

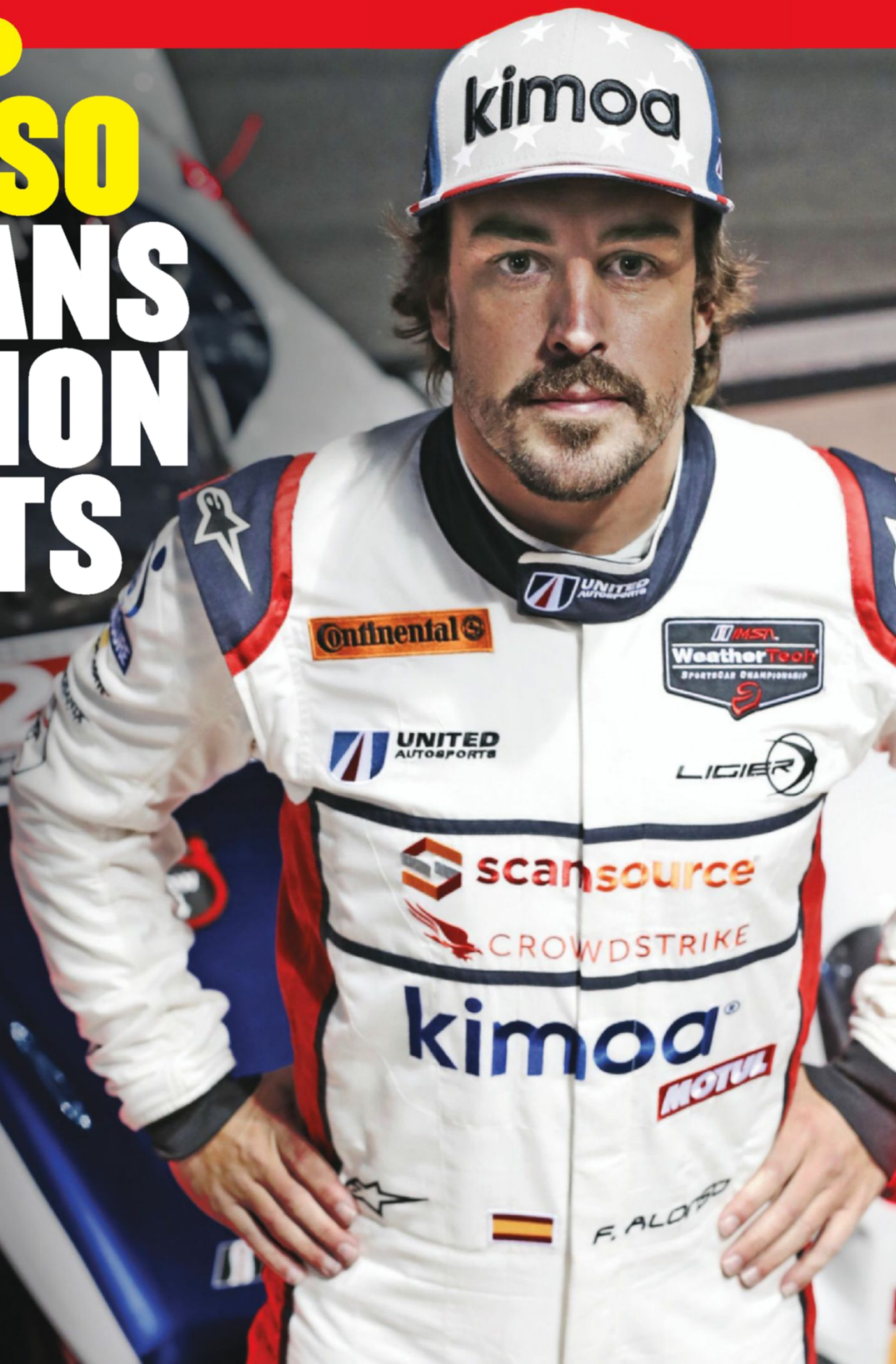
WRC PREVIEW RALLYING'S GREATEST CHALLENGE

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EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

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Alonso talks about his newest challenge

FERNANDO ALONSO'S INDIANAPOLIS 500 ATTACK

was one of the motorsport highlights of 2017. Now he has turned his attention to endurance racing, with the ultimate aim of winning the Le Mans 24 Hours.

Exactly when the double Formula 1 world champion will take on the French Classic is not yet known, but he'll make his first step this weekend at the Daytona 24 Hours. In our cover piece, Edd Straw speaks to Alonso – and the drivers and team members working with him – to see how the Spaniard is finding this latest challenge.

Predictably, Alonso has already worked out the key areas that need to be honed to do the best job in sportscar racing, including helping his co-drivers get the most out of the machinery. The United Autosports Ligier may not be quite quick enough on raw pace, but it would not be a surprise to see Alonso, Lando Norris and Phil Hanson securing a good result. Whatever happens, it should be useful experience for Alonso if and when he commits to Le Mans.

While Alonso is getting his season under way, the World Rally Championship contenders will also be in the midst of their first battle of 2018. In our preview, we look at the secrets of winning the Monte Carlo Rally, assess the leading runners and riders, and talk to Kris Meeke and Elfyn Evans about their troubled journeys as they attempt to knock five-time champion Sebastien Ogier off his perch.



KEVIN TURNER EDITOR

kevin.turner@autosport.com

@KRT917



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Jakob Ebrey

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






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FORMULA 2

Russell joins the British

HALF OF THE FORMULA 2 GRID FOR THIS season is yet to be revealed, but the calibre of the drivers unveiled so far points to an exciting and multi-layered 2018 contest.

Prema Racing – the dominant force in GP2/F2 for the past two seasons – and returnee Carlin had already respectively announced line-ups of Nyck de Vries and Sean Gelael, and Formula 3 European champion Lando Norris and Sergio Sette Camara. And now junior single-seater powerhouse ART Grand Prix has unveiled a tantalising all-rookie pairing, with 2017 GP3 champion and Mercedes Formula 1 junior George Russell confirmed as team-mate to Jack Aitken.

“It was a natural step for me and it made complete sense to continue with ART,” said Russell (above). “Obviously this season there’s going to be a new car, so no-one really knows who is going to be the best, let’s say, as everything is going to be a bit different.”

Since the series’ inception in 2005 – and particularly after the high-degradation Pirelli tyres were introduced in ’11 – the performances of rookie drivers have always been a fascinating subplot on the final step on the ladder to F1.

In Russell, Aitken, Norris and Nirei Fukuzumi – who will race for Arden International alongside a part-campaign in Super Formula –

F2 will have at least four of the most exciting up-and-coming drivers finding their feet in the series in 2018. Charles Leclerc somewhat rewrote the script for rookies at the second-tier level by charging to the ’17 crown with Prema, but even if they are not in the title hunt – and nothing at this stage suggests they won’t be – the development and results of this pack will make for a fascinating background story this year.

As Russell alluded, their progress is also rather tied to another story to keep an eye on: the

performance of the all-new haloed F2 2018 car. The teams have begun taking delivery of their V6, 3.4-litre turbocharged machines and, while an F1-style car change raises hopes about levelling the playing field, Russell doesn’t think it’s quite so clear-cut.

“Because the testing time we get in all categories across motorsport isn’t enormous, we have limited data,” he explained. “You might rock up to the first test and one team might have X set-up, we might have Y set-up and the guy with X just seems to work better than the guy with Y. So, you may see the usual top teams fighting for victories or you might get an outsider come in because they’ve just got it right. It’s going to be really tough – it’s going to take at least two or three races before things start settling down and people start optimising their set-ups.”

“I’m not here for a Lando-v-George battle or whatever”



PORTLOCK/LAT

LAT IMAGES

'super-rookies' in F2

Speaking at the McLaren Technology Centre last week, Norris played down expectations ahead of his rookie F2 campaign. "Especially in the beginning I think it's going to be quite tough," he said. "But, just like last year where we definitely came on much stronger in the middle of the year, that's the aim again." But with Russell and Aitken – "It'll be a chance for me to get one back over George," says Aitken – also stepping up, a fascinating British battle is brewing.

But, sensibly, Russell is not focused on Norris, or any other driver for that matter: "He's a rookie like myself, he's on an F1 programme too, but I'm here to prove myself to Mercedes and to show that I deserve a seat in F1 in the near future. I'm not here to prove myself to the British media or public, let's say, in a Lando-versus-George battle or whatever."

A further strand to watch in 2018 will be how ART gets to grips with its new machinery. As Russell points out, the team has gone through three varieties of GP3 car, and has claimed seven out of the eight teams' titles at that level. But it is without a GP2/F2 championship since '15, when it ran Stoffel Vandoorne to the drivers' crown. With several teams possibly in the mix this year, Russell and Aitken must work together – after a sometimes tricky relationship in GP3 – to help boost ART up from the fourth position in the teams' standings it secured in '16 and '17.

"Although there were never any hard feelings in GP3, it was kind of like every man for himself,"

says Russell. "Whereas we know this year in F2, we're going to have to work together to optimise our chances. Between us we understand that and we were working in that way in Abu Dhabi for the [post-2017 season] F2 test – very differently compared to how we were working together in GP3. I think it's going to be positive."

Hughes and Hubert in GP3 line-up

In what is likely to be the final season of the GP3 Series before it is replaced by a single-spec International F3 series in 2019, ART will once again field a mighty line-up. Alongside the already announced Ferrari junior Callum Iltott and Force India F1 development driver Nikita Mazepin will be Jake Hughes and Anthoine Hubert.

Hughes returns to GP3 – where he won two races for DAMS in 2016 – after finishing fifth in Euro F3 last season with one win and two poles. "[ART's] performances in the series, over the last few years especially, have been extremely impressive," said Hughes. "So, when the opportunity came about to be able to jump in one of their cars for '18, it was impossible to say no."

Frenchman Hubert, the 2016 European F3 race winner who finished fourth in the 2017 GP3 standings, returns for another year at ART and has his eyes fixed on the prize: "This year, my goal will be to win the championship."

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

IN THE HEADLINES

F1 LAUNCH DATES ARE SET

Formula 1 big guns Mercedes and Ferrari joined the hotly anticipated launch-date-announcement season by confirming that their 2018 contenders will be revealed on the same date: February 22, with Merc taking the wraps off its W09 at Silverstone. McLaren will unveil its car on February 23, with Toro Rosso on February 25.

MOSS RETIRES FROM PUBLIC LIFE

Sir Stirling Moss has retired from public life, aged 88, following his serious illness at the end of 2016. Severe infections struck Sir Stirling, who has since been making a "slow and arduous recovery".

WHITMARSH BACK IN F1 WITH FIA

Ex-McLaren team boss Martin Whitmarsh is to return to F1 in a temporary consultancy role with the FIA. Whitmarsh will work with the governing body to attempt to introduce cost-control rules. He is already a member of Formula E's Global Advisory Board, which is chaired by Alain Prost.

SAINZ TO DRIVE MONTE STAGE

Renault F1 star Carlos Sainz Jr is to drive the Renault Megane RS course car on the final stage of this week's Monte Carlo Rally. Sainz, whose father Carlos Sr won the rally three times, told Autosport: "It's too early in my career to go for a rally [in competition], but in the future I will do something for a hobby."

SCHUMACHER MAKES F4 DEBUT

David Schumacher, the son of Ralf, nephew of Michael and cousin of Formula 3 racer Mick, made his car-racing debut last weekend in the United Arab Emirates Formula 4 Championship at Yas Marina. Schumacher scored three seconds and a third, while Briton Olli Caldwell won twice. Another famous name racing in F4 this season will be Charles Leclerc's younger brother Arthur, who has signed up for the French series.

PATRICK GRABS DAYTONA 500 SEAT

NASCAR Cup racer Danica Patrick has secured a ride for next month's Daytona 500 in the #7 Premium Motorsports Chevrolet. Patrick is also seeking a drive in the Indianapolis 500 to complete her farewell tour before retirement.

CARLIN INDYCAR HITS THE TRACK

Top British team Carlin's IndyCar project hit the track on Monday, with Charlie Kimball and Max Chilton (below) completing 90 laps of the Homestead 'roval' with the team's first Dallara-Chevrolet at the start of a two-day shakedown test. A second car is set to be completed in time for next month's open test at Phoenix.





BRITISH TOURING CAR CHAMPIONSHIP

SHEDDEN SHOCK:
BTCC STAR TIPPED
FOR WORLD ATTACK

THREE-TIME BRITISH Touring Car champion Gordon Shedden has left the Team Dynamics Honda squad and is tipped to race on the world stage instead.

Scotsman Shedden spent 11 of his 12 top-flight seasons in the BTCC with Dynamics, which is operated and run by team-mate Matt Neal and technical director Barry Plowman. Although Shedden's 2018 plans have yet to be revealed, he has been linked with a drive in the World Touring Car Cup, which will run to TCR regulations this term.

Shedden took part in the final round of the TCR International Series last season in Dubai when he was drafted into the WRT team to assist Jean-Karl Vernay (above, with Shedden) in his quest for the title. Shedden qualified on pole and finished second in the first race.

Shedden, who is fourth on the BTCC all-time-winners list with 48 victories, said: "[It is] really difficult and emotional for me. I will not be racing with Honda and Team Dynamics. They have been part of my life for the last 11 years and I have been made to feel a part of the family."

A statement from Dynamics said that a Shedden replacement will be announced "in due course", but its options are limited with most of the leading

BTCC drivers having already firmed up deals.

Neal said: "We're 95% of the way there with another driver, and it will be announced within a few days. We did consider creating another [Flash] Gordon by bringing a driver up and educating them, but also we got our backsides kicked in the BTCC manufacturers'/constructors and teams championships last year. We also need to consider that we need to have someone who can 'plug in and play', if you like. We need success. It will be hard to replace Gordon, but we have options."

Earlier this week, reigning Independents champion Tom Ingram confirmed that he will remain with Speedworks Motorsport to drive a Toyota Avensis. Power Maxed Racing has also completed its BTCC line-up by announcing that reigning Jack Sears Trophy holder Senna Proctor, who won the rookie class in 15 out of 30 races in 2017, will remain for a second season with the Vauxhall-backed team.

Although Shedden's WTCR move is unconfirmed, the series has had its first drivers announced. Aurelien Panis has joined Audi team Comtoyou Racing, and will partner Denis Dupont, a protege of the Belgian federation.

MATT JAMES

FORMULA 1

Weight boost
for tall F1 aces

The Strategy Group's move to help heavier racers should be applauded, but does it go far enough?

The Formula 1 Strategy Group has at last come up with a sensible solution to the problem of a driver's weight with a ballasted minimum weight of 80kg, intended for introduction in the 2019 season.

This is something I have been advocating for years because it isn't correct for someone who would healthily weigh 75kg to go on a diet just because the car is overweight.

In the 1980s and '90s, the weight of the driver was not part of the overall car weight and there were no minimum cockpit-length dimensions, so small-and-light drivers were the order of the day. But while that all changed, and for the better, there is still more that needs to be done to help bigger drivers.

If the planned changes are brought in for 2019, then I hope the rules take into account all the factors related to the driver fitment and weight. The cockpit length is still a little too short for drivers of the size of Nico Hulkenberg. And, because normally the taller you are the heavier you are, a small increase of, say, 5cm would make a big difference to how a tall driver sits in the car.

If they're going to use a driver weight of 80kg, then if you have a 65kg driver you will need 15kg of ballast. If that can be mounted low down (below the seat) then there is still an advantage for the small, light driver as this will lower the centre of gravity. Instead, this ballast should be mounted on the seat-back bulkhead and spread out over a certain area that is relative to the centre of gravity of the driver. That way, smaller and lighter drivers will not get any advantage.

If the minimum cockpit dimensions for seat-back to front bulkhead were increased by this 5cm, this could be checked before fitting any driver ballast. The fact that lighter drivers are normally shorter means that the seat-back-to-seat-bulkhead gap will increase, meaning there will be room for the extra ballast.

The new ruling would mean the overall car/driver weight rises a further 6kg to 740kg, meaning that the car without driver would weigh 660kg. Driver weight became a major issue in the pre-2014 V8-engine era, when cars were right on the limit and heavier drivers were encouraged to slim down by teams, leading to fears about their health. Cars became heavier last year with the new wider track and bigger wheels and tyres, so the car/driver limit was raised from 702kg to 728kg. For 2018 it has been further increased to 734kg, to allow for the introduction of the halo. But teams have found that the halo and its mountings can weigh up to 15kg, and in some cases that will take away any leeway they previously had to run ballast, and potentially put the cars of heavier drivers over the limit.

GARY ANDERSON AND ADAM COOPER



A driver ballast pocket would fit in a recess behind the seat



ANDROS TROPHY The French Andros Trophy has revealed the four-wheel-drive electric car that will form the basis of the headline category in 2020. The twin-motor ANDROS Sport 01 has the equivalent of 340bhp, comparable to the current naturally aspirated V6 machines in the Elite Pro class. Formula E racer Nicolas Prost will debut the new car, which has four-wheel steering, at the penultimate round at Lans en Vercors this weekend against conventional racers. Organisers plan to run a mixed class next winter, before it becomes solely electric the following season. “The potential of this car is enormous, the acceleration when it starts is comparable to the combustion cars in third or fourth gear,” said Prost. “I can already say that without doubt it will compete with and exceed [internal-combustion cars] very quickly.” **Story: Hal Ridge. Photos: B Bade**

FORMULAE

HWA could go it alone without Mercedes

THE FORMULA E GRID IS SET TO expand to 11 teams next season, even before Porsche and Mercedes join in 2019.

Factory entries from the two German giants are already confirmed for the 2019-20 season, but Mercedes specialist HWA has now been tipped to cement a deal to use Venturi powertrains in the 2018-19 campaign, a logical move given its current engineering tie-up with the team.

HWA has been linked to FE ever since Mercedes signed its first option to join the electric category, and had been expected to join next season to learn the ropes ahead of the Silver Arrows' entry.

FE is not allowed more than 24 cars on the grid, so if it grows to 11 teams next season then one will need to disappear to make room for Mercedes and Porsche. HWA's absorption by Mercedes would easily take care of the numbers problem, but sources have indicated that Mercedes may wish to operate the FE team itself instead. This would raise the prospect of HWA competing separately to Mercedes,

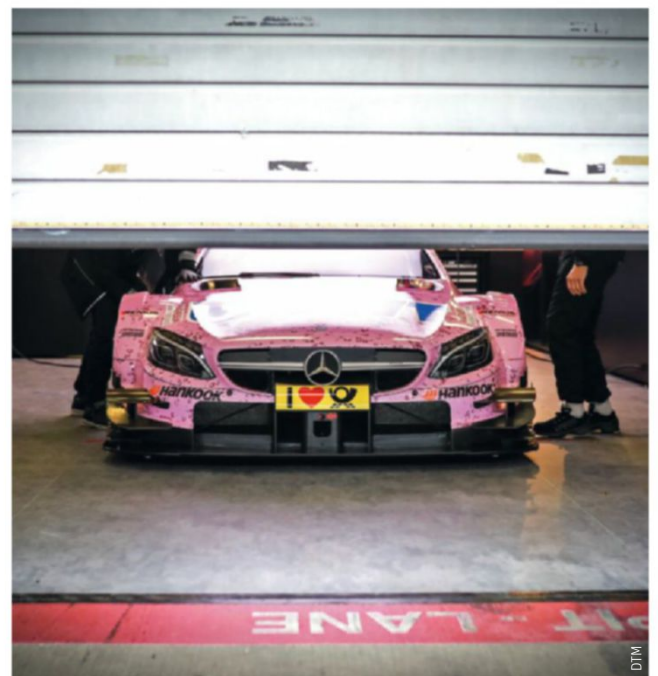
given it will need a new racing focus after 2018 as its main programme is operating the soon-to-be-defunct DTM team (right).

Venturi is considering aligning with another company long term to boost its prospects against bigger opposition, so collaborating again in the future would suit both parties.

Of the race teams not building their own powertrain, Andretti will be the BMW works team while DS is poised to make Techeetah its manufacturer team in place of Virgin Racing. Virgin is understood to have requested a new powertrain supply deal ahead of a deadline last week, and has been linked with both Audi and Mahindra.

• Formula E will not replace its cancelled Montreal double-header and will end a 12-race season in New York in mid-July. Its alternatives included an event in Birmingham, adding a second race onto an existing event such as Rome or a new round at the Norisring.

SCOTT MITCHELL





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DAYTONA 24 HOURS

Cadillacs pegged back by Daytona rulemakers

REIGNING DAYTONA 24 HOURS WINNER CADILLAC has had its performance pegged back for this weekend's running of the Florida enduro following its domination of pre-event testing earlier this month.

The Dallara-based Cadillac Daytona Prototype international (above), which topped every session at the so-called 'Roar' test, has been given smaller-diameter air restrictors for the IMSA SportsCar Championship opener that will rob it of engine power. The latest Balance of Performance for the weekend means that the revised 2018 5.5-litre normally-aspirated V8 will now run 31.6mm restrictors, 0.6mm down on the 32.2mm the four Caddys were allowed at the test.

Mazda, which ended up eighth in the overall times, has been given two performance breaks ahead of the race. The

Joest-run RT24-Ps have received a minimum weight reduction of 15kg and a rev-limit increase of 300rpm.

The Nissan Onroak DPis run by the Extreme Speed Motorsports squad have been given more power, with an increase in boost pressure at the top of the rev range.

The fuel capacities of the cars have also been tweaked to ensure equal stint length for all the cars. The Penske-run Acura ARX-05s have been given an extra four litres, the Cadillacs one and the Nissan two.

The new BMW M8 GTE, which will be making its race debut at Daytona, has also received performance breaks after struggling to match the pace of the GT Le Mans class frontrunners at the test. It has received a 10kg weight break and more boost through the majority of its rev range.

GARY WATKINS



WORLD ENDURANCE CHAMPIONSHIP

Van der Garde returns for WEC

EX-FORMULA 1 DRIVER GIEDO van der Garde will make a return to the sportscar ranks with Racing Team Netherlands on its full-time graduation to the World Endurance Championship this year.

The 32-year-old Dutchman, who has sat on the sidelines since winning the 2016 European Le Mans Series

with Jota Sport, will contest the full 2018-19 WEC superseason with the Dutch team as it steps up from the European Le Mans Series. He will share the Racing Team Netherlands Dallara-Gibson P217 (above) with the squad's boss, Frits van Eerd, and a third driver yet to be announced.

Meanwhile, Larbre Competition,

a five-time class winner at the Le Mans 24 Hours, is on course to make its 25th participation in the French enduro. The French team, best known for its GT campaigns, has filed an LMP2 entry for Le Mans with a Ligier-Gibson JSP217, with Fernando Rees as the first nominated driver.

GARY WATKINS

MOTOGP

ILLNESS FORCES SABBATICAL FOR FOLGER

THE TECH3 YAMAHA TEAM has been scrambling to find a last-minute replacement rider for the 2018 MotoGP season, with Jonas Folger still not fit enough to race.

The German (below), who missed the final four races of the 2017 season after being diagnosed with the rare illness Gilbert's syndrome, has chosen to focus on making a full recovery instead of attempting to make a comeback this year.

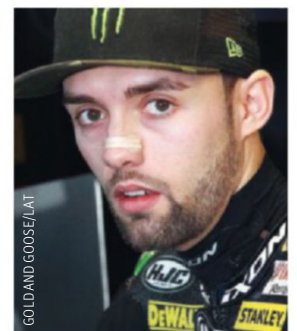
Former Pramac and Aspar Ducati rider Yonny Hernandez has been drafted in as a late substitute for this week's Sepang pre-season test, but Tech3 has yet to settle on a permanent replacement for Folger. It is understood that the French team is aiming to decide on a new team-mate for last year's outstanding rookie Johann Zarco before the second official test at Buriram next month.

Kohta Nozane, the Yamaha tester who made his MotoGP debut deputising for Folger in Motegi, would theoretically be available as a stand-in, but there is also the possibility that Tech3 could promote a youngster from Moto2.

Francesco Bagnaia, last year's top Moto2 rookie, could be a target as mentor Valentino Rossi seeks to keep him in the Yamaha orbit amid reports that he is close to agreeing terms to join Pramac Ducati in 2019.

An outside contender could be Stefan Bradl, who would satisfy German TV interests but would need to get himself out of a recently signed deal to be Honda's test rider this year.

JAMIE KLEIN



NIGEL ROEBUCK

Why we can't say goodbye to the halo

The signature new feature of this season's Formula 1 cars has displeased drivers past and present – but they can't stop it now

[@autosport](#)

ALTHOUGH, FOLLOWING HIS RETURN TO WILLIAMS from Ferrari in 1991, Nigel Mansell and I went through what may be termed a period of estrangement – I didn't like some of the things he did, and he didn't like some of the things I wrote – through most of his 13 years in Formula 1 we got along extremely well, and some of my most enjoyable, no-punches-pulled, interviews were conducted with Nigel.

The times, of course, were different. To organise an interview in this era means setting it up well ahead of time with the relevant team's PR staff, but back in the day Formula 1 people were rather less rarefied: you simply spoke to the driver or engineer or team principal, and agreed a time and place. I remember, for example, one year interviewing Mansell over breakfast in his hotel room in Detroit, after which we walked to the track, and he got on with his day's work.

Since Nigel's retirement, things have again been fine between us, but even when they were not I invariably found myself in agreement with his beliefs about how Formula 1 should be, as James Roberts's recent interview with him served to confirm. I was therefore not surprised to learn of his distaste for the

halo, which will disfigure Formula 1 cars from now on: indeed, of all the former drivers to whom I have spoken on the subject, only Jackie Stewart is in support of it.

Niki Lauda has described the adoption of the halo as 'the worst decision in the history of Formula 1', and if Mansell does not go as far as that, he makes very clear his opposition to it. "I'm not a fan," he told Roberts. "There has to be an element of racing a car and taking some risks, and the drivers are going to be hidden away even more."

Nigel ventures into tricky territory here: as Stirling Moss long ago came to understand, to suggest that racing *should* contain risk, that seeking endlessly to eradicate it changes the very nature of the

sport, is to invite censure – and then some.

"We need to be careful," Mansell went on. "I hope the halo won't be a hindrance if a driver is trapped upside down, or whether it might cause blind spots. We'll have to see what the cars look like, but my fear is that it might turn a lot of people off." After talking to fans at Autosport International the other week, I would suggest that his fear is well founded.

Martin Brundle is another man adamantly opposed. "I

"After talking to fans, I would suggest Nigel's fear is well founded"



Mansell fears halo might be a trap...



...in accidents like Martin Brundle's Monaco inversion



HONE/LAT



Will the halo hamper rapid cockpit egress?

tweeted something about halos a while ago, and got a response from one journalist that rather surprised me. It was sort of, ‘Oh, right, leave the drivers’ heads exposed in 2018, then? We shouldn’t have crash helmets and seat belts, either?’ In my reply I said, ‘Helmets and seat belts were the result of rational, logical, decisions, when crashing a car almost certainly meant injury or death. In my opinion, Formula 1 cars and circuits are now safe enough’. I mean, what happens now? Where do we stop? The only logical conclusion – eventually – is driver-less cars...”

At which point assuredly there will be fan-less grandstands, a phenomenon already disturbingly in evidence at some circuits of the world.

Something that really has angered me is the citing by some of Jules Bianchi’s accident as justification for introducing the halo. “Yes, me too,” said Brundle. “We all have our opinions about the circumstances of that accident, but the halo wouldn’t have helped the poor lad in the slightest. Another point worth making is that, with it, the cars are going to be 10-15kg heavier – which is more mass to go in the wall at 50G or whatever. This year, with driver and fuel and everything, they’re going to go to the grid with 850kg – which is a sportscar, isn’t it? My Tyrrell was about 480!

“As well as that,” Martin said, “there’s the question of getting out of the bloody things in a hurry. Sadly, it doesn’t now look as though we’re going to see Kubica back in Formula 1 – not this year, anyway – but when it seemed as though it was

going to happen I asked Jo Bauer how Robert had coped with the evacuation test. Amazingly, he told me that he was the fastest guy they’d ever tested – came at it with total enthusiasm, got out within three seconds, and put the steering-wheel back on. Incredible, isn’t it? ‘It wasn’t a problem,’ Jo said, ‘but we haven’t tried him with the halo yet – which is an altogether different thing, of course...’”

The required time to vacate the cockpit is therefore necessarily to be adjusted. “Funny, isn’t it?” said Brundle. “Suddenly the getting out time doesn’t matter as much as it did! Believe me, getting out of a Formula 1 car in a hurry is very painful – everyone fudges those tests, using different seats and steering-wheels and so on, because the ‘knees up past the steering-wheel when it’s on’ test is so difficult to pass. I can still remember the amount of skin I lost from my shins and elbows, practising for it – and now, all of a sudden, it doesn’t matter any more! It was just somebody’s ‘arbitrary test’, wasn’t it?”

“Towards the end of last season one of the drivers – for his own sake, I’d better not name him – said to me, ‘It’s put about by the likes of Sebastian Vettel that the majority of us are in favour of the halo – well, let me tell you, that’s far from the truth! A lot of us absolutely do not want it.’”

IndyCar, I said, is working on some sort of see-through shield, but has fundamentally said no to the halo. “Yes,” Martin said, “but here the problem is that the second it existed, the genie was out of the bottle...” ❄

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All sorted, then chaos

Announcements at Autosport International removed some mysteries of the British Touring Car grid. Then we got an earthquake...

By Matt James, BTCC Correspondent

[@MattJMNews](#)

AS RECENTLY AS 14 DAYS AGO, BTCC FANS WERE scratching their heads about the potential grid for 2018. They had been extremely patient to find out the likely shape of the line-up – and then there was an avalanche of announcements. Now there's been one huge bombshell too.

That seismic revelation came on Monday, when Team Dynamics and Honda spread the word: three-time champion Gordon Shedden, who has spent 11 of his 12 years in the BTCC's top flight with Team Dynamics, will leave the series.

He has always professed a desire to perform on a wider stage than just the BTCC, although the domestic series has been such a part of his career it was hard to see him walking away. Whether or not he does end up in the World Touring Car Cup, which is his rumoured new home, Shedden will be a huge loss.

Honda has, for so long, been the benchmark in the BTCC and the Dynamic-built Civic Type Rs have been the best chassis. Matt Neal remains on the driving strength for 2018, but there's a speedbump: the team has to develop a new car and now it has a top-line drive to fill.

The pain of being a manufacturer-backed team means Team Dynamics has to remain current to make sure it aligns itself with the road range. The new Civic Type R is a great looking road car, but will it make a great race car?

Team boss and driver Neal admitted recently that there has been a delay in building the new-look car due to something the team wanted to do that has been outlawed by the BTCC technical bosses. Dynamics has had to go back to the drawing board and it has lost a month's worth of development. In the fast-paced world of the BTCC, that could be a disaster.

Aside from Honda, there are plenty of other seats at the top table, and they have been filled rapidly. In January we've learned that Colin Turkington, Rob Collard and Andrew Jordan (WSR BMW), Jack Goff (Eurotech Honda), Ash Sutton (BMR Subaru), Mat Jackson (Motorbase Ford), Senna Proctor (Power Maxed Vauxhall) and Tom Ingram (Speedworks Toyota) will all stay put, with Josh Cook joining Power Maxed. Sam Tordoff, runner-up to Gordon Shedden in 2016, has expressed a strong interest in returning after a sojourn in GTs. His is a signature everyone is after, but where will he end up?

It's hard not to feel a tiny bit sorry for the championship's up-and-comers who have raced to ink their 2018 deals early. Little did they know that the factory Honda seat, the prime drive in the series, would become vacant. Patience, in this case, might have been a virtue...

And then there's Jason Plato. The BTCC's Mr Marmite had flown below the radar since the end of last season. When drivers go quiet, rumours start. And if there's a paddock that's renowned for magnifying the slightest off-beat speculation,

then the BTCC is it. The gossipmongers had Plato somewhere between retirement, remaining at Team BMR and joining about five other teams. Plato turned up at the Autosport International Show recently, enjoying life and showing his daughter around the place. He was very relaxed, very confident about the future and full of fight.

The way he was talking means he is coming back, and is highly likely to remain with Subaru – although this has yet to be confirmed. Yes, last year was a disaster (by his terms, with only one win), but don't expect that to be his epitaph. Plato doesn't often need firing up, but the desire to erase the nightmare of 2017 could be the driving force that puts him right back in the limelight.

Anyone looking for early value from a bookie would be well advised to hold off for a few weeks yet. While there is now a much clearer picture of what is likely to happen in terms of the BTCC grid line-up, it's certain there will be more twists to come. Patience, in this respect at least, *will* be a virtue. 🍷

BTCC CONFIRMED ENTRIES SO FAR



DRIVER	TEAM	CAR
Sam Smelt	AmD Tuning	Audi S3
Ollie Jackson	AmD Tuning	Audi S3
Ash Sutton	Team BMR	Subaru Levorg
Chris Smiley	BTC Norlin	Honda Civic
Matt Neal	Team Dynamics	Honda Civic
Matt Simpson	Eurotech Racing	Honda Civic
Jack Goff	Eurotech Racing	Honda Civic
Jake Hill	Team Hard	Volkswagen CC
Bobby Thompson	Team Hard	Volkswagen CC
Mike Bushell	Team Hard	Volkswagen CC
Michael Caine	Team Hard	Volkswagen CC
Rob Austin	HMS Racing	Alfa Romeo Giulietta
Tom Chilton	Motorbase Performance	Ford Focus
Mat Jackson	Motorbase Performance	Ford Focus
Josh Cook	Power Maxed Racing	Vauxhall Astra
Senna Proctor	Power Maxed Racing	Vauxhall Astra
Tom Ingram	Speedworks Motorsport	Toyota Avensis
Colin Turkington	WSR	BMW 125i M Sport
Rob Collard	WSR	BMW 125i M Sport
Andrew Jordan	WSR	BMW 125i M Sport



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FEEDBACK

Is there a place for a modern F5000?

Over the years, single-seat series such as A1GP, F1Renault 3.5 (then FV8 3.5), Auto GP and F2 in its 2009-12 guise have come and gone, despite appearing healthy for sometimes lengthy periods.

Apart from historic racing, will there be any decent 'large' single-seater racing in the UK if you don't want to pay a fortune to go to the Silverstone grand prix? British F3 and F4 provide good racing, but the cars are hardly stunning in appearance.

Is there no room for large and spectacular single-seat racing cars anymore? Japan has Super Formula and the USA has IndyCar, but neither of these is likely to be seen in Europe or the UK in the foreseeable future. How about a modern F5000 with cheap chassis, simple aerodynamics and a standard engine, which could race in a European championship, and/or national series?

Wishful thinking probably.

Tim Bailey

Kilbarchan, Renfrewshire

What do F1 people do all day?

The Formula 1 teams are flat-out designing and building the 2018 cars in readiness for the first race in March.

This process was well underway last September, which allows about seven months to get two cars ready.

Most of the teams do not design or build the engine, gearbox, brakes, wheels, tyres, electronics, or safety equipment.

So what do about 500 people do that demands flat-out around-the-clock effort? They would appear to make the tub and develop the aerodynamics from last year's car. When you consider the huge computer input, you would hope this is not taking up too much of 500 people's seven months.

When it's finished, apart from the livery, it will look much the same as last year's car and every other car. And the cars will line up on the grid in much the same order as the last 2017 race.

All the talented people who put in all this effort are well rewarded. Shame most can't afford to pay for a good driver.

Bill O'Shea

Fleet, Hants

Another missed opportunity

So from within the gilded and airtight bubble that is F1, they have announced the bodywork changes for 2019 (to assist, you understand, the commercial aspect of F1 – money, money, money...). The result? 'Despite cost savings also being part of the equations the consensus was that the aerodynamic impact [of simplifying the front wings] would be too great to justify...'

Yes the 'impact' would be cheaper, better-looking cars able to race more closely as all fans, commentators, drivers, etc, etc, know. And if the change was announced now, they'd all have a year to address the issue –



Reader Bailey floats the idea of a modern F5000. Which is all the excuse we need to run a picture of Peter Gethin's Lola-Chevrolet at Brands hatch in 1975

and all would be in the same boat.

It makes me despair that the bloody cars will still end up with ludicrous front wings even after 2021. 'There is no correlation between intellect and wisdom' as some (wise) person once said.

Guy Dormehl
South Africa

Ferrari's too big for its boots

I must take issue with MW Pipe and his disagreement with Nigel Roebuck that Ferrari's bluff should be called (January 18). Yes, Ferrari is a major part of F1, but 'Formula 1 is Ferrari' is taking things too far. I agree with Nigel – Ferrari's bluff should be called; they have far too much influence in the running of the sport, including a say in the regulations, plus a disproportionate amount of monies from the 'prize' fund. What other sport would tolerate having a competitor making decisions that affect the rest of the competition?

Would Sergio Marchionne really make 700-plus people redundant, shut down some very expensive and highly technical facilities, and ignore the wishes of a range of sponsors? I suspect not. Would Ferrari's absence really signal the end of F1? Again, I suspect not, even though it would be a very sad event.

Neil Davey
Newport, South Wales

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Autosport editorial
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ALONSO LE MANS MISSION STARTS HERE

The F1 star is paving the way to achieving his ambition of winning the legendary French enduro with a round-the-clock debut at Daytona. What chance victory this weekend?

By Edd Straw

🐦 @EddStrawF1





**“IN THE
LIST OF TOP
FAVOURITES,
WE ARE NOT
ON IT”**

When Fernando Alonso set his sights on becoming only the second driver, after Graham Hill, to win the so-called triple crown of motorsport, he was on a lopsided footing. Whether or not you consider the Monaco Grand Prix (as Autosport does) or the Formula 1 World Championship as one of the three legs of the achievement, Alonso ticked those off long ago. But he hadn't turned a single lap at Indianapolis or even contested a 24-hour race, let alone the big one at Le Mans.

Last year's glorious (Honda) failure at The Brickyard established Alonso as a credible victory threat there, whenever it is he next goes back in machinery capable of challenging. And this weekend he'll earn his endurance-racing spurs in the Daytona 24 Hours driving for the United Autosports team co-owned by his McLaren boss Zak Brown, alongside Lando Norris and Phil Hanson. This sportscar sortie will help lay the groundwork for a future assault on Le Mans, which could yet come with Toyota this year.

Alonso admits that contesting this race will be a test of whether he enjoys this form of motorsport. "Part of this adventure is to prepare for Le Mans in a better way," he says. "I don't know when I will do Le Mans, but the lack of experience in endurance races is a handicap. As I had at Indy with the lack of experience in oval racing, I did my best for the entire month to get up to speed. If I do Indy again one day, I will have a different knowledge and be more prepared. If I do Le Mans one day, Daytona will be the perfect practice for that."

But winning the Daytona 24 Hours is a very different challenge to winning at Le Mans. While Alonso is driving a Ligier JSP217 of ACO LMP2 specification, he's up against some slightly different equipment in the form of the DPi (Daytona Prototype International) machines. These are basically LMP2 cars, but with manufacturer-designed aero kits and not using the spec Gibson engine. Hence the standard-setting Cadillac DPi-V.R is, at heart, a Dallara LMP2 car, while the Nissan DPi machines fielded by Extreme Speed Motorsports are Ligiers underneath.

There's another more significant difference, for the way you win the Daytona 24 Hours has less in common with winning Le Mans than the strategy required to win the Daytona 500! It's almost impossible to control Daytona in the way you could, assuming reliability and no mistakes, Le Mans. Regular caution periods and the relative brevity of the track mean the pack is often closed up and the priority



JAKOB EBBREY

for a large proportion of the race is to worry simply about staying on the lead lap, rather than establishing any kind of overwhelming track-position or strategic advantage. That is music to Alonso's ears.

For while at Indy he had the best package in the field in an Andretti Autosport Dallara-Honda, he's far from being in the car of choice at Daytona. The Ligier isn't well suited to the long drags on the banking, just as it struggles on the straights of Le Mans, and during the pre-Daytona 24 Hours Roar test the best Ligier — Alonso's — was 1.7 seconds off the leading times. While the pacesetting Cadillacs have been pulled back thanks to a Balance of Performance change that reduces the size of their air restrictor by 0.6mm to 31.6mm, that's not going to be anywhere near enough to bridge the gap. But Daytona is a race where the unfancied can spring a surprise, just as at Le Mans in the old days.

"That's a very big task," says Alonso when asked about his victory chances. "Realistically, to be honest with ourselves first and the fans, for Lando and me it's the first endurance race. For all three it's the very first IMSA race and our package is not on top of the times usually."

"The Ligier and the Gibson [engine], we're not the top favourites. But this is a 24-hour race and anything can happen. We are going to give it a go, but let's say the list of the top, top favourites, we're maybe not on it."

Last year the unfancied and not especially competitive Riley finished a remarkable third having had all sorts of problems in the build-up to the race, so strange things can happen. If Alonso's car can stay in the game and hang around the lead lap, it may just be possible to grab a top result.

"Anything can happen," he says. "There is not exact



ALL PICS: JAKOB EBBREY



Alonso did not shirk photoshoot driving duties

mathematics in any of the results. In F1 the results are more or less known going into the grand prix; you know the fast cars will be on pole, the podium you know, you know more or less who will be in the points. In an endurance race, you can have an idea of who will be fast, but the final result you never know. So it remains open for us, and for the fans I hope, until the chequered flag.”

For Alonso, the challenge of adapting to an LMP2 car at Daytona is significantly easier than mastering an IndyCar on an oval. But while it’s a very conventional car – and generally LMP2 cars have a power-to-weight ratio that doesn’t make them too challenging to drive as a result of the pro-am foundations on which the class is built in Europe – he has had far less running.

At Indy Alonso logged a couple of hours of running in the simulator before heading to the track for practice. And with a two-week build-up to the race, he had plenty of opportunity to learn, adapt and try things. In the Ligier he notched up 571km in a test at Motorland Aragon in Spain last November and a further 367km in the Roar test earlier this month. That’s plenty of running for a driver of Alonso’s calibre, but includes only 13 night laps. Not that he was remotely concerned by the challenge of nocturnal driving, doubly so given Daytona is so well illuminated and lacks the gloomy spots Le Mans offers.

That’s not to say it’s been straightforward. “It’s been a challenging car,” says Alonso. “The level of grip is good, but at Daytona, especially at night, you face some really cold temperatures so it’s really difficult to put the tyres in the right window. There are no tyre warmers in IMSA, so there are extra challenges for this reason. The level of grip is constantly changing throughout the stint, so you need to adapt your >>



Norris (l) and Hanson (r) bond with Alonso

THE TEAM-MATES

WHEN FERNANDO ALONSO made his grand prix debut in March 2001, his Daytona 24 Hours co-drivers were both one year old. Lando Norris’s and Phil Hanson’s combined age is just two and a half months greater than that of Alonso, who responds: “I’m not that old.” It must be a strange, but remarkable, experience for all of them.

Norris is well known as a McLaren-contracted rising star. He heads into Formula 2 this year as F3 European champion and, despite being a stablemate of Alonso’s, the Roar test was the first time he’s had the chance to spend significant time working with him.

“He’s definitely a character and he’s great to be around,” says Norris when asked about what it’s like to work with a driver shrouded in mythos. “He’s made it enjoyable so far and it’s a chance to go and do something else. We’re trying to have a bit of fun and trying to work hard.

“At the end of the day, we want to win and we have to do as much as we can to do that. Between the three of us, we all get along really well. That’s definitely a positive for a race like this.”

While Norris is, like Alonso, an endurance-racing virgin, Hanson is in his natural habitat.

He finished ninth in LMP2 at Le Mans last year driving for Tockwith Motorsports and is the reigning Asian Le Mans Series LMP3 champion. Unlike the others, he is also now a United regular and will take on the ELMS with the team.

“It’s a bit unusual to be team-mates to two very, very competitive drivers,” says Hanson. “It’s great for the race because we’re in a good stance for the win, or to finish strongly.

“Personally, it gives me a really good opportunity to learn from the best. I’m sure there are many drivers who see this as a weakness, to be up against such good drivers, as maybe it will make me look bad. But it’s just an opportunity to see where you stand compared to the best.”

Kudos to Hanson, who brings backing to the team that has been crucial to getting Alonso into the car. After all, he presumably could have ensured that he was in the other car, to avoid direct comparisons, and deserves credit for being so willing to partner drivers of this calibre.





JAKOB EBREY

Alonso's time in the Ligier has been limited

driving style a little bit from lap one to lap five to lap 25.

"[The preparation] is a little bit different to Indy. I didn't work in the simulator because I didn't find a good simulator that had the LMP2 and Daytona, so it was more to work with the team and analyse the data that was sent to the drivers, to know my team-mates better and spend as much time with them as possible off track to create a good team spirit. It was a different preparation, but a 24-hour race is a little bit more unpredictable. We know certain scenarios we will face, but it doesn't matter how we prepare – it will always surprise you. Hopefully we can have a good surprise."

Contrary to the mythology of Alonso as a troublemaker, which is rooted in both truth and fantasy, his approach to this race has been every bit as professional as you would expect. Richard Dean, co-owner of United Autosports and a man with serious pedigree both as a racer and a team boss, has been impressed. The squad has faced an uphill struggle as it is effectively new to Daytona (in 2011 it competed in association with Michael Shank Racing, but that was a United entry more in name than execution), and in the Roar test had to adapt to the new aero configuration of the Ligier using unfamiliar Continental tyres. It's fair to say it wasn't the most straightforward of tests.

"Fantastic," is Dean's verdict on Alonso's approach. "I'd admit I've been really nervous about how he would handle a situation like we've had where we haven't looked organisationally in the best shape, just because of what was thrown at us in the first week of January. And I wasn't sure how he would handle the concept, which I believe is new to him, of Balance of Performance and how DPi integrates with LMP2. But he's been focused on the job and been professional

and that's why he's as good as he is. In the car, I wouldn't say he's happy, but who is unless they are at the front? And unless you were in a Cadillac at the test, you're probably not going to be very happy."

Alonso's professionalism extends beyond what may be called the main part of the job of a racing driver. Inevitably there's huge interest in his appearance at Daytona, and that means there's a good opportunity both for IMSA and United Autosports to capitalise. On the Friday night after driving in the Roar test, Alonso happily drove the Ligier for the car-to-car tracking photography (in F1 this role would often be filled by a stand-in using a star driver's helmet), before taking part in Autosport's photoshoot. In very cold conditions he took every opportunity to try to stay warm, but patiently and gracefully did the work when he had to. There was no sign of prima-donna behaviour, even for the press work that some drivers consider not to be an important part of their job.

"He's like all of us, he's a racer," says Dean. "But he's been brilliant with the team and amazing with the media side. We all know America is fan-friendly, IMSA pride themselves on that, and they ask a fair amount of the drivers. Fernando has probably been at the top of their list for requests and, as far as I know, he hasn't turned down anything. He's blown that myth that F1 drivers don't want to talk to anybody, don't want to do anything."

When drivers prove to be troublesome, the first to complain will be those working directly alongside them in the garage. That means the mechanics and engineers, who can quickly come to hate a disruptive and disrespectful driver as quickly as they will love a cooperative and professional one. The key here is that Alonso is fitting in well with the working >>



THE RIVALS

AMONG THE 20-STRONG Prototype field, four cars stand out: and they are all the same. The Dallara LMP2-based Cadillac DPi-V.R swept the board at the pre-Daytona 24 Hours Roar test earlier this month and, having won nine out of 10 IMSA SportsCar Championship rounds last year, there's no reason to think things will change in 2018.

That said, things are a little different. Gone is the 6.2-litre V8 the Caddys used last year, replaced by a 5.5-litre version. Based on performance so far, there's no reason to expect there's any disadvantage, although the Balance of Performance changes announced last Friday have reduced the size of the air restrictor on the engine from 32.2mm to 31.6mm since the Roar test.

Last year's winning Wayne Taylor Racing squad has also undergone some big changes. Jordan Taylor remains, but brother Ricky has joined the new Penske Acura squad, Max Angelelli has retired and Jeff Gordon has not returned. Now featuring Dutch ex-Formula 3 star Renger van der Zande and IndyCar ace Ryan Hunter-Reay, it's a very different line-up. As Jordan Taylor points out, it has less of the feel of a family team.

The pace was set in the test by one of the two Action Express Cadillacs, the Whelen Engineering-livered #31 car of Felipe Nasr, Toyota LMP1 ace Mike Conway, IMSA expert Eric Curran and Sunoco Challenge winner Stuart Middleton. Not that there was much to separate the Cadillacs, with the second Mustang



The Cadillac is ahead of the pack so far

Sampling-backed Auto Express car and the Spirit of Daytona team's hastily convened entry also right up there.

As for who will lead the challengers, the new Penske Acuras looked promising in the tests and, while Joest's

Mazdas weren't especially fast, they have benefited from a rev increase.

Of the pukka LMP2 cars, the ORECA 07 looks the most promising, with the Jota-run Jackie Chan DC Racing entries likely to lead the line – although

the CORE Autosport squad also looked quick at the Roar.

As for the Ligier, United should be the main contender with its two cars. But although the Cadillacs have been pulled back a little, it's going to be hard work.

PROTOTYPE ENTRIES

DRIVERS	TEAM	CAR
2 Scott Sharp/Ryan Dalziel/Olivier Pla	Extreme Speed Motorsports	Nissan Onroak DPi
5 Filipe Albuquerque/Joao Barbosa/Christian Fittipaldi	Action Express Racing	Cadillac DPi-V.R
6 Dane Cameron/Juan Pablo Montoya/Simon Pagenaud	Acura Team Penske	Acura ARX-05 DPi
7 Helio Castroneves/Ricky Taylor/Graham Rahal	Acura Team Penske	Acura ARX-05 DPi
10 Jordan Taylor/Rengervan der Zande/Ryan Hunter-Reay	Wayne Taylor Racing	Cadillac DPi-V.R
20 Marc Drumwright/Eric Lux/Alex Popow/Tomy Drissi/Brendan Gaughan	BAR1 Motorsports	Riley-Gibson Mk30
22 Johannes van Overbeek/Pipo Derani/Nicolas Lapierre	Extreme Speed Motorsports	Nissan Onroak DPi
23 Phil Hanson/Lando Norris/Fernando Alonso	United Autosports	Ligier-Gibson JSP217
31 Felipe Nasr/Eric Curran/Mike Conway/Stuart Middleton	Cadillac DPi-V.R	Cadillac DPi-V.R
32 Will Owen/Hugo de Sadeleer/Paul di Resta/Bruno Senna	United Autosports	Ligier-Gibson JSP217
37 Lance Stroll/Felix Rosenqvist/Robin Frijns/Daniel Juncadella	Jackie Chan DCR Jota	ORECA-Gibson 07
38 James French/Pato O'Ward/Kyle Masson/Joel Miller	Performance Tech Motorsports	ORECA-Gibson 07
52 Sebastian Saavedra/Gustavo Yacamán/Roberto Gonzalez/Nicholas Boulle	Mathiasen Motorsports	Ligier-Gibson JSP217
54 Jon Bennett/Colin Braun/Romain Dumas/Loic Duval	CORE Autosport	ORECA-Gibson 07
55 Jonathan Bomarito/Harry Tincknell/Spencer Pigot	Mazda Team Joest	Mazda RT24-P
77 Oliver Jarvis/Tristan Nunez/Rene Rast	Mazda Team Joest	Mazda RT24-P
78 Ho-Pin Tung/Alex Brundle/Ferdinand Habsburg/Antonio Felix da Costa	Jackie Chan DCR Jota	ORECA-Gibson 07
85 Simon Trummer/Robert Alon/Devlin DeFrancesco/Austin Cindric	JDC-Miller Motorsports	ORECA-Gibson 07
90 Matt McMurry/Tristan Vautier/Eddie Cheever III	Spirit of Daytona Racing	Cadillac DPi-V.R
99 Chris Miller/Stephen Simpson/Misha Goikhberg/Gustavo Menezes	JDC-Miller Motorsports	ORECA-Gibson 07



**“I DON’T
NEED TO DO
THIS, BUT I
AM BECAUSE
I LOVE IT”**



practices of a team that, after all, is a serious operation. United fought for the overall European Le Mans Series title last year, so everyone there knows what they are doing.

“Any race engineer would love to work with that kind of driver,” says Gautier Bouteiller, race engineer on the #23 Ligier. “It’s a fantastic opportunity and I’m very lucky to have that kind of chance. We have to enjoy it as much as possible and if you don’t enjoy it, you need to change your job. There is no point in changing our habits or the way we’re used to working. We’ve worked with Filipe Albuquerque, Bruno Senna, Pipo Derani, Olivier Pla — all those kinds of guys, professional drivers not as famous as Alonso but very fast and with a lot of experience in sportscars. Changing because you have Alonso working with you is the biggest mistake you can make.”

As a result, Alonso did not have a huge amount of time to focus on his own acclimatisation during the Roar test. Given that his team-mates, McLaren junior Norris and Asian Le Mans Series LMP3 champion Hanson, are also both Daytona rookies, and there was a significant programme to get through with the car in the three days of running, he had to get on with it. Returning to the topic of his mission — the triple crown — if Alonso is to win Le Mans, he needs to take this approach.

“He wants to learn for Le Mans, that’s one of his main goals for here,” says Bouteiller. “The way we operate and run the test programme and go through all the procedures we have in place, he’s really keen on discovering that. I like a lot of what he’s told us, so it’s good. Even if Fernando is a superstar, he’s very open. He wants to learn a lot. He isn’t going to change what we’ve been doing. He has a lot of people looking at him because he is Fernando, but we need to keep that outside of the tent and be focused on our work.”

Alonso also worked well with his team-mates. While it’s obvious this is part of the challenge of endurance racing, it’s fair to say that some drivers with what you might call more ‘individualistic’ sporting backgrounds do struggle with this. Alonso quickly realised the benefits he would gain by helping his team-mates get up to speed. He quickly started working with Hanson, who was the slowest of the three at Daytona, but only by 1.3s — a deficit stretched by the fact that Alonso set the quickest time in the ‘qualifying’ session, which dictated pitbox and garage allocation for the 24 Hours.

“He was coaching Phil, giving him some advice,” says Brown. “He knows that to win this race — and this is where he’s so good and focused — he needs his team-mates to do what he’s going to do. So he’s laser-focused on that and is not selfish at all. He’s just settled in immediately to this being more of a team race than anything else. Everything you see of him in F1 is here, but slotted in. It’s almost like Indy — this doesn’t feel like his first time at Daytona. He doesn’t make rookie mistakes.”

And Alonso, and his team-mates, will need to avoid errors to have any chance of pulling off a victory. There are multiple factors that make the two United Autosports Ligiers (the sister car is driven by, among others, Bruno Senna and Paul di Resta) outsiders among the 20 prototype-class contenders, so it’s going to be a case of hanging in there, then trying to make something happen late on. And if they can do that, a cynic may suggest that having a high-profile driver such as Alonso in the car could lead to the odd ‘race control assist’ — especially if they look at the move Ricky Taylor, sharing with megastar Jeff Gordon, got away with when taking the lead late last year...

The big unanswered question for Alonso is how he copes





Management of traffic is a new task for Alonso

with traffic. With 30 GT cars entered at Daytona across the GTLM and GTD classes, and a wide spread of drivers from the superstar to the amateur, there's a huge amount of time to be lost. The main compromise made to the programme because of Alonso's inexperience was to give him the chance to do some running to pick the right spots to make moves, and where could be the right place to try to gun a marginal pass at the business end of the race. Alonso did a good job, but it won't be until we've seen how he handles it in the race that we can be sure he's mastered it. And it's a difficult challenge given his lack of familiarity with the opposition and which drivers may be more or less cooperative. But this is Alonso, and it would be a surprise if he doesn't quickly get on top of that, even if it's unrealistic to expect him to be as proficient in traffic as the IMSA stars.

Another key question is how much more United can get out of the upgraded Ligier, with a new, stronger front end. This, combined with the fact that the team is unfamiliar with the Continental tyres, which have a softer sidewall and require far more aggressive warm-up than the Dunlops United is familiar with, has created a big challenge in terms of exploiting the car.

"With this new package, it's kind of a different game now because we're lacking experience with it," says Bouteiller. "From the windtunnel we know more or less where we are compared to our competitors. The new package is an improvement, but the way this car is designed — with or without the new package — this kind of track, with long straights where we need a lot of traction, has never been our garden. On a single lap we have no chance. The focus is on consistency. For the final hour, if we're still in the fight, we'll have to be strong in the traffic and push at the maximum." »



THE CLOSEST BATTLE

The GTLM fight will be the fiercest of all the classes in the Daytona 24 Hours, with five factory teams going for glory. Based on previous years, expect the leaders in the GTE-specification machines never to be separated by more than a few seconds.



FORD

The Chip Ganassi-run Ford GTs head into the race as favourites, with the 2017 race-winning #66 car of Joey Hand, Dirk Muller and Sebastien Bourdais fastest in the Roar test. But it has been pegged back, with an increase in minimum rear-wing angle from two to five degrees holding it back on the straights.



CHEVROLET

If the pace from the Roar is to be believed, the Chevrolet Corvette C7.R should be the biggest threat. The #4 car of Oliver Gavin, Tommy Milner and Marcel Fassler won in 2016, and the Jan Magnussen/Antonio Garcia/Mike Rockenfeller machine is also strong. But the car has also gained two degrees of wing on BoP.



FERRARI

Ferrari is at a disadvantage, because it has just one car entered compared with two for the other four manufacturers. Its Risi Competizione-run 488 GTE will be fast enough to threaten, with Toni Vilander, Alessandro Pier Guidi, Davide Rigon and James Calado a strong line-up. It's the only GTLM car that hasn't had a BoP adjustment.



PORSCHE

Porsche has struggled at Daytona in recent years, and despite a first-rate driver line-up, including Le Mans winners Nick Tandy and Earl Bamber, and GT superstar Gianmaria Bruni, it could face a tough battle with the normally aspirated 911 RSR.



BMW

The new BMW M8 GTE was the slowest of the GTLM cars in the Roar test, with Alexander Sims setting the quickest time for the two-car Rahal entry 1.446 seconds off the pace. Will a 10kg weight break get it in the game?

**“IT WOULD
BE EASY TO
BE AT HOME
ENJOYING
MYSELF”**

United has been working hard in the time since the Roar to get on top of the car. During that first test, the team lost its way a little before turning things around late on. This indicates that it is working through the problems well, but it's probably unrealistic to expect United to have the car perfect for this weekend.

“I really don't know how far we're going to go with what we've got,” says Dean. “What we do know is the car is not right yet. We got close, then we lost our way and went in the wrong direction, so we came back again and we ended at probably the best point we'd been.

“It's clear to see from the data that on the high-downforce tracks we've been winning races in Europe and on the high-speed, low-downforce tracks like Monza and Le Mans the ORECA's have had the edge. Ligier has been working hard to address that and the upgrade will supposedly address that.

“What's the potential? More than where we were at the Roar, but how much more? I really don't know. Personally, I still think we're going to be learning with the car all the way up to Le Mans probably, never mind Daytona.”

Whatever happens this weekend, whether it's a character-building learning experience or if United can pull off a shock result, Alonso will make another big splash. His tour of what he calls the “iconic races” is, for all his protestations to the contrary, possible largely because of McLaren's struggles with Honda over the past three years, and that puts him in a unique position. And who can blame him for taking advantage? It's certainly to the benefit of motorsport fans, events such as Daytona and the man himself.

“I'm happy and I'm surprised,” he says of the response. “I'm proud the fans are loving motorsport as much as I do; they probably see the effort we are putting behind these races. At this time of my career it would be easy to be at home enjoying myself in the off-season and then, during the championship, race wherever the performance of the car is and get around without too much stress. But it's not the way I am. If I am second, I will not be happy, and if I am 12th I will be even less happy. That's the way I approach F1 and also not F1.

“It's a lot of effort, there are no holidays anymore, no free days and there are a lot of studies behind it. Even every single steering wheel needs a couple of weeks to study all of the buttons. I don't need to do this, but I'm doing it because I love it. Some of the people see this extra effort and they love and appreciate what we're doing.”

Motorsport fans certainly are appreciating the chance to see Alonso take on these new challenges. Now they just have to hope that he and United Autosports can at least be in the hunt this weekend. *✂*



UNITED STANDS AS A SLOW- BURN SUCCESS

WHEN UNITED AUTOSPORTS WAS launched amid much fanfare in 2009, great things were expected. After all, this was a team owned by sponsorship-finder extraordinaire Zak Brown and driver/team boss Richard Dean, who had proved his abilities running such an operation with both Team JLR and then Ginetta.

The team has achieved a tremendous amount of success, but perhaps not in the way fans might have expected from high-profile early outings with drivers like Martin Brundle, Mark Blundell and Stefan Johansson.

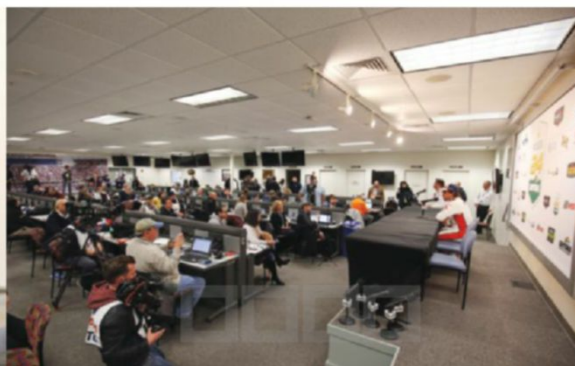
In the European Le Mans Series it has been the dominant force in LMP3 for the past two seasons, and fought for the overall championship, spearheaded by Filipe Albuquerque in its LMP2 Ligier JSP217. Perhaps the team's finest hour was finishing fifth overall at Le Mans in 2017.

In its eight years of competition, United has competed in myriad categories, including GT3 and the British Touring Car Championship.

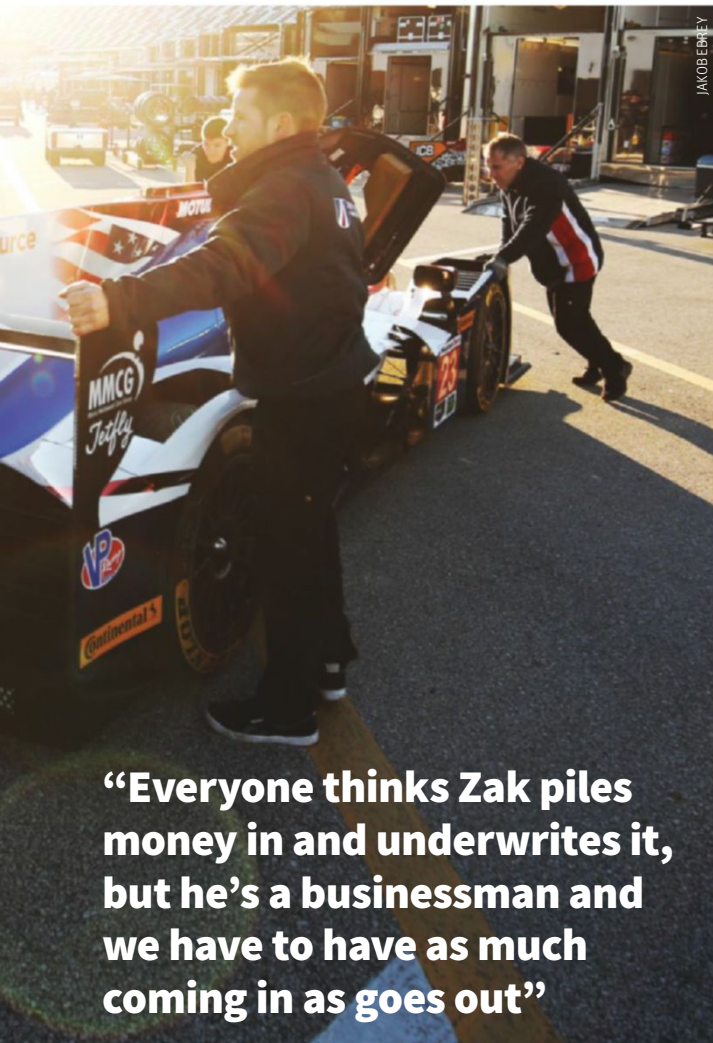
“It's a racing team to the fans, but it's a business and any business has to grow,” says managing director Dean. “Everyone thinks Zak just underwrites the whole thing and piles money in, but he's a businessman and we have to have as much coming in as goes out. That's why the growth has looked slower.

“The past two years, the growth has accelerated really quickly. We've got 50 people at an ELMS event across LMP2, LMP3 and the Michelin Le Mans Cup. We're going to run six cars in the ELMS and probably going to go up to 60 people. It just takes time.

“We want to be more than just ELMS and Le Mans, to go a bit more international and take on these



ALL PICS: JAKOB EBREY



JAKOB EBREY

“Everyone thinks Zak piles money in and underwrites it, but he’s a businessman and we have to have as much coming in as goes out”

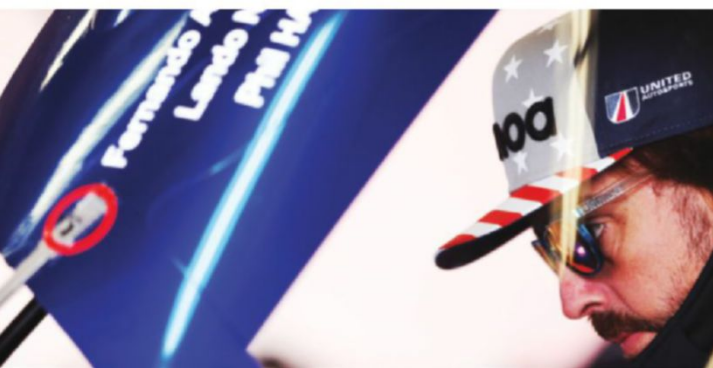


JAKOB EBREY

blue-riband events.”

For Brown, the key for United expanding to the very top levels is to become a works team. But this will not, he stresses, be with McLaren.

“Our next step is to get a manufacturer deal,” says the United chairman. “We’re a Ligier factory team now, but the next logical step is you want to win Le Mans and Daytona and it’s easier to do that with a manufacturer.”



DOUBLE WINNERS DAYTONA 24 HOURS AND FORMULA 1



LAT IMAGES

LAT

LORENZO BANDINI (1967)

Sharing with Chris Amon, Bandini took a Ferrari 330 P4 to victory in the second Daytona race to be run over 24 hours.



LAT

JO SIFFERT (1968)

One of five drivers in the winning Porsche 907LH alongside Vic Elford, Jochen Neerpasch, Rolf Stommelen and Hans Herrmann. Siffert was also classified second after car-hopping!



LAT

PEDRO RODRIGUEZ (1970, '71)

After winning the Daytona sportscar race in its early days as a three-hour and a 2000km race in 1963 and '64, Rodriguez won the big one for Porsche twice.



LAT

THIERRY BOUTSEN (1985)

Switching to the winning Porsche after his 962 retired, Boutsen shared victory with Bob Wollek, AJ Foyt and Al Unser in Preston Henn's Swap Shop entry.



LAT

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA (2007, '08, '13)

Montoya claimed a trio of victories in Chip Ganassi Racing-run Rileys in the Grand-Am era, with his late charge to win in 2013 the highlight.

10 Dan Gurney's **GREATEST DRIVES**

From Formula 1 to Indycar via NASCAR and Trans-Am – Dan Gurney, who died earlier this month, won in all of them. Here are our highlights from his great career

By Kevin Turner, Editor

[@KRT917](#)

10 1962 French GP

Porsche 804 (1st)

Although this was perhaps not his finest performance, Gurney held the race in high regard. It was his 22nd world championship grand prix and he took his first points-paying success at the challenging Rouen circuit.

Gurney qualified sixth, 1.7 seconds behind polesitter Jim Clark's Lotus. The Porsche held position as Graham Hill's BRM battled the Lola of John Surtees for the early lead. Gurney moved up to fourth thanks to the problems of others, but he could not match the pace of the leading duo, or Clark in third.

Fourth became third when Surtees hit fuel-feed issues, while Clark took the lead when Hill spun. Front-suspension problems then forced Clark out and, when Hill's throttle linkage came adrift, Gurney was left in front.

He duly gave Porsche its first – and so far only – world championship victory as a constructor.



LAT

9 1966 Bridgehampton 200, Can-Am

Lola-Ford T70 (1st)

The early years of Can-Am sportscar racing were dominated by Chevrolet power, but Gurney's first success – of three – was taken with a revolutionary Ford unit. As was to become one of his hallmarks, Gurney was key in the development of his machine, in this case the Gurney-Weslake Ford V8.

Gurney was beaten to pole by Jim Hall's Chaparral, but the troublesome bewinged machine was withdrawn. Gurney's Lola immediately grabbed the lead, leaving Phil Hill's Chaparral to pass round-

one winner John Surtees for second.

Hill closed on the leader and harassed him, but Gurney remained firm and soon edged away again. The final challenger was Chris Amon (McLaren-Chevy), who charged to within a second of Gurney at the line.

Not only had the victory demonstrated Gurney's calmness under pressure, but it also proved the worth of his alloy Gurney-Weslake cylinder heads, which went on to score many other successes, including two Le Mans wins in Ford GT40s.



LAT



8

1967 German GP

Eagle-Weslake T1G (retired)

Gurney had come close to winning the German GP at the Nurburgring before – most notably in 1962 after taking pole for Porsche – but his '67 effort was probably the most heartbreaking.

The #9 Eagle qualified 'only' fourth, but immediately engaged Jim Clark's Lotus (which had taken pole by 9.4s!) and the Brabham of Denny Hulme for the lead. Despite the practice pace of the Lotus 49, "Clark was having his work cut out to hold off Hulme and Gurney," reckoned Gregor Grant in Autosport's report.

On lap four of 15, Clark toured in with collapsed front suspension and a puncture. Gurney pounced on Hulme and started stretching away. After eight laps he was 30s ahead. "The Eagle held its advantage and seemed to have plenty in hand," reported Grant.

But with only three laps to go, and while holding a 45s lead, Gurney ground to a halt with halfshaft failure. The "dreadfully unlucky" Gurney thus lost another well-deserved victory.



6

1965 Race of Champions

Brabham-Climax BT11 (retired)

As the benchmark of his era, Jim Clark did not make many mistakes, but Gurney forced him into one at Brands Hatch in March 1965.

The inaugural non-points-scoring Race of Champions was decided across two 40-lap heats. Clark's Lotus qualified on pole and disappeared down the road in the first part.

Gurney's Brabham suffered problems during practice and started on row five, though his time in what would later be known as morning warm-up was quicker than pole. After a slow start, he was 14th at the end of lap one, but quickly shot through the field. During his charge, Gurney got ahead of team-mate Jack Brabham – despite the Australian's two world titles, it was the American who was seen as the team's fastest driver – and the BRMs of Graham Hill and Jackie Stewart.

Gurney then closed on the Lotus of Mike Spence, matching Clark's new lap record, and made it into second just after half distance. At the flag he was 20.8s behind the winner.

Another good start gave Clark a narrow lead in heat two, but this time he could not get away. Gurney applied the pressure (below), pushing Clark to another lap record.

"The pair were going at it hammer and tongs," wrote Autosport's Gregor Grant. "Their struggle had the crowd yelling with excitement."

Out of Druids Gurney got alongside the Lotus and then Clark made a mistake at Bottom Bend, now known as Graham Hill Bend. The Lotus ran wide, spun, hit the bank and lost a wheel, handing Gurney a healthy advantage. But just as reliability had been a Brabham bugbear in 1964, so Gurney's bad luck struck again. He soon pitted with a misfire and retired with bearing problems.

Brabham later dropped out of the lead following a broken oil pipe and Spence took victory, but the real story was a rare error from Clark – and the pace of Gurney that had made it happen.

7

1967 Green Valley 4 Hours, Trans-Am

Mercury Cougar (1st)

Trans-Am was a big deal for the American manufacturers in the 1960s, and Gurney was drafted into the Bud Moore Engineering-run works Mercury team alongside Parnelli Jones for 1967.

The season did not start well as reliability problems afflicted the Mercurys, but things came together at Green Valley for round three. Although Shelby Ford Mustangs initially set the pace, the race boiled down to a duel between Gurney and Jones.

Indy 500 winner Jones was a hard racer and would become one of the stars of the series. Despite being three laps clear of the rest, the duo battled to the end and crossed the line together. They were credited with the same time after the photo finish, but the win was awarded to a drained Gurney.

When Autosport asked Gurney to pick his best races last year, this was on his list, underlining the effort that went into a tough event that lasted nearly four hours.



5

1960 Nurburgring 1000Km

Maserati Tipo 61 'Birdcage' (1st)

As part of the Ferrari squad, Gurney had been on the receiving end of a Stirling Moss Nurburgring masterclass in 1959, but they teamed up in a privateer Maserati the following year.

Two Camoradi Racing Tipo 61s faced four works Ferraris around the 14-mile circuit. Moss was gunning for his fourth Nurburgring 1000Km victory, but this time he would be aided rather than handicapped by his co-driver.

Jim Clark in the Border Reivers Aston Martin jumped into the lead at the start before Moss reasserted himself at the front. With fog and drizzle reducing visibility, Moss pulled away and, just before one-third distance, handed over to Gurney, who resumed with a lead of a minute.

Then an oil pipe broke and Gurney brought the Maserati back in. Unlike the previous two years, Moss did not jump in to begin a recovery. Problem fixed, Gurney went back out, now down in fourth and 4m35s behind the leading Ferrari of Phil Hill/Wolfgang von Trips.

A fine charge brought Gurney up to second just after half distance, but still he wasn't done. "The race continued, with Gurney driving absolutely brilliantly under quite dreadful conditions, slicing more and more off the Ferrari's lead," wrote Martyn Watkins in Autosport.

On lap 28 of 44, Gurney took the Maserati back to the front. He then handed over to Moss, who resumed behind the Jo Bonnier/Olivier Gendebien Porsche and the Hill/von Trips Ferrari. When the Ferrari's engine failed and Porsche made its final stop, Moss swept by into an inevitable lead. The Maserati's final winning margin was nearly three minutes.

In *Stirling Moss: My cars, my career*, written with Doug Nye, Moss gave Gurney much credit: "It was a dazzling recovery drive through the mist and drizzle.

"I could not have done so well without such a superb co-driver, because Dan was quite brilliant that day. He was the best co-driver, along with [Juan Manuel] Fangio, I think I ever had."



4

1968 Riverside 500, NASCAR

Ford Torino (1st)

Gurney was the king of NASCAR's Riverside round, taking five wins in six years during the 1960s. His final win, in blisteringly hot conditions, was arguably his best.

The entry featured most of the big names in US racing of the era. Parnelli Jones, Mario Andretti, 1966 NASCAR champion David Pearson, AJ Foyt and reigning champion Richard Petty were all ranged against the local hero.

Pearson outdragged poleman Gurney to take the lead at the start, with Jones also overtaking him. Jones then moved ahead, while Foyt's engine blew. Andretti

jumped Gurney in traffic, but thereafter the Californian began a charge. He overtook Andretti and Pearson prior to the first round of stops.

Jones and Gurney continued to battle for the lead, with Petty's Plymouth – the leading non-Ford – not far behind.

"With 250 miles to go Gurney challenged Jones for the lead and the two fought as only two professionals can, as though the race had but a lap or two to go," said Gordon Martin in Autosport's report.

Then Jones picked up a puncture and Gurney was able to make his next stop



without losing the lead to Pearson.

While Jones recovered to second, Gurney hit his first real problem – some metal cut his left-rear tyre and he had to pit. "His blistering hot wheel was almost impossible to change and the emergency pitstop dragged out to 1m25s," wrote Martin. "He returned to the race in third, 54s behind Jones."

Gurney now began one of his

Riverside charges, aided by Jones suffering a loss of power. After their final fuel stops, Gurney emerged right behind Jones and soon retook the lead.

A late stop dropped Jones behind Pearson, but made no difference to the winner. Gurney took the flag 36s ahead after five hours of hard-fought racing against America's best drivers, picking up \$21,250.



3

1964 Belgian GP

Brabham-Climax BT7 (6th)

Gurney scored Brabham's first world championship F1 win in the 1964 French GP, but he did so only after Jim Clark's faster Lotus retired. Just two weeks earlier, however, Gurney had dominated the Belgian GP in a manner that should have brought victory on the old Spa circuit that Autosport's Gregor Grant believed placed "the highest possible emphasis on skilful driving".

Gurney qualified on pole by an impressive 1.8s. Apart from the start, when Peter Arundell led, and lap three, when John Surtees' Ferrari briefly got ahead, Gurney controlled proceedings.

Surtees retired early, leaving Gurney to pull away from Clark and the BRM of Graham Hill. He was 21.4s ahead after 10 laps.

While Clark and Hill battled, Gurney set a string of lap records as he built up a seemingly unassailable lead. Hill eventually got the better of Clark (who then lost third to Bruce McLaren with a stop for water), but he was 38s behind the flying Gurney in the closing stages.

Then, Gurney dived into the pits for fuel with two laps to go, only to find the Brabham team didn't have any for him. He had a 30s deficit to new leader Hill heading into a dramatic final lap.

Hill's fuel pump failed, Gurney – now pressing on despite no extra fuel – ran dry, and McLaren also ran out. Clark's Lotus swept by the stranded Cooper to take a surprise victory. But it was Gurney who Autosport described as "man of the day".

2

1967 Rex Mays 300, Riverside, Indycar

Eagle-Ford 67 (1st)



Gurney won seven Indycar races and it's the 1967 success at his beloved Riverside that is widely regarded as his greatest. Mario Andretti (Brawler), AJ Foyt (Coyote) and outsider Gordon Johncock (Gerhardt) went into the finale fighting for the USAC title, while former F1 champions Jim Clark (Vollstedt) and John Surtees (remarkably in a Lola with an off-set for oval racing) added to the quality field.

Gurney took pole and slotted into the lead ahead of Clark at the start, with the battling duo soon pulling clear. "Gurney's battle with Clark was reminiscent of the Race of Champions in 1965, except this time it was Gurney who was in front and under pressure," said Autosport's report.

Eventually, Gurney made a small mistake and ran wide, allowing Clark ahead. But then a valve broke on the Vollstedt's Ford engine and Gurney retook the lead.

The Eagle pulled ever further clear, Gurney leading Roger McCluskey by half a minute after 50 laps. Then a backmarker spun in front of Andretti and Foyt, forcing Foyt to crash. McCluskey pitted to hand his car over to Foyt, leaving Gurney leading Andretti and Bobby Unser.

On lap 72 of 116 Gurney pitted for fuel, but a problem with a tyre that unexpectedly needed changing dropped him to third behind Andretti and Unser. "Gurney now produced a superb display of just how fast he can drive round Riverside," said Autosport. "He was catching Andretti at the rate of 1.5s a lap."

Andretti still seemed out of reach until the final six laps, when he began to run out of fuel. As Andretti pitted, Gurney attacked Unser for what was now the lead. He grabbed it on the final tour to score a famous victory.

1

1967 Belgian GP

Eagle-Weslake T1G (1st)



A predictable entry for number one, perhaps, but Gurney's Eagle success on a true driver's track is iconic, and was the climax of his F1 adventure.

Jim Clark's Lotus 49 dominated practice, taking pole by 3.1s, but Gurney was able to split the 49s and was a remarkable 3.1s faster than the next-best non-Lotus.

Despite Graham Hill's Lotus immediately hitting clutch issues, Gurney lost ground at the start and completed lap one in fifth. The Eagle soon started to come through the field and moved into second when the lead Lotus's electrode blew out of a spark plug and forced Clark to pit shortly before half distance.

Gurney had been challenging Stewart's BRM, but a brief stop to complain of fluctuating fuel pressure gave the Eagle driver a 16s gap to reduce. At first the margin only oscillated, but then Stewart started suffering gearbox maladies and Gurney increased his pace. Indeed, on lap 19 of 28 he set a new lap record and he overtook Stewart for the lead at the start of lap 21.

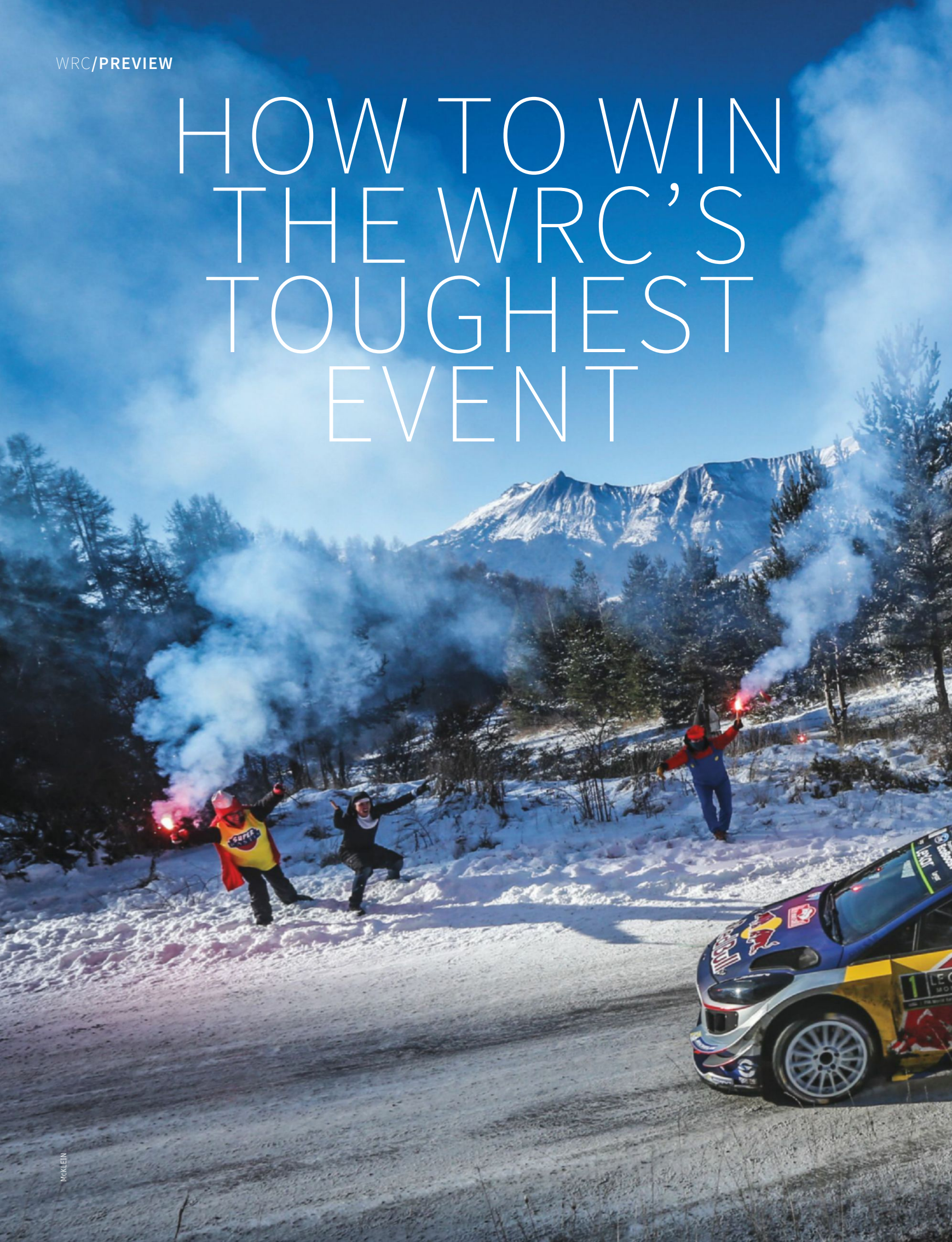
"Fingers were crossed for Gurney, whose lone effort had captured the imagination of the vast crowd," said Gregor Grant in Autosport's report.

Stewart was powerless to respond and Gurney took the flag over a minute clear to record Eagle's first – and only – world championship grand prix victory at a then record speed of 146mph.

Gurney may have needed a little more luck for this victory than some of the others on this list, but winning in his own car around one of the greatest circuits in the world made this a famous moment, one the man himself cherished.

WRC/PREVIEW

HOW TO WIN THE WRC'S TOUGHEST EVENT



Taking victory on the Monte Carlo Rally, which kicks off the 2018 World Rally Championship this week, is the toughest of tasks in motorsport. You need skill, knowledge, preparation, improvisation... and a lot of luck

By David Evans

 @daviddevansrally





hat makes the Monte Carlo Rally so difficult to win? Before answering that, maybe it's better to rewind to a rather more straightforward question: what makes ice slippery?

Ask someone with a working knowledge of science, and they'll tell you that it's because ice *doesn't* form into a wholly solid state, and instead retains a layer of semi-liquid molecules that are inherently unstable. It's such science that will potentially decide the outcome of this week's

World Rally Championship season opener in the French Alps.

Victory in Monte Carlo this week is really a piece of cake — as long as you know exactly what the weather's going to be doing in four hours' time on the far side of the second mountain to the left. And don't forget, it'll be getting dark soon and you need to factor in the drop in temperature. Oh, and there's a peak elevation of 1500 metres in the third stage, which could mean a drop of around 13C from sea level. Unless you're in cloud. If you are, the drop will only be around nine degrees.

Just before you go, don't forget the first stage is 79% north-facing and that means you'd ideally take a softer tyre than for the remaining 21% of the stage. And now it's snowing, so presumably you're *au fait* with expected accumulation levels, and where the ice base starts and stops...

And that's just snow and ice. Chuck rain, sleet, fog and sunshine into the mix and you've got yourself the season's toughest rally to call. Frankly, it's a nightmare.

As we saw last week, Scotland is no stranger to winter, so throwing a Scotsman in at the deep end to work with Sebastien Ogier seemed like a good idea for M-Sport last year. Stuart Loudon came close to a nervous breakdown as he tried to second-guess some of the most changeable conditions in living memory on the 2017 Monte.

"I don't think I slept all week," says Loudon. "We had meteo [weather] crews in and about all the stages, we had Meteo France with us on the event, and we had family and friends calling in with more advice.

I was coordinating all that information and translating it into what it might mean for tyre choices. The problem is, you're in the mountains and a slight and unexpected change in something as simple as the wind direction can impact

on all the other data. The sense of satisfaction when you called it right was immense, but that's constantly balanced by the sense of trepidation when Seb [Ogier] and the boys bolt slicks on and head under a sky you'd swear was full of snow."

Loudon's main job in the sport is as a co-driver, and he's seen those tyre decisions from the other side. "I've done the Monte and been on slicks when you come around a corner onto sheet ice," he continues. "The first thing that happens is everything goes quiet when the car locks up and stalls. It's horrible. You need a long lie down in a darkened room after this one."

You're never going to get the weather right every time, and five-time Monte winner Ogier says the secret is to accept that things will go wrong and make the best of it when they do.

"Yes, tyres are really important," he says. "It's such a difficult challenge to be 100% right. You always face mixed conditions, and getting the right choice always plays a key role in winning. We have the gravel crews [driving the stages beforehand] and we have all the meteo information coming in, but these are the mountains and the truth is that you really need a bit of luck on your side as well. The weather can turn, and it can turn for you or against you, and this can make your rally or it can finish it."

These days the tyre permutations are much simpler than they once were. There's a soft racer, a very soft racer, and studded and unstudded winter tyres — just four to choose from. When Toyota team principal Tommi Makinen was busy winning his four Montes, the tyre options were genuinely mindboggling. There was the full range of slick, intermediate and wet compounds. Then there were the winter tyres with full studs or studs just on the shoulders, again in varying compounds. And then there was the full super-narrow snow tyre. And again, this came with and without studs — and those studs varied in length. Beyond that, tyre technicians could cut a new tread pattern and customise any of those tyres. Going back before Makinen's time, the teams would have most of these options available for every stage — in Lancia's case, they even changed tyres mid-stage to cope with snow and ice on one side of the col and dry asphalt on the other.

Tyre choice may have simplified, but car set-up remains based upon terrain and temperature — it's still cold, it's still mountainous and the car still needs compromise.

"Rallying is always about compromise," says Ogier, "and that's really true on this event. When you come to the set-up for the car, you have to compromise some of the performance to find the grip and the comfort. Being comfortable in the car is so important here. It's not absolutely necessary to have the fastest racing car — it's better to have the car that gives you the confidence in all of the conditions.

"In Monte we have a very soft [engine-management] map. If you have snow and slick tyres, and this happens from time to time in Monte, then you need a car that is not pushing; if the ALS [anti-lag system] pushes you, this can be a good reason to go off. We have a setting on the ALS map where it's not completely off, but it's very close. There is very, very little grip with the slicks on ice."

It's about the percentages, as well as the weather. If it's pre-dawn or the sun's gone down, then the temperature will plummet and there's going to be more ice. In these conditions, a softer car is vital. The drivers want subtlety and constant feedback through the chassis. Undoubtedly, when the sun's out, the roads are dry and the slicks are piping hot, precision and stiffness would be worth a whole heap of time, but that's a massive gamble when you crest the col and find ice everywhere heading downhill. First, the physics of the thing mean you're way more likely to crash, and second, if you don't crash, you'll

come out of the stage with confidence shattered.

And winning this rally is all about confidence, feel for grip and anticipation of what's coming.

Ogier's point about comfort in the car was demonstrated graphically last season when he arrived

short on testing time aboard M-Sport's Ford Fiesta WRC. He was still familiarising himself with the buttons and dash layout when he was on his way to the first stage.

It was that lack of knowledge of the Fiesta that dropped him into the ditch on the outside of an icier-than-expected hairpin right, midway through Friday morning's opener. "This corner was extremely slippery," says Ogier, "but it was also linked to my inexperience in the car: I didn't expect that pulling the handbrake would create the opposite effect I wanted in this moment. It created understeer and didn't rotate the rear like I wanted. I won the rally, even after I had done a couple of small mistakes — and everybody else has done the same. The Monte is an event where it's very difficult to stay away from the mistakes."

A big part of winning is about reducing the chances of errors and, at times, driving more defensively on a conservative tyre package. The Monte offers huge rewards for those willing to take a gamble, but rolling the dice and risking everything on the ice melting before you get there can end in disaster. Fortunately for Ogier, he's had a year to get to know the Fiesta. "This time I will have more knowledge of the car, but so will everybody else after driving them for the last year," he says. »

"The Monte Carlo Rally offers huge rewards for those willing to gamble"



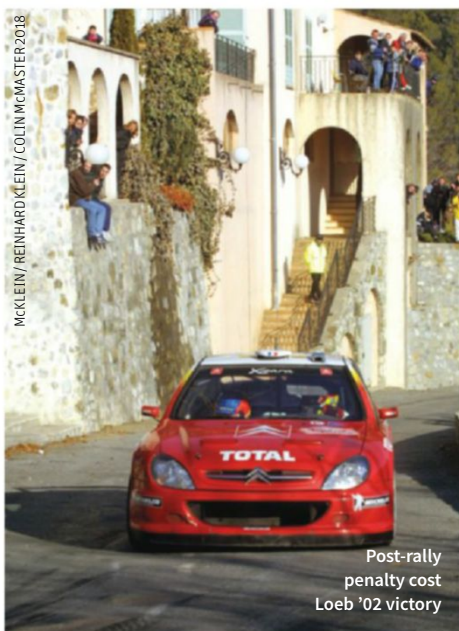


Delecour (here in '98) made the Sisteron stage his own

MCKLEIN/REINHARD KLEIN/COLIN MCMASTER 2018



2017: Ogier and Malcolm Wilson celebrate win



Post-rally penalty cost Loeb '02 victory

MCKLEIN/REINHARD KLEIN/COLIN MCMASTER 2018



Which tyres to fit? That's the Monte conundrum

MCKLEIN/LAT

TOP 5 MONTES



MCKLEIN/KLEIN/MCMMASTER 2018

1 1985

A mistake from co-driver Terry Harryman turns Ari Vatanen's three-minute lead into a five-minute deficit. The following 300 competitive miles become the stuff of legend as the Peugeot powers back to win.



MCKLEIN/KLEIN/MCMMASTER 2018

2 1965

Timo Makinen guides a Group 3 Mini 1275S to an incredible victory in some of the worst winter conditions ever. The Finn thrashes the Mini – and the opposition – through the mountains.



MCKLEIN/KLEIN/MCMMASTER 2018

3 1968

The first Monte free from its ridiculous handicapping system aimed to help smaller-engined cars. Vic Elford wins in a Porsche 911, jumps on a plane, heads to Daytona and does the same over 24 hours in a 907.



MCKLEIN/KLEIN/MCMMASTER 2018

4 1991

Frenchman Francois Delecour steps aboard a factory Ford for the first time and comes within an ace of winning the Monte. Damaged suspension on Turini – the final stage – breaks his heart.



MCKLEIN/KLEIN/MCMMASTER 2018

5 1964

This list has to include Paddy Hopkirk and 33 EJB, the Northern Irishman's victorious Mini Cooper S. This win raised awareness of rallying beyond all recognition in Britain.

The one thing nobody else can hope to rival is Ogier's experience of the mountain environment. He was born and brought up just outside Gap, he learned to ski on the slopes high above the rally's host town – and he learned to drive on the roads he now attacks as a world champion.

"The feeling is special to drive some roads I know or some sections I drove with normal cars," he says. "But at WRC speed it's another road. To know the place is always going to help you, but the truth is that when you drive with normal cars it's very different. This [knowledge] only helps you in cases of bad visibility – then you have more experience than the others. I feel more at home here in the same way that a Finn would feel more at home over the crests and jumps in Finland.

"Even though I don't live here anymore, I am still familiar with this environment and this can help to read the grip and the weather. But a big thing for me is the fans. I love being in Gap and seeing my home fans. I'm lucky to have this round of the world championship at home; it was the same for [Sebastien] Loeb when we were in Alsace and for Elfyn [Evans] in Wales. It brings pressure to be at home, but I find this positive pressure – it helps, it gives me extra motivation."

Loeb knows all about the motivation of competing at home. And, while he hails from some way north of the Alps, he was the Monte master. Had it not been for his participation in the Dakar Rally earlier this month, he'd have been back chasing an eighth Monte Carlo Rally win this week. Ironically, Loeb's South American effort ended so early with Peugeot that he could have made the start of the Monte.

Instead, he'll talk about a rally he made his own. "It's the challenge," says Loeb. "I love the challenge of driving in this mountain environment. I have always the best memories of this rally. I won the rally on the stages in 2002, but lost it afterwards [when Citroen was penalised for changing tyres in the wrong place] – this one I think of as half a win!

"It's the weather that makes this event interesting. I remember sometimes we were in the Ardeche and there was nearly no snow, it was like a Sanremo Rally. You need the winter to come to make the challenge and, to win, you

have to understand how to drive just below the limit for the grip. It's so much about experience."

Few people know more about the Monte Carlo Rally than Francois Delecour. He's done it 20 times and won it once. For Delecour, everything was in the planning. And that included the organisation of his own taskforce.

He made the Sisteron stage his own and, shortly before 10 o'clock tonight (Thursday), this is the test that will kick off WRC 2018. Missing from the route last year, this epic 22-miler runs from Thoard, so it's in the opposite direction from what the drivers are used to. But the challenge is the same. Immediately, tyre strategy and planning will come to the fore. There have been huge snowfalls in the Alps in recent weeks and it's reckoned that the route up and over Col de Fontbelle is covered for around four miles in thick, thick ice.

In 1992, Delecour gambled on a slick for Sisteron, well aware that the hairpins close to the col are always covered in ice. "I

called some friends," he says. "I got around 10 people and I told them to go to those two hairpin bends, very famous and very difficult. I told them to go there and wait to help me... but only me. They had to be ready to push, because on

the slick I didn't know that I would make it to the top.

"In the hairpin, the key is not to go sideways. If you go sideways, you stop and you cannot move. I came to the corner very, very slowly. I was at 2km/h or something like this. I was looking for traction, but my friends were saying, 'What the hell is he doing?' They started to walk to the car, they were going to push, but we were climbing. I opened the door and shouted, 'No! Don't touch the car!' I could find small stones, little rocks that were giving us traction."

Did Delecour win the stage? No, Armin Schwarz did on better-suited Pirellis. Did he win the rally? No, a blown turbo on Col de Saulce did for his chances.

The Monte requires thought well and truly outside the box, and the deployment of any kind of advantage you can lay your hands on. But more than that, success on this rally relies on the right kind of weather and good fortune. ❧

"Ogier learned to drive on the roads he now attacks as a world champion"



Mountain hairpins characterise the Monte

After the Monte...

RALLY SWEDEN

February 15-18

Based Karlstad/Torsby

Surface snow/ice

The WRC's winter rally continues with a dual-country format, with the opening day's action running through Norway – the Rojden stage starts and finishes in Sweden, but includes most of its mileage in Norway. Based out of Torsby again this year, in the hope that being further north guarantees more snow.

RALLY MEXICO

March 8-11

Based Leon

Surface gravel

Out of the snow and ice and into 30C heat of high-altitude Mexico for round three. The teams will employ specific engine maps to deal with the thinner air, which starves the World Rally Cars of power. The stunning subterranean Guanajuato street stage returns – in the absence of a Mexico City test – this year.

TOUR OF CORSICA

April 5-8

Based Bastia

Surface asphalt

Significantly overhauled route for this year, with much of the asphalt action based in the north of the island and including roads that haven't been used for more than 20 years. After two days in and around Bastia, the final day takes the crews south to Ajaccio for an agonisingly twisty 35-miler.



RALLY ARGENTINA

April 26-29

Based Villa Carlos Paz

Surface gravel

With close to a million fans regularly lining the route for this South American classic, Rally Argentina is a highlight for the drivers. The roads are a mix of wide and fast and tight and technical, and the vistas and backdrops are out of this world. As is the smell of beef cooking on *asados*.

RALLY PORTUGAL

May 17-20

Based Matosinhos

Surface gravel

Incredibly demanding of the driver/co-driver relationship, with so many deceptive corners over crests, but get it right and the vast crowds are appreciative. Continues to flourish since returning to its heartland around Porto. Running just inland from the Atlantic, it can be susceptible to changeable weather.

RALLY ITALY

June 7-10

Based Alghero

Surface gravel

Sardinia in the summer is sunny and usually very, very hot. Combine those conditions with some of the most abrasive roads of the season and tyre management becomes a key task. The good news for the winner is that it's become a tradition to wash the dust off by jumping into the sea at the finish.



RALLY FINLAND

July 26-29

Based Jyväskylä

Surface gravel

The fastest rally of the season and the one they still all want to win. Finland requires absolute bravery and commitment to fly flat-chat for 50 metres between the trees. It's one of the season's biggest and best spectacles, and the action is backed up by a service park packed full of entertainment.

RALLY GERMANY

August 16-19

Based Saarbrücken

Surface asphalt

Last year's move south from Trier to Saarbrücken was largely well received, taking the event closer to the heart of the route. As usual, the rally will comprise three very different styles of road, with the vineyards, country lanes and military test tracks putting the crews through their paces.

RALLY TURKEY

September 13-16

Based Marmaris

Surface gravel

Back in the championship for the first time since 2010, Marmaris is the third location for Turkey's WRC round and arguably the most attractive. The route runs around the Turquoise Coast and into the mountains inland, providing a variety of gravel roads in what are certain to be hot conditions.



RALLY GB

October 4-7

Based Deeside

Surface gravel

Remains a hugely popular and significant round of the World Rally Championship. The crews love the challenging conditions and the classic gravel roads of mid and north Wales. The shift to an early October date could rule out night stages, but the rain, mud, mist and sunshine will still be there.

RALLY SPAIN

October 25-28

Based Salou

Surface gravel/asphalt

Still the season's only mixed-format event, Spain provides teams with the challenge of converting their cars from gravel to asphalt spec in just 75 minutes on Friday night. Once onto the Tarmac, the stages are faster and smoother than any others in the championship, providing a fantastic road race through Tarragona.

RALLY AUSTRALIA

November 15-18

Based Coffs Harbour

Surface gravel

The forests and banana plantations of northern New South Wales provide the backdrop to this year's finale. Run at the height of the southern-hemisphere summer, it brings the season to a dusty conclusion on entertaining gravel roads, which offer an advantage the further back you are in the running order.



IS SEOUL'S FOOTPRINT ON THIS YEAR'S WRC?





ALL PICS: MCKLEIN

Hyundai had the quickest car last year. This time around, says **DAVID EVANS**, reliability should be sorted for the South Koreans, and they have a superb driver line-up



Neuville (main and top right) ended 2017 on a high with Australia win

The row of ducks has never looked quite so ordered. Everything, it seems, is ready for Hyundai Motorsport to step up to the top of the world. Three cars and four seasons have brought the South Koreans to the start of what's looking like their most exciting year yet. Who can beat them? What can beat them? Simple: themselves.

When Hyundai arrived in the world championship in 2014 with a car thrown together in next to no time, it stood no chance against the might of Volkswagen. The German manufacturer's methodical, painstaking build-up was the very antithesis of Hyundai's approach. The original i20 WRC should never

have seen the light of day; it was as underpowered as it was underdeveloped. It won, but it was lucky. But the paymasters in Seoul overruled the team in Alzenau, and it was launched.

The New Generation i20 WRC, which arrived two years later, was the one that really interested everybody. This was the car Michel Nandan and his team had been working towards. The 2016 car underpinned Hyundai's future in the world championship — it was the basis for the next generation of World Rally Car regulations and a testbed for what would become the fastest rally car of all time. So far.

Hyundai's i20 Coupe WRC led from the first stage last season and chalked up the sort of statistics Volkswagen had enjoyed for the previous four years. Following the 2017 regulatory reset and VW's departure from rallying, we were assured the cars would be closer than ever.

On the face of it, they were, and it was M-Sport's Ford Fiesta WRC that was out front for longer than any other car and ultimately took both titles. There's as strong an argument for saying Hyundai lost the title as M-Sport won it. The ➤

THE RIVALS **M-Sport Ford**

For all the talk about Andreas Mikkelsen and Thierry Neuville having everything going for them this year at Hyundai, ask either of them who's the one to watch this year and they'll give the same answer: Sebastien Ogier.

Last year the reigning champion was up against it in a new car and a new team, but the Volkswagen refugee rose to the challenge and ticked off title number five in the M-Sport Ford Fiesta. In doing so, he demonstrated patience to match the pace we'd always known about.

Toyota's Jari-Matti Latvala has already made it plain that he wants to ape Ogier's season this time around, while Citroen's Kris Meeke was similarly impressed. "He was incredible last year," says Meeke. "He was only fastest on 22 stages or something like that, but he still won. With four championships before last season, he went into 2017 with nothing to prove at all and that helped."

Consistency was the key for Ogier last season and it's going to be the same this time around. "I wasn't driving in a different way last year," he says. "I was still trying to win as much as in the years before. Maybe one of the reasons this wasn't possible is that I needed to have a bit more time in the car to make it the way I wanted it, but the other reason is that it's harder than ever to win a rally when you are first on the road [and have to sweep the loose surface clean on gravel rallies]."

"This year will be tough, but that's the way we like it – the competition is why we are here. Everybody is waiting for us and everybody has a strong car. We have to raise our game in terms of performance and speed; I was not always happy last year, but the key point is to be consistent

again. Last year we won two rallies; the target for this year is to do more than that. But if you tell me I can win the championship again by winning only two rallies, then I will sign for this straight away."

Ogier has started 123 rounds of the world championship, 59 short of Latvala, the most experienced driver in the field. But nobody starting the 2018 season has won half as many events as the champ: Ogier's on 40, Latvala's next up on 17.

You simply can't discount Ogier. Like he says, last year was a toughie for him as he found his feet with the Fiesta, but he still won. Everybody will be a year wiser with these new cars this week, but it's likely to be the Frenchman who will put

"You can't discount Ogier. Last year he was finding his feet, but he still won"

that knowledge to the best use.

So, Ogier can retain his title, but what about M-Sport? The loss of Ott Tanak will hit the Cumbrians hard – you don't say goodbye to a two-time world rally winner and not feel some pain in the points department. But Elfyn Evans is a more-than-satisfactory prospect and is somebody who knows the team intimately. Evans's improvement through last year was remarkable, and he starts the new season in the best possible position, with a car he knows and loves beneath him and the same tyres as everybody else.


The Welshman's ability to keep stacking up

points will definitely play him into a possible title fight this season. It's looking increasingly unlikely that one driver or team will run away with the championship in 2018, and that wins will be shared out even more evenly than they were last year. Being in and around the podium will be vital for anybody's title tilt. Evans is strong when it comes to letting a rally evolve and making the most of the opportunities that arise. He's got the speed, but also a clear head to know when it's best to deploy that pace.

There's no change in the FIA points structure for this season – it's the first two of a manufacturer's three registered cars to finish that contribute to the score, and Ogier and Evans were two of the most consistent last season. There's concern at the lack of a regular third car from M-Sport Ford, but the third driver is a safety net and recent history suggests the team may not even need one. That said, Bryan Bouffier in Monte and Corsica, and Teemu Suninen on at least eight rounds, offers peace of mind.

The call for more power from the Fiesta is something M-Sport's Chris Williams has been working on since the middle of last year, and the car starts Monte Carlo with significant engine improvements. Asked to quantify that, Williams avoids quoting numbers and goes for a broader description. "It's a chunk," he says, "a good chunk."

Elsewhere on the #1 car, M-Sport has deployed homologation jokers with work on the bodywork (sills and rear quarter), differential tweaks and more-durable wishbones.

 **P46** TEAM BY TEAM





ALL PICS: MCKLEIN

Mikkelsen (here and below) should fly – if he can see where he's going

difference was the lack of a second Thierry Neuville.

As Hyundai team manager Alain Penasse pointed out, “We had one Thierry and we needed two.” Neuville’s teammates Hayden Paddon and Dani Sordo were shockingly out of sorts last season and their failings – allied to technical glitches – cost Hyundai the title.

Neuville is typically forthright in his assessment of those driving alongside him in 2017. “We were clearly missing a team-mate to help us in the fight for the championship,” he says. “For 90% of the year, I was alone fighting when [M-Sport had] two, three Fiestas always on the podium. Nobody really joined us in that fight except for on two rallies. That makes my fight for the drivers’ title even harder and for the manufacturers’ title, it makes it impossible.”

It’s for that reason that Paddon and Sordo find themselves sharing a car this year. In the second full-time i20 is Hyundai’s ‘second Neuville’: Andreas Mikkelsen, the Norwegian stolen from beneath the nose of Citroen towards the end of last season.

This partnership is the one that strikes most fear into the rest of the service park and offers Hyundai its first chance of global glory. Both Neuville and Mikkelsen are well capable of lifting this year’s drivers’ title. Mikkelsen spent much of last year on the sidelines, and his time away has made him hungrier than ever. Crucially, he loves the i20. “I feel really comfortable in the car,” he says, “especially on the loose surfaces – it really reminds me of the Polo.”

And what happened last time he was in a Polo? He beat Sebastien Ogier in a fair, final-day fight on Volkswagen’s last outing in Australia at the end of 2016. Make no mistake, Mikkelsen’s ready for this season.

Right now, Hyundai’s chosen ones are talking the talk about the need for the manufacturers’ title and the requirement to satisfy Seoul with a tangible year-long return on its WRC



investment. And they will, no doubt, be helped out by Sordo and Paddon. Sordo remains one of the fastest drivers on asphalt and one of the most consistent points-scorers on the dirt. In his last three full seasons and 39 rallies with Hyundai, the Spaniard finished outside the points only five times. He’s the banker.

Paddon suffered the nightmare of nightmare seasons last year, but still, when he brought the car to the finish, he was never lower than eighth, and he was on the podium twice. Again, the Kiwi’s a super-strong option in the third car.

The good thing for Hyundai is that Sordo and Paddon are still feeling sufficiently aggrieved at their demotion that each is looking to demonstrate to the team’s management just how badly they’ve been misjudged. Perfect. For different reasons, Hyundai arrives at the start of the season with four of the series’ most motivated crews.

And they arrive in a car that, we’re told, has lost none of »

its speed, despite the inevitable requirement to trade some performance for the sort of reliability and durability Hyundai looks to have found over the closed season. Last year the thing was fast but fragile. On more than one occasion we'd see Hyundai's rivals bouncing off things and talking about it at the end of the stage, while the i20 Coupe WRC lay mortally wounded at the side of the road.

Hyundai revealed much of its 2018 car at the penultimate round in Wales last October, when Neuville ran development parts in a last-gasp effort to wrestle the drivers' title from Ogier's grasp. Since then there's been more work, and there will be more to come on the i20 in the first quarter of this year.

Now you can see why Hyundai is talking with increased confidence. With speed, drivers, budget and back-up, we need look no further for M-Sport's most likely successor. But nothing is ever that simple in the World Rally Championship...

What will be tested most severely through 2018 will be Hyundai's ability to manage its campaign and bring the big prize home. The team appears to favour something of a 'good cop/bad cop' approach to management, with Penasse more than happy to take his drivers to task in the media – witness his acerbic assessment of Neuville's wayward focus on the star-rating of his hotel rather than his speed on the stages a few years ago. Or, more recently, his frank and forthright appraisal of Paddon's problems last season.

Penasse's approach to the Neuville issue looked to have caused irreparable damage at the time. But you'd have to argue that it (along with his being dropped to Hyundai's B team late in 2015) did the trick. Three years ago, Neuville was a world champion without the world championship, increasingly high on his own supply, and needing to be brought back down to earth.

Volatility is never far away at Hyundai, and there's definitely the potential for this year to go absolutely perfectly – or absolutely pear-shaped. As the season progresses, team orders will doubtless have to be deployed and it will be fascinating to see how that plays out against the backdrop of bonhomie between Mikkelsen and Neuville.

And then there's the bad feeling yet to come from second-stringers likely to be sacrificed at the altar of an FIA-badged crown. Paddon, for example, will start Portugal in a near-perfect position, having contested only Sweden from the first five rounds. Here's the scenario: Paddon's rivals sweep the Porto gravel off the line, allowing him to power into a big lead at the end of day one. He maintains that through Saturday and is then told to stand aside to allow one or possibly both of Neuville and Mikkelsen to come past him. The New Zealander has to give up on a possibly career-boosting victory for the common good. Handling that tricky situation, where the rich get richer, is likely to be a key skill for Hyundai this season.

Whichever way it falls – the perfect season or the perfect storm – it's got the makings of the perfect story. 🏆



Penasse could have a tough job managing his drivers

ALL PICS: MCKLEIN



THE RIVALS **Toyota**

One of the most interesting subplots in this year's World Rally Championship will be Toyota's ability to keep three charging drivers from either side of the Baltic Sea happy.

Last year Toyota's order was well set: Jari-Matti Latvala arrived late, but took the seat at the head of the table without any questions; Esapekka Lappi still hadn't started a world championship event in a World Rally Car; and Juho Hanninen was more than happy to toe the party line in an effort to further illuminate the twilight of his career.

Now Lappi's a Rally Finland winner and Hanninen's been replaced by Ott Tanak, a man who, with a bit more planning and event management early in 2017, could have been sticking the #1s on either side of his Yaris WRC this year.

There will, of course, be rallies where Lappi will fade into the background: he has yet to start in Mexico and Argentina, and he's only done Sweden once and Monte twice. But in Portugal, Sardinia and, of course, Finland – places he knows and where he's comfortable – he will be

a real threat. Yes, he's young and sensible enough to heed team principal Tommi Mäkinen's advice about when to throttle back and take the points, but his speed unnerved Latvala at times last season. This time Lappi will be looking to get fully under his countryman's skin.

Arguably, this is Latvala's best chance to win the championship. That may sound strange when you think that this guy spent four years with Volkswagen and couldn't make it happen, but it's only since he departed VW and headed to Toyota that we've discovered how much of a struggle he found life alongside Sebastien Ogier. Latvala looks just as contented as he ever did at M-Sport (the mutual affection between him and the Cumbrians is still talked about in Dovenby), but now he's got the experience and common sense to drive a champion's drive.

Late last year Latvala talked about the time it took him to settle at Volkswagen after such a long spell at M-Sport, adding that he expected Tanak to experience some of the same in his new home at





Toyota. Secretly J-ML will be hoping that's the case. It's vital for the Finn to steal the march on the Estonian. If Latvala can bag some early points and put some distance between him and his team-mates, he'll keep the team firmly behind him, and this will likely sway any decisions regarding team orders later in the season. It will also help Latvala's frame of mind. If – and this is a definite possibility from what we've heard from Tanak's early tests of the Yaris – he steps in and is straight up to speed, that could destabilise Latvala and bring about the sort of confused, tail-chasing meltdown we saw at the end of 2016.

Toyota and its immediate pace provided the biggest surprise of last year. That speed was tempered by teething troubles from a car that had come together in a shockingly short space of time. Mäkinen reckons the thing is completely debugged and ready to go now. Certainly, prolonged high-altitude (5000 metres) running at Toyota's engine factory in Japan has brought both performance and reliability gains – the overheating seen in Mexico and Argentina last year should be a thing of the past.

THE RIVALS Citroen

Nothing shocked the service park more than Citroen's woeful showing at the dawn of rallying's new era last year. Things have changed significantly since then. Suspension expert Ohlins was brought in to help out on gravel, while the team's own engineers came to terms with the conundrum that was the active centre differential. Finally, post-Poland – arguably the team's low point, when Craig Breen and Andreas Mikkelsen could barely keep the car in a straight line – changes were made and some sort of consistency was found from the transmission, helping the transfer of power and delivery of grip.

From the outside, this is the Citroen of old, but behind the scenes the budget is nothing like it was a decade ago. The expertise is, however, still there and the comrades inside the red army are more than up for the fight. If the Versailles team can capture the sort of pace it showed on 2017's asphalt and the rougher, tighter, twistier gravel stages, and transfer it to the wider, smoother dirt roads, then the C3 WRC becomes a genuine threat all around the world.

Kris Meeke is a potential rally winner everywhere and Breen's certainly going to be in the mix on some of his favoured rallies. And then there's Sebastian Loeb. What can we expect from him? His first event will be Mexico and, running at the back of the World Rally Car pack (because he won't have picked up any points in Monte and Sweden), he will benefit from a much cleaner and quicker line. Don't be surprised to see Loeb out front on Friday in Leon. The bigger question will be whether he can sustain that lead once the field is reversed and the playing field levels out over the weekend.

It's testament to the budget restrictions in place in Paris that Loeb comes in to replace Breen in Mexico, Corsica and Spain. Citroen will only run three cars when Mads Ostberg returns in Sweden or team partner Khalid Al Qassimi starts a handful of rallies later in the year. The upshot of this is a negligible challenge for the makes' crown, but genuine potential for wins and a shot at the drivers' championship.





BACK FROM THE BENCH

Kris Meeke and Elfyn Evans start 2018 in better shape than ever. As they tell (the unrelated!) **DAVID EVANS**, in part that's because they've bounced back from the lowest of lows: being dropped

The World Rally Championship has been in the hands of French drivers for the past 14 years. It's therefore hard to lambast British drivers for a lack of recent success without castigating every other nation.

But before the Sebastien Loeb and Ogier-led French revolution, it had only been two years since Richard Burns won Britain's second world title, with Colin McRae at the sport's forefront for a decade before that.

Now, though, there's a genuine opportunity for Britain to be the best once again. You may have read those same words this time last year, but 12 months ago they were about just one driver: Northern Ireland's Kris

Meeke. Now, though, his rival from the eastern shores of the Irish Sea has to be seriously considered: Elfyn Evans.

Having disappeared into the ignominy of an unwanted British Rally Championship campaign in 2016, Evans was offered a choice: sink or swim; fight or flight. He fought harder than ever and learned more about himself, his sport and his driving in those 12 months than probably ever before. Last year, Evans came as close as anybody to winning the rally they all want to win: Finland. He finished second in Jyväskylä – but went

on to score his maiden victory during an unforgettable week at home in Wales last October.

Besides the desire to become the first British champion since Burns 17 years ago, the thing Meeke and Evans have in common is their time on a career rollercoaster. Meeke's journey in particular has been one long series of highs and lows: Intercontinental Rally Challenge glory with Peugeot leading to a WRC chance with Mini; Mini's programme going down the toilet and sending him back to the PSA Group for the odd bit of Citroen testing. Two rallies in a DS 3 WRC in 2013 led to a full season in '14 and the breakthrough win in '15. A season of testing and development with the C3 WRC followed and then came '17, which turned out to be his entire career in microcosm: crazy, calamitous, contentious and victorious.

For Evans the ride's been shorter but arguably more extreme. A decade ago he and his then co-driver Gareth Roberts were involved in a fatal accident on the Donegal International Rally. Four years later Evans was hit hard by the loss of Roberts himself after an accident on the Targa Florio Rally. Perhaps such genuine tragedy offered perspective when he lost his seat after some – at best – middling performances towards the end of 2015.

Evans knows when and where things turned around. "I remember being up with Malcolm [Wilson, M-Sport team principal] at the end of 2015," he recalls. "Malcolm said,



‘We can give you two rounds of the world championship and the chance to do a full British Rally Championship’. I was sitting there listening to this having come off the back of a full WRC programme and saying, ‘Oooo, this is going to be a bit crap’. But I went home and thought about it. I evaluated everything that had gone on and I still had an opportunity.”

He took that chance and used his year on the naughty step to become the second member of his family to be crowned BRC champion (dad Gwyndaf took the crown in 1996).

“I was there to be shot down,” says Evans. “I knew I had to perform at WRC2 and BRC level or that would be the end. Before then I’d worked a lot on trying tactics for rallies and seeing how we’d fare here and there. I put an end to that and I said, ‘Right, we’re going to be fastest on every stage until we have to manage the rally’. That’s what I did.

“If you can’t go to the national championship and absolutely wipe the floor [with the opposition], then you’ve no hope in the WRC. The level is so high. I knew most people expected me to win, but in my mind unless I could dominate, there was no point in looking at the WRC again.”

That success carried him straight back to a full world championship programme, which ended with eight top-six finishes, three podiums and that famous Welsh win. Those are the stats, but what’s more important are the changes that

have taken place in the 29-year-old. Starting 2018 he’s leaner, meaner and less focused, and all three of those are real positives.

“The situation I was in, in 2015, wasn’t down to a lack of effort or anything like that,” Evans adds. “Probably I pushed too hard on a lot of rallies and my approach was all very intense. I don’t think I was taking the breaks I needed and I wasn’t able to relax. I think I burned myself out rather than let it slip away.”

That’s changed. The intensity’s risen where it had to rise – such as in team debriefs – but it’s lessened where it really had to: Evans is no longer plugged into watching onboards of stages 24/7 when he’s out of the car.

The peaks and troughs of his own career afforded Wilson insight into how to deal with Evans at the end of 2015. Plenty thought it was mad to drop the Welshman after investing in him at WRC level for two years, only to start the process again with Frenchman Eric Camilli. Wilson has subsequently shown method in that supposed madness.

“This does relate back to when I was driving,” he says. “Part of my thinking was to put pressure on him to go and dominate the BRC and WRC2, because there’s nothing like winning for a driver – you can see the whole body language changes. I have seen it over the years, time and time and time again, and I know from my own driving that when you are relaxed you always drive better than when you’re putting yourself under pressure. »



Year in the BRC ended up being a boost for Evans

"It was not a nice decision to have to take with Elfyn, but the one thing I will say is that I never lost faith with him. I always felt he could get back here and boy has he done that. It was hard for him to take, but look where he is now and what his future holds. He might not have liked it, but it worked."

A couple of years ago, mid-high, or possibly mid-low — they all blurred into one for Meeke — I mentioned to him that maybe being managed by Wilson might have done him some good.

"We wouldn't last until shakedown," Meeke replied. I could see his point. Aware that he was advancing on his mid-thirties, he was in a hurry to realise the opportunity that had finally appeared before him with Citroen. Starting competing later than most, aged 20, Meeke has spent his career playing catch-up.

Ahead of last season, it was generally accepted that Meeke had made it. He'd caught up and finally started the year as a genuine title contender, and was riding the crest of a wave created by one of the sport's returning giants. But the new dawn was false — the Citroen failed and Meeke suffered his most turbulent year yet.

The C3 WRC remains in the middle of an unexpected evolution process, but there's no doubting it is improving. In its element, the car was always quick, but now there's consistency coming with an ever-widening performance sweet spot.

But what about Meeke? When he missed Rally Poland last year, there were plenty predicting that the end of his tumultuous ride was nigh. In the end, it worked out and Meeke accepts it was the right move. Andreas Mikkelsen

stepped into the car and struggled to keep it in a straight line, just like Meeke and team-mate Craig Breen had done.

Meeke offered more insight into that decision in a radio interview at the end of last year: "Ultimately it was my call. We talked and discussed a lot about it. I wasn't happy with the situation, but I needed to take a step back to allow everyone else to realise where the troubles with the C3 WRC were at. They got Mikkelsen in, they even got Sebastien Loeb to test the car, but everybody was giving the same feedback.

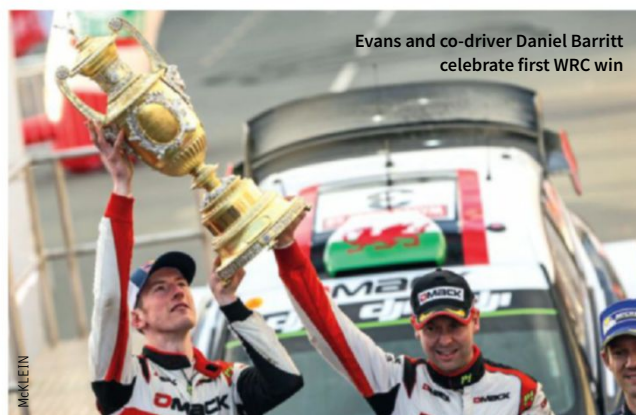
"It took a while for everyone to understand the issues we had. It became a very difficult situation and, to be honest, I was the one that put my hand up and said I'd step back. What was probably my fault, on the previous three events, was [that] I had continued to put my head on the chopping board. Looking back, [stepping down for Poland] was probably the right thing to do in the circumstances, but it's never a nice situation."

Reflection has provided clarity, but beyond that, towards the end of last season we started to see a different Meeke. Rally GB was a case in point. He'd never be happy with seventh, but was genuinely relaxed with the reasons for his result. He was, he pointed out, only 40s behind the top Michelin runner, second-placed man Thierry Neuville. Meeke had given it a go, but when he'd seen it wasn't on, he hadn't tried to force the issue.

"There were a lot of shortcomings last year," says Meeke. "I admit my biggest fault was continuing to push even when things weren't comfortable. But we got off to that nightmare of a start and I was trying to play catch-up. I got sucked into



A rally crew's role requires mucking in...



Evans and co-driver Daniel Barritt celebrate first WRC win



Victory in Mexico was early-season high point for Meeke



Meeke's Argentina crash part of learning curve



Win in Spain showed how Meeke turned his 2017 around

it and we were weak in that area, but you learn as you go.

"There was huge expectation with Citroën coming back last year; everybody put us up there on a pedestal and it turns out we were very much underprepared; our testing hadn't been in good places. We were poor. The approach this year is very different. I'm not *expecting* anything from this year, I will take each event as it comes. I don't want to talk about a big opportunity for this year; every year's an opportunity. What we have now is a clean slate in front of us.

"We learned a lot in 2017 and you learn more from the low points than the high points – it's easy to carry the wins with you. It was difficult to communicate the feeling we had in the car and that wasn't necessarily translating into fixing things. On top of that there were issues in the team as we incorporated all of PSA Motorsport's division under one roof, but that's all much more settled now.

"We showed last year that we can dominate events from start to finish when I have a car beneath me. Hopefully we can have a consistent package and I can improve and be a stronger driver."

It'll be interesting to see how Meeke fares without team principal Yves Matton, who has moved on to the FIA, with

the largely unknown Pierre Budar coming in to replace him. Meeke has Matton to thank for giving him his break with Citroën in 2013 and then standing by him ever since, but there's no doubt the relationship became strained last season. Budar is part of the clean slate.

While Wilson is quick to encourage a wager on an Evans win this season, the drivers themselves are more reluctant to talk in positive terms about ending French resistance to a title takeover.

Instead of a straight prediction, Meeke smiles and offers: "Sébastien [Ogier] had five years in the world championship before he was champion, this is the start of my fifth. Let's see what we can do."

Meeke and Evans have matured into entirely worthy factory WRC drivers. The parallels between this generation and the last are marked: Meeke followed McRae over the limit, crashed, bounced back and has arrived as arguably the sport's fastest man from A to B, while Evans traced Burns' step-by-step approach to the top. More than ever, both men start this year aware that points – as well as pace – will help them to the ultimate prize.

And return the silverware across the Channel again. 🍀

TEAM BY TEAM

Introducing the competitors for the 2018 World Rally Championship

By David Evans



Based Versailles, France Car Citroën C3 WRC



KRIS MEEKE (GB)

Age 38
WRC starts 85
WRC wins 5
WRC titles 0
Co-driver
Paul Nagle (IRL)

When the car is there, Meeke's speed is always beyond question. Happily for the Northern Irishman's fans, we also saw an ability to temper his enthusiasm towards the end of last year. He knows what he's got to do and few want the title more than him.



CRAIG BREEN (IRL)

Age 27
WRC starts 48
WRC wins 0
WRC titles 0
Co-driver
Scott Martin (GB)

Breen finished fifth six times last year, and now needs to press on and challenge for podiums where he has the experience. He can win, but, like Meeke, his chances will definitely hinge on whether the car beneath him is offering the sort of consistency he needs.



SEBASTIEN LOEB (F)

Age 43
WRC starts 169
WRC wins 78
WRC titles 9
Co-driver
Daniel Elena (MC)

The last time the master came back he stunned the WRC by leading the Monte from the opening stage, but it's doubtful it'll be the same story this time when he returns in Mexico. If Loeb has somehow lost any of his speed, his time in the Dakar dunes will have taught him plenty about patience.



Based Alzenau, Germany Car Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC



THIERRY NEUVILLE (B)

Age 29
WRC starts 84
WRC wins 6
WRC titles 0
Co-driver
Nicolas Gilsoul (B)

The fastest and most successful driver, in number of wins, of last year. Nobody got close in terms of fastest stage times or the length of time spent in the lead. But he couldn't close the deal. This year he needs a solid start and the ability to remain competitive for the duration of the championship.



ANDREAS MIKKELSEN (N)

Age 28
WRC starts 87
WRC wins 3
WRC titles 0
Co-driver
Anders Jaeger (N)

Mikkelsen led two of the three rallies he started with Hyundai last season, so it's clear he's already up to speed with the i20 Coupe WRC. While he missed a few events last year, he still has enough experience, speed and consistency to be counted among the title favourites this year.



DANI SORDO (E)

Age 34
WRC starts 152
WRC wins 1
WRC titles 0
Co-driver
Carlos del Barrio (E)

A part-programme for this year looks like the beginning of the end of the hugely likeable Sordo's lengthy WRC career. That he won't be distracted by rallies he hasn't always enjoyed means he'll be even more focused when he is in the car. Always a threat on asphalt.



HAYDEN PADDON (NZ)

Age 30
WRC starts 72
WRC wins 1
WRC titles 0
Co-driver
Seb Marshall (GB)

Practically and psychologically, Paddon will be on the back foot by missing seat time and not doing all the rallies, so he needs to rely on his speed and natural ability. If he gets his head straight, he could really show what he's capable of against the odds this season.



Based Cockermouth, UK **Car** Ford Fiesta WRC



SEBASTIEN OGIER (F)

Age 34
WRC starts 123
WRC wins 40
WRC titles 5
Co-driver
 Julien Ingrassia (F)

Is title number six coming up? Don't bet against it. It's likely the superstar Frenchman will face closer competition than in any of his previous title defences, but he still has the sustained speed, approach and brain power to take his second consecutive crown with M-Sport.



ELFYN EVANS (GB)

Age 29
WRC starts 63
WRC wins 1
WRC titles 0
Co-driver
 Dan Barritt (GB)

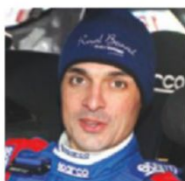
Eight top-six finishes and three podiums last year show he has great consistency – but it's the speed we're more interested in. Second in Finland, just missing victory in Argentina and a win in Wales prove he has commitment in spades. Now with a full test programme and Michelin rubber, watch him go.



TEEMU SUNINEN (FIN)

Age 23
WRC starts 28
WRC wins 0
WRC titles 0
Co-driver
 Mikko Markkula (FIN)

Showed exceptional pace when he drove the 2017 Fiesta WRC in Poland and Finland last year, but still needs more experience of certain types of rally. Mature beyond his years, he will take a sensible approach to this season, but when the going gets quick he's a definite podium threat.



BRYAN BOUFFIER (F)

Age 39
WRC starts 17
WRC wins 0
WRC titles 0
Co-driver
 Jerome Degout (F)

Has huge experience – and is a former (non-WRC) winner – of the Monte Carlo Rally and Tour de Corse, which is why he's driving M-Sport's third car on both events. His ability to read the conditions and translate that to a workable tyre solution in the mountains will be invaluable.



Based Puuppola, Finland **Car** Toyota Yaris WRC



JARI-MATTI LATVALA (FIN)

Age 32
WRC starts 182
WRC wins 17
WRC titles 0
Co-driver
 Miikka Anttila (FIN)

Could finally be crowned world champion this year, or could sink without a trace. Mentally, he's stronger than ever and will have to face down new ice-cool team-mate Ott Tanak. Latvala has the speed and the experience to be champion, but questions remain over his mindset.



OTT TANAK (EST)

Age 30
WRC starts 79
WRC wins 2
WRC titles 0
Co-driver
 Martin Jarveoja (EST)

After six years competing in an M-Sport-built Fiesta, Tanak has jumped ship. He has the full confidence of Toyota – team boss Tommi Makinen chose him over Sebastien Ogier – but now he needs to use this opportunity. Finding his feet quickly is vital as his rivals won't wait for him.



ESAPEKKA LAPPI (FIN)

Age 27
WRC starts 29
WRC wins 1
WRC titles 0
Co-driver
 Janne Ferm (FIN)

You could argue that Lappi's Rally Finland victory last season came just a touch too early, as it raised unrealistic expectations of a driver short of experience. But he's a fast learner and an even faster driver. Will fight for wins when he knows where he's going and learn lots where he doesn't.



Peugeot's Dakar programme will end after three consecutive wins between 2016-18

Sainz takes second Dakar

DAKAR RALLY
SALTA-CORDOBA (RA)
JANUARY 16-20

WORLD RALLY LEGEND CARLOS SAINZ scored his second Dakar Rally win in an eventful and occasionally controversial 2018 edition.

The double WRC champion, a winner with Volkswagen in 2010, had not finished any of the three Dakars he had previously contested as a Peugeot works driver, but this year he delivered the goods in the manufacturer's final outing. Having survived the high-attrition opening leg in Peru, Sainz emerged as the rally's leader courtesy of back-to-back stage wins either side of the mid-rally rest day in La Paz.

These would be his only stage wins of the event, but his path to overall victory over the rest of the rally was relatively smooth – aside from a penalty for an alleged incident with a quad rider that was ultimately rescinded.

The start of the final week was delayed by Monday's last Bolivian leg, Tupiza-Salta, being cancelled. Heavy rain in the area had created doubts over the stage's viability – particularly regarding the state of the Tupiza bivouac.

When the running resumed in Argentina on Tuesday (Jan 16), former rally leader Stephane Peterhansel recorded his third stage win of the event and overhauled Toyota driver Nasser Al-Attiyah for second place behind Sainz in the general classification. Before the day's running began, Sainz had been handed the penalty that took his lead below the one-hour mark.

The 55-year old incurred a 10-minute forfeit for allegedly colliding with quad racer Kees Koolen and subsequently failing to stop and assist the Dutchman, who then lodged a complaint. Sainz was adamant he "didn't hit any quads", but was eventually given the penalty in the general classification for "potentially dangerous" conduct.

Peugeot backed its driver and lodged an appeal, while Koolen maintained his assertion that Sainz had hit him and that the penalty was too lenient. But after Toyota's Bernhard ten Brinke had topped the 11th stage ahead of another former race leader, Cyril Despres, Sainz's penalty was overturned when Peugeot presented new evidence regarding the incident.

"The telemetry does not show any crashes," said team boss Bruno Famin. "Maybe a brush,



VARGIOLU/RED BULL

victory as Peugeot exits

but nothing like an impact. The accelerometer didn't register it, just as Carlos hadn't." The organisers then issued "formal advice to crew #303 [Sainz and co-driver Lucas Cruz] to take extra care while overtaking other competitors".

With the penalty rescinded, Sainz led Peterhansel by one hour and 45 seconds in the general classification with three stages remaining. Al-Attiah topped the longest timed special of the 2018 race on stage 12, finishing two minutes quicker than Peterhansel through the 325-mile run between Chilecito and San Juan, while Sainz suffered a puncture and gearbox problems, conceding 18m07s of his lead.

Sainz edged closer to the overall win by coming home a safe sixth on stage 13, almost 20 minutes behind the day's winner Al-Attiah. But his lead actually increased by almost two minutes as Peterhansel hit a tree early in the day's running, which resulted in steering damage on his Peugeot and left the 13-time Dakar champion with a thumb sprain. Assisted by team-mate Despres, Peterhansel lost almost an hour making it to the neutralised zone, where his car was finally attended to by an assistance crew. He fell to fourth in the general classification,

which cost Peugeot a one-two finish.

On the final stage – a 120km loop near Cordoba – Sainz finished ninth behind eventual third place finisher, Giniel de Villiers, and lost less than three minutes to Al-Attiah to end the event with a lead of 43m40s.

"We have seen in this race that every day things happened and it was very hard," said Sainz after sealing the win.

"I have never run a race like this. It is difficult to win a race that lasts two weeks. When you win with this advantage [44 minutes], you have done the job well. From the [Dakars] I have competed in this has been the hardest, including the two in Africa that I did."

VALENTIN KHOROUNZHII AND SERGIO LILLO

RESULTS

1 Carlos Sainz/Lucas Cruz (Peugeot 3008 DKR) 49h16m18s;
2 Nasser Al-Attiah/Matthieu Baumel (Toyota Hilux) +43m40s;
3 Giniel de Villiers/Dirk von Zitzewitz (Toyota); 4 Stephane
Peterhansel/Jean Paul Cottret (Peugeot); 5 Jakub Przygonski/
Tom Colsoul (Mini All4 Racing); 6 Sheikh Khalid al Qassimi/Xavier
Panseri (Peugeot); 7 Martin Prokop/Jan Tomanek (Ford F150 Evo);
8 Peter van Merksteijn/Maciej Marton (Toyota); 9 Sebastian Halpern/
Edu Pulentia (Toyota); 10 Lucio Alvarez/Robert Howie (Toyota).

Karting star Novalak wins finale

TOYOTARACINGSERIES

TERETONGA (NZ)

JANUARY 20-21

ROUND 2/5

CLEMENT NOVALAK UPSTAGED the established single-seater aces by winning the Spirit of the Nation Trophy finale at Teretonga, the world's most southerly race track.

The French-born, Swiss-raised, British-based karting star had hitherto struggled with a litany of botched starts, but this time his Giles Motorsport Tatuus got the jump on polesitting local boy Marcus Armstrong and he led all the way. Runner-up Armstrong soaked up pressure from Richard Verschoor and continues to lead the points, while Robert Shwartzman and Brendon Leitch completed the top five.

Novalak had qualified on pole for the opening race on Saturday, but slipped to fourth position away from the start. Verschoor jumped into the lead and stayed in front all the way, with Shwartzman second and Armstrong third as the M2 Competition squad completed a podium lockout. Behind Novalak, James Pull finished in fifth.

The reversed-grid race was won by GP3 racer Juan Manuel Correa, who led throughout from pole. This time Novalak jumped the start before embarking on a frenetic early battle with Pull for second on the road. Novalak won that, but a five-second penalty relegated him to fifth. That pushed Pull up to second, Armstrong to third and Shwartzman to fourth.

RESULTS

Race 1 1 Richard Verschoor 20 laps in 18m06.899s;
2 Robert Shwartzman +0.450s; 3 Marcus Armstrong;
4 Clement Novalak; 5 James Pull; 6 Juan Manuel
Correa. Race 2 1 Correa 20 laps in 18m08.159s;
2 Pull +3.446s; 3 Armstrong; 4 Shwartzman;
5 Novalak; 6 Verschoor. Race 3 1 Novalak 25 laps
in 22m42.026s; **2 Armstrong +0.970s; 3 Verschoor;**
4 Shwartzman; 5 Brendon Leitch; 6 Pull. Points
1 Armstrong 397; 2 Shwartzman 369; 3 Verschoor
322; 4 Novalak 310; 5 Pull 300; 6 Correa 279.



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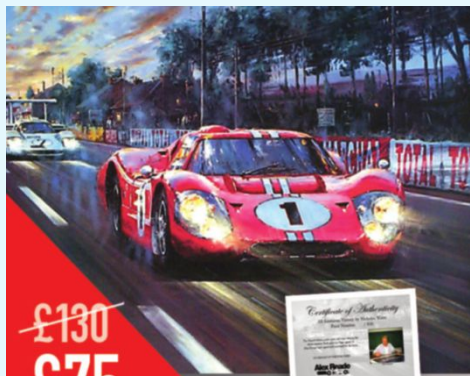
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Fans' viewing limited on Brands GP loop

AREAS OF THE BRANDS HATCH Grand Prix Circuit will be out of bounds to the spectating public in the wake of changes planned for this season.

In a bid to improve safety, certain as-yet-unspecified areas of the loop will be inaccessible, and debris fencing will be erected around parts of the circuit.

The debris fencing will not be put up around the whole GP loop. It will be in selected yet-to-be-confirmed areas as part of a safety review by circuit owner MotorSport Vision. Part of the impetus for the review was the return of the German-based DTM, which will race this season at Brands for the first time since 2013, and for the first time on the GP loop.

MSV group operations and engineering manager Giles Butterfield told Autosport: "The changes to spectator access within the Grand Prix loop coincided with discussions with [DTM promoter] ITR about the return of DTM to Brands Hatch, but are primarily part of an ongoing review of spectator protection.

"The changes do not involve debris fencing being erected around the whole loop; instead they involve certain areas being designated as viewing areas, some without debris fencing, some with where required, and other areas designated as not for public access. This set-up will operate for all race events on the



The Carvalho crash in 2010 set off debate about spectator safety on the GP Circuit at Brands Hatch

Grand Prix Circuit and is not particular to DTM.

"The works to the inside of the GP loop will be finished in advance of the first race event on the Grand Prix Circuit in May [Blancpain GT].

Updated maps of spectator routes and viewing locations will be published in due course to clarify the changes."

Similar changes were discussed as recently as 2010, when a car driven by Francisco Carvalho vaulted the barriers in a SEAT Leon Eurocup race between Sheene Curve and Stirling's. The rolling car narrowly missed a group of marshals.

The Brands Hatch Indy Circuit layout will not be affected by the changes.

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GT3 McLaren will run in red livery in 2018



Bell (l) and Balfe (r) won GT Open

BRITISH GT

McLaren GT3 heads back to British GT

MCLAREN WILL RETURN TO THE GT3 division of the British GT Championship this season as part of a new multi-class attack from the Balfe Motorsport team.

The family-run squad has entered a McLaren 650S GT3 for team owner and racer Shaun Balfe and McLaren factory man Rob Bell. It marks the first time a GT3 McLaren has run in the series since the final round of the 2016 season and Balfe's first British GT entry since '13.

Bell and Balfe raced together in the 650S in International GT Open last season, where they won the Pro-Am drivers' championship. "We've had a couple of great seasons in Europe, winning the Pro-Am title and finishing second overall, but now it's time for a new challenge and British GT

most definitely provides that," said Balfe. "Rob and I have been racing the 650S for the last year and a half and we enjoy a great relationship, but there's a lot of unknowns this season and we expect to start on the back foot.

"We've never raced on the Pirelli tyres, and the circuit temperatures will be very different to what we're used to in Europe. Then there's the competition: the Ams are so competitive and know the championship inside out, while this year's GT3 Pro driver roster is incredible. We're just aiming for a clean opening weekend before building on what we've learned."

The team will also run 2016 GT4 class champions Graham Johnson and Mike Robinson in a 570S GT4. After winning the '16 title in an

Optimum Motorsport-run Ginetta, the duo switched to the McLaren midway through last season, finishing second in spite of a number of teething troubles with the new car.

Race engineer Geoff Kingston will follow the pair from Optimum to Balfe. "McLaren introduced us to Balfe and we were really impressed by their facilities in Grantham," said Johnson. "Having Rob [Bell] in the team is also hugely valuable.

"We're very grateful to Optimum Motorsport for their efforts over the past three years, but in joining Balfe, we're joining a team with more experience working with McLaren and which has ambition not only to compete for both British GT class titles, but also at legendary races such as Le Mans. Mike and I share those same goals."

GINETTA GT5 CHALLENGE

Strong junior field in Ginetta GT5s

A HOST OF LEADING junior drivers plus top Ginetta team HHC Motorsport have signed up to compete in the Ginetta GT5 Challenge this year.

The Ginetta G40-based series, which runs primarily on the British GT package but also enjoys BTCC support events, is attracting a strong field for 2018.

Will Dyrdal and Gordon Mutch, champion and race winner respectively in Junior Saloons, and ex-Ginetta Junior racer

Scott McKenna will take part. While McKenna will race for HHC, Mutch joins Fox Motorsport and Dyrdal will run as a privateer.

McKenna will be one of three drivers at HHC, which returns to the series for the first time since 2012.

Other GT5 drivers include 2016 JSCC champion Katie Milner, former JSCC and Britcar racer Oli Willmott, and Josh Hislop, who was fifth in the Fiesta Junior standings last year.



LAT IMAGES

GINETTA JUNIORS

HHC out, WDE in for Ginetta Junior

LEADING GINETTA JUNIOR TEAM HHC Motorsport has confirmed that it will not take part in the series this season.

The team's drivers have won the title four times in the past six seasons, but it now has its sights set on a campaign in the British GT Championship, and it will also compete in the Ginetta GT5 Challenge (see left).

While HHC leaves the series, leading Renault UK Clio Cup team WDE Motorsport has joined. The squad has grown to become one of the largest teams in the Clio series since entering in 2014, having previously competed in Fiestas.

WDE boss Wayne Eason wants to repeat his team's Clio success in Ginetta Junior and will field Jamie Osborne – the younger brother of WDE Clio racer Sam – in the category this year.



SSANGYONG CHALLENGE

SsangYong series canned for 2018

THE SSANGYONG MUSSO PICKUP Racing Challenge has been dropped for 2018 after a change in senior management at the company's UK importer.

The series, which was introduced last year and operated by MotorSport Vision, featured 2.2-litre turbodiesel powered Musso Sports pickup trucks.

Six events were held in 2017, and Harry Webb, Lewis Grant and Michael O'Brien

were among the race winners.

A spokesman for SsangYong Motor UK said: "SsangYong Motor UK went through a management change at the end of last year, and following a thorough review of the whole business and its activities, the decision has been taken to focus on other areas, and not continue with the Musso Racing Challenge."

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IN BRIEF



HISTORIC F1 CARS GET THREE UK EVENTS

The Historic Grand Prix Cars Association's calendar of races for pre-'66 cars will take in three UK dates in nine events across Europe. Silverstone National (April 21/22), Brands Hatch GP (June 30/July 1) and Silverstone GP (July 20-22) are the domestic dates, while Clermont-Ferrand and Copenhagen join the European schedule.

CATERHAM CHAMP ROBINSON TO MINIS

Multiple Caterham champion David Robinson will join the Mini Challenge JCW Championship for 2018. Robinson, 29, has partnered with Excelr8 Motorsport after making a one-off appearance in the series finale at Donington Park last season. Robinson has won the Tracksport (2012), Supersport (2013) and Superlight R300 (2015) Caterham titles.

CROCKER WITH PYRO FOR TCR UK

Former Clio Cup racer Finlay Crocker will compete in the inaugural season of TCR UK in 2018. Crocker, who raced in selected rounds of ADAC TCR Germany and TCR Italy over the past two years, will drive one of two Team Pyro-run Honda Civals. Despite huge initial interest from teams, Crocker, Carl Swift and Lewis Kent are the only drivers yet to be confirmed as entrants in the series.

REVAMP FOR BROOKLANDS TRACK

The restored Finishing Straight of the Brooklands Race Track will be the setting for the VSCC's annual New Year Driving Tests this Sunday, January 28. Tests will be laid out on the straight, the Members' Banking and other parts of the site. Notable entries for the event include Katie Forrest's Rolls-Royce.

EX-DTM CARS RULE THE ROOST AT TAUPU

The ex-DTM BMW M3s of Graeme Cameron and Conrad Timms finished one-two in Saturday's Archibalds Historic Touring Car race at Taupo, New Zealand. Phil Mauger bounced back to win the sequel in his ex-Matt Neal Nissan Primera from Cameron and Paul Radisich. The series now moves to the South Island, and a 20-car field is expected at Ruapuna on February 3-4.



UK LMP3 CUP

Champions back to UK LMP3 Cup

COLIN NOBLE WILL RETURN TO defend his UK LMP3 Cup title in 2018 with Nielsen Racing and co-driver Alasdair McCaig.

Scotsman Noble will combine this with outings in both the Le Mans Cup – for which he won funded entries through last year's LMP3 Cup title – and the European Le Mans Series.

"I've never done a championship twice so there will be some pressure now I have the experience," Noble said.

The Nielsen Racing team's cross-championship plans are helped by the UK LMP3 Cup's move to Michelin tyres for this year, bringing the series into line with other LMP3 contests. Last

year the championship used Pirellis not specifically designed for LMP3 machinery.

● The LMP3 Cup will also hold an eSports Championship through the Online Racing Association in 2018. Run on *Project Cars 2*, it will comprise 12 events of two 40-minute contests with a pitstop per round.



RENAULT UK CLIO CUP

Pyro sustains Burns in Clio Cup

FORMER FIESTA JUNIOR RUNNER-UP Bradley Burns will tackle a full season of the Renault UK Clio Cup this year with the dominant Team Pyro squad.

The 16-year-old had planned to contest Clio Cup Junior last year, but when that was postponed he decided to join the senior series for the final three rounds instead.

He made an instant impression and on his third appearance he qualified second at

Brands Hatch, only to stall and be collected by Jade Edwards, ending his weekend. Team Pyro boss Mark Hunt said of Burns's performance: "It's rare for someone to come in and be on the pace like he was."

Burns is the first driver confirmed so far with the multiple title-winning Team Pyro for this year, but the team is understood to be in talks with a number of its other racers from last season.



Gornall lost his appeal to keep title

BMW COMPACT CUP

Gornall loses Compact title

FORMER BRITISH GT CHAMPION JAMES GORNALL has been stripped of last season's BMW Compact Cup crown after his car failed post-season scrutineering.

The series' top three cars were examined after the season had finished and it was at this point that scrutineers found that Gornall's engine had been modified. Gornall appealed the decision to the National Court but was unsuccessful and has therefore been excluded.

Chair of the National Court panel David Munro said in his report: "The examination revealed clear evidence that the crankshaft had been ground to the front web and accordingly Mr Kennedy [scrutineer] concluded that it had been modified and was therefore not compliant with championship regulations.

"The National Court concludes that the examination was conducted in accordance with the regulations and that the crankshaft did not comply. Accordingly this Appeal must fail."

Championship manager Greg Graham explained

why the scrutineering took place two weeks after the end of the season. "We, unlike most club championships, have our own post-season scrutineering process," he said. "We take the top three cars and specifically with the engines, we give them a really good investigation. If we find anything untoward, which happened last year, that gets reported by the scrutineer to the MSA and then there's the appeal process and sorting all that has taken this time, which is frustrating for all parties."

Graham added that he did not believe that Gornall had deliberately broken the rules. "In my opinion there's been no intent for James Gornall to cheat and I believe it's been an oversight," he said.

The points are being adjusted before a new champion is declared. Steven Dailly finished second in the standings, but is not guaranteed the championship as the organisers will adjust the points to remove Gornall from each race.

Gornall was unavailable for comment before Autosport went to press.

CLASSIC FORMULA FORD

MILLS MAKES SWITCH TO CLASSIC FF1600

FORMER SPORTS 2000

Duratec ace Tom Mills will make a return to single-seaters this season in Classic Formula Ford with a Royale RP26.

One of four examples of Pat Symonds's design supplied to the Brands Hatch Racing school in 1979, chassis 14 was raced by Nigel Greensall but has been sprinted and hillclimbed for the past few years.

"I miss Sports 2000 but couldn't afford a car," said Buckingham-based Mills, twice runner-up in the Duratec championship in a Gunn chassis.

"Initially I looked at Caterhams – because I love ultra-competitive racing – but a visit to November's Walter Hayes Trophy changed all that. I came away hooked on FF1600!

"[Reigning] Historic champion Richard Tarling is a mate from school days, and I'd have liked to join him, but the [Pre-'72] cars were beyond my pocket.

"He recommended the Classic [Pre-'82] series and Alan Cornock of Fulmar Competition Services did a deal on the RP26.

"It will be tough but I'm looking forward to getting stuck in and learning as much as I can from period Royale works driver Rick Morris, who is racing his RP26."

JIM CLARK ANNIVERSARY

Celebration event to remember Clark

THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF double Formula 1 world champion Jim Clark's death will be commemorated with a special programme of events.

The Scot, who was killed in a Formula 2 race on April 7 1968 at Hockenheim, won 25 grands prix and his two titles with Lotus.

The events will take place on April 7-8, including a

commemorative church service in Chirnside and a ceremony at the new Jim Clark Museum in Duns. There will also be an anniversary dinner at Carfraemill Hotel and an exhibition at Chirnside Village Hall.

Some of Clark's famous race cars will also be exhibited by Classic Team Lotus during the weekend, which has been

organised by The Jim Clark Trust, Club Lotus, Live Borders and Chirnside Common Good Association.

Doug Niven, cousin of Jim Clark and trustee for the Trust, said: "We feel honoured that so many people have shown interest and we want this weekend to be a celebration and commemoration and to inspire future generations."



Clark won two F1 titles and 25 GPs with Lotus

LAT IMAGES



A series on the up

The Ginetta GT5 Challenge is a hotbed of young talent this season. Can it become an essential rung on the junior racing ladder?

By Stephen Lickorish, Special Contributor

[@sdlickorish](#)

JUNIOR SALOON CAR CHAMPIONS WILL DYRDAL AND Katie Milner. JSCC race winner Gordie Mutch. Ginetta Junior frontrunner Scott McKenna. Star Ford Fiesta Junior rookie Josh Hislop. Highly rated former JSCC and Britcar racer Oli Willmott. The list goes on and on. And the one thing that unites this crop of top junior racing graduates is that they will all be taking part in the Ginetta GT5 Challenge this year.

Now, the British Automobile Racing Club-run series may not sound like the obvious place for young drivers to make a name for themselves. But for an increasing number of reasons, it's proving to be an ever more popular destination for those rising from the junior ranks.

The first — and most obvious — is cost. While it's a stretch to describe it as 'cheap', it's certainly affordable to drivers who don't have access to endless streams of cash. The entry fee alone is a fraction of the cost of some of the other options the drivers have, such as the Renault UK Clio Cup (entry fee: £15,850) and Ginetta GT4 Supercup (£15,550). The GT5 Challenge is £6450 to enter (all prices including VAT).

Another (related) point is that this is the sort of series you can still compete in as a privateer. Entrants emerging from true 'clubbie' junior categories such as the JSCC or Fiesta Juniors don't suddenly need to

find a substantial budget to compete with a big team.

Take Dyrdal for example. He won the JSCC title with his own family team and will now be tackling the GT5 Challenge with the same tiny two-man squad. Dyrdal himself admits that if things don't work out, he would join a larger squad next year. But he certainly won't be the only privateer on the grid and there's no reason why he can't succeed.

The affordability of the series makes it perfect for 16-year olds such as Mutch, who could still compete in various junior categories for 14-17-year olds. He considered contesting Ginetta Junior this year, especially after winning a free drive in last season's Winter Series courtesy of Fox Motorsport. But in the end he decided that competing in Ginetta Junior wasn't a price worth paying when he could get a similar experience racing against older drivers, in near enough exactly the same machinery, for a fraction of the cost.

Another draw of the GT5 Challenge is the incredible calendar it offers. Mutch points out that it benefits from being on the British GT undercard at five rounds — including Spa — and then joins the TOCA package at Thruxton and

Knockhill, making it very attractive to young drivers.

It means they get the opportunity to perform in front of the right people. They can network with the GT3 and GT4 teams if they want to go down the sportscar route, while if they're more interested in a future in tin-tops they can make themselves known in the TOCA paddock too.

It's no wonder that some of the larger teams are really starting to sit up and take notice of GT5. Reigning GT4 Supercup and British GT4 winning team HHC Motorsport has decided to return this year for the first time since 2012, while other well-established names including Century Motorsport and Optimum Motorsport also feature.

Then there's the sheer volume of competition. Forgetting the fact that this year so many drivers of a similar age, experience and success have entered, the series always gets strong grids. In 2017 it averaged 25 cars. For this year around 30 drivers have already signed up, and it's not even the end of January. Admittedly not all of the names on the entry list have the ability of some of those listed here, but by pitting

so many drivers against one another in evenly matched cars it's a great place to learn, and makes it very likely that there will be someone for you to battle on track.

But the one thing the series does lack is an

“The one thing the GT5 Challenge does lack is an established role model”

established role model. There's no past champion who has really progressed to reach the big time. For example, look at 2015 champion James Kellett. He was clearly a talented young racer who starred in Ginetta Junior the year before. But since taking the crown he has been without a full-time drive, and instead has acted as team manager for Douglas Motorsport's Junior squad. Similarly, Ollie Chadwick has also only raced sporadically since winning the '16 title. Going further back, '14 champion George Gamble went two years without racing before finally making a comeback in the GT4 Supercup last season. That's the only thing the championship is missing — some of the drivers lower down the rankings have progressed, but even then a racer such as Will Burns has struggled to make a name for himself in the British Touring Car Championship. Otherwise the series ticks all the boxes.

If whoever emerges victorious from this year's impossible-to-predict title fight goes on to a successful career in the higher levels of the sport, it would cement the Ginetta GT5 Challenge's position as a great option for those beginning the climb. And that can only be a good thing. ✎

2017

Rating the 'new' club championships...

A number of new categories launched – or attempted to, at least – last year. We take a look at those, as well as what's set to come in 2018

By Jack Benyon, Robert Ladbroke, Stephen Lickorish
and Stefan Mackley



LMP3 CUP

★★★★★

Where did it all go wrong? The pre-season hype around the new-for-2017 LMP3 Cup was palpable. But it failed to deliver, with a high of 10 entries and a low of five. For a championship dedicated to prototypes in the UK, that's surely not good enough.

There are a few areas in which it stumbled. The Pirelli tyres – developed for GT cars – required different set-ups compared to the Michelin rubber used in LMP3 on the continent. That ruled out some of the European Le Mans Series and Michelin Le Mans Cup regulars from joining for the series' away round at Spa for circuit experience, as they would have had to run the Pirellis around which their cars were not optimised. In order

to use the LMP3 name, the series had to be affiliated to the Le Mans-organising ACO, and it was only later in the season that the club allowed two silver drivers in each car rather than the silver/bronze category template – too late for a pair of quick, up-and-coming racers to share a budget for the season.

LMP3 was created for the gentleman driver, and the majority of those don't want to compete in the UK only. If they can afford an LMP3 Cup assault, chances are they can do the same in ELMS or MLMC, where they can race at more-prestigious circuits.

Perhaps the switch to Michelin tyres and the new acceptance of silver-silver crews could boost the series for 2018. It can't get much worse, and there are a lot of people who want to see this championship succeed.

CITROEN C1 CHALLENGE

★★★★★

Who would've thought that racing a Citroen C1 would prove to be so popular? When Autosport was compiling this feature last year, we didn't even include the Citroen C1 Challenge among the new series, because it had a European-focused calendar with only three races in the UK. But we were wrong to be sceptical – instead this series proved to be *the* success story of 2017's new categories.

Things got off to a modest start, when 14 cars took part in the Snetterton opener. But many more were said to be in build. Grid numbers started to rise, culminating in 30 taking part in the 24-hour race at Spa. And now there's been an explosion of interest. When a new 24-hour race at Rockingham was announced, entries filled so quickly that a second one – and this is also now full – had to be added to the calendar.

It certainly seems that plenty of people think racing a Citroen C1 is a great idea. Watch this space in 2018.





RENAULT UK CLIO CUP JUNIOR

★★★★★

It's fair to say the Renault UK Clio Cup Junior organisers won't look back on 2017 with fond memories. Just weeks before the series was due to start, it was announced that it would be postponed because it was not a suitable point to launch. The organising team faced plenty of hurdles, with many of them outside their control.

And yet, despite the setbacks, the series still got going, with a shortened four-event contest run towards the end of the year. Grids were unsurprisingly thin, but were packed with talented drivers, and it was a competitive championship that was eventually won by Jack Young.

With more stability, it could grow. A six-weekend series planned around the school-exam seasons has been created for this year, and by the end of 2018 we should be able to better judge this category's future.

CASTLE COMBE HOT HATCH CHALLENGE

★★★★★

The Castle Combe Racing Club's new Hot Hatch Challenge series might have held only five races last year, but that didn't stop grids averaging 25 cars, including a 31-car bumper entry at one event.

Open to non-turbo saloons, four classes from 1400-2100cc meant there was a large range of cars competing throughout the grid. It was a perfect formula

for great racing at an affordable price. Established names took an interest straight away, with Gary Prebble – the Wiltshire circuit's most successful driver – racing a Peugeot 205 GTi and 2015 Saloon champion Mark Wyatt competing in his familiar yellow Vauxhall Astra.

This year the series will have five meetings, with a double-header at the August 27 event. Numbers are expected to be similar, and should the series continue its success it could soon be turned into a championship.



SSANGYONG RACING CHALLENGE

★★★★★

When this series was unveiled, it's fair to say it turned a few heads. Featuring 2.2-litre turbodiesel Korando Sports pickup trucks, it was hard not to notice when they were out on track. Jonathan Palmer's MotorSport Vision Racing operated the series, held at Snetterton, Silverstone, Knockhill, Oulton Park, Cadwell Park and

Brands Hatch. It even had grids of 12 cars at most of those rounds – not bad for a new venture. While the SsangYong Actyon Ute Racing Series in New Zealand, which began in 2014, was used as a basis, we'll never know if the UK series could have flourished in the same way. SsangYong Motor UK went through a management change at the end of last year and pulled the plug on what could have been a promising series.



ARMED FORCES CHALLENGE

★★★★★

The Armed Forces Challenge may have slightly misleading entry figures for a new championship, based on the fact that it was an already-established series before making the switch to championship status in 2017. But it shouldn't be penalised for the fact that it has remained popular, with 36, 36, 28 and 31 entries respectively over its four rounds.

A performance index keeps drivers relatively equal, and of course the series has the benefit of providing enjoyment for British servicemen and women. That's enough for an extra star all on its own.

BMW 330 CHALLENGE

★★★★★

Progress. That's just about how you can sum up the BMW 330 Challenge's 2017 season. Unlike the previous year, when the concept failed to get off the ground, races did actually take place under the 750 Motor Club's stewardship.

Yes, they were all split with either the now-defunct Super Cooper Cup or the very similar M3 Cup, but they did at least happen – albeit with the biggest grid being just eight cars.

Longer term, it's unclear what will happen, considering more new BMW series are entering an already crowded market in 2018, making life even tougher for the 330 Challenge to survive.



Z CARS

★★★★★

The new Z Cars series promised much in 2017, but sadly failed to deliver on the premise of pitting some of the most attractive of modern BMW vehicles against each other.

Despite talk of cars being in build by Gary Feakins, only two materialised and they competed in the MSVR's Allcomers series. Emphasis has apparently switched to 2019 with the hope of more cars being built, but only time will tell.

➔ P68 A LOOK AT THE NEW SERIES FOR 2018

2018

...and a look at the new race series



TCR UK

There's no disputing the success the TCR concept has enjoyed across the world. The idea of a tightly controlled, affordable touring car series with stable regulations has unsurprisingly been a hit – to the point where the World Touring Car Championship has decided to adopt the TCR format.

When it was announced last July that TCR would be coming to the UK, there was a buzz in British motorsport that is very rarely seen. Teams from across the motorsport spectrum were queuing

up to say they were considering entering, with at least 47 expressing serious interest. Some bought cars, including Motorbase Performance, Team Hard, Sean Walkinshaw Racing and Team Pyro.

A support-series package was also assembled around TCR UK, with the British Racing & Sports Car Club bringing together some of its best and most popular categories. An attractive calendar was announced too and a taster day took place. But then silence.

The train of momentum the series had built up has come abruptly to a halt. Only a handful of drivers have

now actually committed to the championship – and most of them are privateers, such as Ford Fiesta race winner Lewis Kent and ex-Civic Cup champion Carl Swift.

A number of teams, including Motorbase and Team Hard, have sold their cars.

All this has left many wondering if TCR UK will even take place this year. Six months is a long time in motorsport and attitudes towards the series have certainly changed a lot in that period. What was looking like being the standout performer in 2018 may not even get off the ground.

CSCC TURBO TIN TOPS

The Classic Sports Car Club is known for its innovation. Across nine race series – crucially not championships, encouraging more-relaxed racing – you'll find full grids almost throughout.

Turbo Tin Tops will be its 10th category, and brings a twist to the usual hot-hatch formula. As the name suggests, it caters exclusively for forced-induction machines, and they must be front-wheel drive. Think Fiesta ST, SEAT FR, Mini Cooper S, VW GTi and more.

The CSCC has spotted the growing trend from

manufacturers to move away from naturally aspirated hot hatches, and has tailored this series to cater for the new generation. That theme is continued by the addition of rules to allow hybrid cars to enter, making it the first such class in the UK scene that allows in hardware such as the Golf GTE, Honda CRZ and Mini Cooper S E.

For the first year TTT will run across eight rounds, and can share a grid with one of the CSCC's existing series. The CSCC's ethos of allowing drivers to share a car to reduce costs, and its open and accommodating paddock atmosphere, means it has no trouble courting entries.



HERITAGE FORMULA FORD

Formula Fords seem to be as popular as ever, and with that in mind James Beckett – inventor of the Walter Hayes Trophy and SuperSeries – has created Heritage Formula Ford.

The new series is open to Formula Ford cars manufactured before 1993 and will be run in association with Jonathan Palmer's MotorSport Vision Racing. The series will race at venues including Donington Park, Silverstone National, Oulton Park and Brands Hatch Indy, as well as another track yet to be confirmed.

One driver from the series will also get the chance to compete in a Formula Ford race in Australia. Twenty drivers have already registered, but expect that number to rise.



MAZDA MX-5 SUPER SERIES

Why the need for a new MX-5 series? Well, with the British Racing & Sports Car Club's Mazda MX-5 SuperCup – which uses Mk3 cars – joining the TCR UK package this year, organisers have seen a gap in the market for its drivers.

With the SuperCup oversubscribed this year, and many teams that run the series' Mk3 cars also managing Mk1 machines in the Mazda MX-5 Championship, it was felt that the Super Series could provide a cheaper alternative for Mk3 exponents than the TCR-affiliated SuperCup.

Based on the popular MX-5 SuperCup and Championship, don't be surprised to see packed grids for the Super Series.

BMW CAR CLUB RACING

BMW's. Not many of them about. Not many championships for them either. Insert more sarcasm here.

Despite the saturation in the market, the UK's only BMW-sanctioned car club – BMW Car Club GB – has launched a new racing series for 2018 with the

aim of stepping up to championship status in the future.

This category is hoping to succeed by offering low-cost, open racing. Pretty much any BMW is eligible and you can use any tyres you like. A sort of 'put-the-fun-back-into-racing'-type series. It'll be a struggle to establish, but going back to the 'fun'-damentals isn't a bad idea.

SCOTTISH HOT HATCH

Catering for a wider audience can often be a gateway to big grids and a healthy club-racing series, and that's exactly the thinking behind the Scottish Motor Racing Club's new Hot Hatch Trophy.

Knockhill has a popular trackday scene, but its racing options can be rather more limited. Formula Ford holds its own in numbers, while Mini racing north of the border is thriving. The Saloon and Sportscar series offers an opening, but is dominated by big, powerful machinery. For modern hatchbacks, such as trackday

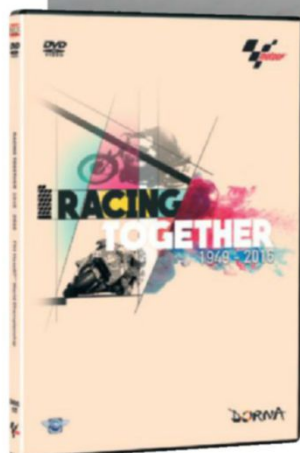
specials, there was less choice.

The new Hot Hatch Trophy will cater for any production tin-tops with engines up to 2100cc. It will share a grid with the Ford Fiesta ST Championship, with those cars expected to have very similar performance to most of those that will run in the new category.

The Hot Hatch Trophy is designed to encourage trackday drivers to try full-fat racing. It's based on a model that's already proven to work in England – via MSV's popular Trackday Trophy classes – and has the potential to grow quickly.



WHAT'S ON



Racing Together through MotoGP history

CONDENSING THE ENTIRE HISTORY of a motor-racing series into a two-hour documentary often results in a fairly generic retelling of events – with very little room for the character and intrigue behind pivotal moments to stand out – all set to the background of some nice archive footage.

Racing Together, Dorna Sports' own attempt at telling the complete story of MotoGP, does follow this fairly standard set-up, with riders past and present, alongside a selection of journalists, giving their accounts of events gone by.

But where the film deviates from this tried and tested (and boring) path, is in its focus on the many important subplots of the series' history, from four-time 500cc champion Geoff Duke pioneering the one-piece leather suit in the 1950s, to Honda's ahead-of-its-time four-stroke NR500, and Dorna's takeover of the series in 1992.

Undoubtedly grand prix bike racing's

greatest subplot, and the highlight of the film, is the story of how East German manufacturer MZ and its genius designer Walter Kaaden revolutionised the two-stroke engine – a defining feature of the category from the 1970s onwards – and how that technology ended up in Suzuki's hands courtesy of the defection of rider Ernst Degner to the West in '61.

A meeting between Kaaden's and Degner's sons on the grounds of the old MZ factory makes for great viewing, as does the archive footage of Cold War Germany, while their tales of how the defection affected both of their fathers adds a fantastic human element to the film. That approach also extends to the series' many famous rivalries, with several fierce enemies brought together to discuss their duels – and the most interesting is the bitter battle between American heroes Wayne Rainey and Kevin Schwantz.



Schwantz and Rainey interview is a highlight

HEATH/LAT

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HOT ON THE WEB THIS WEEK

▶ INYCAR FUTURE LOOKS TO THE PAST

Search for New IndyCar 'a throwback to the 1980s and 90s'

IndyCar champion (and brilliant series ambassador) Josef Newgarden explains why the new car, with its emphasis on underfloor aero, aims to take the racing back to the style that was so popular during the late-20th-century heyday.



Modern-era material in bike GP history DVD is disappointingly vanilla

GOLD & GOOSE PHOTOGRAPHY/LAT

Neither is afraid to admit to absolutely hating the other during their rivalry, and it's this frankness that makes the segment so utterly engaging. Rainey's admission that his defeat to Schwantz at Assen in 1991 still niggles away at him is a fascinating glimpse into the mind of a racer, especially one whose career ended so tragically in '93. The film does not shy away from really getting into Rainey's thoughts on the terrible accident at Misano, which left him paralysed from the waist down, though it is perhaps the man alongside him revealing that his love for racing faded at the loss of his "sparring partner" that packs the biggest emotional punch.

Sadly, that same tell-all format between rivals does not extend into the modern MotoGP era and Valentino Rossi's many wars. While the chances of sitting Max Biaggi down with his countryman were always slim,

something other than the former saying he remembers their battles "fondly" would not have gone amiss.

Rossi's often messy fallouts, on and off track – which are at least touched on in the 2015 segment that covers his clashes with Marc Marquez and Jorge Lorenzo – are just as integral to Dorna's 'golden era' as the rest of the incredible racing in this period. To have it largely brushed over in favour of the Italian coming out generally as the hero was far too safe a decision for my liking. Not even the unashamedly blunt Casey Stoner digs his elbows in. It's way too diplomatic and the film suffers as a result, frustratingly making the MotoGP section the weakest point of the production.

Mercifully, this serves as the only real low point in an otherwise stunning documentary that proves to be so much more than a simple educational retelling.

LEWIS DUNCAN

NEXT WEEK

📌 RICCIARDO v VERSTAPPEN

The battle to be F1's next world champion



DUNBAR/LAT

INTERNATIONAL MOTORSPORT

MONTE CARLO RALLY WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

Rd 1/13

Monte Carlo, Monaco
and Gap, France

January 25-28

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DAYTONA 24 HOURS IMSA SPORTSCAR

Rd 1/12

Daytona, Florida, USA
January 27-28

TOYOTA RACING SERIES

Rd 3/5

Hampton Downs, New Zealand
January 27-28

ANDROS TROPHY

Rd 6/7

Lans en Vercors, France
January 26-27



McKLEIN/LAT

FROM THE ARCHIVE

The 1998 Belgian Grand Prix is etched in the memory of fans thanks to the spectacular crash following the first attempt to start the race, the later violent coming together of David Coulthard and Michael Schumacher (and Murray Walker's "Oh God!"), and the Jordan team's first Formula 1 win. Here, in another moment of drama, Mika Hakkinen's McLaren and Schumacher's Ferrari touch at La Source just after the restart, which spun the Finn into the path of Johnny Herbert's Sauber, eliminating them both from the race.

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TOP FIVE

ALFA ROMEO RACERS

This year Alfa Romeo returns to Formula 1, so it seemed like a good time to look at the best cars from its illustrious competition history.



1 158/159

The first car to dominate F1 initially appeared as a Voiturette (think multi-make F2) in 1938 and became the benchmark of the new regulations after the Second World War. The Gioacchino Colombo-designed 1.5-litre supercharged straight-eight Alfetta was unbeaten from July '46 until July '51, and was finally defeated in the British Grand Prix by Ferrari. It helped Giuseppe Farina and Juan Manuel Fangio to the first two drivers' world titles in '50 and '51.

J BLOXHAM/LAT



J BLOXHAM/LAT

2 P3/TIPO B

The follow-up to the successful P2, the P3 helped set the single-seater template for pre-war grand prix cars. It won on its debut midway through 1932 and was the racer to beat before the arrival of the *wundercars* from Mercedes and Auto Union in '34. Even then, it still won the '34 French GP (with Louis Chiron) and, famously, the '35 German GP thanks to the virtuosity of Tazio Nuvolari.

3 8C 2300

Alfa Romeo was the supercar maker of the 1930s, before the term was even coined. The 8C 2900 was probably the ultimate example, but the 8C 2300 – different versions of which competed in GP and sportscar events – gets the nod due to its record. Highlights among its successes were four Le Mans 24 Hours wins (1931-34), two Mille Miglia victories (1932-33) and a Targa Florio hat-trick (1931-33).



SUTTON

4 155

We're cheating slightly because we're counting two cars together: the Super Touring 155 from British Touring Cars and the Class 1 version from the DTM. The latter ended the German-manufacturer monopoly of the DTM in 1993, with Nicola Larini the dominant champion. The Super Tourer controversially brought wings to the BTCC in 1994 – Gabriele Tarquini took eight wins on his way to the crown.



LAT

5 GTA/GTAM

This spot was between the GTA and the variants of the T33 sportscar, which ultimately lost out because its biggest successes came after most of its rivals had withdrawn. But the GTA is a tin-top great, taking European Touring Car class titles in 1966, '67, '69 and '70. Among its other successes was the overall win in the first Trans-Am race at Sebring, where Jochen Rindt beat the V8 heavy metal.



McKLEIN

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Autosport Media UK Ltd, 1 Eton Street, Richmond, TW9 1AG
Tel +44 (0) 20 3405 8100 Email autosport@autosport.com
Individual email firstname.surname@motorsport.com
Website www.autosport.com Twitter [@autosport](https://twitter.com/autosport)



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