Hill's turbulent year



Damon Hill was a great ambassador for the sport as the reigning Worl Champion - he organised an unofficial two minutes silence in memory of Diana, Princess of Wales, at Monza



Tom Walkinshaw's criticisms were answered at Silverstone with sixth place

◀ performance in Hungary was underlined by the performance of the other Bridgestone teams, not least his team mate Pedro Diniz, none of whom were anywhere near him. He had the Arrows absolutely flying that weekend, coming up with a set-up that perfectly exploited the advantage he had in his tyres.

In Jerez, at the end of the year, he was also excellent, narrowly missing out on pole, even if he did fade in the race.

But in the glory of those days, it is difficult to explain how team mate Pedro Diniz outqualified him three times during the year, including at both of the sport's greatest drivers' circuits, Spa and Suzuka.

Arrows boss Tom Walkinshaw wondered the same thing, as did the rest of the team, some of whom questioned whether Damon was firing on every cylinder all the time in 1997. Hill repeatedly insisted that he was, and explained Diniz's performance like this at the French Grand Prix, the first time the Brazilian managed to pop ahead: 'I'm taking a stab at set-ups trying to get performance and it's catching me out.'

"It was difficult to explain how Pedro Diniz outqualified him, especially at Spa and Suzuka"

The moment, though, had been coming for a while. Only a brilliant final qualifying lap in Monaco stopped Diniz being ahead there, and in Canada the Brazilian was ahead throughout the race. And then there was Spa and Suzuka.

Certainly Diniz has come a long way in his three years in F1, but few would try to make a case for him being anything more than a superior journeyman. The World Champion should not have allowed him to be so close so often, and why he was remains something of a mystery.

Walkinshaw explained what he thought had been the problem in a quiet moment at Jerez. 'Maybe Pedro remained more focused than Damon this year,' he murmured. Half a season previously, at Silverstone, he had been a little more blunt.

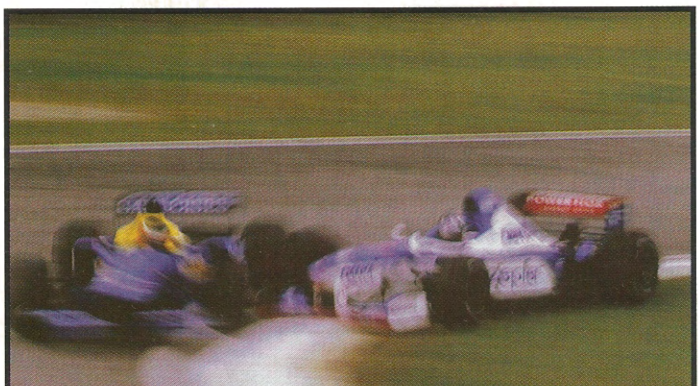
'By his own admission, Damon's performances have dropped recently and he has acknowledged that it has been difficult to drive himself on,' the Scot told a group of British newspaper journalists, who could not believe their luck to get this story on the eve of Hill's home Grand Prix. 'I don't believe a professional should have difficulty keeping his motivation. If the money is not a motivation, then the fear of failure should be. I think this is an issue of application rather than motivation. I've been subtle, but now it's time to be blunt. It is time for me to remind him that what he is capable of is better than what he has delivered.'

You could understand his frustration, but he did miss out one important fact: Walkinshaw may have been expecting more for his £4.5 million than he had been getting from Hill, but at the same time Hill had probably been promised much more from his machinery than he received.

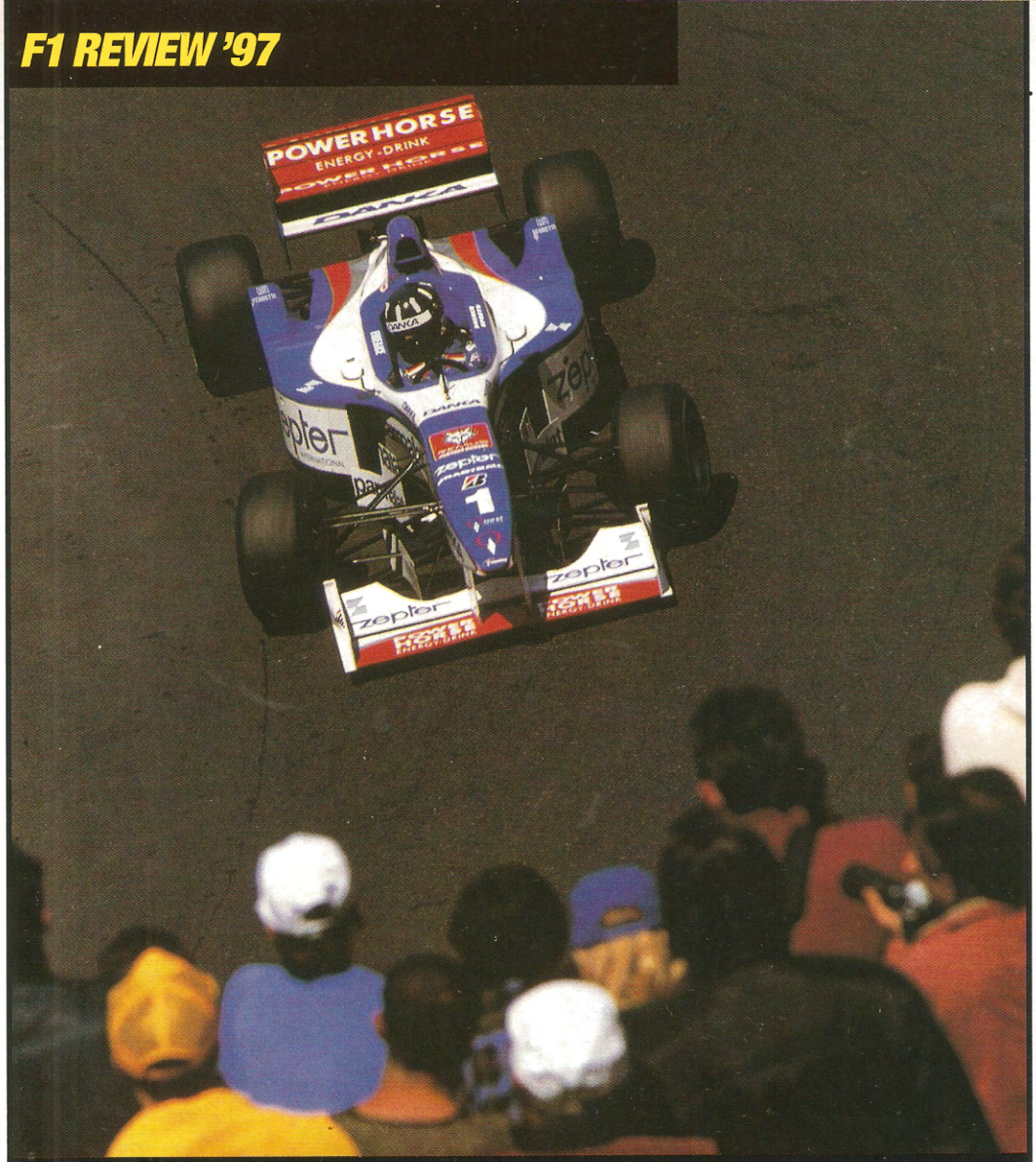
In the circumstances, Hill remained admirably restrained. 'I feel I've done enough to prove myself over my career to date and felt that the ball was in Tom's court,' he said. 'I have been very keen not to draw comparisions about how I feel about the package that was represented to me at the beginning of the year by Tom and what we actually have. I've been giving it everything I can.'

His sixth place that weekend could be seen as justification for both men's point of view, and while relations improved as the team's performance did the same, the writing was on the wall, and no one expected Hill to stay at Arrows for 1998 after that.

Neither, it became apparent, did Hill, but the summer soap opera of his transfer negotiations cannot have done much for his peace of mind, and there were several people who wondered whether the furore over his rejection by McLaren that blew up at the Belgian Grand Prix was the reason that he was so out of sorts at Spa, where, apart from his grid ▶



Damon's attack on Shinji Nakano's Prost at Imola was a sign of frustration



The performance of the Arrows-Yamaha A18 improved during the year, but still left few opportunities for Hill to shine

◀ position, he had one of those Sunday afternoons when you forget drivers are out there.

It all worked out for him in the end, though, and he has a seat in a Jordan-Mugen Honda to look forward to over the winter. Damon and Eddie Jordan were very happy with the outcome of their negotiations, but Alain Prost, who thought he had his own deal agreed with Hill, was most certainly not.

For Hill, all that is in the past. Will the future see him return to the top of the sport? He certainly thinks so: 'I think Jordan will be winning races in 1998, and if you can win races, then you can challenge for the championship, and that's what I really want to do. It's a bit far-fetched to talk about winning the championship next year, but it's possible to be fighting in the top three.'

Privately, Hill is said to be slightly concerned that the team will not be using Bridgestone tyres, but otherwise is happy that he has the most competitive car he could have chosen in a team that made him feel wanted. If Jordan produces a competitive car – and everyone expects that it will – he should thrive in the team's environment; he has already proved this year that he can make the most of opportunities when they come his way.

All of that is good, because, bar a few sweet moments, the role Damon Hill found himself playing in 1997 did not fit him well. As Jacques Villeneuve said after Hill had only just made the grid in Melbourne for the first race: 'Damon is worth more than that.' ■



Jordan, the comeback... Hill switches to Eddie's Mugen-powered team for '97



Hungary saw Hill racing at his best

Hill's turbulent year

Bad omens

History does warn against champions switching teams

It was hardly Damon Hill's decision to leave Williams at the end of his World Championship year, but the minute it happened, Grand Prix history would have told the Englishman that he was probably in for a tough year.

In the 47 years of the Formula 1 World Championship, only six drivers have left the team with which they won the title, and only one, the great Juan Manuel Fangio, has taken the title the following season.

Part of that can be explained by the sheer difficulty of winning the title once, let alone two years in a row, but it is also difficult to integrate into a new team quickly enough to be at maximum potential right away.

Trying as 1997 must have been for Hill, though, he can console himself that people have had worse championship defences in new teams.

In 1954, for example, Alberto Ascari, having joined Lancia after taking consecutive titles for Ferrari, only raced four times, and drove for Maserati or Ferrari for three of them, as his new Lancia was not ready until late in the year.

Nelson Piquet fared little better when he left Williams for Lotus at the end of 1987, taking the Honda turbo engine with him. But while the Honda-powered McLarens of Ayrton Senna and Alain Prost won 15 of the 16 races, Piquet only made the rostrum three times, in third place each time.

Niki Lauda had a better time when he joined Brabham in 1978 after leaving Ferrari on bad terms, but even he scored only two wins, and each was by default – he kept his Swedish Grand Prix victory in the infamous BT48/2 'fan car', but it was banned thereafter, and he inherited victory in Italy after Mario Andretti and Gilles Villeneuve were disqualified for jumping the start. Michael Schumacher had a similar season with Ferrari in 1996. Not truly competitive, he did take three brilliant victories.

Apart from Fangio, only Prost has been a true title contender in these conditions. In 1990, he joined Ferrari after his problems with Senna and McLaren, and almost won the title again. But then Senna took him off at the first corner of the Japanese Grand Prix, which, even after Jerez 1997, remains the most outrageous deliberate removal of a rival in F1 history.

THE YEAR IN STATS

The full guide to who was fastest, who won and who didn't in 1997

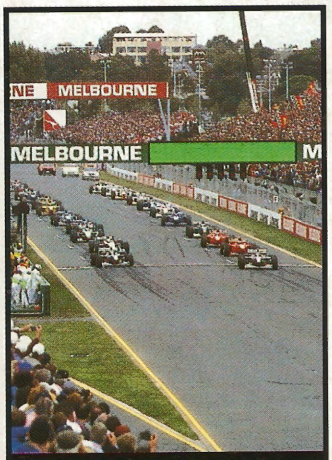
FIA FORMULA 1 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

FASTEST DRIVERS

RACE	POLE	FASTEST LAP
AUSTRALIA	VILLENEUVE	FRENTZEN
BRAZIL	VILLENEUVE	VILLENEUVE
ARGENTINA	VILLENEUVE	BERGER
SAN MARINO	VILLENEUVE	FRENTZEN
MONACO	FRENTZEN	M SCHUMACHER
SPAIN	VILLENEUVE	FISICHELLA
CANADA	M SCHUMACHER	COULTHARD
FRANCE	M SCHUMACHER	M SCHUMACHER
BRITAIN	VILLENEUVE	M SCHUMACHER
GERMANY	BERGER	BERGER
HUNGARY	M SCHUMACHER	FRENTZEN
BELGIUM	VILLENEUVE	VILLENEUVE
ITALY	ALESI	HAKKINEN
AUSTRIA	VILLENEUVE	VILLENEUVE
LUXEMBOURG	HAKKINEN	FRENTZEN
JAPAN	VILLENEUVE	FRENTZEN
EUROPE	VILLENEUVE	FRENTZEN

CONSTRUCTORS' CHAMPIONSHIP

1	Williams-Renault	123
2	Ferrari	102
3	Benetton-Renault	67
4	McLaren-Mercedes	63
5	Jordan-Peugeot	33
6	Prost-Mugen Honda	21
7	Sauber-Petronas	16
8	Arrows-Yamaha	9
9	Stewart-Ford	6
10	Tyrrell-Ford	2



Between the start of the season...

QUALIFYING HEAD TO HEAD

ARROWS	HILL	14	DINIZ	3
WILLIAMS	VILLENEUVE	13	FRENTZEN	4
FERRARI	M SCHUMACHER	16	IRVINE	1
BENETTON	ALESI	7	BERGER	7
	ALESI	1	WURZ	2
MCLAREN	HAKKINEN	11	COULTHARD	6
JORDAN	R SCHUMACHER	7	FISICHELLA	10
PROST	PANIS	10	NAKANO	0
	TRULLI	6	NAKANO	1
SAUBER	HERBERT	5	LARINI	0
	HERBERT	8	MORBIDELLI	0
	HERBERT	4	FONTANA	0
TYRRELL	VERSTAPPEN	7	SALO	10
MINARDI	KATAYAMA	1	TRULLI	6
	KATAYAMA	8	MARQUES	2
STEWART	BARRICHELLO	15	MAGNUSSEN	2
LOLA	SOSPIRI	1	ROSSET	0



...and the end, these guys kept us all balancing our Sunday lunch on our laps every other weekend

FIA FORMULA 1 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

Pos Driver (Nat)	Team	Car	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	TOTAL
1 Jacques Villeneuve (CDN)	Williams G P Engineering	Williams-Renault FW19	1/R	1/1	1/1	1/R	3/R	1/1	2/R	4/4	1/1	9/R	2/1	1/5	4/5	1/1	2/1	1/DQ	1/3	81
(*) Michael Schumacher (D)	Scuderia Ferrari Marlboro	Ferrari F310B	3/2	2/5	4/R	3/2	2/1	7/4	1/1	1/1	4/R	4/2	1/4	3/1	9/6	9/6	5/R	2/1	2/R	78
2 Heinz-Harald Frentzen (D)	Williams GP Engineering	Williams-Renault FW19	2/8	8/9	2/R	2/1	1/R	2/8	4/4	2/2	2/R	5/R	6/R	7/3	2/3	4/3	3/3	6/2	3/6	42
3 David Coulthard (GB)	West McLaren Mercedes	McLaren-Merc. MP4-12	124/1	12/10	10/R	10/R	5/R	3/6	5/7	9/7	6/4	8/R	8/R	10/R	6/1	10/2	6/R	11/11	6/2	36
4 Jean Alesi (F)	Mild Seven Benetton Renault	Benetton-Renault B197	8/R	6/6	11/7	14/5	9/R	4/3	8/2	8/5	11/2	6/6	9/11	4/8	1/2	15/R	10/2	7/5	10/13	36
5 Gerhard Berger (A)	Mild Seven Benetton Renault	Benetton-Renault B197	10/4	10/2	12/6	11/R	17/9	6/10	DNE	DNE	DNE	1/1	7/8	15/6	7/7	18/10	7/4	5/8	8/4	27
=Mika Hakkinen (SF)	West McLaren Mercedes	McLaren-Merc. MP4-12	6/3	4/4	17/5	8/6	8/R	5/7	9/R	10/R	3/R	3/3	4/R	5/DQ	5/9	2/R	1/R	4/4	5/1	27
7 Eddie Irvine (GB)	Scuderia Ferrari Marlboro	Ferrari F310B	5/R	14/16	7/2	9/3	15/3	11/12	12/R	5/3	7/R	10/R	5/9	17/10	10/8	8/R	14/R	3/3	7/5	24
8 Giancarlo Fisichella (I)	B&H Jordan Peugeot	Jordan-Peugeot 197	14/R	7/8	9/R	6/4	4/6	8/9	6/3	11/9	10/7	2/11	13/R	4/2	3/4	14/4	4/R	9/7	17/11	20
9 Olivier Panis (F)	Prost Grand Prix	Prost-Mugen Honda JS45	9/5	5/3	3/R	4/8	12/4	12/2	10/R	DNE	DNE	DNE	DNE	DNE	DNE	DNE	11/6	10/R	9/7	16
10 Johnny Herbert (GB)	Red Bull Sauber Petronas	Sauber-Petronas C16	7/R	13/7	8/4	7/R	7/R	10/5	13/5	14/8	9/R	14/R	10/3	11/4	12/DNF	12/8	16/7	8/6	14/8	15
11 Ralf Schumacher (D)	B&H Jordan Peugeot	Jordan-Peugeot 197	12/R	10/R	6/3	5/R	6/R	9/R	7/R	3/6	5/5	7/5	14/5	6/R	8/R	11/5	8/R	13/9	16/R	13
12 Damon Hill (GB)	TWR Arrows	Arrows-Yamaha A18	20/DNS	9/17	13/R	15/R	13/R	15/R	15/9	17/12	12/6	13/8	3/2	9/13	14/R	7/7	13/8	17/11	4/R	7
13 Rubens Barrichello (BR)	Stewart Grand Prix	Stewart-Ford SF1	11/R	11/R	5/R	13/R	10/2	17/R	3/R	13/R	21/R	12/R	11/R	12/R	11/13	5/14	9/R	12/R	12/R	6
14 Alexander Wurz (A)	Mild Seven Benetton Renault	Benetton-Renault B197	DNE	DNE	DNE	DNE	DNE	DNE	11/R	7/R	8/3	DNE	DNE	DNE	DNE	DNE	DNE	DNE	DNE	4
15 Jarno Trulli (I)	Minardi Team	Minardi-Hart M197	17/9	17/12	18/9	20/R	18/R	18/15	20/R	DNE	DNE	DNE	DNE	DNE	DNE	DNE	DNE	DNE	DNE	–
	Prost Grand Prix	Prost-Mugen Honda JS45	DNE	DNE	DNE	DNE	DNE	DNE	DNE	6/10	13/8	11/4	12/7	14/15	16/10	3/R	DNE	DNE	DNE	3
16 Mika Salo (SF)	Tyrrell Racing	Tyrrell-Ford 025	18/R	22/13	19/8	19/9	14/5	14/R	17/R	19/R	17/R	19/R	21/13	19/11	19/R	21/R	20/10	22/R	21/12	2
=Pedro Diniz (BR)	TWR Arrows	Arrows-Yamaha A18	22/10	16/R	22/R	17/R	16/R	21/R	16/8	16/R	16/R	16/R	19R	8/7	17/R	17/13	15/R	16/12	13/R	2
=Shinji Nakano (J)	Prost Grand Prix	Prost-Mugen Honda JS45	6/7	15/14	20/R	18/R	21/R	16/R	19/6	12/R	14/11	17/7	16/6	16/R	15/11	16/R	17/R	15/R	15/10	2

Rounds: 1 Mar 3 Melbourne (AUS), 2 Mar 30 Interlagos (BR), 3 Apr 13 Buenos Aires (ARG), 4 Apr 27 Imola (RSM), 5 May 11 Monaco (MC), 6 May 25 Barcelona (E), 7 Jun 15 Montreal (CDN), 8 Jun 29 Magny-Cours (F), 9 Jul 13 Silverstone (GB), 10 Jul 27 Hockenheim (D), 11 Hungaroring (H), 12 Aug 24 Spa-Francorchamps (B), 13 Sep 7 Monza (I), 14 Sep 21 A-1 Ring (A), 15 Sep 28 Nurburgring (D - Luxembourg GP), 16 Oc 12 Suzuka (J), 17 Oct 26 Jerez (EU)

Points system 10-6-4-3-2-1 **Key**: R = Retired; DNS = Did not start; DNE=Did not enter DQ=Disqualified **Disqualifications: (*)** Michael Schumacher was disqualified from the 1997 season but allowed to keep his individual race results. Jacques Villeneuve was disqualified from his original fifth place in the Japanese Grand Prix and Mika Hakkinen was disqualified from his original third place in the Belgian Grand Prix.

Qualifying position/Finishing position ©1997 Federation Internationale de l'Automobile, 8 Place de la Concorde, Paris 75008, France

TOP GUN '97

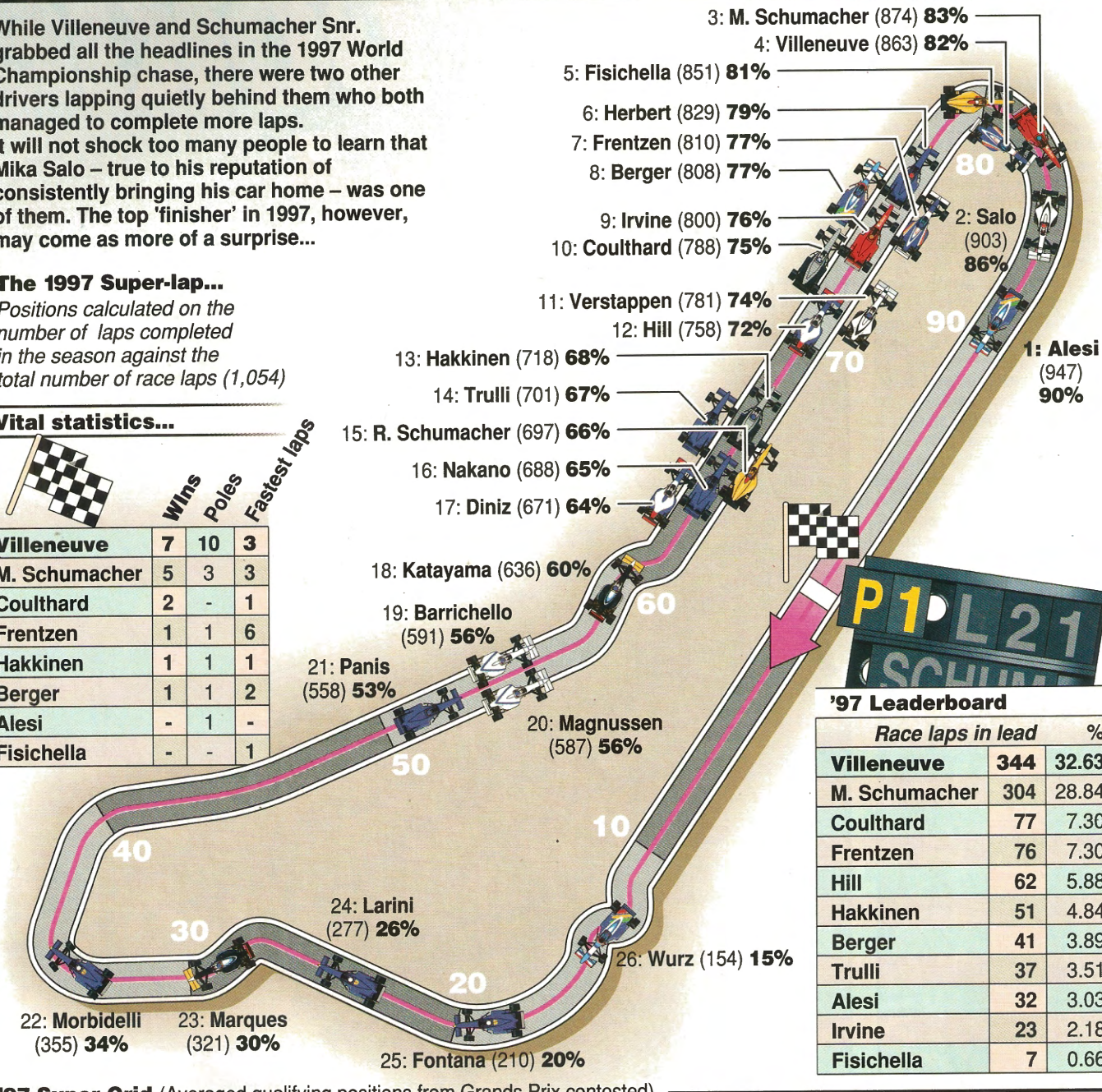
While Villeneuve and Schumacher Snr. grabbed all the headlines in the 1997 World Championship chase, there were two other drivers lapping quietly behind them who both managed to complete more laps.
It will not shock too many people to learn that Mika Salo – true to his reputation of consistently bringing his car home – was one of them. The top 'finisher' in 1997, however, may come as more of a surprise...

The 1997 Super-lap...

Positions calculated on the number of laps completed in the season against the total number of race laps (1,054)

3: **M. Schumacher** (874) **83%**
4: **Villeneuve** (863) **82%**
5: **Fisichella** (851) **81%**
6: **Herbert** (829) **79%**
7: **Frentzen** (810) **77%**
8: **Berger** (808) **77%**
9: **Irvine** (800) **76%**
10: **Coulthard** (788) **75%**
11: **Verstappen** (781) **74%**
12: **Hill** (758) **72%**
13: **Hakkinen** (718) **68%**
14: **Trulli** (701) **67%**
15: **R. Schumacher** (697) **66%**
16: **Nakano** (688) **65%**
17: **Diniz** (671) **64%**
18: **Katayama** (636) **60%**
19: **Barrichello** (591) **56%**
20: **Magnussen** (587) **56%**
21: **Panis** (558) **53%**
22: **Morbidelli** (355) **34%**
23: **Marques** (321) **30%**
24: **Larini** (277) **26%**
25: **Fontana** (210) **20%**
26: **Wurz** (154) **15%**
2: **Salo** (903) **86%**
1: **Alesi** (947) **90%**

10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90



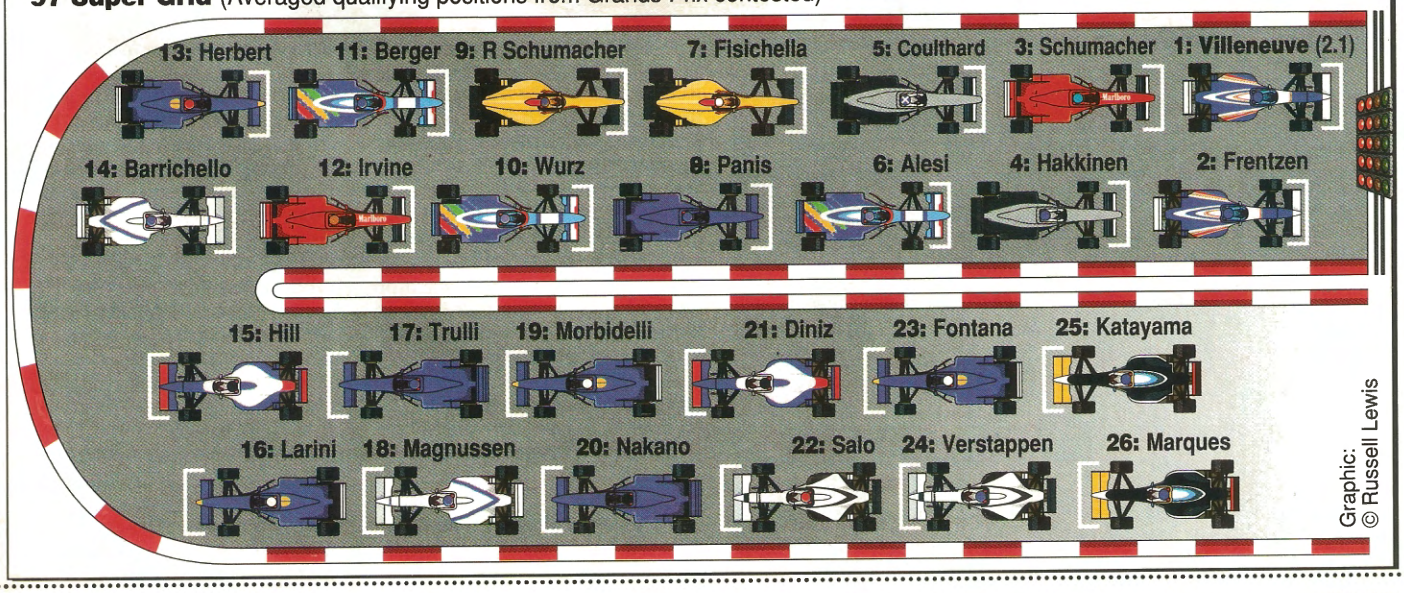
Vital statistics...

	Wins	Poles	Fastest laps
Villeneuve	**7**	**10**	**3**
M. Schumacher	**5**	3	**3**
Coulthard	**2**	-	**1**
Frentzen	**1**	**1**	**6**
Hakkinen	**1**	**1**	**1**
Berger	**1**	**1**	**2**
Alesi	-	**1**	-
Fisichella	-	-	**1**

'97 Leaderboard

	Race laps in lead	%
Villeneuve	**344**	32.63
M. Schumacher	304	28.84
Coulthard	77	7.30
Frentzen	76	7.30
Hill	62	5.88
Hakkinen	51	4.84
Berger	41	3.89
Trulli	37	3.51
Alesi	32	3.03
Irvine	23	2.18
Fisichella	7	0.66

'97 Super Grid (Averaged qualifying positions from Grands Prix contested)



Graphic: © Russell Lewis

The rookie report

1997 was a vintage year for new driver talent; Adam Cooper assesses Formula 1's newcomers

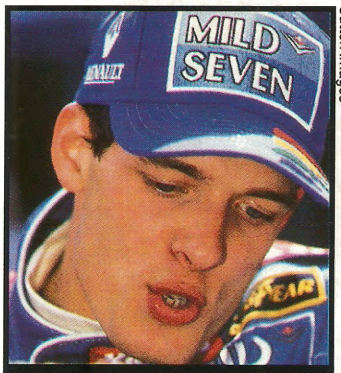
This season brought forth a bumper crop of young F1 drivers, and if you ignore poor Vincenzo Sospiri, left in the lurch after the first race, we saw eight fresh faces vying for attention. That three of these guys got on the podium and another led a race gives some idea of the impact made by the new boys.

There's every reason to suspect that several members of the Class of '97 will be around for a long time, and it could fairly be said that this is the most exciting generation to come along in 20 years.

Back in 1977-'78 future stars such as Riccardo Patrese, Gilles Villeneuve, Patrick Tambay, Bruno Giacomelli, Didier Pironi, Rene Arnoux, Nelson Piquet and Keke Rosberg all made their debuts. Their influence was felt well into the '90s. This year's group is arguably as strong as any seen since, with the possible exception of 1984, which produced Ayrton Senna, Stefan Bellof, Martin Brundle and Gerhard Berger.

Five of the eight were genuine F1 rookies (Ralf Schumacher, Jarno Trulli, Shinji Nakano, Norberto Fontana and Alex Wurz). Jan Magnussen had done a single race for McLaren in 1995, while both Tarso Marques (two starts) and Giancarlo Fisichella (eight) had appeared for Minardi in '96, but still had covered very few miles.

If you accept that anyone with less than half a season under their belt is eligible, then the unofficial



Sutton Images

Wurz picked up a podium place



LAT

After struggling for a while, Jan Magnussen finally got fired up in the Stewart

Rookie of the Year honours went to Fisichella. The Italian racked up 20 World Championship points, beating Jordan team mate Schumacher, who scored 13. They had an enviable opportunity to display their talents; the car clearly had the potential to win races.

Both faced a steep learning curve, and nowhere was it more apparent than Argentina, where they managed to collide.

Giancarlo seemed to fall asleep in some early races, but over the course of the season he had the upper hand, proved more technically adept, and matured considerably. He had a brilliant drive to second at Spa, and was third in Canada. But he really made his mark at Hockenheim, running second and leading briefly.

Ralf was the more erratic of the two. You could almost guarantee that he would spend some part of Friday in the gravel, and he often had moments in the races. It became fashionable to slag him off, but that was inevitable. He'd had an easy run to F1, and his personality rubbed a lot of people up the wrong way. He won few friends in the paddock, and that still counts for a lot in F1. He was set up for a big fall, and would have had to perform miracles to avoid criticism.

All this worked in Giancarlo's favour, and both inside and out of the team it was he that won the popularity vote.



Giancarlo Fisichella took the rookie honours on points

LAT

Out with the old...

The average age of drivers is falling at a rate of knots

The strange thing about F1 is that while racing drivers are eternally young, everyone else gets older. Drivers always seem to be in their 20s, while the average age of team owners, technical directors, journalists and just about everyone else goes up every year.

Back in 1989 I got a shock when JJ Lehto became the first guy who was born after me to take part in a Grand Prix. Until then, F1 stars had always seemed so much older. As the years have ticked by, so more and more new hotshoes have come along.

Recently the turnover has been so great that next season there are just three blokes left in the field who were born before me, and in the case of Jean Alesi and Johnny Herbert, the gap is less than a year. Meanwhile our big brother, 37-year-old Damon Hill, is flying the flag for the golden oldies. He's three years and nine months older than Jean, but as a late starter, he's still young at heart...

Gerhard Berger is the last bloke born in the '50s to race in a GP, and the field is now full of children of the '70s – in fact all but nine drivers on the 1998 entry list are products of that decade. Amazingly, half the field is actually younger than baby-faced Jacques Villeneuve. We've even had a guy – Tarso Marques – who was born in 1976.



LAT

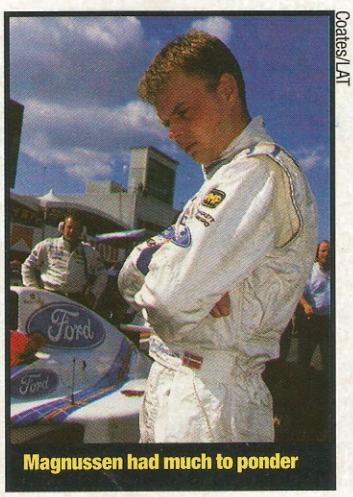
Berger: last of the '50s generation

The same could be said of Alexander Wurz. The lanky Austrian's progress from no-hoper to man-in-demand was quite stunning, and a textbook example of how to make an instant impression on the insular F1 world (author: M Schumacher). In F3 and the ITC he had been unspectacular. Wurz proved once again that a list of FF1600, Opel/Lotus, F3 and F3000 titles does not a GP driver make; if you have friends in high places and you get in the right F1 car at the right time, and make a big splash, then you're set.

Sponsorship from Austrian telecommunications company A1 got him the Benetton testing deal, and like many before him, he could have sunk without trace. But everything fell into place. He won over the team's technical staff, and showed a confidence which belied his youth and the relative lack of hard results on his CV.

When Berger became indisposed, he stepped in, twice beat Jean Alesi in qualifying, and finished third at Silverstone. Despite one or two blips he'd made himself into the man of the moment, and the world took note.

After that he just had to sit on the sidelines, and wait for confirmation of his drive for 1998. He joins that elite group of drivers who get straight into a top team without the pain of a difficult apprenticeship. Does he deserve it? Only ▶



Coates/LAT

Magnussen had much to ponder

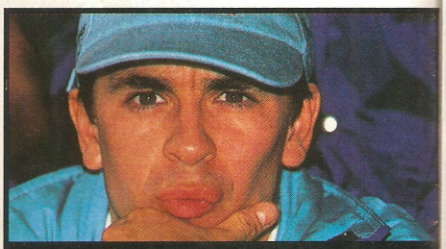
It's been quite a few years since so many newcomers came along at once, but misfortune played a major part in '97 as many established drivers were sidelined by injury or illness.

Wurz and Trulli were the main beneficiaries, and both have secured top class drives on the strength of their performances. History shows that turning up in the middle of the year is a pretty good career move, and among those to have made their names in similar circumstances to Wurz are Michael Schumacher, Jean Alesi and David Coulthard. But it doesn't always work – just ask Jean-Christophe Boullion...



Of all the rookies, Jarno Trulli arguably had the toughest challenge. He coped well and could turn out to be one of the best

F1's new boys



Vandystadt

Fontana faced a struggle at Sauber



Sutton

LAT

Shinji Nakano took a point in Canada

◀ Fisichella can settle the debate.

Jarno Trulli didn't make the podium, but he showed considerable flair when he led in Austria. Stepping straight from F3 with just a handful of testing miles behind him, Jarno had a tough job. It ain't easy to get noticed in a Minardi, and all he could really do was outpace team mate Ukyo Katayama. When the Prost drive became vacant, he was the most mobile of the drivers with current experience.

But now the pressure was on; Olivier Panis had demonstrated that the Prost had racewinning potential, and it was a case of show us what you can do, kid. At first, he struggled. Perhaps the team lost its way, or perhaps, as some suggested, team mate Shinji Nakano was being given a leg-up by Prost's Japanese suppliers. At Hockenheim Jarno was a strong fourth, but without that fine race in Austria he might not have held onto his drive.

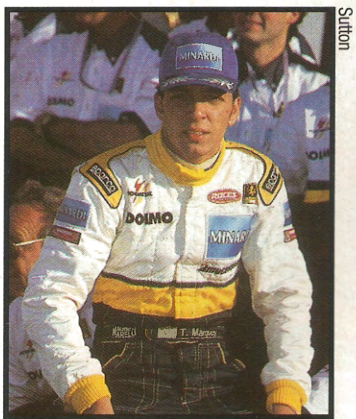
Articulate, smart and an extremely pleasant young man, Trulli has a great deal of potential. He could yet prove to be the best of the bunch.

Nakano was the other rookie point scorer. Arriving in F1 with very little fanfare – even in Japan he had a low profile – he proved to be more competent than expected. But the Prost was a pretty good car, and in a Minardi or Tyrrell he would have sunk below the waves. Without a big sponsor behind him, he now seems to be stranded.

Three years ago Jan Magnussen had a mega reputation, and his debut for McLaren at Aida in 1995 was impressive. Sustaining that 'next Senna' momentum was never going to be easy, and in the ITC and his brief interlude in CART, his career stalled out slightly.

But no one expected him to struggle at Stewart like he did in the first two thirds of this season. Jan's main problem was lack of mileage. The engines broke often, and more worryingly, so did the suspension; the Dane suffered several failures which did his confidence no good. Meanwhile Barrichello was driving out of his skin, which made Jan's performances look all the more average. He was under far less pressure than he would have faced at a Benetton or Williams, and perhaps needed a kick up the backside, as JYS eventually realised. He got his act together by season's end, but of this little group he arguably has the most to prove in 1998.

"It could fairly be said that this is the most exciting generation to come along in 20 years"



Sutton

Tarso Marques had few chances

Our final pair had nightmare seasons, as far removed as possible from Wurz's blissful experience. Norberto Fontana was a man on the up, doing pretty well in Japan, until he stepped into the Sauber. Despite his nominal title of test driver he'd done no running in the new car, and he floundered. When the team boss gave him a public bollocking it was clear his F1 career was all but finished before it started. An amiable bloke who might easily have thrived in a different environment, he may have missed the boat.

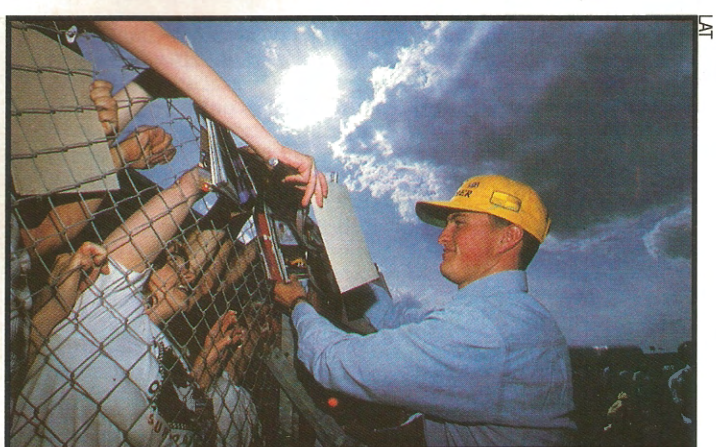
Tarso Marques is in danger of doing the same. Called into Minardi to replace Trulli, he had little chance of doing anything except make up the numbers. He appeared to get shoddy treatment from an uncompetitive team with limited funds, and the thing broke nearly every time he got in it. But the talent is clearly there, and if steered into a decent test drive, he could yet make it.

The next group of supersubs is already waiting in the wings, and it includes the likes of Ricardo Zonta, Juan Pablo Montoya, Pedro de la Rosa and Nick Heidfield, all with proven potential. Who'll be the first to get a big break? ■



Coates/LAT

Giancarlo Fisichella showed flair and won the popularity vote at Jordan...



LAT

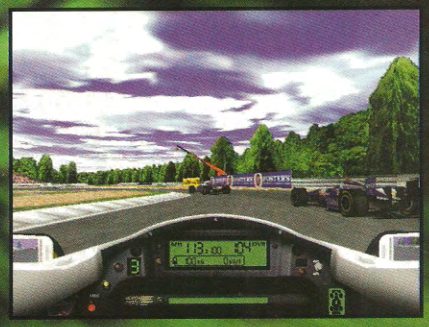
...while Ralf Schumacher's cavalier approach raised one or two eyebrows

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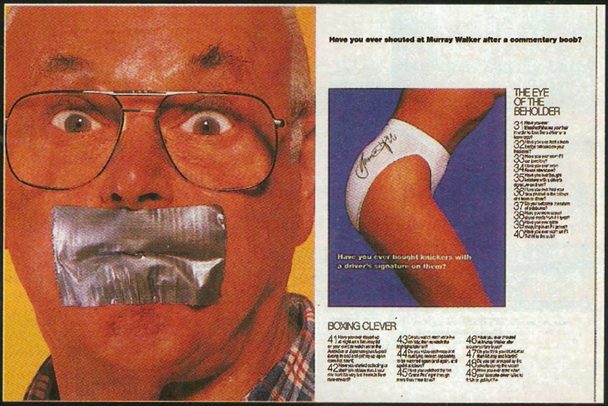
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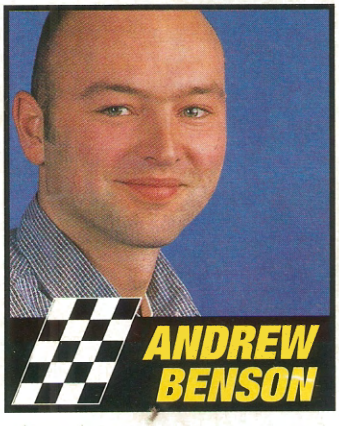
WHY FERRARI WILL TRIUMPH IN '98

GOODYEAR #1 in Racing

JANUARY ISSUE OUT NOW

(Probably more important at Christmas than the Radio Times)

Let's give youth its head



ANDREW BENSON

Formula 1 is a funny old business when you get down to it. Teams are constantly going on about wanting new talent to replace the old drivers whose commitment they feel they cannot rely on, and then, when they come along, if they do not perform miracles within a handful of races, everyone loses interest and says maybe they weren't so good after all.

It's all about fashion, you see, this sport, when it comes to drivers, and if you're not in fashion you can forget it, no matter how good you might be. Just Ask JJ Lehto, Alessandro Zanardi or Bernd Schneider...

In 1997, there was a flood of young drivers who would seem to have great futures ahead of them, for Giancarlo Fisichella, Ralf Schumacher, Jarno Trulli, Jan Magnussen and Alexander Wurz have all demonstrated abundant talent at times. But the season still provided the perfect example of how short-sighted F1 is in danger of being at times, for two of the most talented of them were, at various points in the season, in danger of not finding a seat for 1998.

Both Trulli and Magnussen had an up-and-down year, and at various times you would find people muttering darkly about them. 'Trulli looked good in the Minardi,' they would say, 'but he's been pretty inconsistent in the Prost, and you have to wonder what Olivier Panis would have done with it if he hadn't broken his legs.' Or, in Magnussen's case: 'He's just not doing the job, is he? They might as well dump him now and find someone else, because he's obviously not got what it takes. Or if he had, he's lost it.'

Happily, events later in the season were to prove the error of these opinions, and when everything came together for Magnussen and Trulli, they showed exactly what they are capable of. Trulli led the Austrian Grand Prix in a way which made you think he'd been doing it for years – which, as he pointed out, he had in a way. 'I've been leading races all my career,' he said. 'I don't see why this one is any different.' And Magnussen had a very impressive end to the season, fast and consistent from the Italian Grand Prix on. Multiple champions in karting and the junior formulae, talent like theirs does not go away. Sometimes it just needs time to develop at the highest level.

Alain Prost and Jackie Stewart know a bit about driving, and decided to keep their young charges on, but would other team owners have been so enlightened? Somehow I doubt it.

The problem is that F1's ethos, which is all about instant results, can be incompatible with the development of a young driver. Team owners need their cars to be as high up as possible all the time, to earn money from results and to attract sponsors. So it's very difficult for them to be relaxed about giving a young driver time to grow into his role.

They would claim it's all about making the most of your chances when you get them, and that if a driver is any good, he will show it at once. It's a sort of natural selection, they say. Brutal but necessary.

But trying to push right out to the limit immediately is not always a good idea – look at the mess Ralf Schumacher made at times. As Trulli and Magnussen demonstrated, sometimes it's better to ease your way in and build your confidence slowly.

Trulli had some poor races for Prost, but his engineers always sang his praises and admitted that it was their fault, that they had got lost with the car. Not everyone in the paddock had the same view. Panis's form when he returned proved the engineers were right. But in some teams it would have been too late by then.

The same goes for Magnussen, who took much longer than expected to get up to speed. His problem was compounded by having a front-line, quick team mate (Martin Brundle insists that Rubens Barrichello is as quick as Mika Hakkinen on his day). Stewart persevered, Magnussen built his confidence, and by season's end he and Barrichello were neck-and-neck. But, as Stewart said, in another team he would probably have been ditched by mid-season.

Perhaps six or seven years ago expecting immediate speed was valid, but there are increasing signs that F1 cars are such hi-tech pieces of machinery that it has become unrealistic to expect a driver, no matter how good he is, to get in one and set the world on fire straight away. Williams has taken the problem on board and set up a driver evaluation programme, which it will use to groom potential future race drivers. As senior operations engineer James Robinson says: 'The cars are just too complicated for drivers to take them to the limit straight away, and the F1 environment is a difficult one in which to learn. Jacques (Villeneuve) and Heinz-Harald (Frentzen) both took a long time to get used to the technology, so you can't put someone in the race team as a learning process. You've got to develop someone in-house. So we are changing the way Williams approaches picking a driver.'

Other teams know this as well, but still get disappointed if a young star is not electrifying in his first three races. On top of that, some still view a test driver as a useful source of extra revenue rather than a cheap way of grooming a future race-winner. If new talent is to find its way effectively into F1, those views have to be eradicated.

Race driving is all about confidence. If you don't have it, you won't be able to push those limits as far as you need to in an environment as competitive as F1. Both Trulli and Magnussen admitted they lacked it this season, and that it affected what they felt they could do with the car. Some take that as a sign of weakness. But neither is cowardly or slow. Quite the opposite, in fact. In the right environment, both could win Grands Prix in the future. So here's hoping that the fact that they still have that opportunity is a lesson to some of the men who hold in their hands the future of motor racing's next generation. ■

> **"The cars are too complicated for drivers to take them to the limit straight away"**



Houdek/Sutton Images

Benetton are prepared to gamble on youth's imperfections to run talented duo Giancarlo Fisichella and Alex Wurz in '98



Ville-power is

Dominant yet again, with Jacques Villeneuve Williams's latest Champion driver. By Nigel Roebuck

Frank's team and number one driver scooped the titles again in 1997, but they made harder work of it this time, and the statistic that says most is that, after finishing one-two six times in '96, the Williams-Renaults achieved not a single formation finish this year. Last season, too, Williams won the Constructors' Championship by 105 points, clinching it as early as Budapest in August; this time the margin was down to 23, skimpy by the team's extraordinary standards.

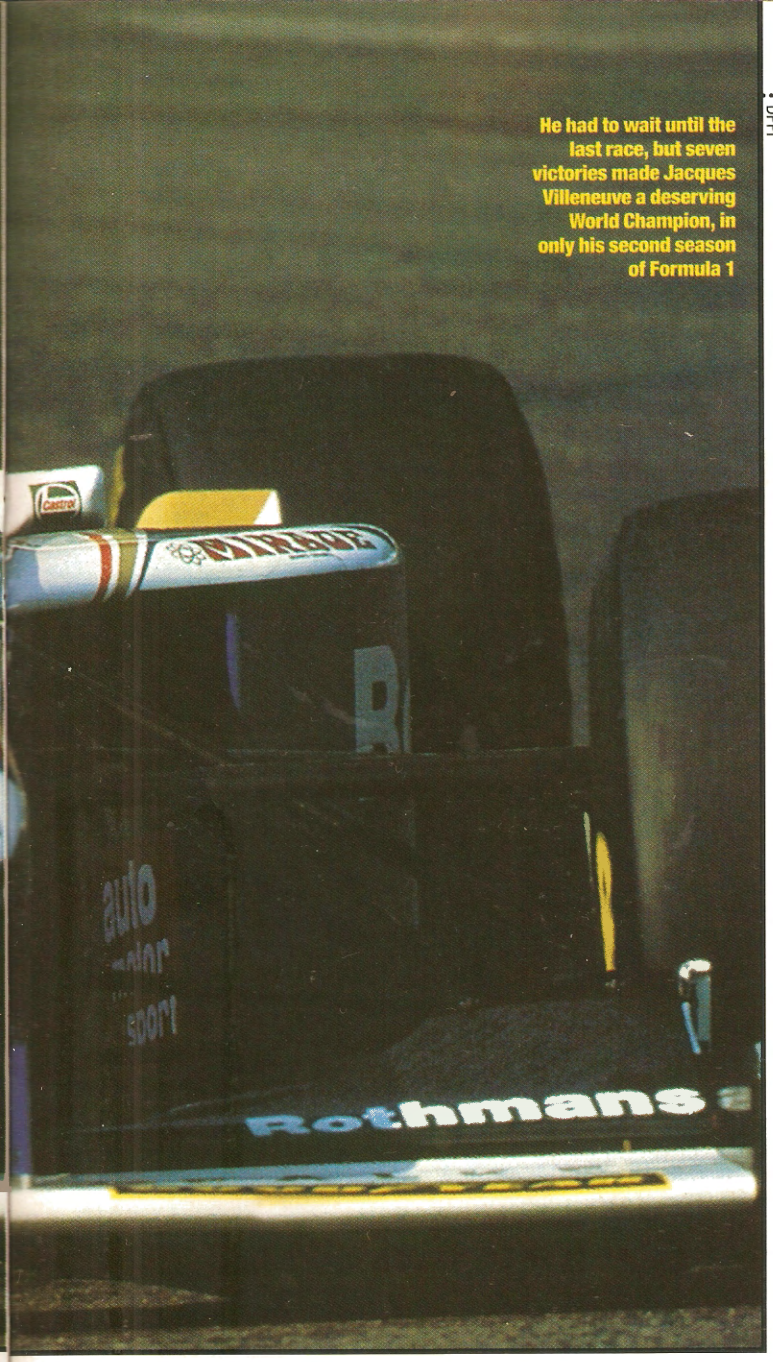
That said, Williams Grand Prix Engineering proved yet again that it makes better race cars than any other Formula 1 team. In 1997 it didn't help that Adrian Newey, the designer of the FW19, was not on hand at the races (having departed to McLaren), but still Jacques Villeneuve became the seventh Williams driver to take the World Championship title.

Firm favourite for the title before the season began, Villeneuve initially looked as if he were going to walk it. In Melbourne he took the pole by a scarcely credible 1.8s, and it was only at the very end of qualifying that his new team mate Heinz-Harald Frentzen 'trimmed' the margin down to that.

Come race day, though, Jacques paid dearly for a poor start, being collected, together with Johnny Herbert, by a ridiculously ambitious Eddie Irvine at the first corner. While Villeneuve walked angrily back to the pits, Frentzen took over for Williams, leading until the first stops. A slow second stop put him back to third, but still he was on course for an honourable finish, until his left brake disc exploded close to home.

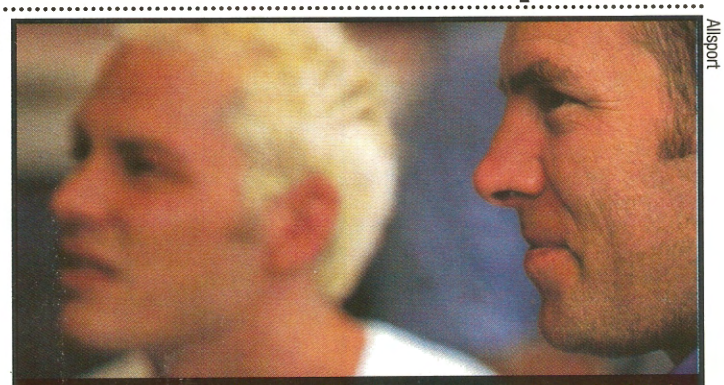
Braking problems were a feature of that opening race, Patrick Head conceding that, given the hugely quicker lap times produced by Formula 1's new tyre war, the team had simply underestimated the later braking which would follow.

Zero points for Williams in the opening race, then, but everything – so far as Villeneuve was concerned, anyway – came back on course at Interlagos, where he won. This was not without a certain amount of luck, however, for Jacques foolishly tried to sit it out



He had to wait until the last race, but seven victories made Jacques Villeneuve a deserving World Champion, in only his second season of Formula 1

DPPI



Allsport

Jock Clear's role in engineering JV's title success cannot be understated

the key

with Michael Schumacher into the first chicane and went off. Fortunately for him, other cars became involved in further incidents, and the race was stopped.

Still, he was off the mark, despite brake balance problems. For the team, a greater worry was the quite lamentable performance of Frentzen, who qualified eighth, and finished ninth. Damon Hill, whom he had replaced at Williams, had dominated here a year earlier, and it escaped no one's notice that Hill – in the Arrows-Yamaha – was right behind him on the grid. F1 was unaccustomed to seeing a Williams-Renault wasted.

Heinz looked better in Buenos Aires, qualifying second to the inevitable Villeneuve (albeit 0.8s away), and it was no fault of his that the Williams suffered a clutch failure in the early laps. Jacques, meantime, went on to victory number two, but this, like Interlagos, was no dominant affair, for he had not only a sticky gearchange and the close attentions of Irvine to contend with, but also more than a touch of the fine sprays, which had afflicted him for days, leaving him dehydrated and weakened. Professor Watkins, whose proposed remedy had been compromised by 'one of those fitness gurus', had little sympathy.

By Imola JV was restored to full health, and stuck it on the pole for the fourth consecutive time, H-HF alongside him. This should have been another Villeneuve victory, for he led comfortably enough, but then lost time on the stops, and finally retired with gearbox woes. Frentzen took up the Williams cause, and held off Schumacher to win his first Grand Prix.

This was looking altogether better for the relationship between Frentzen and his team. Imola, after all, had been only Heinz's fourth Williams race, and it had taken time, he said, to learn about the team, its work practices and its car. At Monte Carlo he followed his first win with his first pole position, and smiles in the pit began to broaden.

Villeneuve's first Monaco Grand Prix, in 1996, had been his only real dud of the year, Jacques never really getting to terms with the street track, and admitting as much. It was a relief to all, therefore, when he qualified a solid third.

But then came the race, and it was a day to make you wonder just what Williams might achieve, were they ever to shed their occasional attacks of curious behaviour.

As Monaco start time approached, it was raining. You could tell because the roads were wet. Schumacher went to the grid on intermediates, but most thought that a gamble too far, and opted for full wets. Williams personnel didn't agree, either, but in a more… individual way. Their expert weather forecasting service informed them that this was merely a passing shower, and promised that the track would be dry within 20 minutes of the start.

Thus, Villeneuve and Frentzen lined up on *slicks*! And it wasn't a total surprise to most onlookers that they found their cars near undriveable. Even if it had dried within 20 minutes, Schumacher would by then have been out of reach, so quite what was in Williams minds remains a mystery: at the very least, it might surely have been worth risking one car on the same tyres as its leading rival.

Both Jacques and Heinz ultimately crashed out, and Ferrari took a momentary lead in the Constructors' Championship. What is it about Williams and Monaco? Routinely dominant elsewhere, they have won here only twice, the last time back in 1983.

Normal service was resumed in Barcelona, however, where Villeneuve won after a supremely intelligent drive, perhaps his most impressive Grand Prix victory to date. Tyres were again the story in Spain, the first race in which Bridgestone enjoyed a discernible advantage, at least in terms of wear. If you were on Goodyears, the trick was at first to baby each new set, for otherwise blistering was a swift certainty, given the combination of abrasive surface and great heat.

Through practice, Frentzen's tyre wear had actually been better than Villeneuve's, but in the race it was the other way round, Jacques winning (from Olivier Panis's Bridgestone-shod Prost), Heinz fading away to eighth. Six races into the World Championship, he had only his 10 points from Imola to show, while Jacques headed the table once more.

> **"For the team, a greater worry was the quite lamentable form of Frentzen, who qualified eighth"**

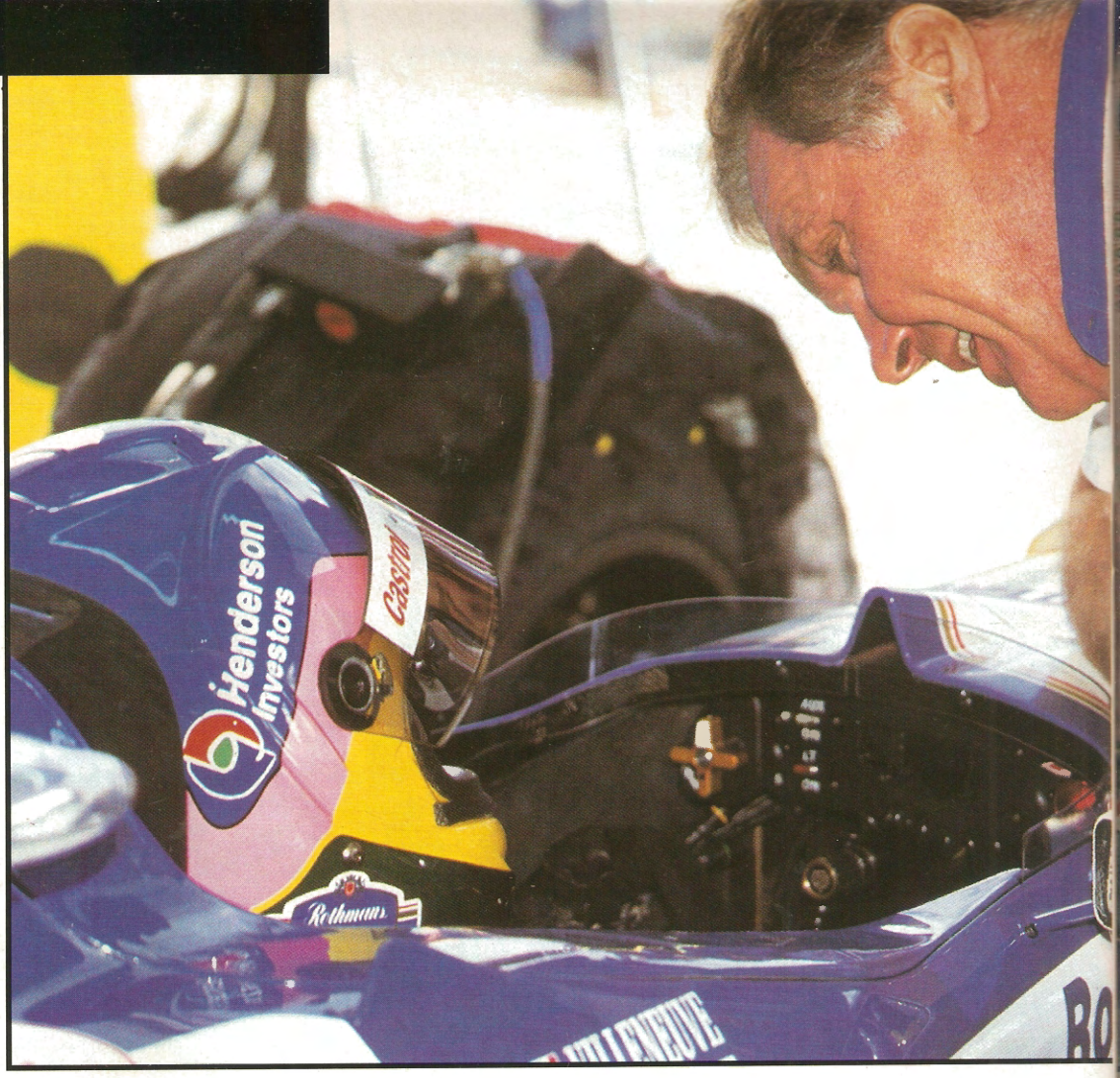
It was at this point, though, that Villeneuve's season took a dive. Earlier, he had been an outspoken critic of the FIA's major rule changes for 1998, and free speech – much as in the Labour government, really – is not encouraged these days. For his transgression, Jacques was summoned to Paris for a dressing-down; more to the point, his presence was required on the Wednesday before his home race in Canada. Having gone out to Montreal early for inevitable PR work, he was required to make a couple of extra Atlantic crossings. The FIA really does its standing no favours with petulant displays of muscle such as this. ▶

This quite unnecessary hassle may not have affected Villeneuve's race preparation to any great degree, but it did seem that certain pressures upon him might have been avoided. Jacques likes to do his own thing at the race track, but an entourage in Montreal made this impossible. Even before the race, those close to him felt this weekend was 'all wrong.'

Running second to Schumacher, he spun on the second lap, and his body language was eloquent as he stumbled away from the car holding his head. How *could* he have done such a thing?

A fortnight later Jacques showed up in Magny-Cours, his hair now dyed blond. 'Just fun,' he replied, when asked why the change, but there were those who wondered if something more fundamental was involved here. It is a fact that many people, when confronting a major upheaval in their lives radically change their appearance. Therapeutic, they say.

"JV made his move, survived Michael's terrorist tactics and duly brought the title home"



Whether or not this was so with Villeneuve, only he knows, but there is little doubt that the error shook him to his boots, and it didn't help, either, that Schumacher won that race in Canada, in so doing displacing him at the top of the point standings. Maybe there wasn't to be this relentless march to the World Championship, after all.

Michael won again in France, while Jacques, having qualified only fourth (two places behind Frentzen), finished there, too. Anticipating rain, he had gone for a set-up leaning towards wet, but only in the closing laps did the weather change in his favour, and by then the leaders were history. On the plus side, his essential spirit manifested itself at the last corner, where he attempted to pass Irvine for third; the manoeuvre ended in a spin, but clearly the racer in Jacques was alive and well.

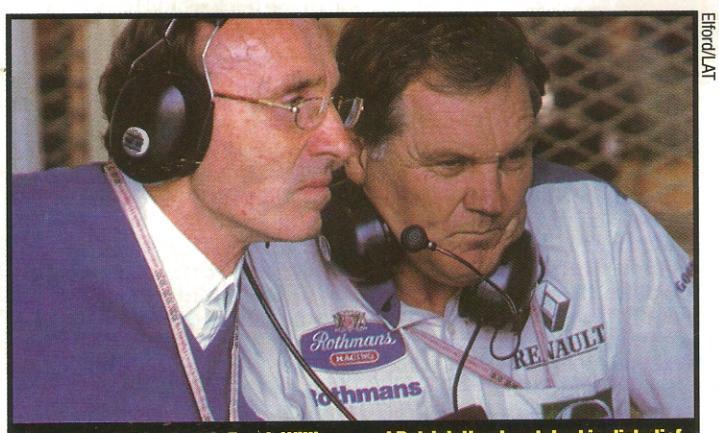
Frentzen's season was on the up at this stage, for he had finished only a couple of tenths behind Schumacher, but now began a calamitous period for him. At Silverstone, he stalled on the grid (front row, alongside Villeneuve), started from the back at the restart, then crashed out on the first lap.

Jacques won this time, but the victory owed something to luck, for he lost time with a long stop (stuck front wheel), and rejoined in seventh. For once Schumacher, leading, had a mechanical failure, and then Mika Hakkinen, whom Villeneuve was pressuring in the late laps, blew up.

Now within four points of the championship lead again, Jacques came to Hockenheim, and there Williams had its most uncompetitive weekend for many years; Frentzen qualifying only fifth, Villeneuve a disastrous ninth. And race day was even worse, Heinz going out in a first corner shunt (Irvine again), and Jacques spinning out of a fight with Jarno Trulli's Prost.

At this low-downforce track, neither driver had got close to a competitive set-up, and again many remembered the German Grand Prix of a year earlier, when Damon Hill's Williams-Renault had taken both pole and victory.

Many a time in 1997 Patrick Head found himself, when it came to setting up the cars, at odds with his drivers. In this regard, Frentzen is a ditherer, and Villeneuve's radical tastes, in Patrick's opinion, are not calculated to bring out the very best in the chassis. 'Jacques cannot abide roll in a car,' he said, 'so he sets it up *extremely* stiffly, which in turn makes it highly nervous. Look at the on-car footage, and you can see that he's having to work much harder than other drivers.'



Sometimes this season Frank Williams and Patrick Head watched in disbelief

Efford/LAT

Well, maybe so, but that was what Villeneuve wanted and in Hungary came win number four, a lucky one this, inherited from Hill on the last lap. In point of fact, given a trouble-free run, Frentzen would have won in Budapest, for he had rightly gone for the harder Goodyears on offer. As it was, his car shed its fuel tank connector.

At Spa, the sort of 'proper' circuit he so relishes, Villeneuve was unapproached in qualifying, and would assuredly have won the race, had the day been dry. In rain, though, they set off behind the pace car, which pulled off when conditions began to improve – at which point Schumacher's intermediates, rather than Villeneuve's wets, were the thing to have. Michael, unsurpassed on a slippery surface, quickly took the lead and disappeared.

Thinking to cut his losses after a mistake at the Bus Stop, Jacques took on intermediates after six laps. Big mistake; by that stage, it would have been worth chancing slicks, which he took on five laps later. Three stops, instead of the planned two, cost him any chance in the latter part of the race, even though the track was now dry, and Villeneuve significantly the fastest man on it. He ultimately took fifth, Frentzen third.

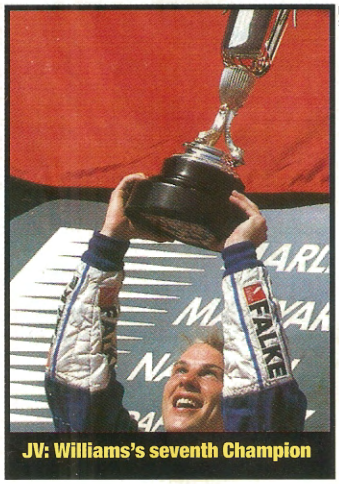
The pair were thereabouts through the Monza weekend, but ran in a high-speed procession,


Technical director Patrick Head and Jacques Villeneuve didn't always see eye to eye over set-up ...or the Canadian's blond crop

Sutton Images


Heinz-Harald Frentzen punctuated a trying year with his first GP win at Imola

LAT


JV: Williams's seventh Champion

LAT

devoid of overtaking, from start to finish. Heinz (third) again finished ahead of Jacques (fifth); with four races to go, Schumacher was 10 points ahead.

Villeneuve's fortunes, though, were about to turn around. As the season neared its end, he seemed to have his sparky confidence back. At the A1-Ring he trailed Trulli for the first half of the race, but got ahead at the stops, and stayed there to the flag, with H-H third. In a turgid race at the Nurburgring, they finished one-three again, but only after the two dominant McLaren-Mercedes had blown up.

Schumacher, by contrast, had been having a bad time of it, so Villeneuve set off for Suzuka with a handy nine-point lead. By the time he took the pole there, though, he knew he was in strife; in the morning he had gone past a waved yellow flag without lifting. Several others had done the same, but the difference was that Jacques was already under threat of suspension, having committed that very offence several times before.

'You sometimes get the impression that Jacques doesn't think certain rules apply to him,' Patrick Head tersely said, and really you had to wonder what Villeneuve was thinking about, particularly at such a crucial stage of the season. The Stewards duly announced he would be banned from the Japanese GP, and although allowed to race, under appeal, it was a certainty he'd lose any points scored.

Ferrari made hay the next afternoon, Irvine for once running at Schumacher's pace, and very willing to help his leader. Initially, Jacques tried to delay Michael, so as to keep him in traffic, but after the stops Eddie did the same to him, allowing Schumacher to get away. While Villeneuve lost interest and dropped back, Frentzen came through to split the Ferraris, but in the early stages, when it could have counted, he was too far back to help his team mate.

At Jerez, it was the other way around. This time Irvine was nowhere, but Heinz stepped up to the plate, matching the championship protagonists in qualifying, and at mid-race holding up Schumacher sufficiently to let Jacques close in. On lap 48, JV made his move, survived Michael's terrorist tactics, and duly brought it home for the title, in only his second season of F1.

By Williams-Renault standards, an up and down season, then, but it says everything about the team that, even in these circumstances, still it took it all. In some respects, Head admitted, the FW19 was less good than its predecessor – under braking, for example, it suffered from excessive pitch sensitivity – but still, combined with Renault's lighter and lower RS9 V10, it was usually the fastest car, as 11 poles and eight wins bear out.

All told, you would have to count Frentzen – one pole, one victory – a disappointment in his first Williams season, and certainly the myth that he is 'at least as quick as Schumacher' is buried for good and all. True, he had his moments, but there were too many clumsy errors, too much uncertainty.

As for Villeneuve, well, maybe he is even better than he looks, as Head suspects: 'To my mind, he makes very hard work for himself, setting the car up as he does...' In the end, we should rejoice that Jacques became World Champion; rejoice, too, that he did it with the pass of the season. Not too many drivers have ever caught Michael Schumacher asleep, after all. ■


Jacques Villeneuve was quick, yes, but prone to some curious tactical errors

Tee/LAT

Racing opinion

John Watson assesses how the Williams pilots did in '97

'There is one particular question which has been raised by a number of folk: Just how good is Jacques Villeneuve? Certainly Eddie Irvine has been scathing. But World Champion Jacques won 11 Grands Prix in two years, he's won the Indy 500 and the CART World Series. You certainly have to give him credit, and I wouldn't be as doubting as others.

'Villeneuve is a very strong, self-sufficient personality who had a lot of success before he was in Formula 1. He was lucky to arrive in a team with a team mate – in Damon Hill – who had been there a long time, and who understood the car and contributed to its development. The difference in 1997 was that when Hill left, the responsibility for development fell on Jacques.

'Also, the pressure Williams found itself under in terms of the reduced advantage its car had was very much greater than in 1995 and '96. Suddenly, Jacques found that getting the maximum out of the car consistently was less easy.

'I'd like to see what he does in 1999, assuming he doesn't stay with Williams. Then we'll see what his true capabilities are.

'Equally, Heinz-Harald Frentzen was coming from a family-oriented team where the level of pressure was probably insignificant to that to which faced him at Williams.

'The Williams probably wasn't that much better than the Sauber, although the overall package was infinitely better. So there was a culture shock when Heinz-Harald joined Williams, not only in terms of car performance, but also understanding the methods and working practices of Williams. The work rate and the commitment was very much higher than at Sauber. So the role of being a Grand Prix driver changed, and it took him a long time to adjust.

'Driving a racing car is not about having big balls, it's about having a big brain. Heinz-Harald hasn't got the outward signs of confidence his compatriot Michael Schumacher has; he is still, in a sense, looking to find his true level, not just in terms of competitiveness but consistency.

'I'm not convinced Frentzen ever really got to grips with the car, and I think it may not be until next season that he realises his full potential. He could win a World Championship, but that would take a substantial step forward from where he is now.'

Close, b cigar

Nigel Roebuck recalls how Ferrari so nearly came away from '97 with the drivers' title



Gerhard Berger always used to say, not altogether facetiously, that it was Ayrton Senna, rather than Ron Dennis, who was truly in charge at McLaren. 'Ron has quite a strong character, you know, but Ayrton always told him what to do – I remember times when he said things to him that I couldn't believe, but Ron accepted anything from Ayrton. If you ask him, I'm sure he will say, "No, it's not true," and maybe he believes it. But, from the outside, there was no doubt about it.'

There are those who would say that Michael Schumacher's position at Ferrari is not dissimilar. In his second year with the team, he began to gather about him some of the key figures who had helped him to his World Championships at Benetton, Ross Brawn coming in as technical director, and Rory Byrne – prevailed upon to postpone his retirement from racing – as chief designer.

Neither man, though, had a hand in the design of the Ferrari F310B, which had been carried out by John Barnard at the team's English-based design office. Even before the season began, JB and Ferrari had parted company (again), so that the team – like Williams, like Benetton – was without the man who had conceived its car. And, for the second time, Ferrari abandoned the idea of having an English 'arm' (as at the end of 1989), and concentrated everything in Maranello.

The 1996 F310, although winning three races in the hands of the inevitable Schumacher, had never been an easy car to drive, Eddie Irvine often frankly admitting he lacked confidence in it. In designing its successor, therefore, Barnard tried to alleviate that problem, making his priorities stability, consistency, reliability. And, from the first tests, Irvine confirmed that the new car was much more to his taste. Indeed, he was rather more enthusiastic than Schumacher.

'Here we go again,' sighed Frank Williams, after hearing the words of both Michael and Luca di Montezemolo on the subject of the forthcoming season. '"Well, it would be nice to think we might win a race or two, but as far as the World Championship's concerned... no, not this year." B*****ks, Michael! If you're in a race, you're going to be a potential winner, end of story.' Patrick Head echoed Frank: 'One really does get rather bored with hearing yet again from Ferrari that it's all going to happen *next* season...'

Apart from anything else, it was important for symbolic reasons that Ferrari should have a successful World Championship campaign in this, the company's 50th year. In a way which one would have imagined unthinkable to Enzo, Maranello merchandising, some of it more than a touch tacky, is big business these days.

The whole image of Ferrari, indeed, underwent something of a transformation in 1997, this having much to do with a vastly increased association with Marlboro. The classic Italian Racing Red was no longer in evidence, replaced by a less attractive orange-red, and the traditional sign-writing on the transporters had given way to a great daub of 'Scuderia Ferrari Marlboro.' It may have been to the taste of some...

At the first race, Melbourne, nothing could look at Villeneuve's Williams-Renault in qualifying, but the red cars were thereabouts, Schumacher starting third and Irvine fifth. In terms of points, Michael made a solid start, finishing second to Coulthard, but Eddie – apparently trying to pass everyone in front of him in the first few seconds – collided with Villeneuve and Herbert at the first turn. All three were out on the spot. 'I'm glad I made a slow start,' his team mate said afterwards. 'Otherwise, he would have got me, too.'

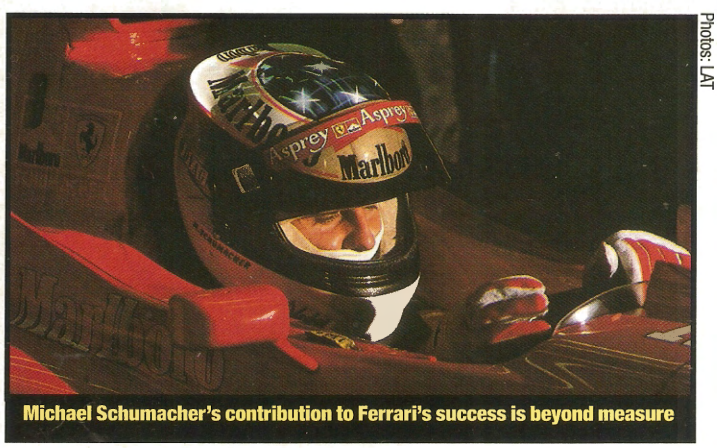
Overtaking being near impossible these days, it is perhaps not surprising that drivers routinely chance their arm in the opening moments of a race, for the run down to the first corner constitutes the best passing opportunity they will have all afternoon. There was another first corner fracas at Interlagos, this one involving Villeneuve and Schumacher.

> **"One gets bored hearing yet again it's all going to happen *next* season"**
> **PATRICK HEAD, WILLIAMS**

It was not Jacques's brightest move, you'd have to say, for Michael had won the corner, and he should have accepted it, rather than jeopardise his race within seconds of the off. As it was, the Williams went on to win, while the Ferrari – running a lot of wing, so slow in a straight line, yet also short of grip – slipped back to an ignominious fifth.

Irvine had a miserable time in Brazil, qualifying only 14th, but he had an 'on' weekend at Buenos Aires, starting seventh, and ultimately pushing Villeneuve for victory in the late stages. So long as Jacques didn't make a mistake, though, he was never going to lose the lead: as at Interlagos, Ferrari were running more wing than Williams, and on the straights Eddie was always struggling. Even so, he was less than a second behind at the flag, which was heartening for Ferrari; in Argentina the red car to depart at the first corner was Schumacher's.

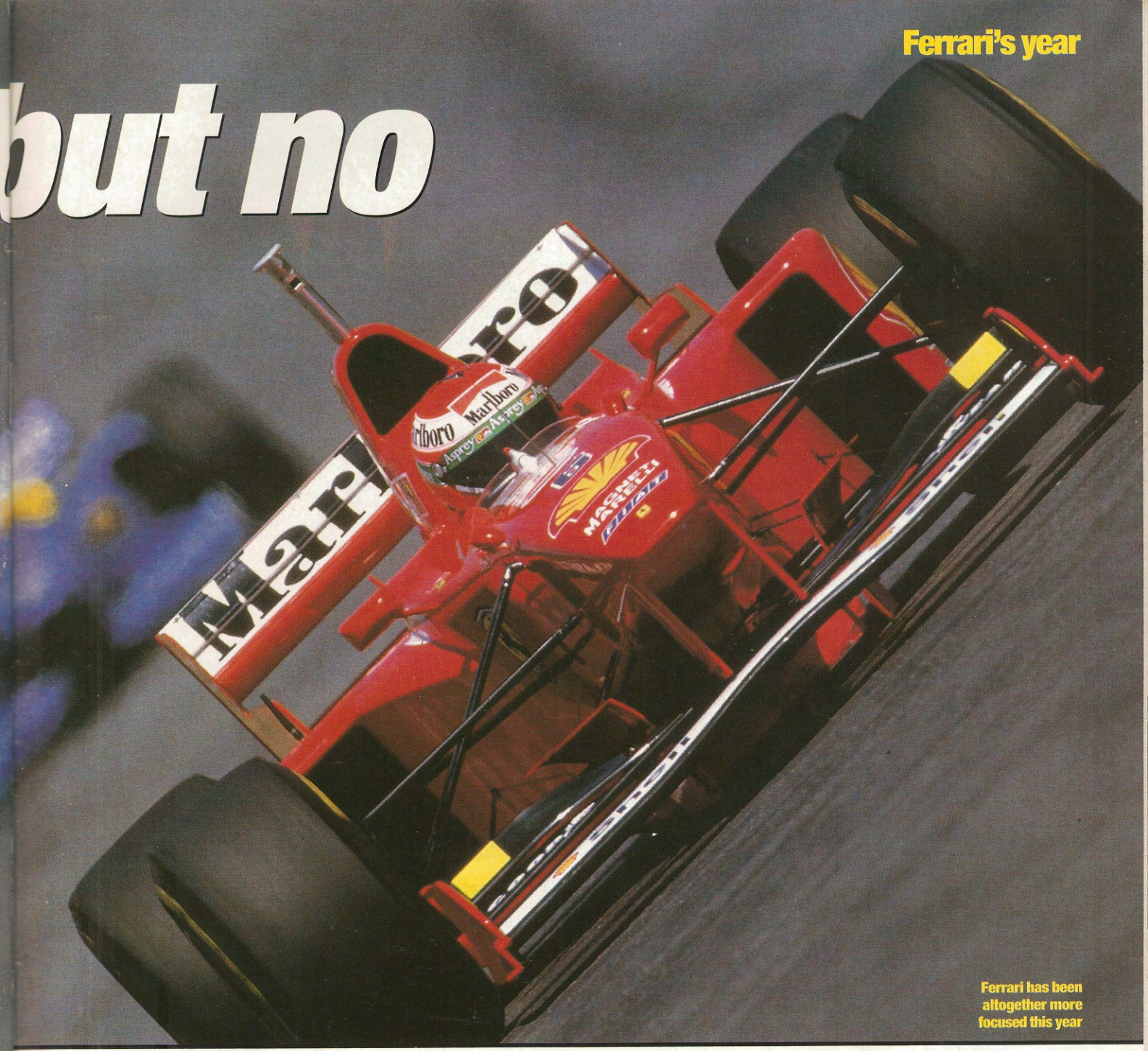
Michael and Eddie were second and third at Imola, inevitably behind a Williams-Renault (Frentzen's for once), so at least the 310Bs were proving reliable, if not ultimately quick. Brawn admitted that it was not easy to develop



Photos: LAT

Michael Schumacher's contribution to Ferrari's success is beyond measure

but no



Ferrari has been altogether more focused this year

a car in whose conception he had played no part, Barnard's design philosophy being somewhat different from Byrne's, with whose ideas he was more familiar. Ferrari's two newcomers therefore set about putting their own modifications to work, and readily conceded that while some were a success, others were not. One fundamental shortcoming of the F310B, about which nothing could be done, was that its centre of gravity was too high.

At Monte Carlo, though, none of these things mattered, for it rained, and whenever that happens Schumacher wins, just as Senna did. Michael qualified second, between the Williams-Renaults, and couldn't quite believe it when Frentzen and Villeneuve went to the grid on slicks. Had they not noticed that the track was wet? Did they, he even momentarily wondered, know something he didn't?

His two major rivals effectively sidelined even before the lights went out, Schumacher disappeared up the road, completing his first lap a staggering *seven* seconds faster than the next man, Fisichella. And what made his early pace the more remarkable was he was not on wets, like the majority, but on intermediates. 'Someone told me that at the time,' a rival technical director said, 'and I simply didn't believe it. Not lapping at that sort of speed, on something that's virtually a slick. But he was.'

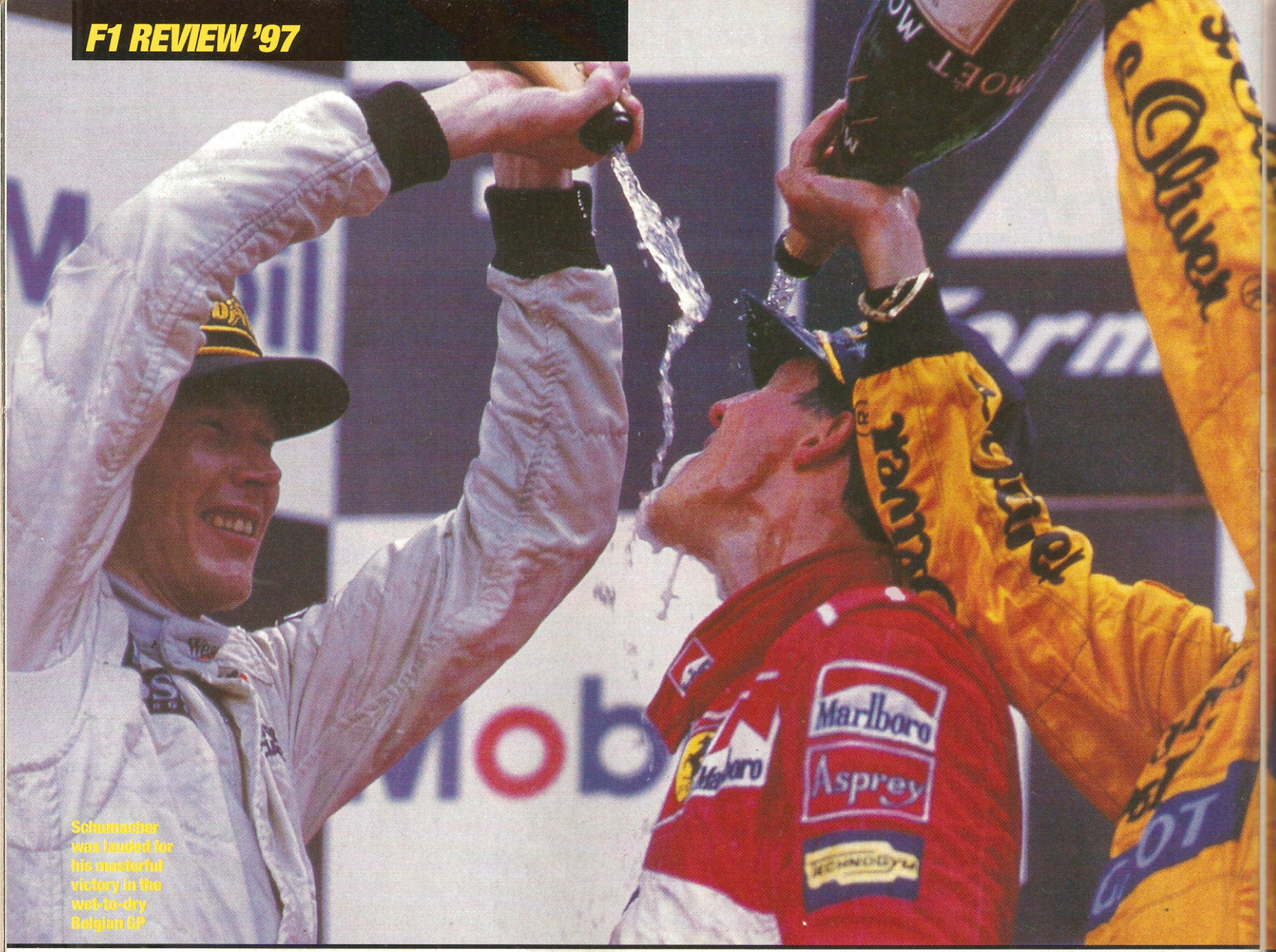
A complete *tour de force* for Schumacher then, and his first victory of the season. Irvine, too, delighted the team by finishing third, after a strong drive from 15th on the grid. Williams scoring nothing, Michael went to the top of the point standings for the first time, while Ferrari assumed the lead of the Constructors' Championship.

Barcelona, though, was much less satisfactory, for the track surface was abrasive and the day hot, so that the 310B, always heavy on tyres, was in dire trouble. Irvine started 11th, and even Schumacher could do no better than seventh, but Michael made an astonishing start, and was second at the end of the opening lap, behind Villeneuve.

Jacques was actually pleased ▶



Technical director Ross Brawn and Schumacher worked together at Benetton



Schumacher was lauded for his masterful victory in the wet-to-dry Belgian GP

◀ to see red in his mirrors for he knew, from previous tests at Barcelona, that Schumacher's tyres would swiftly go away. This they did, in a matter of five laps, after which the Ferrari dropped three seconds a lap to the Williams. It did not, though, surrender second place for another 10 laps, by which time Villeneuve was out of reach. An eventual fourth place was better than Schumacher had expected – but on points Villeneuve was now ahead once more.

The two of them would see-saw this way throughout the season, but it was a curiosity of the year that the races of Michael and Jacques very rarely touched each other, in the sense that – despite accounting for 12 of the 17 victories – they were almost never involved in hand-to-hand combat.

In Canada, Schumacher fractionally beat Villeneuve to the pole, and then took the race, but there was a deal of luck involved here, for Coulthard's McLaren looked set to win until a clutch problem intervened at its second stop. Had David delayed even a lap longer, indeed, he would have been declared the winner, for just at the time of his trouble the race was red-flagged, following Panis's serious accident. As it was, Schumacher got the 10 points, and Villeneuve, significantly, zero. As for Irvine, he was involved in another first corner accident, albeit not one of his making.



A much-improved Eddie Irvine was a key element in Schumacher's title attack

Midsummer was the time when the titles seemed to be edging Maranello's way. It was pole and victory again for Schumacher at Magny-Cours, while Irvine qualified fifth and finished third – ahead of Villeneuve who was into his wayward period of the season, although he did somewhat fortunately win at Silverstone after Schumacher, leading comfortably, suffered a rare mechanical failure. This did not, however, cost Michael the World Championship lead.

At the time, the impression was that Ferrari was truly getting on terms with Williams-Renault, but Ross Brawn reckons this was illusory, that it was more a matter of Williams temporarily losing its way. 'This car's real abilities are reflected by Eddie's performances,' he insisted. 'Anything beyond that is all down to Michael.'

That seemed a touch exaggerated – the part about Irvine, anyway, fine driver though he may be – but there is little doubt that in 1997 Schumacher drove with a sustained brilliance remarkable even by his own previous standards. He could do nothing about Berger's Benetton at Hockenheim, but then neither could anyone else, and six more points came his way, while Villeneuve again failed to score. Irvine crashed out of this one, after tangling with Frentzen – yes, you guessed, at the first corner...

For Ferrari, Budapest was Barcelona revisited, a tale of blistered tyres. Schumacher, fourth, said afterwards that he had been surprised, for in practice and qualifying – he took his third pole of the season – there had been no tyre problems at all. But race day was significantly hotter, for one thing; for another, Michael was obliged to race his 'standard' T-car, having damaged the new lightweight F310B, following a startlingly untypical lapse of concentration at the end of the warm-up.

Byrne and Brawn had been working on a revised car for some little time, looking to shed some weight, and also, following Schumacher's unforeseen 'splash and dash' third stop in Melbourne, to increase its fuel tankage.

Initially, there was but one such car available, and Schumacher would have run it at Spa had the track been dry at the start. As at





The strengthened team bond at Ferrari has been more evident than ever in '97

Monaco, he had both his cars in pit lane as race time neared, one on 'dry' settings, the other with a compromise set-up. As at Monaco, too, he ran a pre-race lap as late as possible, made his decision, and jumped into the appropriate car, which was on intermediate tyres.

In the dry, the Ferrari was not a match for the Williams at Spa, but by the time slicks became the thing to have, Schumacher was a minute ahead, driving another maestro's race, extending his points lead over Villeuneuve to 12, with five to go.

Who knows what then went wrong with Ferrari for the next couple of events? Brawn thinks maybe the team simply confused itself with an excess of testing. Whatever, when Schumacher qualifies ninth – as he did in Italy and Austria – you may be sure there are major problems with his car. When track temperatures were high, he shrugged, the tyres overheated, and away went the grip.

At Monza, though, Michael managed to hang on to the procession at the front of the pack, and at least scored a point which pleased him, not least because Villeneuve got only a couple; the *tifosi* may have gone away growling, but, as a damage limitation exercise, the race was not too bad.

"What went wrong? Brawn thinks the team confused itself with an excess of testing"

Zeltweg, Schumacher's 100th Grand Prix, was disastrous, however. Again nowhere in qualifying, he ran much better in the cooler race, to the point that he passed Frentzen for second soon after half-distance. Problem was, he did it under the yellow flag, waving to warn of a shunt between his team mate Irvine and Alesi.

While Frentzen drily advised his pit that never had he so easily made up 10 seconds on Schumacher, the Ferrari driver was advised of the stop/go penalty. Expensive, that one. Now eighth, he stormed back into the race, passing Hill's Arrows for sixth – and a precious point – on the final lap. At the flag he was only a second behind Ralf, but brotherly love did not extend to giving up a place.

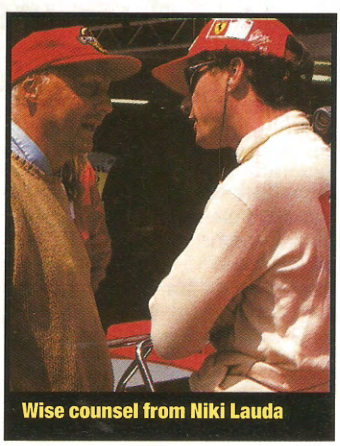
Brotherly love, indeed, was stretched to breaking point at the Nurburgring, for at the first corner Schumacher Jr, increasingly desperate as the season wore on, tried to squeeze Jordan team mate Fisichella, bounced off him and landed on Schumacher Sr. Michael was fortunate to come away from this without injury, and showed great family solidarity in declining to criticise Ralf. For his title hopes, though, the day was catastrophic, for Villeneuve won and now had a nine-point advantage.

Suzuka, though, turned things around for Schumacher – why, it might have been scripted. Ferrari was back on the pace with a bang, and Irvine, who always excels at this marvellous circuit, was fast enough materially to help Michael. Everything went his way that weekend in Japan, not least the 'yellow flag incident' in practice which precluded Villeneuve's scoring any points. In the race the Ferrari drivers worked together shrewdly against the Williams, and Schumacher came away with victory - and the one-point advantage to take into the final race, which history shows can mean *so* much…

And so he went to Jerez, where, caught napping by Villeneuve, he allowed his darker instincts to take over, and this time paid the price. Thank the Lord. ■



Michael Schumacher was at his devastating best in rain-soaked Monaco



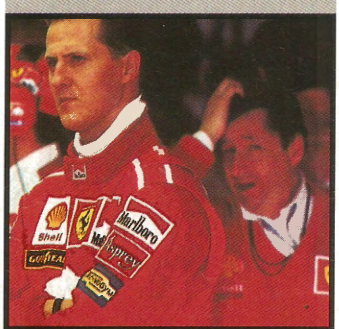
Wise counsel from Niki Lauda

Racing opinion

John Watson gives his view on the current state of Ferrari

'To assess just how complete Ferrari's package is you have to ask whether it includes Michael Schumacher. Technical director Ross Brawn himself actually said that Eddie Irvine was probably more representative of where the team and the car both were than Schumacher. With the German the team is all of 95% there. Without him, it's only around 75%.

'Next year will be the definitive year for Ferrari. What we've had to judge this year was a John Barnard car that probably didn't suit Schumacher, which was then adapted to make it suitable for him, all of which introduces compromise. Next season it will be much more of a Ross Brawn/Rory Byrne-style car and maybe the leap that Ferrari had looked for on the technical side will only come then. After all, the Benetton B194 they built was a bloody good car.



Next year… 'the definitive year'

'Another person who must not be overlooked is Jean Todt. The historical problems that have meant that Ferrari has more often than not beaten itself more in the past have now been consigned to the past as Todt has enabled the different factions of the team to work together. So often the philosophy had been that as long as my bit works, I don't care about the rest. It's very easy to have a "superteam" without having a super team.

'One of the most interesting things about Ferrari is that it does its own engines, and that is a crucial part of the operation which will need to move ahead during the coming year. Manufacturers such as Renault have identified such details as when the throttle goes from full on to off, it unsettles the car, so they have put a minute delay in to stop that sudden problem. That is the level of development Ferrari has to achieve.'

The primary su



David Coulthard can look back on 1997 with some satisfaction after taking two wins

McLAREN

McLaren had a far better season in '97 and Mika Hakkinen broke his duck. Words: Nigel Roebuck

In 1997, McLaren did not return to the glory days of Senna and Prost, but they did make something of a resurgence, winning three Grands Prix, which was three more than in the years since 1993, when Ayrton left. And that number could, should, have been doubled, had reliability been better. As it was, McLaren-Mercedes finished only fourth in the Constructors' Championship, behind Benetton, who won only once.

After all those Marlboro years, it took a little time to get used to West's sponsorship of McLaren, to the striking new livery which inevitably evoked memories of another time, when Mercedes Grand Prix cars, too, were dressed in silver. Then there was the car itself, the MP4/12. When you saw it for the first time, you struggled to believe it was from the same pen – Neil Oatley's – which had conceived the 1995 MP4/10, still to my eyes the most hideous Grand Prix car yet put on this earth.

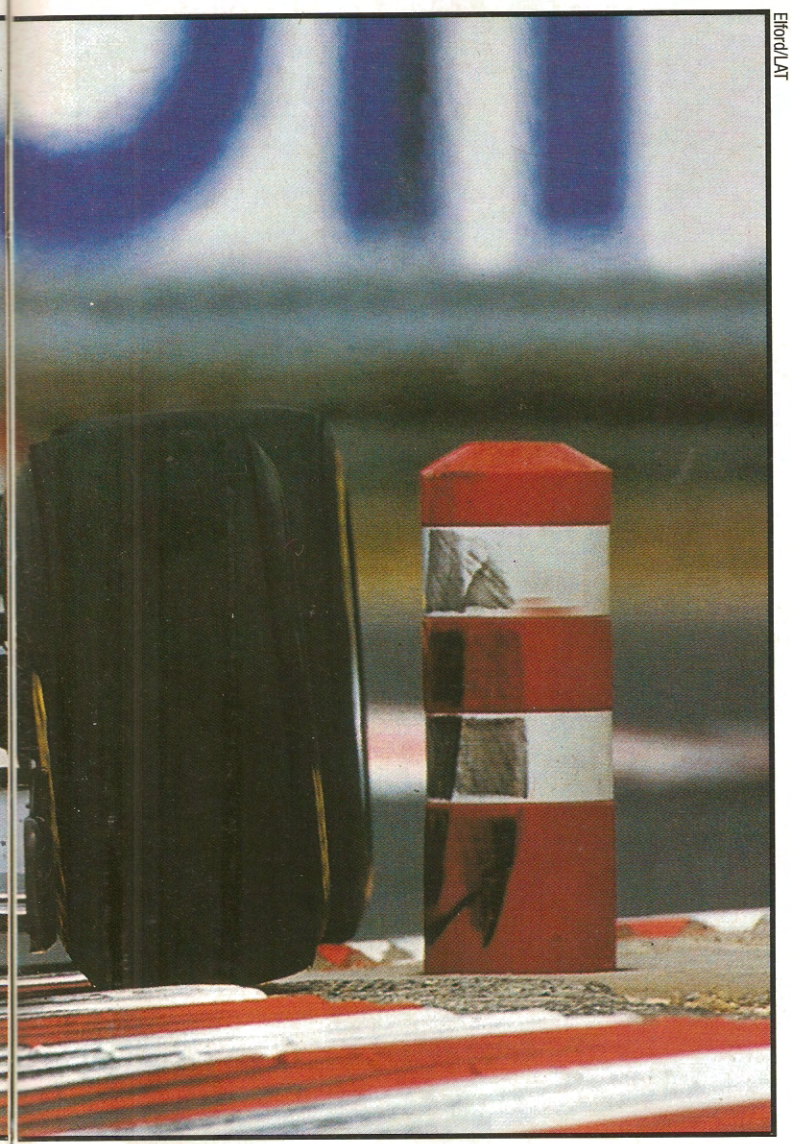
The new one was gorgeous, its elegance further flattered by the silver paint job. Everything about the MP4/12 flowed; and best of all, perhaps, was its nose – raised and pointed in the contemporary style, yes, but still aesthetically pleasing. If the old maxim were true that, 'If it looks right, it is right,' McLaren at last looked set to end its drought.

Pre-season testing seemed to confirm this view, both Mika Hakkinen and David Coulthard enthusing over the car's grip, the Ilmor-built Mercedes V10's power. Not even Ron Dennis, though, could have imagined that the season would start the way it did. At Melbourne, Coulthard qualified fourth and Hakkinen sixth, and in the race they finished first and third. The sight of Jo Ramirez's face as DC took the flag is an abiding memory of the season; on his slowing-down lap, David admitted, he was in tears.

In truth, McLaren did not win in Australia because they had the fastest car – that, as ever, was the Williams-Renault – but after the first corner debacle had removed pole man Villeneuve, Coulthard, the best starter in the business, was at once into second spot, behind Frentzen, ahead of Schumacher.

The lead passed to David on the stops, as is nearly always the way of it these days. McLaren had planned to pit only once, but Williams had

...pporting cast



Elford/LAT



Tee/LAT

Mika Hakkinen, engineer Steve Hallam and boss Ron Dennis thrash out ideas



LAT

Mika Hakkinen was robbed of more than one win, but finally broke his duck

opted for two stops, and Frentzen's second was inordinately slow, which put Coulthard into the lead, Schumacher into second. For lap after lap, David was faultless, impervious to pressure from the Ferrari, and that's how they finished.

To some degree, you had to feel sorry for Hakkinen in the aftermath of the race, for if anyone had earned the right to end McLaren's long spell in the wilderness it was he, who still awaited his first Grand Prix win. No arguments, though: on the day Coulthard was the quicker of the two.

In victory he tempered his joy with a little realism, pointing out that there was a lot of work to be done with the MP4/12, that neither he nor Mika was yet confident enough with it to push really hard. That being so, 14 points looked like a pretty sound result first time out.

Problem was, the next 14 points arrived over the next nine Grands Prix, and a couple of these, at least, McLaren should have won. Coulthard drove a magnificent race in Montreal, for example, building such a lead over Schumacher that his team felt it worthwhile for him to make an unplanned second stop, one of his tyres having blistered. Unfortunately for David, though, when he came to leave his pit, a clutch actuation problem led to a stalled engine. 'Eventually I managed to re-start off the jack,' he said, 'but by then the safety car was out, because of Panis's accident, and the race was effectively over.' Compounding the team's misery, of course, was the thought that if Coulthard had stayed out just a lap longer, he would have been declared the winner...

At Silverstone, it was Hakkinen's turn to lose out in the closing stages, his engine blowing up with five laps to go. At the time Mika was under pressure from Villeneuve (who was on newer tyres), but he had no doubts that he could have held on – just as Jacques, of course, was adamant that he would have got by.

In truth, Hakkinen was only in a position to win because a Villeneuve pit stop had been horribly long, but he might justifiably argue that his advantage over Jacques would have been more sizeable had McLaren personnel ordered Coulthard to let him through. David, suffering brake problems, plainly held Mika up for the first 28 laps of the race.

"Had Coulthard stayed out one lap longer he would have been declared the winner"

Engine failures indeed cost McLaren dear in 1997. Through the grid there was general agreement that the new F-spec version of Mario Ilien's Mercedes V10, introduced at Barcelona, had more out-and-out horsepower than anything else, even if its rather peaky torque curve made it less driver-friendly than some others, notably the Renault and the Ferrari.

Coulthard made the most of it at Monza, where he won his second race of the season. For spectators, this may have been the dreariest Grand Prix of 1997, a high-speed procession devoid of overtaking, but David laid the foundations of victory with yet another scintillating start, taking him from sixth ▶

Racing opinion

McLaren and Adrian Newey can rule says John Watson

'I'm quite sure that when Adrian Newey joined McLaren, he didn't join on the basis of him being part of a "design by committee" department. He would want to have total control over it. That is a change from the way McLaren has been for some time.

'With the current regulations, which I disagree with, with flat bottoms and the way it has been evolving, you end up with very pitch-sensitive racing cars that are then highly-critical when you attempt to optimise the performance. I think the McLaren showed that to try and control the car through the entire speed range created a car that was very difficult to drive. '

'David Coulthard, more than Mika Hakkinen, needed a car that inspired confidence rather than try to bite him.

'As Newey finally got some influence within the team, principally with the changes with the aerodynamics in the nose and the wings, he seemed to come up with a car which was more consistent. It was less pitch sensitive, more comfortable to drive, but still enabled both drivers to be able to get a good performance out of it.

'In 1998 it can only get better for McLaren, and I'm sure every other team is aware of that. McLaren with Adrian Newey, plus the effort that Mercedes is putting in and the effort that its two drivers are putting in, has to be favourite for this season's championship.

'And it's to the credit of Ron Dennis, who negotiates extremely well and supports his people better than probably any other team in F1. It's difficult to see which of the two drivers will best suit the particular demands and needs that Newey will provide. Both have the ability, so it's going to be very interesting.

'I believe that with Hakkinen, when he really discovers the knack of being able to win races, he has the speed and skill to be able to. Also, he has a stronger emotional push from the team because he has been such an extraordinary team player.

'In his favour, David is an exceptionally bright and clever young guy. He has a very easy, natural personality and he understands that motor racing is not just about driving.

'He knows that he could be the next British World Champion. He is quite ruthless and behind that choirboy smile is the finest quality Scottish granite.'



David Coulthard celebrates a fine start to the year, victory in the Australian GP

Eiford/LAT



Mika Hakkinen (behind) lost a possible win in Britain through a blown engine

Tee/LAT



Hakkinen took a magnificent pole at the Nurburgring, but blew up in the race

Tee/LAT

◀ to third, where he ran until the stops began.

McLaren had sent their drivers into the race with more fuel than most of their rivals, which allowed them the opportunity of some quick laps on a clear track before pitting. DC closed right up on the leading Alesi, and although they stopped at the same time, the McLaren mechanics were a second quicker than the Benetton boys, allowing Coulthard to sneak out ahead. 'I knew,' Alesi said, 'that was the end of it,' and he was right.

It has been a curiosity of the Hakkinen-Coulthard partnership that very rarely, it seems, do both drivers shine at the same meeting. 'As a general rule,' one McLaren man says, 'we think of David being better when all's right with the car, and Mika when it isn't.'

That was not wholly borne out by the facts in 1997, though, for the McLaren-Mercedes became an increasingly competitive proposition as the season wore on, and whereas Coulthard out-qualified Hakkinen in six of the first eight races, Mika was higher up the grid every time in the remaining nine. He looked a very likely winner at Zeltweg, and a certain one at the Nurburgring, but both times went out with a blown engine.

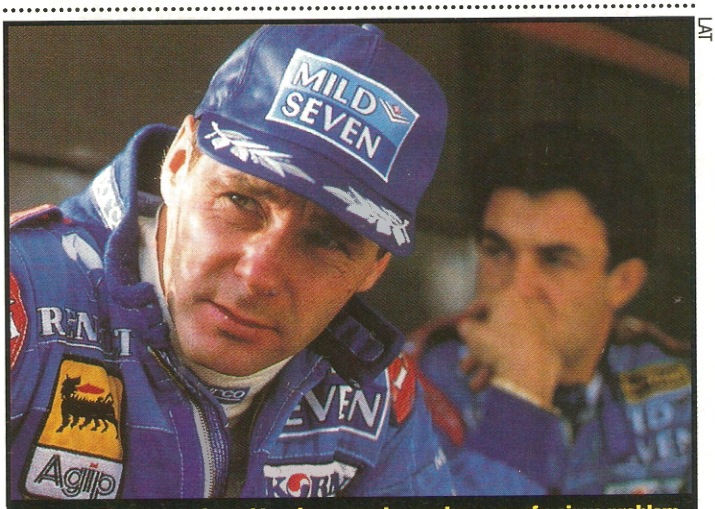
At the misnamed 'Luxembourg Grand Prix', indeed, McLaren looked on for a one-two, having run away from the rest, but then, within the space of a couple of minutes, both motors let go. For the Mercedes hierarchy, present in force, it was time to swallow hard.

Hakkinen-Coulthard was how it finished in the final race at Jerez, however, and while David plainly felt it should have been the other way round, none could truly begrudge Mika a first Grand Prix victory which should have come years ago. The pity was that, having looked on course to win on merit so often, he was... assisted to the top step of podium, let's say. No matter. As Mario Andretti used to say, 'I've lost more than I've won this way.' Ron Dennis believes Hakkinen may now be over a major mental hurdle, and could be right.

The driver line-up is unchanged at McLaren next season, and not a few suspect that Mika and David will be in the pound seats. Chassis by Adrian Newey, engine by Mario Ilien, tyres by Bridgestone. It adds up appealingly. To win world titles, though, you need consistency, and that was what lacked in 1997. ■

BENETTON

The stars of pre-season testing, Benetton's year failed to deliver the goods. Words: Nigel Roebuck



LAT

Gerhard Berger was forced to miss several races because of a sinus problem

Like Williams, like Ferrari, Benetton went into the new season without the man who had designed their car. Rory Byrne's intention had been anyway to retire from the racing business for a new life in Thailand, but ultimately he was persuaded to postpone that plan, and work for Ferrari. This came on the heels of Ross Brawn's move to Maranello, as technical director, so Benetton found themselves without two key players for 1997. By the time of his leaving, though, Byrne had completed the design of the B197, and Gerhard Berger, in particular, stressed his faith in Pat Symonds, who took over Brawn's role.

The early signs were that Benetton, without a win in 1996, would be very much more competitive this year. In pre-season tests, Berger was repeatedly fastest, and both he and Jean Alesi enthused about the new car, which had been conceived with their driving styles in mind, unlike the B196, which was in the 'Schumacher' tradition, and too nervous to suit either of its new drivers.

Gerhard and Jean could hardly wait for Melbourne, therefore, but disappointment lay in store, for they qualified only eighth and 10th, and generally poor grid positions were to be a feature of the Benetton-Renault season, particularly on low-grip circuits, and at tracks where pre-race testing was not possible.

Symonds points out that an element of Benetton's design philosophy had always been to make a car that was easy on its tyres; that was fine – indeed obviously desirable – for the race, but in qualifying, when the car was light, and the tyres necessarily used that much harder, it was difficult to get sufficient temperature into them.

Often, therefore, the Benettons were a more competitive proposition on race day than qualifying might have suggested, but Alesi and Berger had the abiding problem of starting too far back. From 10th on the grid in Australia, Gerhard finished fourth, right up with Schumacher and Hakkinen, and Jean, too, might have scored well, had he not simply run out of fuel, despite repeated suggestions from his pit that now might be a nice time to come in…

Afterwards, he protested that his radio had not been working properly, but Flavio Briatore was in no mood to listen, and delivered a dressing-down that left Alesi close to tears.

It was the start of a complete disintegration of the once-close relationship between driver and team principal; by mid-season, indeed, there was virtually no communication, and the more easy-going Berger was also increasingly at loggerheads with a man who, as he said, 'knew nothing about motor racing – and, more to the point, was proud of it.'

"Briatore, in no mood to listen, delivered a dressing down that left Alesi close to tears"



LAT

David Richards and Flavio Briatore

Still, a good season seemed in prospect for Gerhard. At Interlagos the car worked well in qualifying, putting him third on the grid, and in the race he finished second, only four seconds behind Villeneuve. Had there not been a restart, following a first corner shunt which would have put Jacques effectively out of the hunt, Gerhard would almost have won.

In Argentina, though, the qualifying problem reasserted itself, the Benettons starting from row six, and finishing sixth and seventh. At Imola the situation was even worse – 11th and 14th on the grid this time – but a more fundamental problem was that Berger, racing in his 200th Grand Prix, was in pain from a sinus condition which would worsen as time went on. There, and at Monaco and ▶



Tee/LAT

Gerhard Berger made a magnificent comeback to action after illness, taking a welcome, if unexpected, sole victory of the year in the German GP at Hockenheim

There were happy days, particularly at the German GP, but Benetton was largely a team in turmoil during 1997

◀ Barcelona, he was packed with heavy-duty antibiotics, and by the time of Montreal had been ordered by his doctors to forget about racing for a while.

Gerhard missed three races at midsummer, during which time he underwent two operations, then was devastated by the loss of his beloved father in a light aircraft accident. His opinion of Briatore did not rise during this period.

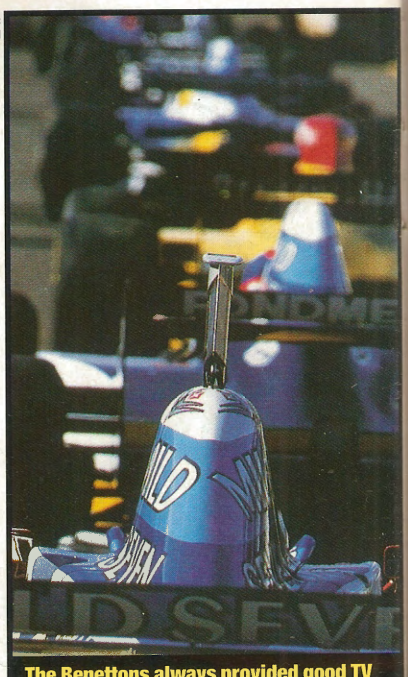
In Berger's absence, young Alexander Wurz partnered Alesi, and made a very fine job of it, his best finish third at Silverstone, only a second behind his team mate who had been scoring consistently throughout. It is a fact that Jean, although still considered a rock ape by some in the paddock, has long been one of the very best finishers in the business; nine races into the season, only Schumacher and Villeneuve headed him in the championship. At Barcelona, where tyre conservation was crucial for the Goodyear runners, he drove a marvellous race to second.

There had been no wins for Benetton, however, just as in 1996. And when Berger, inevitably far from fully fit and still drained by his father's very recent death, came back at Hockenheim there was no reason to believe this situation might change. In the event, though, Gerhard was magnificent at a circuit on which he has always excelled, taking both pole position and victory. He felt, he said afterwards, as if he had some special power all weekend, and doubtless his motivation came from various sources, among them a wish to pay



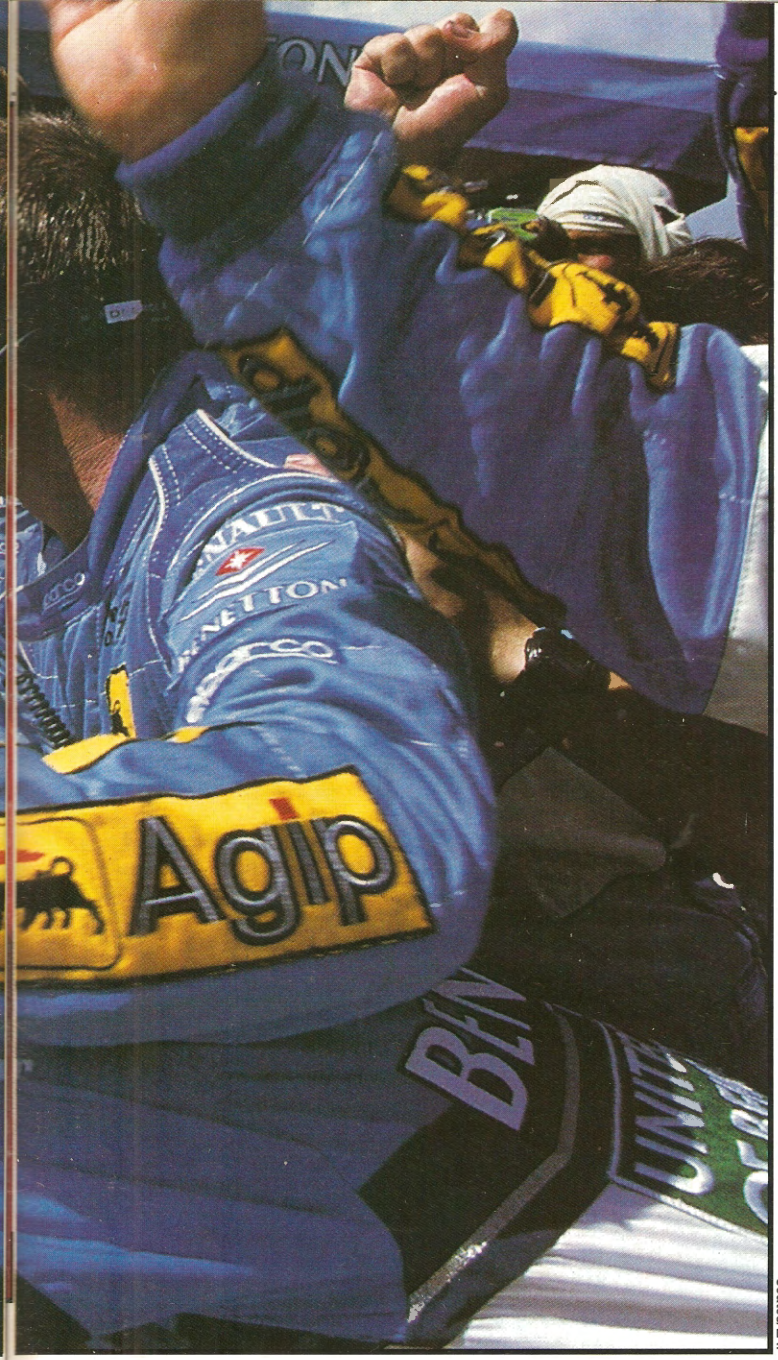
Fourth place in the championship was just reward for Jean Alesi's consistency

Elford/LAT



The Benettons always provided good TV

LAT



Coates/LAT

tribute to his father, and also a desire to give the finger to Briatore, who had been suggesting maybe he should not come back.

Alesi also took a pole position in 1997, and fittingly it was at Monza, where he then led the race – until the stops. Coulthard, right behind him, came in at the same time, and, having started the race with more fuel than Jean, now needed less to make the finish. Hence the McLaren stop was a shade faster, which allowed David to get out ahead of Jean. Passing being out of the question at Monza these days, that's how they stayed to the flag.

"Berger felt, he said afterwards, as if he had some special power all weekend"

Alesi was also second at the Nurburgring, with Berger fourth. But the week before, at the new A1-Ring, Benetton had their worst race of the season, qualifying only 15th and 18th, and making no impression whatever in the race. For Gerhard, returning to compete in Austria after a 10-year absence, this was, he said, 'the worst race of my career.'

It was typical of him, though, that the *final* race of his career, at Jerez, should have been driven with absolute spirit and commitment. At the finish, he was fourth, less than two seconds behind the winner, having overtaken Irvine's Ferrari on the very last lap.

Although Alesi and Berger ultimately finished fourth and fifth in the World Championship, Benetton's season nevertheless fell far short of pre-season expectations. The car's up and down form was one thing; quite another was the deteriorating atmosphere in the team, particularly when it became clear that Briatore would be departing.

Alesi hated the discord, and Berger tired of being blamed by his engineer Nick Wirth for the relative lack of results. 'There are some really good guys in this team,' he said, 'like Pat Symonds, but one or two of them... When someone says to you, "Why don't you always drive like you did at Hockenheim?" I might reply, "Okay, why don't you always give me a car like the one I had at Hockenheim?"' One way and another, it was definitely time for a change. ■

Racing opinion

John Watson looks at the brave new world at Benetton

'The 1998 season for Benetton has got great potential, although it may take another season for it to be seen on a really consistent basis.

'On the managerial side I'm pleased that David Richards has joined Benetton. I admire and respect his achievements in other aspects of the sport and he has got all the skills that are essential to be a survivor and successful in Formula 1.

'Richards and Flavio Briatore are totally different. Flav was a money man, very flamboyant and good for F1, but when he wasn't winning, a different aspect to his personality came through.

'I would expect Richards' style of management to be similar, but in terms of how you see it to be quite different. He will be answerable to the Benetton family, but you don't bring in someone of that quality and then tell them how to run the show. He will be not be a pushover with drivers. He will support them 100%. When they perform they will earn his credit and praise, when they don't he will explain the facts of life to them.

'On the technical side, responsibility has passed to Nick Wirth and his team. In 1997, you could say that there was still a fundamental legacy of the Brawn/Byrne chassis, there was a certain amount of playing around with it. That is a different responsibility and a great test of the technical side of the team.

'The other factor is that the team has two new and hungry drivers. We know what Fisichella is capable of from Jordan this year. I was most impressed also with Alexander Wurz, who did a stunning job in a relatively limited amount of time standing in for Gerhard. So on the drivers side they have two young guys who are going to be stars of the future.'



Jean Alesi (right) and 'sub' Alex Wurz celebrate a Benetton two-three in Britain

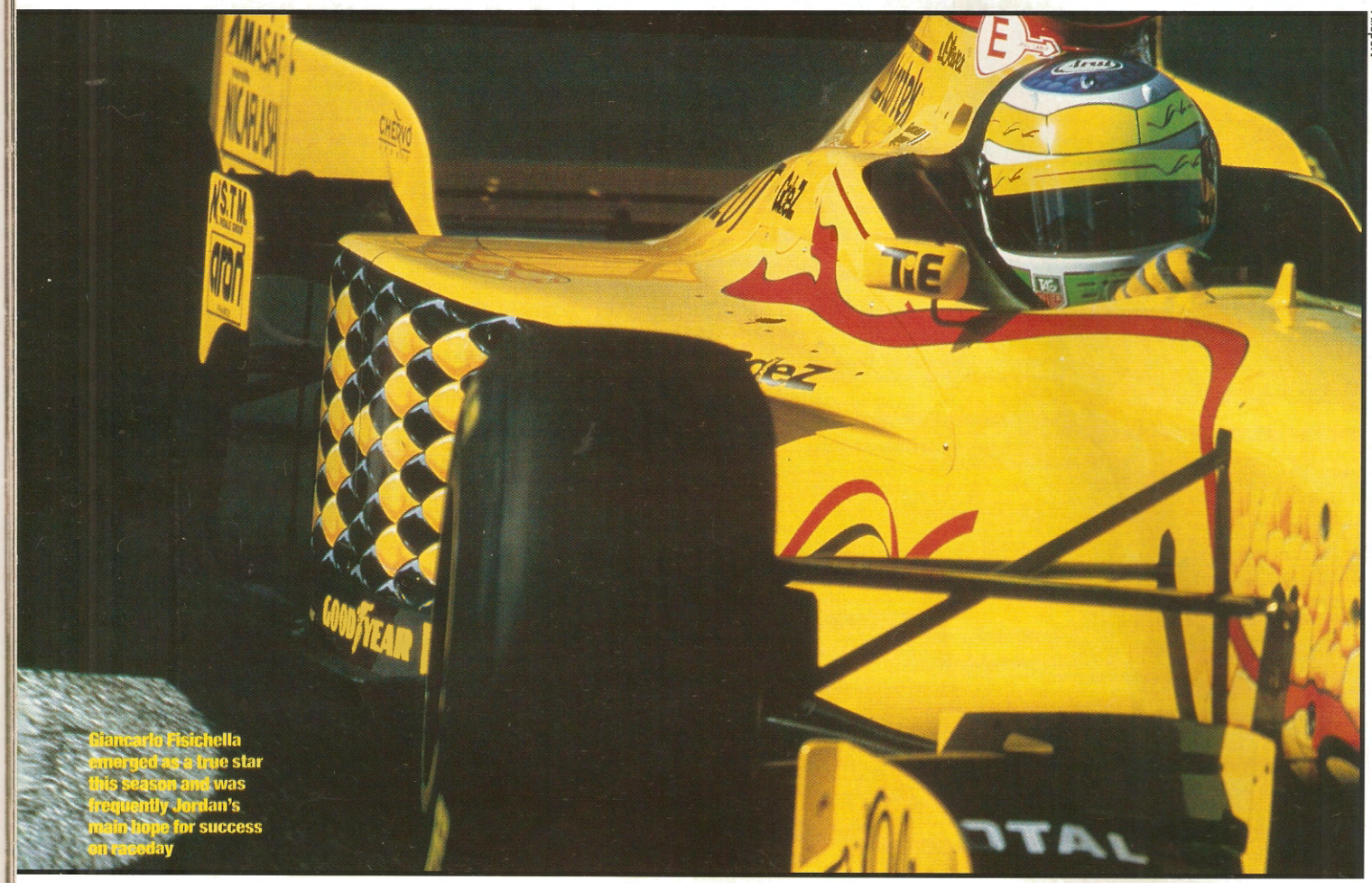
Tee/LAT



Jean Alesi erred big time in Oz when he allowed his Benetton to run dry of gas

Elford/LAT

Primed for the

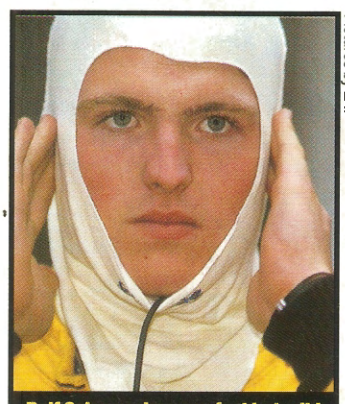


Allsport

Giancarlo Fisichella emerged as a true star this season and was frequently Jordan's main hope for success on raceday

JORDAN

No wins yet, but Jordan was a truly competitive proposition this season. Words: Nigel Roebuck



Pictures by LAT

Ralf Schumacher was fast but wild

The victory promised for so long by Eddie Jordan didn't materialise in 1997, but at least the team came close this time, producing a car that was often a genuine contender. At Hockenheim, Giancarlo Fisichella started from the front row, and in the race at Spa he was beaten only by Schumacher. Michael, that is.

'My God, Jordan have discovered downforce!' one of the team's ex-drivers exclaimed early in the season, and if the jibe was cruel, so it was undeniable that in previous years the lack of it had often been apparent. Gary Anderson's attractive 197 soon revealed itself as one with serious potential, a quantum leap over its predecessor.

Jordan-Peugeot entered 1997 with a couple of novice Formula 1 drivers, Fisichella having previously done only half a season with Minardi, and Ralf Schumacher nothing at all at this level. Although Giancarlo's pedigree was obvious, there were many who believed Ralf's surname had propelled him into F1 sooner than might have been expected, competent though he had looked in Formula 3.

The revamped team got off to a rocky start in Melbourne where both drivers retired in the race, Fisichella crashing after an ill-judged pass on Barrichello. In Brazil, though, the performance was better, both drivers qualifying in the top 10, and at Buenos Aires Ralf impressed by making it to row three.

On race day he shone, finishing third in the team's 100th Grand Prix, but at the end he received a mixed reception in the pits, for *en route* he had punted off his team mate while trying to separate him from second place. Fisichella was anything but amused, and EJ came face to face with the problems of running two young chargers.

In truth, such problems were inevitable, and there were times, as the season wore on and Fisichella asserted himself as the more intelligent and stylish of the two, when it seemed as though Schumacher's sole preoccupation was getting the better of his team mate. If this internal rivalry grew wearisome for team personnel, at least here were two drivers clearly giving their all every time they climbed aboard. There was a spark about Jordan that had been absent too long.

But Fisichella and Schumacher had more than youthful enthusiasm going for them, for this was the most competitive car Jordan had produced since 1991, the year Eddie entered F1. At Imola, both qualified in the top six, and Fisichella finished fourth, but at Monaco he impressed even more, running second to (M) Schumacher in the early stages, and making no mistakes on a treacherous surface.

By now, you expected to find the two Jordans among the first 10 qualifiers, but though Schumacher was sometimes ahead – at Magny-Cours only his brother and Frentzen were faster – increasingly the team looked to Fisichella for the good race result. In Montreal, Giancarlo earned his first podium, while Ralf parked solidly against the fence at the first turn.

Premiership?

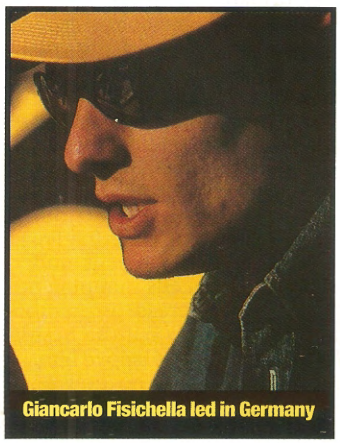
Sutton Images



Ralf Schumacher had plenty of bite – but often his team mate was the victim!

Hockenheim was where Fisichella came of age, narrowly losing the pole to an inspired Berger, and then constituting Gerhard's only opposition on race day. After the stops, indeed, he briefly led for the first time, and although a slight mistake let the Benetton by again, he looked certain to finish second – until a rear tyre blew half a dozen laps from the end. Although Giancarlo brilliantly held the car, and made it to his pit, a radiator was damaged by contact with a kerb, and a fine day's work was shot to hell.

> **"It seemed Ralf's sole preoccupation was getting the better of his team mate"**


Giancarlo Fisichella led in Germany

Hungary was a complete dud for the team, but at Spa Fisichella once more excelled, finishing second to Schumacher Sr on another day when delicacy was rewarded. But for Ralf, the race was traumatic, for he crashed in the wet warm-up laps, ran back for the T-car, then crashed that before half-distance.

As Fisichella conclusively asserted himself as the Jordan team leader, Schumacher showed signs of increasing desperation as he tried to get on terms, and at Monza was guilty of gross misjudgement as he passed Herbert into the first chicane. Moving across to take the best line, he appeared blithely to ignore that he wasn't fully by the Sauber, which was pitched into a sizeable accident. Ralf was lucky the stewards judged this 'a racing incident,' and took no action.

In Austria, both Jordans were off the pace in qualifying, yet both picked up points in the race – which was emphatically not the case at the Nurburgring, where Ralf, after a fine start, bundled into Fisichella at the first corner, and contrived to take out his brother…

While Fisichella emerged as potentially a great driver of the coming years, he did rather fade in the closing races, his head perhaps scrambled a touch by the battle for his future services between Jordan and Benetton. For all that, he was undeniably among the stars of 1997, blending speed with finesse, and Schumacher, while too often coming up short on the grey cell count, at least gave evidence of tremendous natural pace.

Well served by Peugeot's V10 – judged by some the most powerful engine of all – Jordan progressed strongly this year; for the first time, it was only luck that kept them from winning a Grand Prix. When Eddie promises it next time, we will take him at his word. ■

ARROWS

Despite the pre-season hype, Arrows struggled in '97, barring Hungary. Words: Nigel Roebuck

It was a coup, no doubt about it, when in the autumn of 1996 Tom Walkinshaw stayed Damon Hill's pen from a Jordan contract, and persuaded him to join TWR's newly-acquired Arrows team. The whole deal, according to Tom, took less than an hour, not least, he said, because he acceded at once to the '96 World Champion's financial requirements.

The optimism was quite unfettered at the launch of the new Frank Dernie-designed Arrows A18, conducted at the AUTOSPORT International show in January. For all that, some – who remembered Tyrrell's tribulations with the Yamaha V10 – struggled to keep a straight face when Walkinshaw suggested Hill could win 'two or three races' in the coming season.

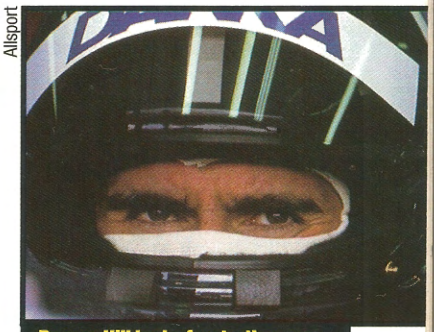
Tom argued his case quite soundly, suggesting that occasionally there would be weekends when either Goodyear or Bridgestone would hold a distinct advantage over the other. 'What we have to do,' he concluded, 'is make sure that Damon is in a position to capitalise on those occasions when Bridgestone has the upper hand.'

All very chipper, then, and when Hill eventually began testing the new car he was initially encouraged by its balance, if disconcerted by engine unreliability. One way and another, he said, he was relishing a time when the pressure was off, and felt he would get great satisfaction from the team's progress through the season.

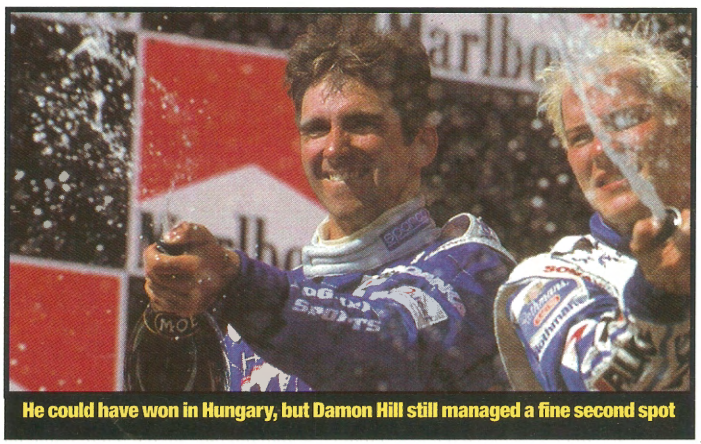
At first, however, the revamped Arrows operation was a decided mess, in the sense that team personnel had been culled from various sources – some from the old Arrows' regime, some from Walkinshaw's previous association with Ligier, some from other TWR operations. The A18, whose build quality at first left much to be desired, did not exactly sparkle on its debut.

Hill had won (for Williams) at Melbourne the previous year. While he cannot have expected to repeat the triumph, neither can he have anticipated qualifying 20th, with only Jos Verstappen's Tyrrell and his Arrows team mate, Pedro Diniz, behind him. On race day, it got worse. The car bearing number one came to a halt on the parade lap. 'Throttle problem.'

Allsport


Damon Hill had a frustrating year

At Interlagos, Damon was superb, qualifying ninth and briefly running as high as fourth before retiring – blown engine – four laps from the end. Yamaha failures accounted for both Arrows in Argentina, and the pattern was set to continue. ▶


He could have won in Hungary, but Damon Hill still managed a fine second spot

"Walkinshaw suggested Hill could win 'two or three races' in the coming season"

◀ By May, it was known that John Barnard, newly parted from Ferrari, would be replacing Dernie as the team's technical director. It wasn't long before JB made his presence felt. A redesigned oil system, for example, markedly improved engine reliability, and suggested that Yamaha had been somewhat maligned in the early stages of the season.

Indubitably, the engine was well down on power, Hill commenting that it felt much like any other low down, but simply ran out of steam at the top end. At some circuits, obviously, this was much more apparent than at others.

In public, Damon was commendably stoic about the Arrows-Yamaha performance, but privately he grew weary of starting from the second half of the pack, and there was evidence that sometimes this took its toll of his commitment. By Montreal, Diniz was matching his qualifying times, and at Magny-Cours actually started ahead of him. Later in the year – at Spa and Suzuka, remarkably – it would happen again.

Not surprisingly, this caused tongues to wag. Diniz is clearly far more of a racing driver than he seemed in his early days, and has matured well, but, in truth, it is difficult to see him as more than a very competent journeyman. Quite how he came to out-qualify the reigning World Champion on three occasions remains a mystery.

At Silverstone, Walkinshaw squarely – and publicly – put this down to a lack of effort by Hill. It seemed a novel approach to team relations at the time, and Damon was plainly stung by it, not least because he had resisted the temptation to holler about a less than competitive car. For all that, he finished sixth in the British Grand Prix, gaining his – and the team's – first point.

At Budapest, he very nearly picked up10 more. On such a tight little track, Yamaha's power shortage was less of a factor than usual, and Bridgestone, too, had the better of Goodyear that weekend. Even so, it was still a memorable performance, Hill calmly taking the lead from Michael Schumacher, and holding on until the very last lap when his car, hobbled by a leak in the hydraulic system, fell victim to Jacques Villeneuve's Williams.

Damon also went well at Hockenheim, but there were no more points for him, one being lost on the final lap in Austria, when Schumacher nipped by. At the Nurburgring, Diniz picked up a couple for a good fifth place, and it is no surprise that Walkinshaw enthusiastically re-signed him (and his sponsorship) for 1998.

Hill, however, decided against a new contract, and committed himself – eventually – to Jordan. The relationship with Arrows did not turn out as either driver or team had hoped, but that memorable day in Hungary, Walkinshaw's pre-season prognostication so nearly came right. ■



As the year wore on, Hill climbing out of a dead Arrows became less frequent



Pedro Diniz enhanced his reputation still further in '97 and managed to outqualify the World Champion three times

STEWART

An extremely promising start for the new boys, with second at Monaco. Words: Nigel Roebuck

Stewart Grand Prix arrived in 1997, a most welcome addition to Formula 1, particularly at a time when grids are rather less crowded than once they were. Given the involvement of JYS, and the reputation established by Paul Stewart Racing, everyone expected consummate professionalism and immaculate presentation: no disappointments there.

When the project was announced, at the start of 1996, Jackie was typically circumspect as he outlined his expectations for the forthcoming team. 'We're under no illusions,' he said. 'We know what's going to be involved in bringing a new team into Grand Prix racing. If we can run near midfield in the early races, I think that would be pretty impressive; if we can score a point or two in 1997, I'll be delighted.'

The SF-1, designed by Alan Jenkins, impressed from the outset. In Rubens Barrichello's hands, it qualified 11th in its first Grand Prix, and the same again in its second. In Buenos Aires, remarkably, Barrichello started fifth.

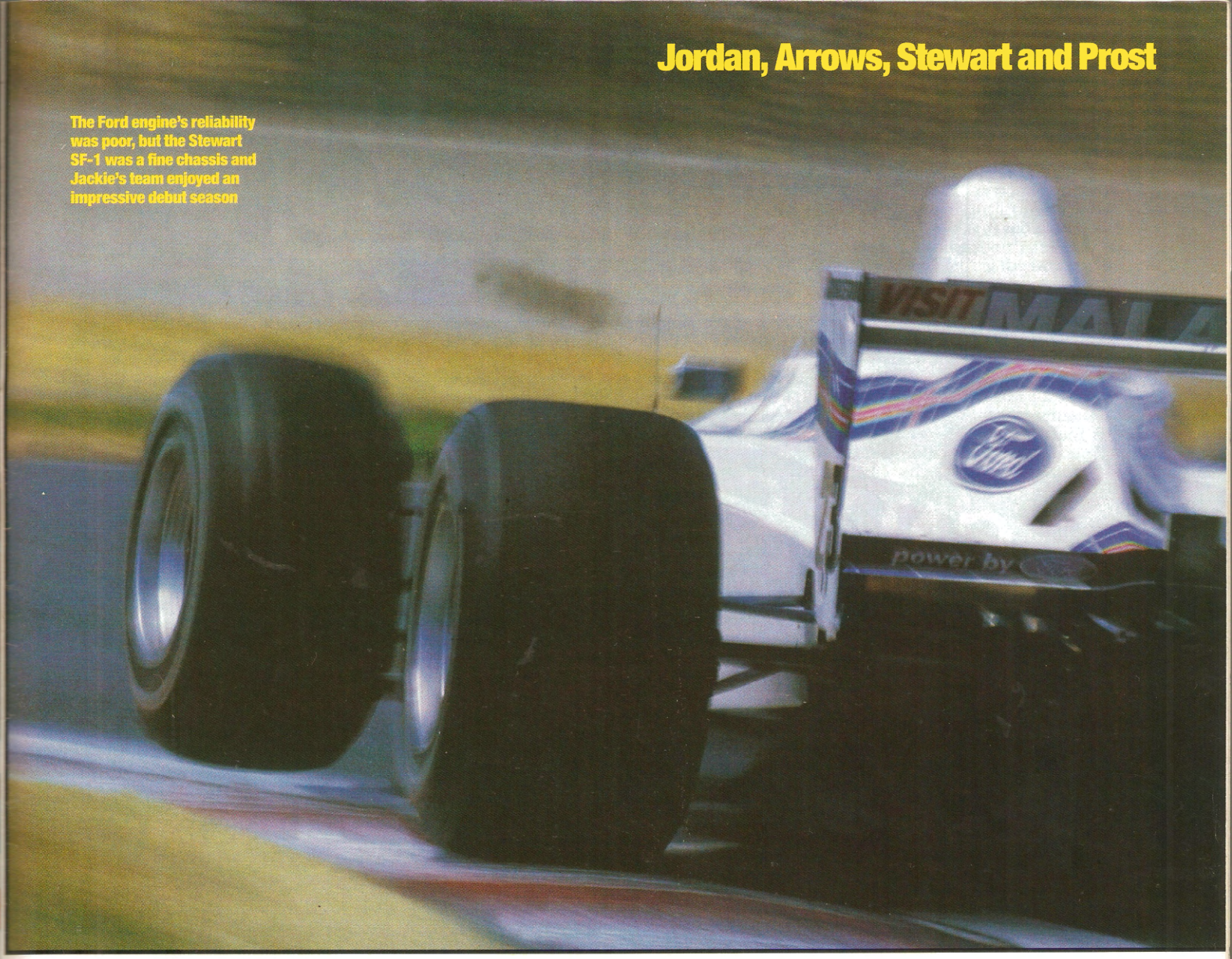
"The team's crowning achievement was Barrichello's second place in the Monaco GP"

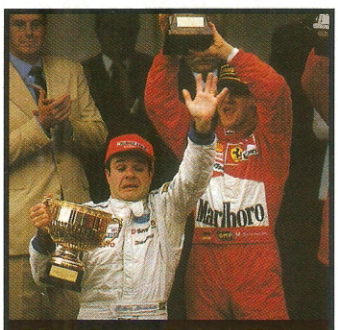
Many folk, myself included, questioned the wisdom of signing Rubens. At Jordan, he had gained a reputation for compromising his undeniable talent with laziness. Both team and driver had tired of each other by the time they parted, after four years. Barrichello, it was said, lacked commitment.

Jackie Stewart thought otherwise. 'I think Rubens is fragile, in the sense that he needs understanding, he needs pumping up. We've tried to create an environment that brings out the best in him, and I hope it's helped him.'

Barrichello had no doubts: 'I didn't feel much support in my last two years at Jordan. Here, I feel

The Ford engine's reliability was poor, but the Stewart SF-1 was a fine chassis and Jackie's team enjoyed an impressive debut season





Rubens Barrichello: fun in Monaco

everyone is on my side.'

Whatever, his driving was something of a revelation. Many had anticipated that Jan Magnussen would soon assert himself as the quicker of the Stewart drivers. But it was Rubens who set the pace, Jan who struggled for most of the season, trying, according to JYS, to shed bad habits picked up in two years of touring car racing.

The team's crowning achievement in its maiden season was Barrichello's second place to Michael Schumacher in the Monaco Grand Prix. This more than mitigated what most saw as a spiteful decision to keep the Stewart motorhome – and only the Stewart motorhome – out of Monte Carlo's admittedly cramped paddock. Examples of such pettiness are sadly rife in contemporary F1.

After the race, the family was ecstatic, Jackie emphasising that this meant more to him than any of his own successes at the wheel. Barrichello had driven a beautiful race in treacherous circumstances. Perhaps it wasn't coincidence that the Cosworth-built Ford V10 held together – for once – on a day when wet conditions prevented it being hammered too much.

There is no getting away from the fact that the engine's reliability was pretty lamentable in 1997, primarily because the camshafts were chain – rather than gear –driven and kept breaking, with necessarily dire consequences.

Until late in the season, Henry's V10 was also seriously short of horsepower. This, in turn, compromised the set-up of the car – it was necessary to run minimal wing in an attempt to find some straightline speed. At Montreal, Barrichello's SF-1 was absolutely trimmed out in qualifying, yet still set third fastest time, which spoke volumes for the basic integrity of Jenkins's design. Even like that, Rubens said, the car worked well under braking, and into corners.

His Monaco points, though, were to constitute the team's total in what was a difficult first season. In terms of sponsorship, Stewart Grand Prix was not a major player (although this looks better for '98). Financial pressures were hardly eased by its ineligibility for 'travel money' in its first year, Jackie and Paul starting from scratch, rather than taking over an existing outfit with instant FOCA membership.

All things considered, the team has every reason to be satisfied with this first year at the top level. True enough, the finishing record was poor, and there were times – notably at Suzuka, where both drivers flew off the road – when Barrichello and Magnussen were to blame. But it was a fine season from Rubens, and in the late races, perhaps fearing for his future, Jan at last got it together in the manner promised by his career in F3.

Best of all, the Stewart team was always open and approachable. 'In our fifth season, we should be getting podiums,' Jackie said before he started this. In point of fact, it took just five races. ■ ▶



A tough year, but Jackie and Paul Stewart celebrated a podium in their fifth race

PROST

Under Alain Prost's rule, the former Ligier team became a major threat

Words: Nigel Roebuck

After several previous attempts to acquire the Ligier team, Alain Prost finally succeeded at the beginning of 1997, and that was fine news for Grand Prix racing. Over time, Ligier had built up a sound, if unexciting, reputation for producing sanitary and reliable cars. Anyone closely involved, including Tom Walkinshaw and Frank Dernie, always stressed the quality of the engineers employed by the French outfit.

What Ligier lacked was a sense of direction, particularly when its choleric founder was at the tiller. A chauvinist even by Gallic standards, Guy Ligier perpetually compromised the company's potential with his erratic decisions, and never lost a deep mistrust of anything or anybody not from his own land.

"Trulli, even more than Fisichella, has everything necessary to become great"

Prost is different. Having spent eight years of his own Formula 1 career with English teams, where folk were employed only on the basis of ability, he understood that this was how things should be, and throughout his early negotiations with Guy Ligier a refusal to consider a French 'national' team was always a fundamental stumbling block.

Ultimately, Alain succeeded in buying the team, and the instant changes within it were startling. Watching the activity in the Prost pit at Imola, John Hogan of Philip Morris (Marlboro) suggested that this would be the next team to join the hierarchy in F1. 'Look at the little bloke,' he said. 'All business, all concentration, just like when he was driving. That team is buzzing.'

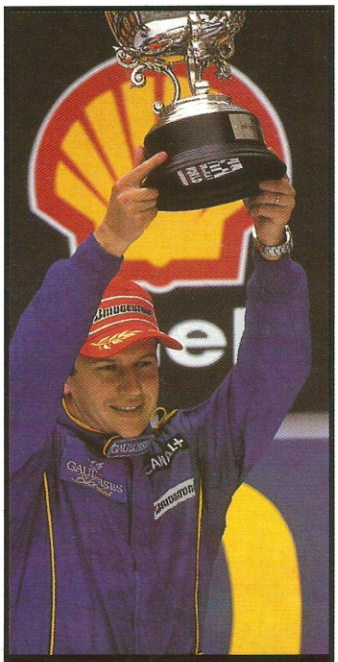
The revamped JS45, with its Mugen-Honda V10 and Bridgestone tyres, quickly emerged as a very competitive car. During winter tests, Olivier Panis had been consistently to the fore, setting times in the wet which frankly unnerved the Goodyear runners, and led to speculation that Bridgestone, even in its first season, might prove quantifiably superior.

On occasions, of course, Bridgestone did, and had it supported one of the major teams – or been rather less conservative – more than one victory would assuredly have come its way. As it was, although Prost, Stewart and Arrows all had their moments, none was able to score the breakthrough victory.

Had Panis not broken his legs in an awful accident at Montreal, he might have been the man. Only a fortnight before, admittedly on a day when Bridgestone's superior wear qualities were shown to advantage, he had finished a superb second to Jacques Villeneuve at Barcelona, and his confidence was growing with every race. It was particularly cruel that he should injure himself immediately before his home race at Magny-Cours, where Prost did the bulk of its testing, and expected to be right on the pace.

Olivier's sudden absence was a hammer blow to the team and its aspirations. Journeyman driver Shinji Nakano, although surprisingly quick on occasion (when he was on the track), had come with the engine deal, organised before Prost took over. Alain had understandably little enthusiasm for this, but attempts to replace the Japanese were vetoed by Mugen-Honda.

Alain was fortunate, however, in being able to sign Jarno Trulli, who had begun his maiden F1 season with Minardi after a very brief career in Formula 3. In Italian karting circles, many of those in the know believe that Trulli, even more than Giancarlo Fisichella, has everything necessary to become one of the great drivers.



Olivier Panis was mighty 'til injury

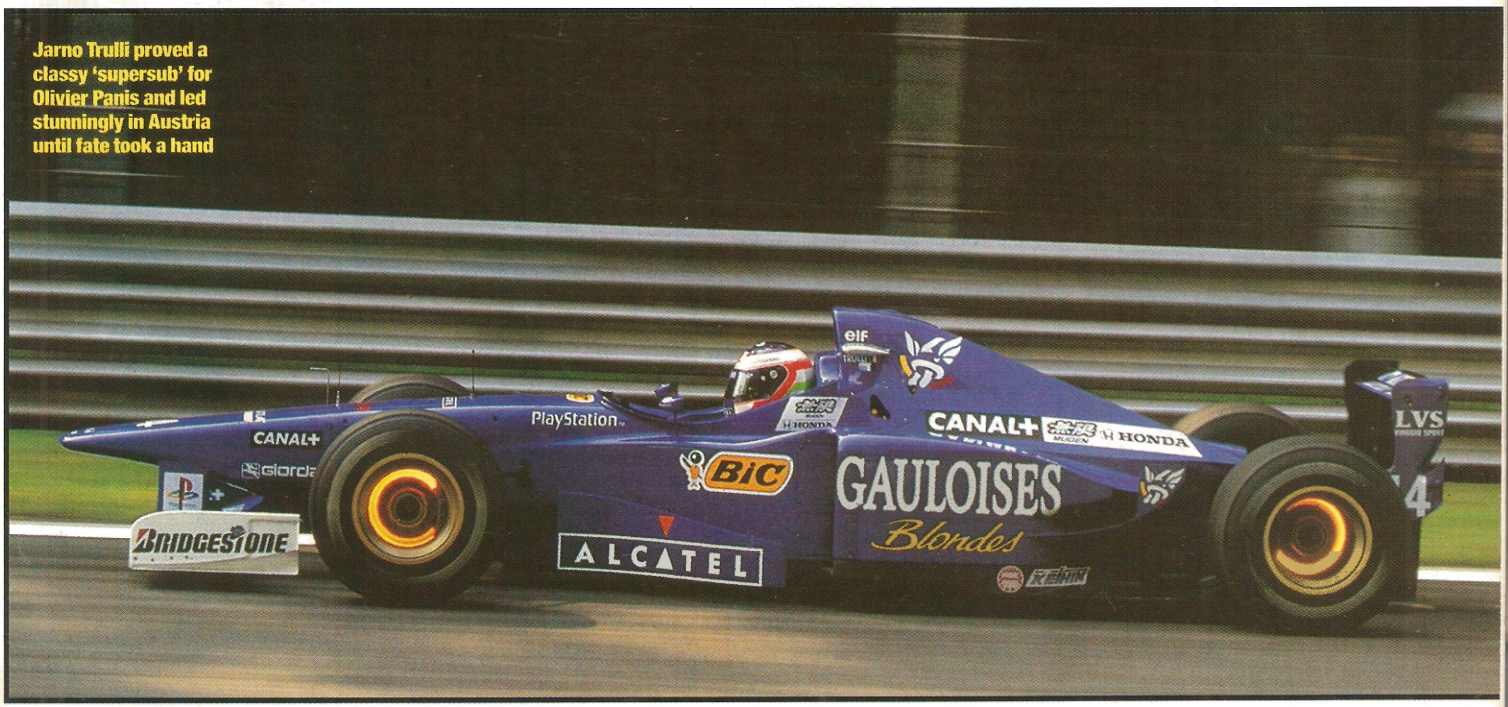
Trulli certainly began well enough, qualifying in the top 10 at Magny-Cours and Silverstone, then finishing fourth at Hockenheim, after getting the better of no less than Villeneuve in what was a long duel. Those three points were to be his lot for the season, but there should have been a bundle more in Austria, where Bridgestone was again to the fore, equipping four of the seven fastest qualifiers.

Trulli was sensational at Zeltweg, lining up third, and sure in his own mind that only a blown engine had kept him from the pole. At the end of the first lap, he was in the lead, and there he stayed, composed as you like, until half-distance, when he made his stop. At that point, Villeneuve took over the lead, but Jarno continued in second place until his engine came spectacularly unglued a dozen laps from the end.

A couple of minutes earlier, Nakano's motor had similarly lunched itself; this most untypical Mugen-Honda unreliability was traced to sub-standard piston quality in the latest C-spec engine.

Sadly for him, Trulli had no further opportunity to impress. The next weekend, at the Nurburgring, Panis made his return, driving as if he had never been away, immediately back in the points. Prost had hoped to continue running Jarno, but Japanese pressures kept Nakano in the car to the very end.

Now, Alain has Peugeot engines, and perhaps a freer hand. Panis and Trulli will indeed be his drivers in 1998 (all his attempts to sign Damon Hill having failed at the last franc), and much is expected. This is a team very much on the up. ■



Jarno Trulli proved a classy 'supersub' for Olivier Panis and led stunningly in Austria until fate took a hand

GIANT-KILLERS

SAUBER

Things started well for the Swiss team, but the going soon got tough

Going into the season's opening race, Sauber had little cause for optimism. Its new car, the C16, had been completed very late in the day, which allowed little time for testing. Thus, Johnny Herbert was agreeably surprised to qualify 17th in Melbourne. Although he and Jacques Villeneuve were turfed off the road by Eddie Irvine at the first corner (when Herbert was already up to fourth!), the other Sauber, driven by the returning Nicola Larini, ran reliably to sixth place, and a championship point.

From the start, the unobtrusive Herbert found the C16 good to drive, and he was delighted – after a year with Ford's new Zetec-R V10 – by the power and the reliability of a Ferrari V10, albeit the original type 046 engine, badged 'Petronas', following a somewhat convoluted deal with Maranello. 'It feels as if it's got 100hp more than the Ford,' Herbert said. 'I'm not kidding.'

The cars were less impressive in qualifying at Interlagos, but both finished the race, Herbert only just out of the points. In Buenos Aires, Johnny was fourth, immediately in front of Mika Hakkinen and Gerhard Berger. Clearly, Sauber was in more competitive shape than for some time.

Thereafter, things took a downward turn. Although Herbert continued to qualify in the top 10, he invariably failed to finish, and at Monaco was fortunate to come away unhurt from an enormous accident at Ste Devote.

Monaco was also to be Larini's last race with Sauber. Ferrari, for whom he had long served as a test driver, was instrumental in getting him into the team, but from the outset he had ideas above his station and resented the fact that he was considered number two to Herbert. There were good reasons for this – he isn't on Johnny's plane as a racing driver – but he wasn't to be appeased, and stomped off.

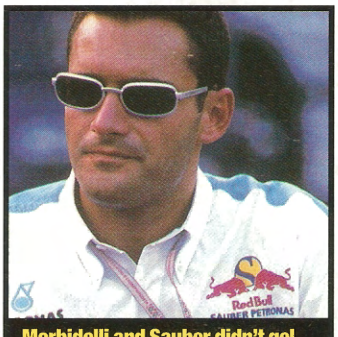
At this point, Sauber brought in Gianni Morbidelli, long regarded as a talent underrated by F1. Unfortunately, the partnership didn't gel, and after only two races with the team, the likeable Italian crashed during a Magny-Cours test, and badly broke his arm. Replaced during his recovery by the singularly unimpressive Norberto Fontana, Gianni later returned, but to little effect. It is unlikely he will be seen in a Grand Prix car again.

Although Herbert essentially liked the characteristics of the C16, it proved stubbornly resistant to development, its behaviour relatively unaffected by quite major aerodynamic changes during the season. Having qualified in the top 10 at four of the first five races, Johnny made it there only once more: ninth at Silverstone. A strong and consistent run in Hungary, though, gave him third place. That was to be the team's best.

Sauber has completed five seasons of F1 now, and should be progressing rather faster. Its resources are substantial and Leo Ress is clearly a competent designer. Whether the presence of Jean Alesi alongside Herbert next season will lead to a harder-edged challenge remains to be seen. ■



Johnny Herbert was Sauber's indisputable number one



Morbidelli and Sauber didn't gel

"Although Herbert liked the C16, it proved subbornly resistant to development"

TYRRELL

Tyrrell paid the price for restricted funds – and engine power – in '97

The Tyrrell team had a pretty miserable time of it in 1997, and there's no point in pretending otherwise. It was always going to be so, given that money, as ever, was extremely tight, and that a V8 'customer' engine – even one with the pedigree of Ford's Zetec-R - was going to mean pain whenever the track was straight.

Mika Salo, in his third year with Tyrrell, was delighted to be free of the Yamaha reliability problems which had blighted his '96 season. He was joined in the team by Jos Verstappen, once ultra-fashionable as a future star (remember all that stuff Flavio Briatore came out with, when signing Jos as the

& GRID-FILLERS



Photos: LAT

Benetton test driver?), but now curiously overlooked.

Salo, with good reason, has long been highly reckoned in the paddock. Indeed, he has frequently been linked with Ferrari. While he had slightly the better of Verstappen in 1997 (out-qualifying him 10-7), usually there was precious little between them, and it is sad that, while Mika leaves for Tom Walkinshaw's Arrows team, Jos should be fighting to find a drive for 1998.

Tyrrell scored points only once in 1997, and if they predictably came on the streets of Monte Carlo, where the power shortage was less costly than usual, they were scored in a most unusual fashion. On a wet day, the race was called at the two-hour mark, after only 62 of the scheduled 78 laps. This allowed Salo to achieve what was believed impossible in the 'refuelling' era – to run a Grand Prix non-stop.

Mika finished fifth, having qualified a very fine 14th. It was a grid position also achieved by his team mate in Montreal, where both of the drivers memorably scrapped with Barrichello's Stewart-Ford in the early stages of the race. It didn't last too long – indeed neither of the Tyrrells finished – but the battle was of an intensity not often seen in F1 these days, and served to remind us of the talent and the competitiveness of Salo and Verstappen.

For 1998, Ken's team, like Minardi, will have the use of the Ford V10 engine, albeit, unfortunately, not the very latest motor (which goes to Stewart alone), but one 'two steps' behind, complete with those chain-driven camshafts…

It will also be the last season for the Tyrrell Racing organisation. The company has been sold to the new British American Racing operation, which will thus have instant FOCA membership and the benefits that ensue. Sad, in my book, but understandable, and perhaps inevitable. ■



Tyrrell spent most of this season fighting it out in back-marker tussles

MINARDI

Preparation problems and a driver shake-up hit the Faenza team

On paper, at least, Minardi prospects for 1997 were better than for a long time. The team's finances, while minuscule by comparison with virtually anyone else's, were in rather better shape than before, Giancarlo Minardi having sold around three-quarters of the company's shares to a business consortium headed by Fondmetal's Gabriele Rumi.

The team had new V8 engines from Brian Hart, as well. These replaced the somewhat desultory Cosworth ED 'customer' motors of the year before. Ukyo Katayama joined from Tyrrell, and the immensely promising, albeit drastically under-experienced Jarno Trulli was signed for the other car.

Unfortunately, Minardi's reputation for producing a neat and wieldy chassis rather hit the sleepers this season, perhaps because the car was produced in a rush, the team not knowing the identity of its engine supplier until the conclusion of the previous season. The 197 was a terminal understeerer from the start, and resolutely resisted all attempts to change it.

It didn't help that Minardi insisted on using Magneti Marelli electronics on the ultra-light Hart engine, where Brian's preferred choice was TAG. This led to endless problems. Then, at midseason, a batch of substandard con rods was responsible for a spate of engine failures.

After Panis's accident in Montreal, Minardi lost the services of Trulli, who took over the Prost drive, and with some distinction. Minardi was pleased for him, of course, as it was for Giancarlo Fisichella, another who had passed through the team *en route* to the big time, but also necessarily a little sad. The competent Tarso Marques, briefly a Minardi driver in 1996, returned for the rest of the season.

Therefore, it was to the back rows of the grid that you automatically looked for the Minardis again this year, Katayama's 15th at Melbourne being the team's best qualifying performance. Ukyo, always very popular in the paddock, announced his retirement at Suzuka, and – as usual – provided one of the quotes of the season, after setting eighth fastest time in the race morning warm-up at the Hungaroring. 'To be honest,' he said, 'I don't know quite how it happened…' ■

"Minardi's reputation for producing a neat and wieldy chassis rather hit the sleepers"



Katayama was a popular figure



Minardi's Ukyo Katayama suffered more than a few hairy moments in 1997



In a season of evolution, rather than revolution, Tyrrell's X-wing 025 was the most striking design

Evolution of the

Cautious development was the approach of most teams for the1997 season. By Giorgio Piola

Although they rarely raced head-to-head, the titanic duel between Jacques Villeneuve's Williams and the Ferrari of Michael Schumacher brought life to the 1997 season. This was at odds with most pre-season predictions, which unequivocally had the Oxfordshire-based team as favourite. After some spectacular testing times, a repeat of 1996 seemed on the cards, with Villeneuve inheriting the title from former team mate Damon Hill.

Yet Ferrari's miraculous renaissance and Williams's poor wet-weather form in Monaco and Spa meant that the destination of the title was in doubt up to the very last round. A doubt which was finally allayed in a gravel trap.

Leaving aside the controversy surrounding that final race, the two teams emerged head and shoulders above the others on a purely technical level. The dramatic changes in the championship lead were brought about not just by the efforts of the drivers, but by the work of their respective teams' technical offices.

A key event was the defection from Williams of Adrian Newey to McLaren on August 1. Newey's former right-hand man at McLaren, Egbhal Hamedy, had set the trend by upping sticks to Stewart Grand Prix at the end of last year. Completing the major personnel changes, we saw the departure of John Barnard and Rory Byrne from the Ferrari design team.

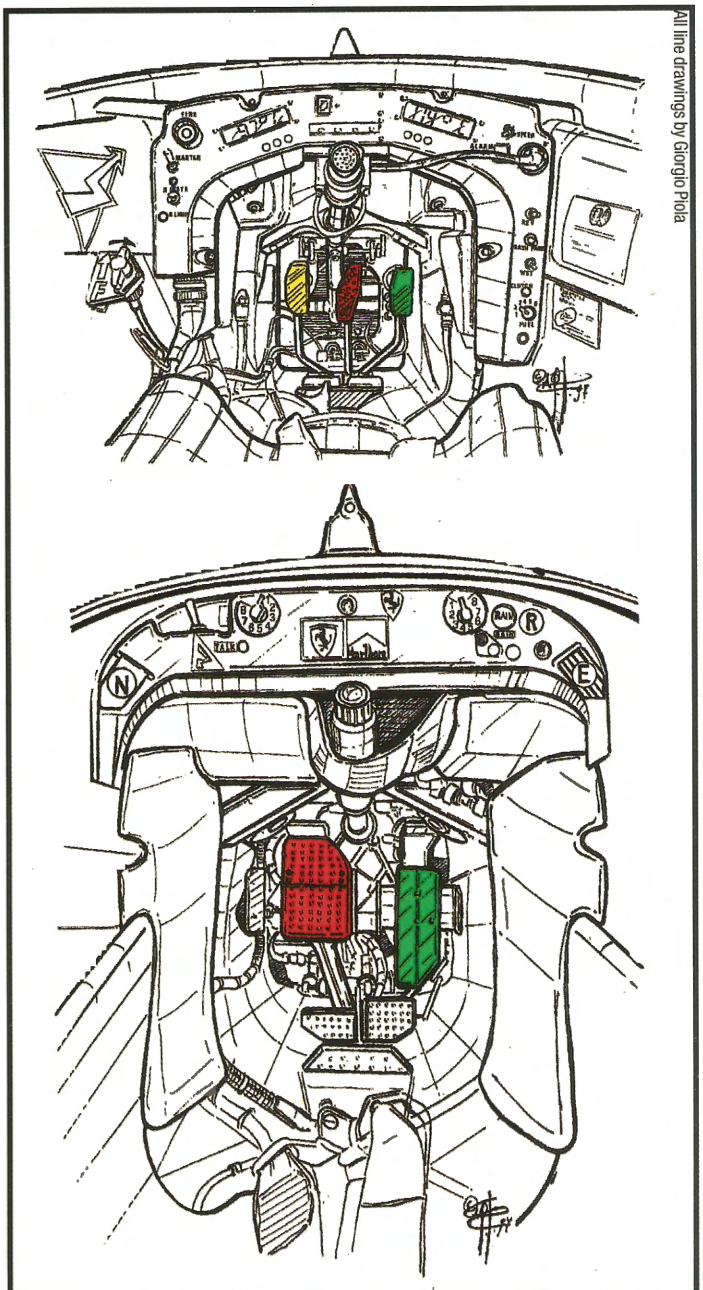
Yet it was Ferrari's chief rival, Williams, which seemed to struggle more throughout the season, despite its eventual clean sweep of constructors' and drivers' titles. Save for a few occasions, the FW19 did not demonstrate the clear-cut superiority to the rest of the field which characterised its predecessors. Above all, it seemed not to receive the same level of ongoing development during the season. The major change was for the Austrian Grand Prix, which saw the introduction of the long wheelbase version (See drawing on page 61).

From a set-up point of view, driver input is crucial and the relative inexperience of Williams's driver pairing undoubtedly contributed to the team's occasional misfortunes. By contrast, Ferrari benefited from Schumacher's



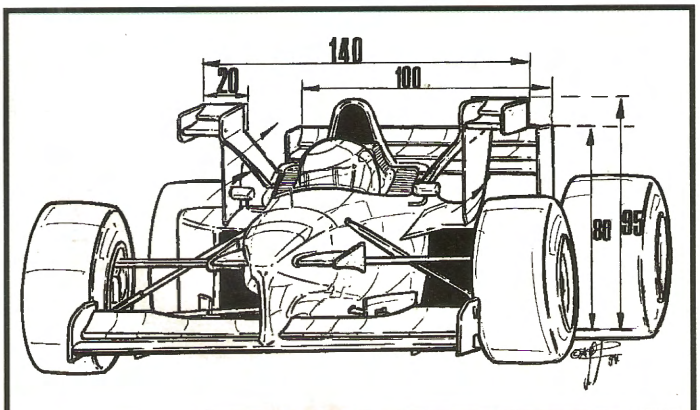
Martyn Eford/LAT

species



All line drawings by Giorgio Piola

A comparison between Damon Hill's Arrows (top) and Michael Schumacher's Ferrari (above) pedal layouts. Hill uses a three pedal configuration (clutch-yellow, brake-red, throttle-green). Schumacher uses only a two pedal configuration with the clutch on the steering wheel. However, Hill also has a clutch on his steering wheel in addition to the foot pedal.



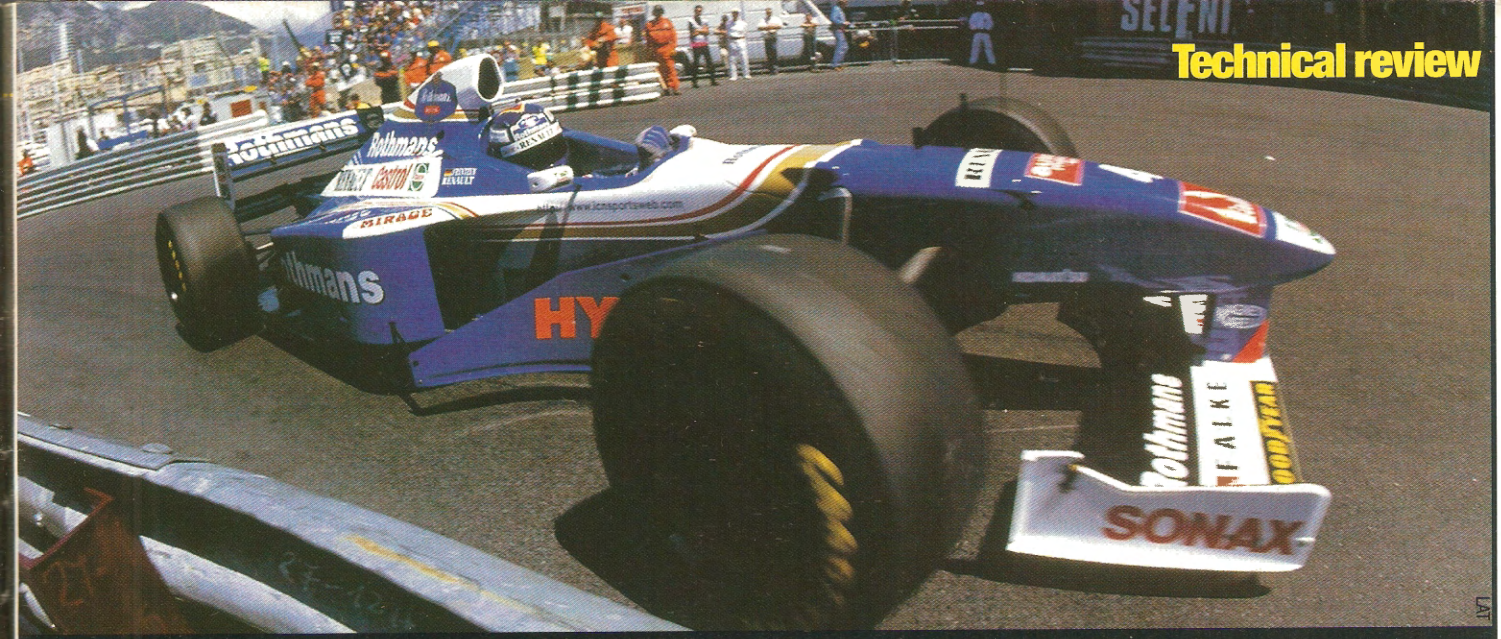
This year's Tyrrell 025 (above and main picture) used high winglets mounted on the side pods to achieve maximum downforce on slow circuits

renowned set-up and communication skills.

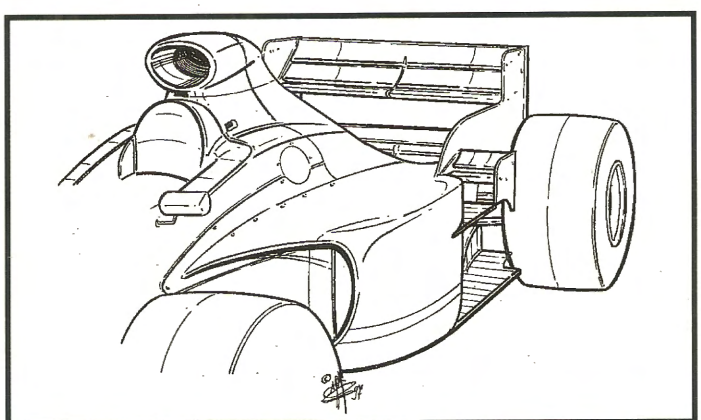
The 1997 season also showed a great deal of promise from resurgent teams, which could well threaten the Ferrari and Williams monopoly next year. Most likely is McLaren, with three victories to its credit in 1997. The arrival of Newey and the notable improvement of Mario Illien's Mercedes V10 engine have served notice of McLaren's intentions in 1998. To this must be added the fact that the Woking team will maximise every opportunity to gain any advantage from its new Bridgestone tyres (even if slightly more had been expected from the Japanese tyre giant in its debut season of Formula 1).

Progress was also made by Jordan and Prost, two constructors whose destinies have crossed. Next year they swap power plants; the Peugeot V10 going to Prost in exchange for the Mugen Honda which the team currently uses. Looking at the comparative performance of the two engines thus far, it would seem Prost has the better deal, given the worrying fragility of the Japanese unit in the latter half of the season.

In general, there were few technical innovations this year, with the exception of many improvements made to the critical area around the airbox and cockpit. Two teams have been at the ▶



The Williams FW19 had an oval airbox, designed to split the airflow behind the driver's helmet. This solution was also adopted by Jordan (see line drawing below)



This was Jordan's version of the oval air intake. The roll hoop is situated very far back in the structure, allowing the bodywork in front of it (i.e. the air intake) to be modified without the requirement for another FIA crash test.

◀ forefront: Jordan and Williams. Both used an oval air intake (see drawing above), which was designed to separate the inlet from the airflow behind the driver's helmet. This was an idea immediately copied by Arrows, Sauber and Ferrari, in that order. In all cases, the roll-hoop was originally designed in a similar way to that of the 1996 Jordan, with the initial part being purely bodywork, so that the whole thing could be modified without having to undergo another crash test.

The most visible innovation of the year was introduced by Tyrrell, which mounted small wings of fixed dimensions on stilts by the sides of the cockpit (see drawing page 59). Used primarily on slow circuits, these high-mounted aerodynamic aids were not a repeat of Tyrrell's design triumph of Monaco 1994, when its winglets in front of the rear tyres were widely copied. In fact, no other team adopted the high wing solution, which perhaps signifies that they were more of an extravagance than a genuine aerodynamic solution.

Electronic driver aids were back with a vengeance after their banishment in 1994. In particular, a concession was made at Silverstone by the FIA which allowed the use of engine revs as a parameter in the control of an engine's fly-by-wire throttle. The objective behind this was to achieve the smoothest possible torque curve, so that the throttle could be programmed to feather to smooth out glitches, but not (so the theory went) to respond to wheelspin by reducing the revs. The effect of this was to put into place a form of electronic traction control. Added to this were the most sophisticated electronic differential control systems seen so far in Grand Prix racing.

Ferrari, Jordan, Benetton and McLaren all introduced electronic brake balance control systems, which proved very effective. It was certainly a major advantage that Ferrari held over Williams, which was forced to claw back the ground lost to Maranello earlier in the season. Being driver-operated rather than automatic, these systems fell within the FIA regulations.

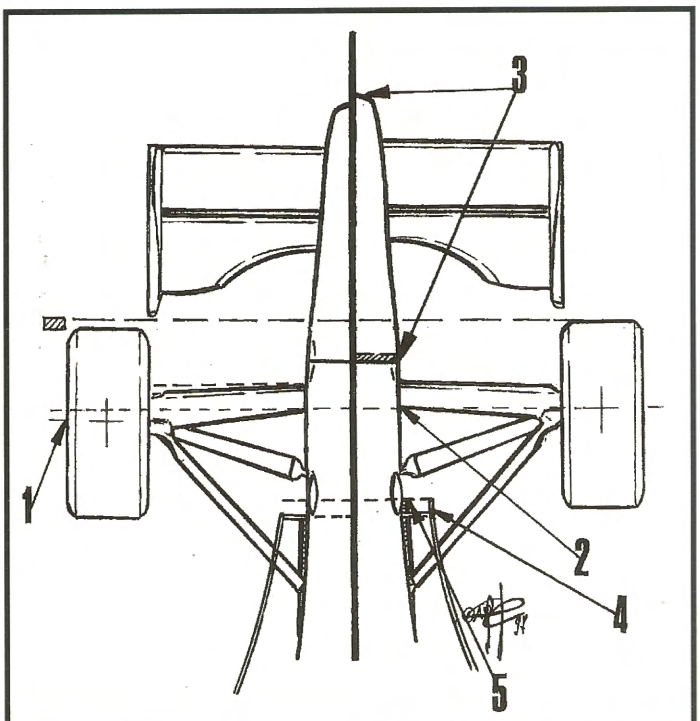
Ferrari worked on a lightweight chassis, which was brought to Hungary, but made its race debut in Spa. The weight loss was achieved by using a different technique in applying the layers of carbon fibre, which allowed the driver's seat to be moved forwards and a larger fuel cell to be fitted, increasing capacity by six litres.

Despite the advent of the rear-end crash test and collapsible steering column, the issue of safety this year was dominated by Olivier Panis's crash in Canada. His Prost broke in two at the level of his knees. The irony is that the FIA had already announced its intentions to stiffen this area for 1998.

The level of technology in 1997 improved greatly for teams like Arrows, which was able to dominate in Hungary with Damon Hill, thanks to a circuit which suited Bridgestone tyres and the technical input of John Barnard.

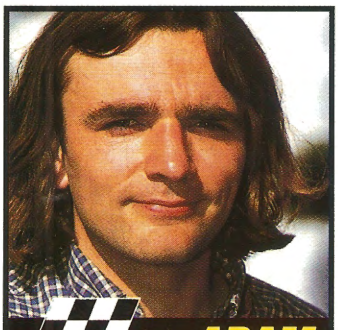
Of the newcomers on the grid, Lola failed to qualify for its one and only GP in Australia, then pulled out for good; Prost followed on logically from its Ligier forerunner in terms of design, but Stewart started from scratch and did an excellent job.

Stewart's SF-1, designed by a team under Alan Jenkins, was one of the most interesting cars on the grid this year. It was extremely well sorted aerodynamically, incorporating some unique solutions. It was the only car other than the Williams not to have winglets in front of the rear tyres. From a technical point of view Stewart was very impressive. Despite being a relatively small team, it had the approach and organisation of a much larger one, and a technical staff that any of the 'cutting edge' teams would be envious of. ■



The major change for Williams was a slight increase in wheelbase to move more of the weight towards the back and improve the handling. Starting in Austria, Williams moved the front wheels forwards by 50mm (1). To comply with FIA regulations, the nose was lengthened by the same amount (3). In Japan, the barge boards (4) and underbody (5) were also lengthened by 50mm

Those magic moments



ADAM COOPER

It seems like we've only just left Jerez, when in fact the World Championship finale was nearly two months ago. Another season is fast approaching, and the scary thing is that we are already nearer to the start of practice in Melbourne than we are to the Luxembourg Grand Prix, the third last race of this year.

One day we'll look back at '97 with fond memories. You've read elsewhere of the numbers of drivers and teams who took victories, podiums and poles, but that's just the statistical proof of what entertaining racing we had. Okay, there was little overtaking, but at least we didn't get on the plane at Heathrow knowing so-and-so was going to dominate the weekend. The tyre war and a general rise in standards contributed to an unpredictable season. And that battle for the title, with its spectacular resolution, was pretty special.

We had 52 days of official action (do the sums and don't forget the extra Thursday practice in Austria!), but inevitably memories are already fading fast. For me what's left is a combination of TV images and things I saw first hand on those occasions when I ventured from the press room to watch the action up close. So before we get stuck into grooved tyres and all the hoopla of the coming season, how about a few personal snapshots of '97?

Melbourne: The first corner, and witnessing Irvine tangle with Herbert and Villeneuve. I knew that this time it was going to be hard to defend him.

Interlagos: Asking a leading Prost guy on the grid if Panis could get away with one stop. 'Easily,' he said. Everyone else seemed surprised when he motored round to third place.

Buenos Aires: The relief when I realised that the only Ferrari still moving at the first corner had an orange helmet aboard. And Schumacher Sr jogging past me on his way back from the wreckage. Marshals had wrongly shown a red flag, he thought there was going to be a restart, and hadn't registered that the safety car was out.

Imola: Joining the all-German celebrations in the Rothmans motorhome after Frenzten had taken his maiden GP win. I could never imagine Michael throwing the same sort of party, or attracting so many of his happy countryman from up and down the paddock.

Monaco: Standing in the pouring rain at the Swimming Pool just before the start, knowing that this was going to be something to relish. Then the Williams guys shuffled past on slicks. The biggest cock-up of the year.

Barcelona: Lap times and gaps seesawing like mad as most folk hit tyre problems to baffle even the most clued-up team engineers.

Montreal: The first corner and sadly another wasted day for my mate Irvine.

Magny-Cours: The late (but not too late) arrival of the rain to stir up the action again. Bernie should arrange it more often! And never-say-die Villeneuve's spectacular, if fruitless, attempt to pass Irvine on the last corner.

Silverstone: Watching qualifying though a little hole in the bridge across the pit straight. Strange, yes, but the view of the cars flicking into Copse was unbeatable. I still couldn't tell the classicists from the front-end guys, but I guess not many people can.

Hockenheim: The unbeatable atmosphere of the stadium section. The reaction when Berger and taxi driver Schumacher tooled round on their slowing down laps was awesome. Forget about Mansell mania.

Hungaroring: Nakano trying to pass Michael! No, of course it has to be that gobsmacking moment when Damon finally slowed about 50 laps later than we expected him to. And then reminding Jackie Oliver that it was exactly 20 years since he was last involved in a team's maiden GP victory.

Spa: Sitting on the barrier before the start talking to Magnussen when *El Nino* dumped on the Ardennes. Luckily Jan had an umbrella, but I was kicked off the grid and had to fend for myself. The subsequent soaking was once again compensated by the certain knowledge that we were set for another special afternoon. Thanks, Michael.

Monza: The absurd sight of the circus which followed Sylvester Stallone around the paddock. Expect a full year of it when he makes his film in 1999! And the realisation early in the race that the drivers could do nothing but run around in each other's slipstream. On paper, it was one of the closest top six finishes in GP history, but with no rain or tyre blistering to spice things up, the reality was unusually dull.

A1-Ring: Watching Formula 1 cars in action against an incongruous bucolic backdrop which included broken down barns and a herd of disinterested cattle. And seeing Trulli dive down the inside of Villeneuve at the first corner and then pull away in the lead after Hakkinen retired. This was a man of the future making his mark.

Nurburgring: Standing on the inside of the first corner and watching Ralf take his brother off. The stunned silence from the grandstands was unnerving, and neutrals could share the feeling of disappointment. It seemed certain that this had robbed us of a battle to the wire.

Suzuka: Those crazy early laps when a relaxed Villeneuve had the entire field stacked up behind him – except for Irvine, who was scooting away as if he had a turbo engine, traction control and full ground effect.

Jerez: Standing at the chicane during qualifying and seeing Michael at full tilt – with the marshals inexplicably showing only stationary yellows for brother Ralf's spun Jordan. The tension on race day was something else, and it lasted until Jacques finally made it across the line. And Sunday night was pretty good too; Michael looked at home in the blonde wig I gave him. That was some party. ■

LAT



Film star and F1 fan Sly Stallone's appearance at Monza attracted almost as much attention as the Grand Prix itself

> "The reaction of the stadium section... was awesome. Forget about Mansell mania"

F1. F. Hot

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