

WRC PREVIEW OGIER v TOYOTA?



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JANUARY 24 2019

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RENAULT'S BIG F1 PUSH AND A TIGHT RALLYING CONTEST

Daniel Ricciardo's move from Red Bull to Renault was one of the biggest surprises of 2018 and triggered a number of other changes in the Formula 1 driver market.

Many questioned the switch, and it's fair to ask whether the likeable Australian will get the chance to add to his seven grand prix victories. He'll also be going up against Nico Hulkenberg, who is far better than his 'no podiums from 156 starts' statistic suggests.

But for Renault the decision to take Ricciardo, one of the few proven race winners on the grid, was surely a no-brainer. As team boss Cyril Abiteboul tells Edd Straw in our cover story (page 16), signing someone of Ricciardo's standing is a signal of Renault's intent to take on the big three at the front of F1.

Expecting Renault to challenge Mercedes, Ferrari and Red Bull in 2019 is too optimistic, but if Ricciardo and Hulkenberg can be clear of the midfield tussle and close the gap to the front that would be a great sign for F1. We'd all like to see more potential winners.

There are plenty of those in this year's World Rally Championship, which kicks off with the Monte Carlo Rally today (Thursday). Although Toyota and Ott Tanak start as favourites for the titles, there is no shortage of rivals with the potential to get in the mix, particularly Monte king Sebastien Ogier and Citroen.

As well as assessing the top teams in our preview (p26), David Evans also speaks to Kris Meeke. The five-time WRC winner's career looked over after he was sacked by Citroen during the 2018 campaign, but now he has another chance with Toyota. Now he needs to make the most of it to take the fight to team-mate Tanak, Ogier and four-time WRC runner-up Thierry Neuville.



Kevin Turner

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COVER IMAGES

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LOEB: DESERT TO ICE – VIA HOME – IN FIVE DAYS

WRC

Somewhere inland from the Peruvian port town of San Juan de Marcona, Sebastien Loeb shuffled his knees in the sand, trying to get more comfortable, and turned his baseball cap around to keep the sun off his neck. Then he was back to it – back to trying to solve the broken transmission that had halted his Peugeot 3008 DKR.

Incredible to think that just five days from another Dakar Rally victory-denying moment in the sand, the temperature would be 30-odd degrees lower and he'd be 1600 metres higher on top of Col de Turini in the middle of the Monte Carlo Rally recce.

By Dakar's end, after 10 days and more than 3100 miles of competition, Loeb and co-driver Daniel Elena made Thursday's finish on the bottom step of the podium. Just hours after explaining how they'd managed such a feat despite losing more than three hours with various problems (and they only lost the event by two...), they were on an overnight, eastbound flight from Lima. Landing back in Europe, there was a moment at home before the nine-time World Rally champion flew into his first test as a Hyundai Motorsport driver.

After a day and a half of getting to know the i20 Coupe WRC, it was into the recce, shakedown and off to the start of the rally.

"The time was short," says Loeb. "Just enough to change my bag and go straight away to the test – but when we agreed for Monte, we knew it would be like this."

The only tell-tale sign of 10 days spent racing across the South American desert – apart from the impressive tan – is a bandaged finger, a legacy of Loeb's battle to keep his Dakar dream alive. "It was hard," he says. "But... we won four stages and I think we should have won without some of the problems, like the roadbook."

The problem with the roadbook was that the organisers' directions were wrong, and Loeb and Elena got lost because of that. At the time, Elena wanted them to quit, head home and focus on the Monte. "I will not go back [and talk about this again]," says Loeb. "Danos' [Elena] did it enough. I spent my time having to motivate him then. It was painful and, at the same time, I understood his frustration."

Loeb put his Dakar adventure to bed with a teasing quote about having to do better



ANTONIN VINCENT / DDP / RED BULL CONTENT POOL

**"I HAVE 10KM OF
PACENOTES I CAN
USE. EVERYTHING
ELSE IS NEW"**

next time. But for now, a six-round WRC programme has come sharply into view. It starts with this week's Monte, an event he's won seven times – one more than countryman and rival Sebastien Ogier.

But this is no ordinary Monte for Loeb. It's his first attempt in four years and his first in anything other than a factory Citroen. "For sure, starting with Monte Carlo is going to be tricky," he says. "It is an event where I have been quite successful in the past, but this year it's a completely new challenge with a new team, a new car, and I only know the uphill section of the Col de Turini from this year's itinerary. I have 10km of pacenotes that I can use from the past – everything else is new, which also makes it more exciting."

"Discovering a new team and a new car is something I haven't really done before, but we had a productive test. I drove for the first time a World Rally Car that is different from what I drove in the past, but it's probably too early to really compare [the cars]. What I can say is that the i20 Coupe WRC is a nice car to drive; we had a really good feeling the past two days trying different things and making the most of the little time we have to prepare for the rally."

"The aim [for the test] was really first



Schumacher Junior gets Ferrari role

FORMULA 1

Mick Schumacher, the son of seven-time Formula 1 world champion Michael, has officially joined Ferrari's young driver programme.

The reigning European Formula 3 champion is also set to work with the management company of Nicolas Todt, whose father – FIA president Jean Todt – was Schumacher Sr's team boss at Ferrari for his run of five straight titles from 2000-04.

New Ferrari Driver Academy member Schumacher said he and his family were "thrilled" with the link, as "all our hearts are very red".

His father spent 11 seasons with the famous Italian constructor, joining in 1996 before retiring for the first time at the end of the 2006 campaign.

The move will likely give Schumacher, who is preparing to race in Formula 2 with Prema Racing this season, his first mileage in a contemporary F1 car. There are two two-day tests scheduled during the 2019 campaign, and two of those days must be completed by a driver who has not competed in more than two world championship F1 races in their career.

Working with All Road Management and Todt, who has always been close to Schumacher, would add further structure as the 19-year-old bids to make it to F1.

The All Road stable includes 2019 Ferrari F1 driver Charles Leclerc, who has worked with Todt since he was in karting and won the F2 title with Prema in 2017.

Schumacher will be joined on the FDA by fellow F2 racers Callum Iott and Giuliano Alesi, plus Marcus Armstrong, Robert Shwartzman, Enzo Fittipaldi and Gianluca Petecof.

Long-term Ferrari juniors Antonio Fuoco and now-Renault protege Guan Yu Zhou (see page 6) no longer feature on the programme.

SCOTT MITCHELL



of all to get used to the car and then to find the set-up for the different types of conditions we could find this week."

Loeb began testing at the Col du Noyer, north of Gap, on Saturday afternoon, taking over the test i20 from team-mate Andreas Mikkelsen in snow conditions. Sunday's road, which was dry with some patches of ice, was further south, close to Aix-en-Provence in St Julien. In total, Loeb completed almost 200 miles of testing.

Short on time in the car and on the event in recent years, Loeb is far from short on Monte experience. This will be his 12th start on a rally that demands

and commands respect, and a deep understanding of how and why conditions and grip levels change so quickly.

"The most complicated thing is to find the right rhythm and not to fall into any traps: there is every possibility of finding ice plates as the temperature drops overnight," he says. "You always have to adapt to the changing and unpredictable conditions. I have always been quite good in these circumstances." "Quite good"? Now that's something of an understatement.

DAVID EVANS





Fears mount among F1 teams over Brexit stalemate

FORMULA 1

Three Formula 1 teams and UK motorsport's governing body have discussed collectively writing to British prime minister Theresa May amid mounting concerns over a possible no-deal Brexit.

David Richards, the head of British racing authority Motorsport UK, has been lobbying the UK government over the country's impending exit from the European Union, and spoke with a trio of F1 teams last week on the issue.

A deal negotiated by May was rejected by MPs last week by 230 votes, the largest defeat suffered by a government in the House of Commons since the First World War. That has heightened concerns that the UK could leave the EU on March 29 without a deal, which would mean, among other things, no agreed customs or trade arrangement with member states.

This could create major problems for F1 teams travelling to European countries, which host nine of the 10 races from mid-May to early September.

Motorsport UK chairman Richards has spoken with three teams, including one of the biggest on the grid, and their shared concern is that regardless of the political argument in favour of the UK leaving the EU or remaining part of it, a no-deal

Brexit needs to be avoided.

While no action has yet been taken, the teams believe that speaking collectively would be stronger than raising concerns individually. They are worried about the impact a no-deal Brexit would have on their ability to move goods and people across borders in Europe.

There is also the matter of hiring staff from EU countries, particularly in manufacturing and shop-floor roles, as well as the cost of importing and exporting goods. Richards says these issues could threaten the viability of teams having major bases in the UK, traditionally an F1 stronghold.

Seven of F1's 10 teams are based in Britain, while 45 of the 61 constructors' championships have been won by a team based in the country, accounting for every title not won by Ferrari.

The impact of Brexit upon motorsport would likely extend beyond F1, including companies that need to import or export goods, or British competitors and championships travelling to races on the continent.

The government and its opposition are currently locked in a stalemate, with no progress made since May's deal was rejected. A Commons vote on further amendments that could shape the outcome of Brexit will take place on Monday (Jan 28).

SCOTT MITCHELL

Zhou to Renault after Ferrari split

FORMULA 2

Formula 2 new boy Guan Yu Zhou has left the Ferrari Driver Academy and will become a test and development driver for the Renault Formula 1 team.

The 19-year-old Shanghai racer has spent four seasons in car racing as a Ferrari protegee, and now graduates to F2 with UNI-Virtuosi after three campaigns in the Formula 3 European Championship. He will get significant simulator time in his new role in the Renault Sport Academy, alongside sitting in on the F1 team's engineering briefings. It is not yet clear if and when Zhou will be given live F1 seat time.

Despite the increased responsibility with a manufacturer-led F1 team, Zhou is confident that the deal will not hinder his F2 performance in his maiden season. While UNI-Virtuosi is a new name to F2, many of the personnel carry over from the Russian Time team that it replaces. And the squad has already confirmed that it is targeting the teams' championship with Zhou and Luca Ghiotto.

"The Renault Academy has a top team to support all its drivers," said Zhou, who is already based in the UK. "I have confidence that this could help me adapt faster in my rookie year in F2 and hopefully also can secure us a good result in the championship. My main goal is always F1, but I know the way to F1 is really narrow and difficult, so I will keep myself alert and focus on the F2 racing, as a proper race performance is always the priority."

Zhou will join reigning GP3 champion Anthoine Hubert as a newcomer in the Renault Sport Academy and on the F2 grid, with the 22-year-old Frenchman confirmed this week at the new collaboration between Arden International and German giant HWA for 2019.

The tie-up means further expansion into single-seaters for HWA, which already has a place in the FIA Formula 3 Championship. Arden team principal Garry Horner said: "HWA bring a wealth of engineering expertise to the programme, and we look forward to working with them in the F2 championship."

"The fact that they are joining with HWA really motivated me to go to them," said Hubert. "I hope it will be a good mix and we achieve great things."

JACK BENYON





ARCTIC RALLY Mercedes Formula 1 driver Valtteri Bottas will dive into rallying's deep end when he starts this week's Arctic Rally in a Ford Fiesta WRC. The Finn has never competed in a rally before, but takes Friday's start with #1 on the doors. Countryman and M-Sport driver Teemu Suninen said: "It's not going to be easy for him, but he's one of the best drivers in the world. His mind will tell him it's slippery, but he will have good grip. I have told him a little bit what to expect and how to get out of problems." Bottas tested the Fiesta close to Rovaniemi earlier this week. **Photograph by Paul Harris**

Paffett back with Mercedes – in GT

INTERCONTINENTAL GT

Gary Paffett may not be defending his DTM title in 2019 after Mercedes' withdrawal, but he is still in for a busy season. The Brit has signed up for the German manufacturer's Intercontinental GT Challenge roster in addition to his Formula E assault with HWA.

Exactly how many of the five IGTC rounds Paffett will contest at the wheel of a Mercedes-AMG GT3 isn't yet clear, but he will be on the grid next week for the season opening Bathurst 12 Hour. He will share a Craft-Bamboo entry with Merc GT regulars Maro Engel and Luca Stolz in the Aussie race.

Paffett (right) revealed that the original plan had been for him to contest all five events, which include the revived Kyalami 9 Hours fixture in November. "After doing the Spa 24 Hours a couple of times [in 2016 and 2018], I made it clear to AMG and HWA that I wanted to do more in the GT3 car," said Paffett. "The plan to do all the races in one car didn't come off, so I'm in with Maro and Luca for Bathurst and after that we'll sort out what races I do. FE is the priority and takes up a lot of time, more

than expected with all the simulator work, but the IGTC races are all at circuits I want to race on. So if I don't get out on some of them this season, hopefully I will next year."

Merc has announced a nine-strong squad for the defence of the IGTC crown it won last year with Tristan Vautier (right, below). The Frenchman completes the line-up with Raffaele Marciello, Maximilian Gotz, Yelmer Buurman, Maximilian Buhk and Thomas Jäger. Marciello will drive a GruppeM car with Buhk and Gotz in the other all-factory Mercedes line-up at Bathurst.

The R-Motorsport Aston Martin squad, a race winner in the Blancpain GT Series in its maiden season in 2018, will field a pair of Vantage V12s at Bathurst. Team regulars Jake Dennis, Matthieu Vaxivière and Marvin Kirchhofer will race the pro class car, while Matt Parry is among the drivers in the Arden/Jota-run team's pro-am entry.

British Touring Car champions Matt Neal and Gordon Shedden will renew their 10-season partnership as team-mates at Team Dynamics, aboard an Audi R8 LMS at Bathurst. The car will be run by Team MPC.

GARY WATKINS



MOST

520

Thierry Tassin
Roberto Ravaglia
Alex Burgstaller
(BMW 318is-1994)

FEWEST

425

Jean-Michel Martin
Philippe Martin
(Ford Capri 3.0S-1980)

Spa gets '24-hour' touring car racing back

SPA 500

Twenty-four-hour touring car racing will effectively return to Spa this year with the inaugural TCR Spa 500 in October.

The Spa 24 Hours was a tin-top race until 2000 and was part of the European Touring Car Championship as well as a round of the one-off 1987 World Touring Car Championship (above). It became a sportscar event in 2001 when it joined the FIA GT schedule, and has since become the Blancpain GT Endurance Cup's flagship race.

Now the WSC Group, which is behind the TCR concept that forms the basis for the World Touring Car Cup, has linked with 24 Hour Series operator Creventic to stage the Spa 500, which will be held over 500 laps of the circuit and is open to TCR cars only.

The Spa 24 Hours touring car races were usually won by cars completing fewer than 500 laps, raising the very real prospect that the race, which falls between the Ningbo and Suzuka World Touring Car rounds on October 5-6, will go even further than the established twice-round-the-clock classic.

WSC chairman Marcello Lotti said the race was the "icing on the cake" of TCR's rapid growth since its inception in 2015.

● The Team Mulsanne Alfa Romeo squad is back in the WTCR for 2019. Operated by the Romeo Ferraris organisation that built the Giulietta, Mulsanne tested 2018 race winner Kevin Ceccon, tin-top veteran Tom Coronel, ex-F1 tester Ma Qing Hua and Kiwi GT ace Jono Lester at Vallelunga, but has not announced who it will field in its line-up.

JACK COZENS

New Aussie megatrack to host Le Mans cars



ASIAN LE MANS

Le Mans-rules racing will return to Australia nearly 20 years after the Race of 1000 Years American Le Mans Series event in 2000 when The Bend Motorsport Park, which opened last year, hosts a round of its Asian equivalent.

The Asian Le Mans Series event will take place in early 2020, though its exact date will be announced when the calendar is confirmed. It will be the second big event at the new 35-turn facility near Adelaide, on the streets of which the ALMS raced in 2000, but unlike the Australian Supercars event last August it

will take place on the full 4.83-mile layout.

"We had been considering an expansion into Australia for quite some time, but we needed to find the right opportunity," said series boss Cyrille Taesch Wahlen. "I visited The Bend last year and was blown away by the high standard of the track and facilities."

Circuit managing director Sam Shahin added: "The vision for The Bend is to be a world-class facility that hosts international-standard events of the highest calibre. To be hosting this event in our third year of operation is a testament to the project."

GARY WATKINS



Who is BMW's new star?

DTM

BMW provided a shock last week when it confirmed its DTM replacement for Augusto Farfus. South African teenager Sheldon van der Linde has probably the lowest profile of the four who took part in the young-driver test last month at Jerez, but he beat Nicky Catsburg, Nick Yelloly and Mikkel Jensen to the RBM-run seat.

Van der Linde is part of a Johannesburg motorsport dynasty. Grandfather Hennie won five national saloon car titles in the 1970s and '80s, and father Shaun was a single-seater champion before becoming a works BMW driver, winning the 1994 South African Touring Car title for the marque. Uncle Etienne starred in Europe, winning the 1998 Opel Lotus Euroseries title and finishing on the podium in the 1999 Marlboro Masters of F3.

Older brother Kelvin made his career in Germany, claiming the 2014 ADAC GT Masters title for Audi as a rookie with Rene Rast, and taking victory in the 2017 Nurburgring 24 Hours. Sheldon followed him to Germany, starring in the DTM-supporting 2016 Audi TT Cup and 2017 TCR Germany series, before teaming up with his brother to compete in GT Masters

last season. At the wheel of an Audi R8 LMS, they lost out on the title by just one point. The van der Lindes also finished third in the Spa 24 Hours.

"Sheldon made a fantastic impression at the wheel of the BMW M4 DTM at the Young Driver Test in mid-December," said BMW sports boss Jens Marquardt. "Prior to that, we had been following his career in GT racing very carefully. Sheldon's speed and versatility make him the perfect addition to our programme. I am confident that he will find his feet very quickly in the DTM."

Van der Linde, 19, is the first South African to be confirmed in DTM history, but he likely won't be the only one. F3 racer Jonathan Aberdein, whose dad Chris was a rival of Shaun van der Linde with Audi in the 1990s, is tipped for a WRT Audi seat.

The DTM has added a push-to-pass system – allowing a boost of 30bhp for use 12 times during a race – to DRS to boost overtaking. Revised rules on the DRS mean it can be used when within three seconds – rather than one – of the car in front, and drivers will be able to use it regardless of the gap to the car in front during the final five laps. This will be fitted to the new wider, single-element rear wings.

MARCUS SIMMONS

IN THE HEADLINES

CHILTON STILL AT CARLIN

Long-time Carlin driver Max Chilton is to remain at the team for the IndyCar Series. Ex-Formula 1 racer Chilton will get a full season once again, but 2018 team-mate Charlie Kimball gets only what is described as a part-time deal. The team is also open to a third car in this, its second IndyCar season.

BLOMQUIST VISA DRAMA

BMW factory driver Tom Blomqvist has been forced out of this weekend's Daytona 24 Hours due to delays getting a visa. The Anglo-Swede, who will be back in BMW's line-up for the Sebring 12 Hours, has been replaced in the #25 M8 GTE by Augusto Farfus.

VW'S NORDSCHLEIFE BID

Volkswagen is to try for the electric lap record on the Nurburgring Nordschleife with its Pikes Peak-winning I.D. R prototype. Romain Dumas, who won the Colorado event, will aim to beat the 6m45.90s set by Peter Dumbreck in a NIO EP9 supercar in 2017.

WIND PROBLEM IN NZ

Two of last weekend's three Toyota Racing Series races fell victim to gale-force winds that battered the Teretonga circuit on New Zealand's South Island. Ferrari protege Marcus Armstrong won Saturday's wet race to move level on points with Liam Lawson. After a poor start, Lawson recovered to pass Artem Petrov for second. Raoul Hyman attacked Petrov for third at the last corner on the final lap, only to slide off the circuit.

DTM PRIZE FOR 'F3' ACE

Formula European Masters, the DTM-supporting continuation series for the old Formula 3 European Championship cars, has come up with a unique prize. The top three in the end-of-season points will be invited to the DTM young-driver test, with one selected to contest a DTM race weekend in 2020. The champion also gets a Super Formula test.

SENNA GETS ELMS DRIVE

Ex-F1 driver Bruno Senna will contest the European Le Mans Series with RLR MSport as the British team moves up to LMP2 with an ORECA 07. He will be joined by RLR's reigning LMP3 champion John Farano.



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Cool heads win races

BY TREVOR CHARLSLEY
SENIOR MARKET ADVISOR AT AFEX

At the second round of the 2018-19 ABB FIA Formula E Championship in Marrakech, BMW Andretti looked certain to secure its first one-two of the season in dominant form. Unfortunately, a rush of blood to the head from both Antonio Felix da Costa and Alexander Sims resulted in an unnecessary defence of an overly ambitious move, eliminating one car from the race and robbing the other of a podium result. BMW Andretti's loss was Mahindra Racing's gain with Formula E veteran Jerome d'Ambrosio keeping his cool among the chaos around him to secure his first win of the season.

It is much the same for foreign exchange (FX) hedging. The market can make fast moves and decisions need to be made quickly and under pressure. Decisions are important and can have ramifications elsewhere in the business. So just like a driver needs to be prepared and cool-headed with a race plan, a finance director needs similar preparation.

Many people saw last Tuesday's vote in parliament as the start of the Brexit race for the UK. Theresa May was defeated by a massive 230 votes (the largest government defeat in history), and five different scenarios could play out on 29 March. A no-deal Brexit; a different version of Prime Minister May's Brexit; a delayed Brexit; a general election (the opposition Labour Party has said that it will continue to call for votes of "no confidence" in the government whenever it can); or even another Brexit referendum.

When the initial Brexit deal was rejected, sterling fell but then quickly bounced back even though the Labour Party proposed a vote of no confidence in the government. As expected, the government won the vote, and this is seen as a positive for sterling.

Also helping the pound to its feet is the suggestion of a cross-party move being initiated with the aim of

passing legislation to stop a no-deal Brexit. Just as a rule of thumb, if the threat of a no-deal Brexit is removed and/or the UK moves towards a possible extension or revocation of Article 50, which could possibly lead to a referendum, the pound could jump higher. On the other hand, if the UK leaves the EU without a deal the pound might fall through the proverbial trap door.

So, businesses need to be aware of the possible destinations for the pound. They are listed below:

POSSIBLE DESTINATIONS FOR THE POUND		Probability
• PM May's deal is modified and then agreed GBPUSD 1.3500 GBPEUR 1.1700		25%
• General election GBPUSD 1.2000 GBPEUR 1.0500		5%
• Soft Brexit UK permanently in customs union GBPUSD 1.3800 GBPEUR 1.1800		20%
• Second referendum GBPUSD 1.4500 GBPEUR 1.2250		30%
• No-deal Brexit GBPUSD 1.1500 GBPEUR 1.0500		20%

When considering how to manage FX risk it is definitely worth remembering that we are currently in a very volatile period for sterling, with the potential for large percentage moves over 24 hours. Could your team stand losing 10% of its budget in one day?

So, it is definitely worth getting race fit for FX. Confirm your cash flows, look at the fundamental picture and likelihood of currency movement, and then make your hedges. If you do that and keep a cool head, you will at least give yourself a chance of reaching the podium.



FASTER BUT SLOWER

The 2017 rules shake-up may have produced lap record-breaking grand prix cars, but take a step back and contemporary F1 is well down on pace

EDD STRAW

How often do you see a Formula 1 car on the limit in a modern grand prix? It's a difficult question to answer, because the limit varies according to myriad factors. But in its simplest form, it's a car lapping at close to its optimum lap time.

F1 changed dramatically at the start of this decade with the refuelling ban, then the introduction of high-degradation Pirelli tyres a year later. The 2010 Bahrain Grand Prix, the first of this latest no-fuel-stops era, was met by a complaining chorus both inside and outside the F1 paddock about 'the show'. That chorus soon became a steady drumbeat, a cacophonous background noise that is the manifestation of F1's existential crisis – one that can't be tuned out and has yet to be resolved.

This brings us to cars on the limit. There are many different manifestations of this, although many hark back to the days of Ronnie Peterson sliding his Lotus through the old, fast Woodcote at Silverstone. It makes for spectacular images, but he was using crossply tyres that lent themselves to this style. You can't drive a grand prix car like that today, and not only because of the downforce. But whatever form this takes visually, the look of a grand prix car on the limit is best described as 'alive'.

"YOU SEE CARS LAPPING AT OR NEAR THEIR LIMIT A LOT LESS OFTEN THAN YOU USED TO"

Watching an F1 practice session today can be frustrating. So many push laps are bookended by ones on which drivers chug around looking after tyre temperature and charging/saving the engine package. And in the race, there are endless complaints about drivers not pushing. Last year's Mexican Grand Prix was a particularly painful example of a tyre-dominated race. Listening to the leading drivers' radio messages during that race revealed the vast majority were concerning themselves with looking after the tyres and getting condition updates.

Given such limitations, how often will you see a car on the limit, going seriously fast, during a grand prix weekend?

Using Autosport's FORIX database (www.forix.com), it's possible to take every lap through practice, qualifying and the race for every driver and calculate what percentage of the time they are lapping within a certain margin of their best lap. To equalise all circuits, we use percentages to calculate this.

Using each driver's fastest individual lap of a session, we can therefore calculate figures across the whole season telling us how much of the time we see a driver lapping close to their fastest overall lap of the whole weekend.

During 2018 you'd have seen 1683 laps set by drivers within 1% of their quickest of the weekend, which equates to 0.8 seconds. That is a grand total, on average, of four laps within that range per driver, per weekend – 3.1% of their laps.

This figure hasn't dropped massively over 10 seasons. In 2009 there were 2564 such laps – 5.4% of the time. But since that's the same number of cars over 17 races rather than 21, it's an average of 7.5 laps per driver within 1% of their quickest. So it's not far off double what you see today.

But 1% is a very narrow window, especially given the many factors that impact pace. Look more deeply into the figures and it paints a more alarming picture.

Expand the figure to 5% – a generous four seconds on a hypothetical 1m20s lap – and in 2018 just 16.5% of laps are within that margin of a driver's outright fastest. That compares to 50.4% back in 2009. That means 9158 laps at that pace today versus 23,986 a decade earlier – and with four fewer races.

That's an average of 70.5 per driver, per weekend in 2009 versus 21.8 now. This is a huge difference and means you are seeing cars near the ultimate limit far less often.

The shift from 2007-09, when refuelling was permitted, to 2010, and then a year later the introduction of the Pirelli tyres, matches the trend for a reduction in quick laps. Today's combination of tyres that must be protected, power units that must be charged and managed, and fuel limits that must be respected means you can objectively state that you see F1 cars lapping near their limit a lot less often than you did 10 seasons ago. What's more, in most practice sessions there's no incentive to lap especially quickly given the focus on race prep and management.

On top of that, the look of an F1 car at or near the limit has changed. This season, F1 cars will be 23% heavier than they were in 2009 based on minimum weight regulations – that's 743kg compared with 605kg. Connected to this, the wheelbase of the average F1 car is also longer. This adds up to cars that look 'lazier' on track and lacking the razor-sharp pointiness of before.

The changes made in 2017 made the cars look meaner. But other factors conspire to hide the wow factor of today's machine.

The scarcity of laps at, or near, the limit is something that needs to be considered as part of the much-vaunted 2021 regulations. That doesn't mean reducing variables that make for good racing or a backward-looking shift to what F1 was a decade ago, but the need to place front and centre cars that look as fast as they really are, and show their speed more often. //

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VERSTAPPEN WATCHES THE WATCHMEN

Outrage greeted the news that Max Verstappen's punishment of 'public service' would include sitting in with the stewards at a Formula E round. What's so bad about that?

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

Picking up litter, removing graffiti, painting fences – just a few of the outcomes that may come to mind when a sentence of 'public service' is handed out for a misdemeanour. Attending a high-level international motor race and watching proceedings unfold from the stewards' room is not.

But that's exactly how the FIA decided Red Bull Formula 1 driver Max Verstappen would serve one of the two days of public service he was given for shoving Esteban Ocon after the 2018 Brazilian Grand Prix. The governing body duly sent him to the second round of the ABB FIA Formula E season, which took place in Marrakech.

So, misbehave in F1, and among the grimmest sanctions a driver can face is to be forced to attend an FE event. Well, that's at least what the howling Twitter mob decided was the case.

To a certain extent they were right – Verstappen was unlikely to have attended the race of his own volition (which would have been his loss – it was an absolute cracker). But this was no simple 'punishment' for the Dutch driver, and nor was it a slap in the face for FE. The angst stemmed, as it often does on the internet, to

send him. It had to be of a high enough standard, be similar in nature to F1, but also have a calendar that wouldn't impact on Verstappen's working season – therefore FE fitted the bill perfectly. This was surely also a show of confidence in the electric championship from the governing body.

Not everyone agreed with the FIA's call in this case – including Virgin Racing's Sam Bird. His response was to point out that FE "is an amazing category, and people pay to come and watch us. It shouldn't be a punishment to come here."

This is a perfectly valid point from Bird, but the counter remains that the FIA picked FE precisely because of its status and relevance to F1. Bird also said he hoped that Verstappen would "give good feedback to some of his [F1] colleagues". And this is crucial to the whole exercise.

As Audi team principal Allan McNish joked, Verstappen has "been in front of the stewards many times – not necessarily like that!" But the 21-year old has now had the opportunity to see how and why the stewards arrive at the conclusions they do. McNish, using his own insight as a drivers' steward in his post-racing career, reckons that this is a valuable lesson for any driver. Verstappen will have been able to see first-hand that the stewards don't make the rules, they just enforce them (and apply the relevant sanctions) in what they deem to be the most appropriate way.

Remember when Verstappen, in battle with Vettel in Mexico, cut the first few corners late in the race, resulting in a vigorously sweary radio rant from Vettel and Verstappen being removed from the podium? Well there was a fairly similar pattern of events in Morocco, when Antonio Felix da Costa's pass on Bird was investigated during the race. The BMW driver had attacked at the Circuit Moulay El Hassan's Turns 4/5 chicane, and Bird cut across the second part of the sequence. Bird still lost the place – and was also then passed by Alexander Sims in the other BMW Andretti car on the next straight. OK, there was a clear reason why no further action was applied in this case, but just maybe Verstappen learned what the outcome would have been had things played out differently. Hopefully one day he can tell us why Jean-Eric Vergne and Lucas di Grassi escaped penalties for their first-corner indiscretions in the race...

So, was Verstappen's public service in Marrakech bad for FE? On the face of it, yes, given the PR storm it invoked. But in reality it was not. Like him or loathe him – and he is a thoroughly brilliant and entertaining driver – Verstappen gets called in to see the stewards a lot and has reacted badly to their decisions in the past. If coming to see an FE race and observing those who make such calls means he behaves differently in the future, then that's a win for all sides. ✎

"VERSTAPPEN WILL HAVE BEEN ABLE TO SEE THAT THE STEWARDS DON'T MAKE THE RULES"

interpretations of a single word.

The decision fits with the governing body's educational philosophy regarding incidents such as the one in which Verstappen was involved at Interlagos, where he and Ocon had clashed at the second corner, costing Verstappen potential victory. Ferrari's Sebastian Vettel was told to attend a stewards' conference following his public-service sentence for driving into Lewis Hamilton at the 2017 Azerbaijan Grand Prix.

Handing Verstappen a sanction of this order was the punishment the FIA had determined, so it had to find the best way to carry it out. Verstappen has been called in front of the stewards on a quite a few occasions in his short F1 career, and in some instances he has been vocal in criticising their conclusions.

So, since the option of making him miss a few F1 sessions to observe the stewards at a grand prix event was obviously out of the question, the governing body had to find somewhere else to

YOUR SAY

Schumacher is entwined within motorsport folklore and, yes, he entertained us 'in the day' – but please don't try to sugarcoat his actions

DERRICK HOLDEN

Alternative perspective on Schumacher's legacy

Edd Straw says of Michael Schumacher (January 3), "Regardless of what you think about the controversies of 1994... and driving into Damon Hill's Williams, Schumacher was outstanding". Are we to also be 'regardless' of driving into Jacques Villeneuve's Williams too?

His championships will always be mired with controversies – must we disregard them all? The myth is perpetuated in your letters page (January 10), "He raised the bar in so many ways and set a standard..."

He was a very good driver but he, and his teams, reduced standards and just about killed sportsmanship.

When was the last time that Lewis Hamilton was held responsible for an on-track collision? He is fast, he is robust, but he can overtake cleanly (as can Daniel Ricciardo – take note Sebastian Vettel and Max Verstappen!).

Schumacher is entwined within motorsport folklore and, yes, he entertained us 'in the day' – but please don't try to sugarcoat his actions (ditto Ayrton Senna, who should never have been allowed back into a Formula 1 car after the 1990 Japanese Grand Prix).

This is my view of his driving. His current plight is a sadness to us all and a reminder of the vulnerabilities and frailties of the human body. I wish him well.

Keep fighting.

Derrick Holden

By email

More broken wings, more front punctures...

One easy prediction for the 2019 Formula 1 season is that there will be more front wings breaking, as they are larger and more 'in the way' when cars get close. More tyres cut by front wings will be another point of discussion.

Eliminating front wings entirely (together with more underbody ground effects) would be more effective at promoting overtaking.

Bruce Merchant

Big Sur, California

CHRISTMAS QUIZ ANSWERS

Congratulations to Stuart Coulter from Belfast, the winner of the Autosport Christmas Quiz. Stuart wins a pair of Bose QuietComfort 35 wireless headphones II, worth £329.95, for his incredible knowledge. They'll be handy if he makes the trip to nearby Kirkistown and there's a wait for the Formula Ford grid to line up. Anyway, here are the answers...

A 1 Valtteri Bottas. 2 Charles Leclerc, 2015. 3 Max Verstappen. 4 Formula 3 European Championship. 5 Scott Dixon. 6 Artem Markelov, Sean Gelael, Roberto Merhi – Monte Carlo. 7 Shō Tsuboi. 8 Christian Lundgaard. 9 Lucas di Grassi, Sam Bird, Alex Lynn, Edoardo Mortara, Neel Jani, Jose Maria Lopez, Jerome d'Ambrosio, Luca Filippi, Andre Lotterer, Jean-Eric Vergne, Felix Rosenqvist, Kamui Kobayashi, Tom Blomqvist, Antonio Felix da Costa. 10 Lirim Zendeli, Enzo Fittipaldi, Kiern Jewiss, Caio Collet, Konsta Lappalainen, Amaury Cordeel, Dakota Dickerson, Moises de la Vara, Yuki Tsunoda, Jayden Ojeda, Jordan Dempsey, Daniel Cao, Alessandro Ghirelli, Charles Weerts.

B 1 Bob Gerard. 2 Giorgio Francia, Roberto Marazzi, Lella Lombardi. 3 Graham McRae. 4 Ernesto Brambilla.

5 Lamberto Leoni, Williams FW08C. 6 1985. 7 Russell Ingall, Marc Gene, Jonny Kane. 8 1977 Dutch Grand Prix. 9 Surtees TS9. 10 Tony Dron, Chris Craft, Richard Lloyd, Bernard Unett.

C 1 Mike Conway, Jose Maria Lopez, Fernando Alonso. 2 Jean-Eric Vergne, Juan Pablo Montoya, Pastor Maldonado, Anthony Davidson. 3 2nd. 4 Gabriele Tarquini, Fabrizio Giovanardi, Yvan Muller, James Thompson, Gordon Shedden. 5 Hideki Mutoh, Kosuke Matsuura, Bertrand Baguette, Joao Paulo de Oliveira. 6 2006 British Formula 3. 7 0. 8 Aiden Moffat. 9 Zaid Ashkanani. 10 39 years.


D 1 Thierry Neuville. 2 Rally Turkey. 3 Hayden Paddon, David Holder. 4 Kalle Rovanpera. 5 Toyota – Ott Tanak, Jari-Matti Latvala, Turkey. 6 Henning Solberg. 7 Denis Radstrom, Ken Torn, Jean-Baptiste Franceschi, Emil Bergkvist. 8 Raphael Astier. 9 12. 10 Mattias Ekstrom, Timo Scheider, Nico Muller.

E 1 Luca Stolz. 2 Mikkell Mac. 3 Lirim Zendeli. 4 Mikel Azcona. 5 Mathieu Jaminet. 6 Rinus van Kalmthout. 7 Raoul Hyman. 8 Yuki Tsunoda. 9 Gianluca Roda. 10 Felipe Drugovich.

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WRC'S CASINO ROYALE

While the Monte Carlo rally won't start in Monte Carlo this year, there's plenty of crackle and pop to expect as the World Rally Championship gets into gear

DAVID EVANS

Monte Carlo's Casino Square will be quieter than usual tonight (Thursday). The locals – certainly the older ones, usually found draped from head to toe in winter mink – will be quite pleased at the lack of a ceremonial start to their round of the World Rally Championship. It means less noise. Fewer proletarians.

The start of the world's most famous rally has been moved up the road to the service park in Gap. And, to be clear, Gap isn't a suburb of Monte Carlo – it's in France. Yes, it was a considerable faff to come all the way down to the coast from the mountains, just to wave the cars off on their journey... back up to those very mountains. But I didn't mind. I loved the sense of occasion, not to mention the opportunity to park one of Hertz's finest Group A motors between a Phantom and a Ghost.

Then again, starting from Monte Carlo was always a bit of a nonsense for an event that was first run a century ago as a way of attracting tourists through the mountains to the Riviera from start points as far away as Glasgow or Warsaw. The crucial thing is that the winner will still get to spray the champagne outside the Prince's Palace on Sunday afternoon.

And the winner will have earned that opportunity. The weather

"THERE WILL FOREVER BE NEEDLE BETWEEN FRANCE'S MOST SUCCESSFUL SPORTING SEBS"

for the week ahead is looking as fickle ever, making tyre choices a complete nightmare and every apex a potential banana skin. In short, we're in for a classic Monte and an even better season.

Rarely has the WRC offered quite so many storylines in one campaign. We've got a champion on the move, with Sebastien Ogier driving a third different World Rally Car in four years. And Seb's move to Citroen comes with a subplot – two subplots in fact, or maybe even three.

Don't forget, the last time Ogier occupied Citroen's orbit, there wasn't an *au revoir* to be had as he achieved escape velocity. When Ogier walked out on Citroen after the team management favoured Sebastien Loeb at the end of 2011, there wasn't a hope of these two parties working together again.

Until now. The previous team management has moved on, but the impression is not one of a wayward son returning home. This deal has a more commercial edge to it; it's a meeting of the minds

with a financial as well as sporting angle. A Frenchman winning in a French car would, of course, be good for business.

Then there's Loeb's return. Yes, it's only for six of the 14 rounds, but still – there will forever be needle between France's most famous and successful sporting Sebs.

Then there's the reported reason for Loeb's departure from the PSA Group to Hyundai, where he will drive a factory rally car that's not a Citroen for the first time in his career. Some say Ogier's arrival at Citroen put sufficient strain on the PSA purse that it was the final nail in Peugeot's World Rallycross effort. And who was most affected by Peugeot's RX departure? Loeb.

But none of the above will rankle with Ogier as much as Loeb's part-programme. Loeb is in Monte Carlo (fresh from a podium finish on the Dakar, he went directly to his pre-event test in the Alps on Saturday) and will also compete in Sweden and Corsica. The second half of his programme will be decided later in the year. It will, undoubtedly, include at least one gravel rally – and that's where Ogier will surely chafe. Loeb will start said event in a preferential place on the road and, quite possibly, win it. Not unreasonably, Ogier is frustrated that part-timers will come in and have an impact on a title race they're not running. Ire will be directed towards the FIA, and there may be fallout of some sort.

There is, of course, more to the season ahead than two Frenchmen. There's a reshuffled Hyundai team that desperately needs a result, and a Toyota squad that is bursting at the seams with potential. Ott Tanak, Jari-Matti Latvala and Kris Meeke represent not only one of the most exciting driver line-ups in the history of the sport, but also one of the most combustible.

All things considered, we should have a season worthy of a 40th anniversary of the drivers' World Rally Championship.

Forty years ago, Ford Motorsport burst out of a winter of discontent (during which strikes had kept the Blue Oval's official Boreham squad out of action for a couple of months in late 1978) to enjoy blistering pace from Bjorn Waldegaard.

Unfortunately for the big Swede, he was robbed of victory in the mountains above Monaco after fans of local hero Bernard Darniche dropped rocks on the road in front of the factory Ford Escort RS1800 on the penultimate stage. Forced to stop, Waldegaard had to wait while his co-driver Hans Thorzelius jumped out of the car to shift the obstructions to one side. They lost the rally to Darniche by six seconds.

Had Darniche been driving anything other than a Lancia Stratos, I would have found this utterly unforgivable. But it all turned out OK since Waldegaard and Ford won both titles. And I kept a blue, Chardonnet-liveried Stratos on my window ledge for years to come. ❧



**P26 WRC SEASON
PREVIEW**

INSIGHT

RENAULT'S NEXT STEP • WRC PREVIEW • DAYTONA 24 PREVIEW • PENSKE RETROSPECTIVE





- 2019 IS ITS **FOURTH SEASON** SINCE RETURNING TO F1 AS A CONSTRUCTOR

- IT HAS **INVESTED** HEAVILY

- IT HIT THE FRONT OF THE **MIDFIELD** LAST YEAR

- IT HAS SIGNED A **STAR DRIVER** IN DANIEL RICCIARDO

IS **RENAULT** READY TO WIN?

EDD STRAW

PHOTOGRAPHY  **motorsport**
IMAGES

A

troubled ninth... a rise to sixth... a midfield-leading fourth... Renault has made strides in the constructors' championship every season since re-establishing its works team in December 2015 by buying the moribund Enstone squad. The shock signing of Daniel Ricciardo gives it a seven-time grand prix winner to partner the rapid Nico Hulkenberg, and serious spending over the past three years means it should leave the midfield behind. The next logical step is a top-three place and wins in '19, but Formula 1 is a complex beast and, despite Renault's formidable progress, expectations must be kept in check.

This is not negativity, rather realism. Renault did rise to the front of the midfield last year, but a performance chasm remained between it and Red Bull, the weakest of the big three teams. What's more, while Renault's championship position was vastly improved, there was negligible difference to its overall pace deficit to the front (0.049% better over the season, to be precise). There is still a long way to go. Not that this is a problem because, right at the start of this project, five years was set as the initial timescale to emerge as a potentially title-contending force, and given the enormous investment of the big teams it's harder than ever to join that elite group.

"We need to take it step by step and be relieved of that first tranche of progression," says team principal Cyril Abiteboul. "The target has to be to solidify the organisation and project ourselves into the top three. Clearly, the next step is a big one, we do not deny that, so we need to think strategically about the next three years and not just 2019. We'd like to be closer to the top three than we've been and the gap to pole is what I like to measure. I would like to see that reduced by a very big margin."

The gap to the top three was enormous last year, equating to 1.340% or around 1.2 seconds over a hypothetical 90s lap. If Renault can catapult itself into no-man's land, breaking clear of the midfield and closing on Mercedes, Ferrari and Red Bull, that would represent a successful season. It would mean finishing fourth again, but that would not represent stagnation provided it's a far stronger fourth than the marginal victory over a Haas team that had, on average, a slightly faster car in 2018.

The five-year timescale set by the team — it's not entirely clear whether this meant getting into title contention in season five or after it — was a logical one. It was based on historical data, with Renault buying Enstone-based Benetton first time round in March 2000, then winning the title in '05, Red Bull buying Jaguar ahead of the '05 season and taking its first crown in '10, then Mercedes taking over Brawn and winning its first title in season five. But both Red Bull and Mercedes needed the opportunity presented by a major rule change to hit the front, something Renault won't benefit from until '21. What's more, the top teams' complexity and resources have grown dramatically since those days.

No wonder Bob Bell, then chief technical officer and now on a part-time deal as technical advisor, last year revised that five-year timescale as a "minimum". With the major 2021 rule changes, the sixth season of 'new' Renault, that's the obvious target. So even if targets for this year seem a little conservative for those impatient to see another factory team at the front, it's a logical progression.

As technical director Nick Chester explains, dropping the midfield and getting within striking distance of the frontrunners is the aim. "We want to be a really solid fourth, away from the





Gap to the big three
is massive, so it's no
small task to close it

ETHERINGTON

HONE

**"WE
WOULD
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TOP THREE THAN
WE'VE BEEN AND THE
GAP TO POLE IS
WHAT I LIKE TO
MEASURE"**



Ricciardo knows
what it takes to
win in Formula 1

THE BOSS

S BLOXHAM



CYRIL ABITEBOUL TEAM PRINCIPAL

How do you evaluate what Renault achieved in 2018?

We set [a target] to double the points [of '17], which we did by a margin, and targeted a championship position for drivers and team. Those boxes were ticked with P4 by a margin. There were two frustrations, the first being the big gap to the top three teams. The second was the inconsistency in our pace and competitiveness.

Has hitting the target of fourth unlocked more financial resource?

No, it's completely steady. What being P4 brings is more confidence and trust between us at the team level, between management and the team, between Viry and Enstone, all the departments. That's important as we build the team, infrastructure and facilities. What is more difficult to build is team spirit and that's why it's important we saw this success. It brings the confidence we need in the F1 team and with our partners and that's important as we continue to invest a large amount resources. It's important they see we have the capacity to stick to the roadmap and what is expected of us in 2020 and '21. In this world, things have to have a justification, a return on investment when there is lots of opportunity of spending marketing resources for a company like Renault.

Looking at the gap to the top three, Renault's spending a lot of money and they're spending more, so how do you ensure you can match them by 2021?

I don't have information regarding our competitors, but I think Renault is spending similar amounts. The thing is we don't enjoy the same revenue

as they have with the prize fund and heritage payments. That's why Renault is in favour of different money distribution because we think there should be more equal chances. So the question is not Renault's competitiveness, it's F1's sustainability. For the rest, it's all about planning and anticipation. Because we have less financial resources we need to use other resources, like time to anticipate the things our competitors will be in the position to do at the last minute.

The engine will be key and reasonable progress was made last year... But not enough.

So that's a main limiting factor?

We are very strong in our willingness to put that handicap behind us. There is a strong commitment from everyone, we have no excuse not to make it happen. We are well resourced in Viry, we've got very good people, new infrastructure, new investment, a new dyno. So there is no reason not to bridge the gap to the best and that's what I expect will happen.

Does having one engine supply deal fewer make things easier in 2019 with Red Bull moving to Honda?

Managing the communications will be simpler! The difficulty with Red Bull has never been much on the technical side – the aggravation was coming from the fact that Red Bull was always communicating on our behalf. One of the reasons we decided to return as a complete team was to control our communication, which will only happen for the first time in 2019.

midfield and starting to nibble away at the top three, even if we can't do it on a regular basis," says Chester. "But with the new regs, it's not just marginal gains, it's making sure we've got the concept right particularly on the aero side of the '19 car, because it's a tough challenge getting the package to work."

"The 2018 car was pretty good in low-speed corners, but we were missing a bit of grip in medium and high-speed corners. That's where we're losing lap time, and obviously we're losing a bit of lap time with the power unit, so there's a lot of work going on in that area for '19. Our target is to improve our medium and high-speed performance, and a bit of car balance as well."

"Sorting out low-speed problems can be tricky and there are a few tracks where there are a lot of low-speed corners and you spend a lot of time in them. So that's positive. We know what we need to do for medium and high-speed; a lot of it is aero performance, but also how we deliver the aero performance through these corners."

The new aero rules, with a focus on mitigating the aerodynamic outwash and the turbulent air leading to changes to the front wing, bargeboards and rear wing, offer both a challenge and an opportunity to Renault. But what Chester underlines is that, while net downforce is the key to performance, it's not simply about finding new ways to generate downforce. Instead, it's about increasing the control of the airflow and the aerodynamic centre of pressure, as well as managing the all-important front-wheel wake through a range of steering locks. This requires ever-deeper understanding that underpins the effective, but tricky to get right, more-complex aero components. If Renault takes a big step in that direction, it will close the gap to the big three and should therefore increase the potential for aero gains in future that could allow it to match up better with the pacesetters.

The arrival of Ricciardo can be viewed both as a blessing and a curse. A top gun turning their back on a race-winning team will increase expectation and pressure, but overall it's a validation of Renault's progress. He could have stayed at Red Bull had he wanted to and, although it's clear that the rise of Max Verstappen meant he wanted a move, Ricciardo had to be convinced Renault was on the right trajectory. Emerging teams often talk of there being the right time to bring in a big-name recruit, and conventional wisdom would have it that Renault has gone a little early. But the reality is that a driver of Ricciardo's quality is always of benefit, and unquestionably the arrival of this effervescent, and fast, driver has further lifted the team. And with three years of significant investment in the bag, and an assurance that the spend on Ricciardo does not impact what's spent on the car, the time was deemed to be right.

"We addressed that question of whether it's the right time, discussing it a lot with Renault," says Abiteboul. "It was not a question of cost, because Renault can afford it, but we need to make sure we're making the right investment. The first thing I wanted to do was secure the financial resources we needed to build up the team and build a competitive platform for drivers, because there's no point in having a star driver if you can't afford to build a competitive car."

"The opportunity of signing Daniel came as a second stage. There's no perfect answer to the question of timing, but what does it mean if we didn't seize that opportunity? I asked myself and the board the message we send to ourselves, to the staff and to the world by securing one of the most capable, motivating and inclusive drivers if we decided not to take it up. So it becomes obvious what you need to do."

"The next thing was the execution, and the discussion with Daniel was always transparent. We've not promised things we are not capable of and we've not said he'd be on the podium or winning races out of the box. But that's the ambition in the next two years and he's the best driver to give us that opportunity."

Abiteboul also talks of the role Ricciardo can have in helping to push Hulkenberg, in his third year with Renault, towards those kinds of results. Hulkenberg is well regarded not just for his speed but his off-track contribution, making this a formidable partnership. Hulkenberg may have the record of most starts in F1 without a podium, but that's a consequence more of circumstance than his ability. Carlos Sainz Jr, who Ricciardo replaces, found Hulkenberg's pace difficult to deal with and if Ricciardo thinks he'll >>

**"THERE'S
NO POINT
IN HAVING A
STAR DRIVER IF
YOU CAN'T AFFORD
TO BUILD A
COMPETITIVE
CAR"**



No longer having to supply Red Bull makes life simpler for Renault

GORIA



MOY

Hulkenberg's speed and off-track input are valued highly



THE NEWCOMER

MARCIN BUDKOWSKI EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Is the Renault project now at the point where you have everything in the right place and you need to work through the process of it maturing?

I think that's fair. In terms of expansion and building we are slowing down, but when you grow that quickly some areas grow quicker than others and you have to address some of the imbalances you've made. So you have to readjust, and this is what we're doing now by placing resources in a very thought-through manner rather than just saying we need hands and brains. It's the same in terms of infrastructure. I think we have enough in terms of being a very strong team and reaching that next step, but it's clear that in order to compete with Mercedes, Ferrari, Red Bull, we are going to need to be more creative and more efficient. Our philosophy is to be very efficient and we're behind because of that explosive growth and adding resources so quickly. The aim is to extract efficiency.

How would you evaluate the team's strengths and weaknesses?

In terms of on-track [performance] from a car point of view, rather than organisation, we've made progress in the integration of Enstone and Viry. These two organisations have been working together for more than 20 years, but over the past couple of years there has been lots of progress in integration. It's a performance differentiator for us, to have great chassis and engine operations, and in the 2018 car we saw a notable improvement in how the two are integrated, not just in how the engine is bolted to the chassis but all projects

and all the trade-offs in performance you have to make. It's not a game of having the most power and the most downforce, it's about having the quickest car, and sometimes you need to lose a bit of power or a bit of downforce to have a quicker car. We've made big progress on that. We had good reliability and we've extracted the performance of the car at the track in the best possible way. The target is to be competitive everywhere and we are working to improve that. We struggled a bit with tyre management and improved that, but in terms of development rate we weren't where we should be.

How do you stack up in terms of windtunnel and CFD facilities and processes?

We have a windtunnel on site and we put a lot of effort and money into bringing it back to where it should be. We're still working on implementing some technologies and systems that will get us to the top level. On the CFD front, I don't think we have anything to envy the top teams for, and the aero department has been invested in significantly. Are we at the level of the top guys? No. Are we on the right trajectory? Yes.

What's the realistic expectation in terms of how much you can close the gap to the front this year?

We know there is a gap of a second to a second and a half depending on the circuit. This is a gulf in F1. We need to show progress, and that means if we are fourth again it needs to be a solid fourth, not one that is contested until the last race.

THE STALWART

GORIA



ALAN PERMANE TRACK OPERATIONS DIRECTOR

You've been at this team since 1989, so how does the recent rebuilding compare to what happened when Renault bought it the previous time?

It feels different now, there's no doubt it's more structured. There's short, medium and long-term plans with goals that are no secret and in recent races we absolutely stuck to those. Before, we used our own homegrown talent, which worked very well. Fernando Alonso was pretty much a junior driver and joined us in 2003 as a race driver. This time, we've hired an established, race-winning driver, which is a statement to everyone here of our ambitions as it is to the rest of the world. We expanded before, but we've never been anywhere near this size. It's a very serious operation with a very serious plan.

So that reflects how much more is needed to be successful in F1 now?

Yes. I don't want to say we got there by chance last time, as we built a very good car and had a very good engine. But F1 has moved on so much and to catch where Mercedes, Ferrari and Red Bull are now is a huge challenge. Everything has to be perfect.

How has the new ownership built on the longstanding Enstone team spirit?

It's a difficult question to answer because I haven't worked for any other team. But there is a great resilience and team spirit. I imagine there's that in many teams, so I can't say we're unique in this aspect. We are located out in the middle of the British countryside, which helps people to bond more because they don't scatter off and go everywhere. I don't know

if that social side brings the team together or not, but it's always been a good place to work and with Renault coming back it is an even better place to work. If anything, the team spirit has strengthened further.

How much of that is down to effective communication and a relative lack of politics?

There's definitely a lack of politics. That doesn't mean Cyril and Marcin sit back and let everyone get on with it, but they are empowering people, saying, 'I fully trust in you so get on.' This attitude filters down to the next manager and their staff.

What's it been like to go through the transition from the latter days of Lotus, given how close it came to folding?

It was very hard and I'm not sure we would have survived without Renault. We lost a lot of people through those years – 2012 and '13 were very strong and we should have capitalised on it. The financial side was really bad. We used to have meetings on Monday mornings and say, 'We've got £18,000 in the account, what do we spend it on this week?'

What does Daniel Ricciardo bring to the team?

He's a race winner and he's driven for a team that has one of the best chassis in F1. He brings experience of what made Red Bull fast. He can't tell us how to build the damper system, but he'll know where to focus and what things have worked and what haven't. The importance of a driver is not to be underestimated and they have to be an integral part of the team.



'Homegrown talent'
Alonso spearheaded
previous glory era



Leaving the midfield
behind: can Renault
break free in 2019?

GALLOWAY



**"2020 AND
THEN '21 ARE THE
YEARS WE EXPECT THE
STRUCTURE TO BE MATURE
AND DELIVER ITS
PERFORMANCE"**

have it all his own way at Renault, this could also cause a problem for him.

"There is no reason to believe there will be a number one and a number two," says Abiteboul. "We value them in the same way and we need to give credit to Nico, who believed in the team when it was not what it is today and he's delivered since then. We are not in a fight for the world championship, so I see no rationality in having that type of hierarchy."

What Ricciardo expects to see is an improvement this season. Renault's capacity to do this is dependent on two broad areas: first, the ability to produce a chassis that's competitive; and second, big steps forward with an engine package that has always been a weakness in the V6 hybrid turbo era.

Key to the chassis improvements are the dramatic changes at Renault's Enstone base during the past few years. After underinvestment in the later days of the team's Genii Capital-owned Lotus incarnation, the Whiteways Technical Centre has been transformed in terms of upgraded facilities as well as increased personnel. Bell oversaw this rapid expansion initially, but now it's spearheaded by ex-FIA man Marcin Budkowski, who started in his role as executive director last year. The result is a revitalised factory, with the staff headcount up to 705 and expected to be not far off 800 by the end of the season.

"I arrived at Enstone in April," says Budkowski, "so most of what you see today in terms of infrastructure was already there, although we've completed a number of improvements since. I found something that was largely transformed since Renault bought the team, in terms of building, infrastructure and tools. There's a lot that's going to be done. We're getting a new gearbox dyno that's in the final stages of commissioning, we've ramped up the windtunnels – it's a continuation of this through the past few months.

"One of the most notable aspects is the growth in headcount – at the end of 2018 around 50% more compared to December '15 when Renault bought the team. When Renault bought the team, it wasn't in the best place in terms of infrastructure and also in terms of personnel, but 50% growth is massive. You need new buildings to house people, and the parking is suffering a bit! But apart from these logistical issues, integrating all these people is a challenge, so it's good to have extra resources."

Building up a team like this is not the work of a moment. As well as the inevitable lag in bringing people in once they've been recruited and the challenge of where to put them, lines of communication and structures must be established and modified to ensure the team works as efficiently as possible. Anyone can throw people and facilities at an F1 team but, while that's a prerequisite of being at the front, it's the processes and their management that will convert that into success on track.

With what might be called the explosive expansion completed, although steady growth continues, Renault is now in the phase of gradually realising the potential that's been created. With dramatic rule changes expected for 2021, this is the obvious focal point for Renault, with steps forward in '19 and '20 creating the platform to strike out for F1's latest new look. Mercedes did this effectively, focusing earlier than its rivals on all aspects of the '14 car, which is something that Renault must try to replicate.

"In general, there's a two to three-year lag in F1," says Budkowski. "Putting together a good structure, you get the full rewards of it in two or three years. We are seeing the benefits now of the recruitment done in 2016–17 and what's been done this year will only show in the latter part of '19 and '20. So naturally, '20 and then '21 are the years we expect the structure to be mature and deliver its performance."

But it's not just about the chassis. The engine department at Viry near Paris has struggled to get on top of the demands of the current power unit rules and still lags behind Mercedes and Ferrari. So even if Renault builds the best car, it still needs the engine to be up to it and for the integration between the two sides to match or exceed what Mercedes and Ferrari can do. >>

Last year, Renault made good progress on reliability despite the overall performance not being up to standard. In particular, progress must be made on the internal combustion engine – Red Bull's dominance in Mexico, where the ERS is a greater part of the competitive equation, underlined that. With facilities at Viry improving too, there's also a change in mindset, which it is hoped will allow it to be more aggressive in the performance it can extract. This particularly applies to qualifying modes, where Renault has always lagged badly behind.

"We always see the Renault-powered cars look more competitive on Sunday than Saturday," says Renault engine chief Remi Taffin. "Maybe we pay too much attention to what we develop to go racing and at some point we did not put that much emphasis on Saturday. By not taking advantage of that state of mind a few years ago, it takes a while before you get back on top of it, which is maybe one of my biggest regrets so far – not having taken the edge on quali. That's something we will bring forward, making sure we can be competitive on a Saturday afternoon."

That means not only being willing to capitalise on some of the more aggressive approaches taken by teams – such as the oil burning that's been progressively curbed in recent years – but also being willing to take more out of the engine life for these extreme conditions, even if it makes things harder in the race.

"Oil burning has been a big story for the last few years and clearly we did not get on top of that," admits Taffin. "We did not play that game and we suffered in qualifying."

"For the year in front of us, it's a matter of how severe you are on your engine and also how your engine is designed and developed to cope with that severity. It's very easy to damage the engine. But you must have this as a state of mind when you develop. At the end of the day, sometimes you choose a way of developing the engine that is much better for qualifying but may be slower in the race. It's a matter of exchange rate, how much you damage the engine and how much you get back from that. That's the thing the other two have been on top of for the past two years and it has made a difference. But we haven't said our final word..."

The Renault engine package will be an evolutionary step this year. The C-spec internal combustion engine was introduced in the closing stages of 2018 to limited success and is not the starting V6 for '19 – Renault has already moved on and there's another step planned. There's no revolution in the architecture, and the hope is that continuing to evolve the ERS package while extracting more from the conventional part of the engine will allow Renault to improve. Whether that's achievable without reliability problems remains to be seen, and given Renault's struggles over the past five seasons it's difficult to be too confident. The engine remains the biggest question mark for Renault, and a big step must be made. That's not just for the start of this season, but during the year given the strides its rivals were able to make with upgrades in '18.

Expectations are rising at Renault, but those hoping to see the team back at the front, giving Ricciardo and Hulkenberg the machinery to fight for wins, must be patient. F1 teams are now massive edifices, requiring brute-force resources combined with outstanding processes and a long lead time to be successful. So while breaking clear of the midfield and simply gaining on the big three, rather than joining them, may seem unambitious, it's actually a sign of realism. Everyone at Renault knows how tough this is, and things must happen step by step. But it's an exciting prospect and if Renault does achieve its aims – which won't be easy with teams such as Racing Point also investing heavily – then Ricciardo will have the machinery to snap at the heels of the big guns. But this is a long game, and the real focus is on 2020 and, most importantly, '21.

Renault is getting there, but it's still spending less than the big three. Ricciardo is another part of the jigsaw that it's putting together. The fact that it's so difficult to get to the front is a reminder of just how big the gap between the front and the back is, and how long it takes for those who can't beat them to join them. ❧

**"OIL
BURNING
HAS BEEN A BIG
STORY FOR THE LAST
FEW YEARS. WE DID NOT
PLAY THAT GAME AND
WE SUFFERED IN
QUALIFYING"**



Big money continues to be spent on facilities and personnel



Getting within striking distance of the front is the crucial next step

THE ENGINE MAN



HONE

REMI TAFFIN

ENGINE TECHNICAL DIRECTOR

How big a change will next year's engine package be?

The main thing for us is the performance you get out of the engine, which is mainly coming out of the internal combustion engine. The structure of the engine is very important. So the trend is we have had to change blocks, pistons, conrods, crankshafts, much more than before because we have to cope with the increase in performance, which is basically all about what's going on in the combustion chamber. It's all about learning fuel efficiency. We tend to discuss the ERS less because that has been done, it's achieved. Sometimes there are a few gremlins but the performance of the ERS is there.

And the performance in Mexico in 2018 confirmed that?

Exactly. Maybe you could argue that there is still a couple of kilograms you can get out of this and that, but that's not where we would actually focus our efforts. The one thing we [had to work on] is how we thought we would get every single ERS element into the engine in 2017 and how we cool them. This is what we sorted out in '18.

So the MGU-K pain is behind you?

Yes, the MGU-K is OK, we have what we wanted to have a year ago. It's the same thing for the MGU-H, so that's basically it on the ERS system. The rest is more about evolution, development, which is a case of how much we can extract from the ICE. We also have to mention the turbo, so that's also a development. The most important thing to us is that

we get back to a level of reliability but also the way we work so we can go quicker and quicker in how we develop.

So if you have a reliable engine, does that mean you are at the point where you can afford to take risks?

There is no choice but to be reliable. You know when we always say that there is a trade-off in reliability and performance, actually it's a no-brainer and you have to have reliability. Last year, we had two problems that repeated but not something in the DNA of the engine – one was quality, one was another. Having a reliable engine is good for racing because you finish races. With Enstone, now it is just like we are one team. We make decisions together; the engine is integrated as we would have liked. It's just an ongoing process now. We are settled and we're fine and we can actually make a good compromise. We put a lot of emphasis on the engine for 2019, we definitely wish to have the engine on top of the rest, but we'll see where we are.

Is it realistic to be on the Mercedes or Ferrari level?

On Sundays I'm very confident that we will be on a par, or even in front. Qualifying is something that is difficult to judge because we know what sort of step we need when we go racing. Then after, it's the final [developments of the engine] that will show us what sort of margin we get into qualifying, because that's always in the later stage of validation of the engine.

WRC
SEASON
PREVIEW



CAN ANYONE STOP TOYOTA?

The Japanese manufacturer had the fastest car for much of 2018 and starts this season at Monte Carlo as the team to beat

DAVID EVANS

PHOTOGRAPHY **McKLEIN**

Sebastien Ogier listened in more closely. Suddenly, the six-time World Rally champion was interested. He wanted to know more, even though it was nearly nine at night and he was being framed for what felt like the thousandth picture on the eve of the World Rally Championship launch.

Deep inside Birmingham's NEC, there was a room where all the promotional assets were kept for the following day. Among them was a list of everybody's competition numbers for the coming season.

"You have them?" asked Ogier. "Come on then, tell me the number for Ott [Tanak]... I want to know exactly what number I'm going to be looking for on the board when I get to the end of the stages this season."

Without trying, Ogier had answered the question he would be asked most frequently the following day.

During the launch, the Frenchman trotted out a well-worn line about everybody being in contention. But Tanak's the man and Toyota's the team for 2019. "If you look to the speed from last season," says Ogier, "especially the second half of last year, then you have to think about Ott and the Yaris."

Tanak's a very straightforward fellow. When he talks, you listen. Especially about the season ahead, a season where — and this bit will really concern his rivals — he hopes to be faster and more focused on winning.

"The start of last year was a bit complicated," says Tanak of his first few rallies in a Yaris WRC. "Going into the events, we didn't know what to expect and that made any kind of strategy difficult. It was always difficult to know where we would be and what we would be capable of."

"This year I believe we have a bit more knowledge of the rallies and it's the same with Monte Carlo [the opening round this weekend]; we should know what we can do. Taking strong points there would definitely be a good start to the season."

Podiums from his past two trips to the French Alps mark Tanak out as a genuine threat on round one — a storyline that remains all >>

WRC CALENDAR		
EVENT		DATE
1	Monte Carlo Rally	January 24-27
2	Rally Sweden	February 14-17
3	Rally Mexico	March 7-10
4	Tour of Corsica	March 28-31
5	Rally Argentina	April 25-28
6	Rally Chile	May 9-12
7	Rally Portugal	May 30-June 2
8	Rally Italy	June 13-16
9	Rally Finland	August 1-4
10	Rally Germany	August 22-25
11	Rally Turkey	September 12-15
12	Rally GB	October 3-6
13	Rally of Spain	October 24-27
14	Rally Australia	November 14-17

RIVAL 1 HYUNDAI

Sebastien Loeb's arrival at Hyundai: sublime strategic move that will finally unlock title-winning potential from the Frankfurt-based squad, or desperate attempt to buy a result that might help shore up a one-man band? Time will tell.

Let's be honest, Loeb's not going to be slow. His ninth title may have been six years ago, but his 79th World Rally Championship win was last October. He knows what's needed. And he knows where he fits into the picture. Having bossed the Citroen team for a decade, the world's fastest Alsatian talks happily – and surprisingly contentedly – about his new life as a member of the support staff.

There are, however, more than a few in blue-and-orange who'll be hoping his memory stretches to the season's far side, when a part-programme leaves him sitting pretty in a favourable place on the road and with chances aplenty to win on the loose.

Loeb's place in the team comes at the expense of Hayden Paddon, and there are few outside of New Zealand who would argue against the move. But there are plenty in the service park who would have argued for keeping Paddon and dropping Andreas Mikkelsen or Dani Sordo.

Condemning Sordo is a bit harsh but, with Loeb likely to force the Spaniard out of some of his favoured events, such as Corsica and Germany, you can see their point. For his part, Mikkelsen has to find some speed from the car and some way of making it stick with his



Loeb is happy to play supporting role at Hyundai

style through the corners. Granted, changing a decade-long driving style's not ideal, but Hyundai can't be expected to re-engineer a car that works for its team leader, Thierry Neuville. The two must meet in the middle.

What's similarly concerning about Hyundai is an apparent lack of ambition to make its car work everywhere. Finland remains the i20 Coupe WRC's nemesis – and guess which round neither Loeb nor Sordo wanted to do this year... Hence Hyundai's decision to offer Paddon a single outing in Jyväskylä.

Talk to Neuville about his trip to the season's fastest gravel roads and his eyes widen ever so slightly: "We know we have been missing pace for years; we just need to be consistent over the whole weekend and benefit from mistakes from the guys in front of us."

It's that kind of thing that is concerning about the Hyundai attack this year. How can that be the answer for a team with title aspirations?



Neuville wanted changes – he's now got a new team boss

And Neuville knows more than anybody about those aspirations. Hyundai has finished second in the makes' race for the past three years. And the Belgian's done the same in the drivers' story. It's such results that make the departure of team principal Michel Nandan in no way surprising.

Neuville was even less surprised than most, given that he pushed for change in the off-season.

"Me and Nicolas [Gilsoul, co-driver] have pushed for some changes," says Neuville. "The main reason was that we wanted to push for better results through the season. It is no secret that we pushed for some changes and a bit of fresh air. That's what happened with Andrea [Adamo, Hyundai Motorsport's new director] replacing Michel. But also other things are going on. All of this is very important for the motivation of the team. I have all my trust and confidence in Andrea that he will work things out that we can improve. We will make the necessary changes to be competitive."

"We have tried everything in the last five years, especially the last three years. We come back from testing and we feel we are fast, but

obviously we are not."

Testing is a bit of a sore point for Neuville who, like the rest of the world, watched with some surprise when Toyota conducted a Monte snow test at its permanent site on frozen gravel roads in Finland. Such a test doesn't come out of its 42-day allocation and now means Toyota's permanent site – theoretically only there for shakedown – could have a direct input into set-up for three rallies: Monte, Sweden and Finland.

"Toyota clearly has a major advantage with their test area in the Finnish woods and no limited testing," says Neuville. "They benefit from it, so the speed they have is really high. But even compared to Citroen, who don't test as much, they too were faster than us last year."

While Hyundai can't match Toyota's test programme, it will benefit from four drivers. Running a split programme means Loeb or Sordo will be further down the championship order and in a preferable position on the road when it comes to the dirt rounds in the second half of the season. If everything goes to plan, Neuville may end up with the sort of help he's been looking for from his team-mates in the past two seasons.

It's interesting – and in direct contrast to his rivals – that he talks of the need for such assistance.

Preparing to fly home from Australia last year, Neuville was adamant that there was serious work to be done behind closed doors, and the team's South Korean paymasters will be as interested as anybody to see how much the car has moved on between the 2018 finale and this weekend's opener in Monte Carlo.

"WE COME BACK FROM TESTING AND WE FEEL WE ARE FAST, BUT OBVIOUSLY WE ARE NOT"

Finland exposes i20 Coupe WRC's weaknesses





Tanak goes into the new season in a more relaxed state of mind...

the way through to the round 14 finale in Australia.

"We've always been in the top three to fight for the title, but it hasn't worked out," continues Tanak. "But I guess now, going into the second season in the same team, the feeling is much more relaxed. Of course, we have the same target as last year, but at least we know what tools we have to do it and that makes our lives a lot easier. It also means we can prepare better, go more into the details."

Such talk brings little relief for rivals. Even from within the team, the appreciation of Tanak's potential is clear. Toyota's latest recruit Kris Meeke has only been there a couple of months, but he's seen enough of the Estonian to know what he'll have to deal with from the #8 Yaris. "If things had gone a bit differently for Ott last year, he could've won the last six rallies on the trot," says Meeke. "He's on it right now."

And so is the Northern Irishman. You'll see elsewhere in this issue (page 32) how Meeke's mood and motivation have altered for the year ahead; he's a fascinating, exciting and forthright interview. Most of all, he makes it clear he's got the tools he feels he's lacked for the past two years.

And then there's the third side of this potentially WRC-conquering triangle: Jari-Matti Latvala. Not for the first time, Latvala comes to the start of a new season with high hopes and solid potential. And, forgive us, we may have said this before, but this really does look to be the friendly Finn's finest opportunity.

A couple of years ago Latvala arrived at Toyota, having elbowed fellow Volkswagen refugee Andreas Mikkelsen out of the way. If rumour is to be believed, the Norwegian was the preferred option for the Toyota Gazoo Racing management – ironic, given the opportunity was with a team based in Finland to join an all-Finnish driver line-up – but such opinion changed when Latvala won on only his second outing with the squad.

In the first half of last season, the appetite for seeing him back for a third year had all but gone. For whatever reason, Latvala had fallen from grace and was near-certain to be shown the door.



...having now banked a season's worth of experience in the Yaris

He's back now. J-ML showed real steel to turn things around from the mid-point in Finland last year. Had he converted a strong Spanish lead into a 25-pointer (he lost it with a puncture), he would have outscored everybody over the last six rallies – including team-mate Tanak – with some ease.

Toyota has the potential to win every round of this year's championship with such a strong driver line-up, but is there an argument for that very strength being the potential undoing of the Japanese giant? Talk to any one of the three drivers and there's little chatter about a repeat of the manufacturers' trophy taken in 2018. It's all about the drivers' championship – all about their own ends.

Team principal Tommi Makinen encourages such talk. He's been there and he's not interested in curbing their passion, pace or potential with talk of strategy. Certainly not at this end of the season. "Tommi understands the driver's point of view," reasons Meeke. "Not once yet has there been any conversation about strategy or anything. Tommi knows that when you're sitting on the startline as a professional driver, you're going to give your best. >>

"We've all been in the sport long enough to understand how a weekend will develop and, if one driver can capture that sixth sense and dominate the weekend, then the others should know the way it is. It's just great to be in a team where each driver is capable of winning every rally. Let's see how that plays out, but Tommi is probably the only man in the service park able to manage that."

Tanak's on the same page. He's not about to ask his teammates for favours. "We have a strong team and I guess all the drivers are going for the maximum, so there is really no second driver," says Tanak.

And Latvala? "I feel the car should be reliable and we should have the machinery to fight for the drivers' title. I think our target, when we go out there, is that we try to do our own thing as well as we can and for the first six months try not to think about the championship. Then you see where you are and, by the end of the year, you can start to calculate a bit more."

Sensing real interest in those words, Latvala slows himself down, checks himself and remembers how important silverware is to carmakers: "The manufacturers' championship was really important for us last year and, of course, it's giving a little bit more confidence. We want to renew it and so our focus is there, but we want to get the drivers' championship as well.

"Like I said, this [the drivers' title] is not my focus at the start of the year. Performance-wise, we should be on the podium pace all the time. Every rally. Do that and normally you are in with the chance of the championship."

From a hardware perspective, the Yaris WRC has wintered well. Much of the attention is on the transmission and finding a more driveable solution from all three differentials, especially the rear. There's a need for more traction on loose surfaces and a need to be able to put increased levels of torque down on the road.

The biggest area of concern for Toyota last time out was the retirements from rock damage on rallies such as Portugal and Sardinia – the two events that arguably cost Tanak the title. But the team is confident that Turkey showed this issue is sorted – a new tank-like Toyota bounced over everything the Marmaris mountains could lay in its path. Chief engineer Tom Fowler reckons they were too cautious in September, trading too much pace for protection. He has spent the off-season working on a suspension solution that comes closer to squaring the circle that is durable speed on the WRC's rockiest roads.

Two years ago, few gave Mäkinen's men a hope. He'd scrambled a team together in a frozen Finnish town with a population of just over a thousand people. How could he take on the world, even with the help of the world's biggest carmaker?

It probably helped that he was Tommi Mäkinen and that the population of Puuppola included names like Harri Rovanpera and Mikko Hirvonen at one time or other. Rallying is a religion in that part of the world. And, in the long winter nights, the team worked tirelessly to turn an expected bit-part player into the king of the road, making Toyota the one to watch in the season ahead. ❧



Mäkinen's understanding of a driver's mindset makes him uniquely qualified as a team boss



C3's performance on mixed-grip surfaces still needs work

RIVAL 2 CITROËN

"WE DON'T NEED OUR CAR TO BE FASTER. MAYBE MAKE IT EASIER TO HANDLE"

Despite starting the Monte Carlo Rally with his third team in four years, Sebastien Ogier remains favourite on the roads around his hometown in the French Alps. That's providing the weather's kind to him and there's not too much snow – or ice – around. On a dry Monte, an Ogier-guided Citroën C3 WRC would be the weapon of choice.

The same can be said for Corsica. And Germany. And for two days in Spain.

Since its arrival on the scene two years ago, Citroën's latest-generation World Rally Car has been at its absolute best on asphalt – and ranged from nowhere to just about somewhere on the loose.

That's probably a bit harsh. Significant geometry and suspension work in the

middle of last year helped make the car more predictable and gave it more grip. Mads Ostberg's second place in Finland demonstrated the step the team had made. But there's more to come.

"We don't need our car to be faster," says team principal Pierre Buda. "But maybe we have to improve how easy the car is to drive when grip is changing. We have to work to make the car easier to handle."

Fortunately for Buda, he's got the men for the job. Ogier arrives following two years (and titles) with M-Sport Ford and having had input into Volkswagen's stillborn 2017 Polo, while Esapekka Lappi moves over from Toyota's Yaris WRC, a car increasingly



Circumstance forced Ogier's move to Citroën, but he's not unhappy



seen as the cream of the crop.

"The new drivers have a lot of experience," says Budar. That's good for us. They have ideas and they have pointed at things to do, but also they have found strong points with the car. For Monte Carlo we have a driver who has won for the last five times. Both of our drivers have told us that in the Monte conditions the car is working properly, so I think we should be in a position to do something."

Citroen's position is a curious one for the season ahead. In a perfect world, neither Ogier nor Lappi would have moved to the C3 WRC. The Frenchman's there because he didn't get the Ford support he needed to keep him at M-Sport, and his Finnish rival's there because, well, he couldn't see eye to eye with his previous employer.

And, let's not forget, there's a history between Ogier and Citroen. Yes, this was the team that gave him his big break, but it was also the team that broke his heart and forced him out at the end of 2011.

"Obviously," Ogier says, "we would never have been back with the same management team, that's clear."

But Ogier and Lappi both have faith in Budar and the technical team in Versailles. Citroen made a step last season but, if it is former glories it's chasing, it will need more steps in the first half of 2019. Do that and what's possible, Esapekka? "The C3 can be the fastest car out there."

RIVAL 3 M-SPORT

On paper, M-Sport Ford can't hold a candle to Toyota. How can it? Financially speaking, the Brits aren't even in the same ballpark as their Finnish rivals. In terms of drivers, Elfyn Evans's sole WRC victory doesn't hold much fear for a team whose trio has 29 times as many wins.

But this is M-Sport. This is a team that has been competing at the highest level for the past 22 years without a break. Nobody has more experience and nobody has more fight than the Cumbrians to make it happen.

Despite a lack of cash and the absence of a world champion, M-Sport managing director Malcolm Wilson is bullish about the season ahead. He wants more wins from Evans and regular podiums from his team-mate Teemu Suninen, and he remains confident in his Ford Fiesta WRC.

"We've been in this sort of situation before and we know how to deal with it," says Wilson. "I can assure you, there will be no dip in the development we've got planned for the car. OK, we might not be staying in as nice hotels as we were last year, but when it comes to the car the commitment to performance is the same as if Seb was still driving for us."

And there's no doubt that the Fiesta remains an utterly competent car with a coherent and deliverable development plan, especially with Ford's technical backing.

This is Evans's moment. He won the fight to keep his seat (edging Craig Breen, whose co-driver Scott Martin does make the

switch to M-Sport to work alongside Evans), and now he's got to make best use of it. He needs wins and he needs consistency. He's capable of both and we saw that with some strong performances through 2018's second half, culminating in a Spanish podium that helped Ogier towards a sixth title.

Ogier's departure undoubtedly robs the team of speed and experience, but it also frees Evans to step up and lead the squad. Suninen will push the 2017 Rally GB winner hard, especially on fast gravel but, if these boys make a solid start and the confidence built from last autumn flows through into this season, anything's possible.

"THERE WILL BE NO DIP IN THE DEVELOPMENT WE'VE PLANNED FOR THE CAR"



Plucky minnow role sits well with M-Sport as commitment is undimmed

WRC
SEASON
PREVIEW

MEEKE BECOMES MILD

He's chilled, he's happy. OK, what happened with Citroen still rankles a bit, but the Northern Irish rally hero is ready for a fresh start with Toyota

DAVID EVANS

R

ight on cue, Tommi Makinen delivers. Kris Meeke is extolling the four-time World Rally champion's virtues as a team principal when the Finn emerges from a side room. Seeing his latest signing talking to Autosport, he breaks into a broad grin.

Walking past us, he holds his arms up and makes a cross above his head. "Team photo is cancelled," he says, sounding like a Finnish schoolboy who's just talked his way out of detention.

What now then, Tommi? Said picture is the last official engagement of the day. Any ideas how the hour or so can be passed before a flight out of Birmingham and Autosport International's WRC launch? Makinen pauses, mentally testing a most-British of answers. Word perfect, he grins again and returns with a one-worder that doubled as an answer and invitation: "Pint."

Moments before, Meeke has been detailing his dealings with one of his boyhood idols. "I enjoy Tommi's character," he says. "I enjoy speaking to him. You know he was my childhood hero? To be here now with him as team boss is something pretty special. Honestly, the atmosphere in the team's just brilliant – and that starts with Tommi."

"The dynamic in this team is pretty special. To have that relationship with someone who has been there and done it, someone who dominated the sport in the late 1990s... It's very easy to have a conversation with him because he knows where you're coming from, he knows what you're thinking. He knows what a driver wants. Conversations and negotiations with him have been straightforward. That's the way the Finnish are. I like it."

The difference in this 2019 evolution of Kris Meeke is quite remarkable. Twelve months ago, two years ago, this same guy was a bundle of nervous energy waiting to explode into a stage. Looking back through transcripts of pre-season interviews, Meeke stared into the abyss in 2017, not knowing what to expect, full of hope and apprehension. A year on and he was tying himself in knots with explanations of how he felt 2018 could be better. It wasn't – it was a whole lot worse. And on Thursday, May 24, Meeke was fired by Citroen following his Rally Portugal crash.

The Northern Irishman maintains that the Monte Carlo Rally of 2017, not Portugal 2018, was the low point. After a year of development, the team hit the WRC opener barely walking, let alone running. It was a disaster. "Somebody asked me that question: what was the lowest point of my career?" he says. "I think it was that: Monte Carlo 2017. We'd had all the big build-up and somebody put the pin in the balloon and we were so, so far away. The following event in Sweden was horrific as well and that's where it all started. After that nobody listened, the bad atmosphere crept in, the commitment disappeared from Citroen and it all unfolded from there.

"Looking back I could have handled situations a bit different, but we arrived in Monte after doing relatively little testing. And what testing we did do was in Sanremo. I questioned that at the time, but I was told to just drive. The car felt mega in Sanremo and, as we saw in Corsica and Catalunya, it was mega on Tarmac – but not in Monte. We were so far away."

The following year and a bit wasn't all bad. There were wins in Mexico and Spain in 2017 and genuine promise at the start of last season. Meeke opened 2018 with a powerstage win in Monte Carlo, and held the lead in Mexico before finishing on the podium. He >>



Citroen pulled the plug on Meeke after Rally Portugal shunt



Microsoft



TOYOTA
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Racing

DMG MORI

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was running second in Corsica until a pacenote error, and in Argentina before a puncture. And then Portugal.

"I got a phone call for about one minute where I was told that maybe I wasn't doing Sardinia," he says. "'What? Right, OK?' I said to Pierre [Budar, Citroen team principal], 'We've got to chat about this'. He was, 'Er, er...'. Then 10 minutes later I read on the internet that my career was over. Nobody has spoken to me since. I tried to make calls, but there was nothing. I tried to call Pierre back, but there was no answer.

"That evening, my wife was away shopping. When she came home we went down to the local park, the kids played in the park, I took a beer and I said, 'Right, we're going to chill for a while'. I enjoyed time with the family, got on my bike and did my stuff."

Meeke did his own stuff for three months. He didn't talk to anybody, and he kept his head down. But he wasn't done. "I knew it was pointless to lift the phone the week after Portugal," he says. "I knew I had to wait two or three months to let the dust settle. You can make that call before Finland [in July], but nobody thinks about drivers at that time. After Finland or Germany you make a phone call. You never know, they might say, 'No, we're not interested', and so you talk to somebody else and if they're not interested then OK. It's done.

"You're not in control in that situation and that's the situation Citroen put me in. They tried to destroy my career with what they said. Once I'd made a few calls after Rally Germany [in mid-August], within a week I had an offer, then another one, and then we started to talk seriously with Toyota and things came together quickly. That showed what a lot of people thought. That showed the job I was doing in 2018 was fine. I made one mistake."

This interview is interspersed with talk of water under the bridge. But all roads seem to lead back to what remains one of the most shocking decisions in the history of the world championship. Curiously, that brought redemption and justification for Meeke.

"What happened in Finland [where Mads Ostberg's finished second in Meeke's Citroen] confirmed I was right," says Meeke. "When we started developing the new car in 2016, my first question



was about who would be backing up the development. Volkswagen had had [Carlos] Sainz and [Marcus] Gronholm as well as their regular drivers. Fundamentally, Citroen got it wrong. They knew that. All the changes I was fighting for and never got the chance to try came in Finland last year. If I'm wrong and Citroen think they're right, why don't they go back to the Monte 2017 set-up and put a bomb in there for Ogier? Anyway, that's water under the bridge."

And, finally, it is. Meeke's over it. His quotes may sound a touch irate here and there, but that's not how they came across in person. He's very matter of fact, very straightforward. The old emotion and the defensive intensity have gone.

"All I want to do now is enjoy my rallying," says the 39-year-old. "I want to get that feeling back. The best period of my career was 2016. I was just loving it. I could do fastest times at will and I could dominate rallies. People might talk about road position [at that time], but Sebastien Ogier was lying second to me, while running first on the road. If I wasn't there, there wouldn't have been any talk of road position. And even when he did have the same conditions as me on the second day in Finland, we were far out front. Clearly, that





Meeke's finding his feet after eight months away from the WRC

"ALL I WANT TO DO NOW IS ENJOY MY RALLYING. I WANT TO GET THAT FEELING BACK"

was the best period in my career. We battled for the lead in Monte and Sweden, we won Portugal, won Finland. I just want that feeling back. Who's to say if that'll be enough to beat Ott [Tanak, his Toyota team-mate]? We all know how fast he is. Like everybody, I want to win rallies and have a strong championship and there are going to be good moments and tough moments, but above all I want to enjoy it like 2016."

Enjoying 2019 means success, and success means beating the man everybody's talking about right now: Tanak.

Meeke agrees: "Ott is clearly the fastest in the championship, we all knew he had this blinding speed, but now it's blinding speed on every stage. He's able to dominate rallies and he could have won the last six 2018 events on the trot and easily been world champion."

"I want to start from a clean sheet. I might be one of the elder statesmen of the championship, but I've only ever done three full seasons [actually he's done two, as he missed Rally Poland in 2017 — ed] and a guy like Elfyn Evans, who's 10 years my junior has more experience in the WRC and a World Rally Car than I do. So, I still have a lot to learn in terms of WRC experience. Sometimes there are expectations of me, that I've been about for so long, but I have to temper that. But once I have something beneath me that I can trust and I can enjoy, that's when the speed comes naturally. And when the speed comes naturally, that's when it becomes quite simple. That's the feeling every driver chases. That's the feeling I want."

That feeling's on tap at Toyota. It wasn't just Tanak who was flying the Yaris flag high late last season, Jari-Matti Latvala was bang on the money as well. Working alongside a pair of hard-charging Baltic boys is not going to be easy, but it's a chance Meeke relishes.

"Like I said, the atmosphere is fantastic in the team," he says. "Jari's the kind of guy you can easily lose an hour with. He and I were out in Japan doing a drive day at the end of last year. We were

on a bus for two and a half hours and we just sat and chatted. We made our WRC debut on the same event: Rally GB in 2002. We talked all through that era and then about JWRC, when he did some events in a Suzuki. It was mega. The difference is, he starts his 200th WRC round this year, whereas Monte will be my 68th start in a World Rally Car."

And Tanak? What does he expect from sharing a team with him? "Ott's Ott. He's quiet, straightforward, there's no bullshit. I've always got on well with him. Our careers followed similar paths. He's been kicked out of a team trying to run before you can walk... In the last two years, he's taken that jump — but he's got the experience of five full seasons now. There's no doubt I'm in the strongest combination, but Tommi's been fantastic. I've been away eight months and I feel no pressure to do anything immediately. We all know you can have a strong season by arriving in Mexico in sixth or seventh position in the championship — that's prime position, nearly. To get to Mexico first on the road means starting a series of gravel events near the front. Don't get me wrong — I want a strong Monte and Sweden, but I have to bed myself in. Ninety-five per cent of what you do comes from the feeling in the car. The last few per cent is the feeling in the team."

With that, Meeke's new co-driver Seb Marshall finds us and reminds Kris of the alternative use of the time allocated to the team photograph. Our work is done and conversation turns to the more mundane — including, from a tanned Meeke, what had clearly been a warm Christmas: "We took the kids to the Caribbean for 10 days. It was mega. Just mega. You know, if rallying stops again, it's not a drama. I've two brilliant kids and I've had a brilliant career — OK, it's been a wee bit up and down at times, but there's more to life than rallying, you know."

Meeke's reboot is complete. ❧

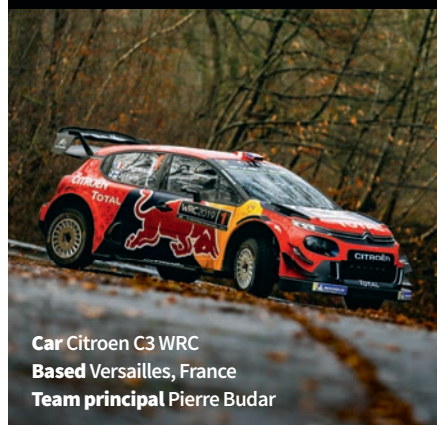


THE TEAMS

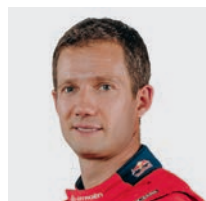
Introducing the competitors for the 2019 World Rally Championship

DAVID EVANS

CITROEN TOTAL WORLD RALLY TEAM



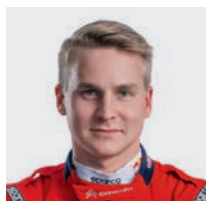
Car Citroen C3 WRC
Based Versailles, France
Team principal Pierre Budar



**SEBASTIEN
OGIER** (FRA)

#1
Age 35
Starts 136
Wins 44
Titles 6
Co-driver
Julien Ingrassia (FRA)

Can he become only the second driver ever to win the WRC with three different manufacturers? We'll find out during the next two years. For now, the focus must be on consistent speed from the C3. Ogier's magic could be enough to win a sixth straight Monte; beyond that he needs the factory behind him.



**ESAPEKKA
LAPPI** (FIN)

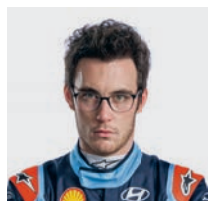
#4
Age 28
Starts 42
Wins 1
Titles 0
Co-driver
Janne Ferm (FIN)

It's going to be fascinating to see how a Finn fares in a French car having left a Finnish-run team behind. Speed's never been a problem for Lappi, but how he slots into life in Versailles could be crucial to the year ahead – he was fairly disgruntled with his lot with Toyota last season.

HYUNDAI MOTORSPORT



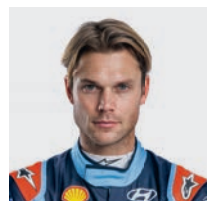
Car Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC
Based Alzenau, Germany
Team principal Andrea Adamo



**THIERRY
NEUVILLE** (BEL)

#11
Age 30
Starts 97
Wins 9
Titles 0
Co-driver
Nicolas Gilsoul (BEL)

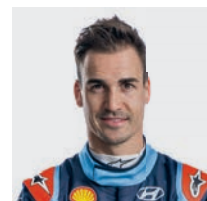
Needs to find a way to elongate the superb starts he's made to the past two seasons if he's going to build a more successful title tilt. He has all the ingredients, including a revised management structure he pushed for at Hyundai, but his chances will depend on how much of the Tanak threat is realised.



**ANDREAS
MIKKELSEN** (NOR)

#89
Age 29
Starts 100
Wins 3
Titles 0
Co-driver
Anders Jaeger (NOR)

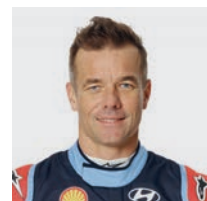
Has to make this year stick. There were flashes of potential last year, but only in a very small working window for the car. The combination of the Norwegian and the i20 beneath him has to bear fruit early in the year or his seat could be under threat in a team that takes no prisoners.



**DANI
SORDO** (ESP)

#6
Age 35
Starts 159
Wins 1
Titles 0
Co-driver
Carlos del Barrio (ESP)

The threat of losing his job sparked an exceptional upturn last season, and we should expect more of the same this time around. But having his old mate Loeb back with him is a double-edged sword. He's nabbed many of the events that Sordo – who we won't see until round three in Mexico – would fancy.



**SEBASTIEN
LOEB** (FRA)

#19
Age 44
Starts 172
Wins 79
Titles 9
Co-driver
Daniel Elena (MCO)

A six-round farewell tour or the start of something new? Who knows... The king's back – but, for the first time in his professional career, he's changed his colours. Expect Loeb to put his new Hyundai company car in the ballpark from the start; fine-tuning and finishing first may take a little longer.



RED BULL

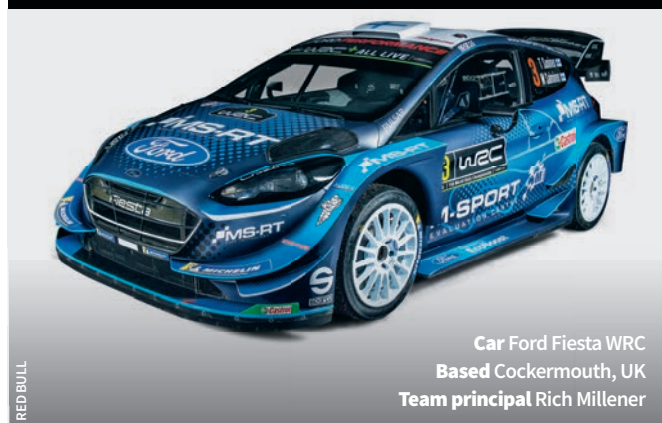
TOYOTA GAZOO RACING



Car Toyota Yaris WRC
Based Puuppola, Finland
Team principal Tommi Makinen

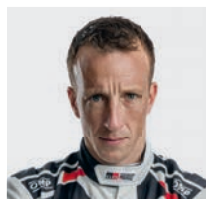
MCKLEIN

M-SPORT FORD WORLD RALLY TEAM



Car Ford Fiesta WRC
Based Cockermouth, UK
Team principal Rich Millener

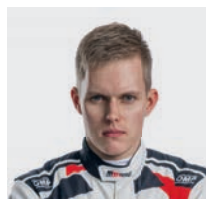
RED BULL



**KRIS
MEEKE** (GBR)

#5
Age 39
Starts 91
Wins 5
Titles 0
Co-driver
Seb Marshall (GBR)

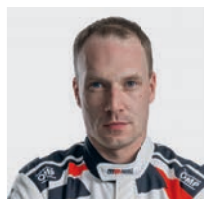
An unexpected eight-month vacation has left him more relaxed coming into the start of a season than ever before. Post-Portugal, it looked like this might all be over, and maybe his laissez-faire attitude has helped with his approach to this year. Whatever, he's a potential winner everywhere.



**OTT
TÄNÄK** (EST)

#8
Age 31
Starts 92
Wins 6
Titles 0
Co-driver
Martin Jarveoja (EST)

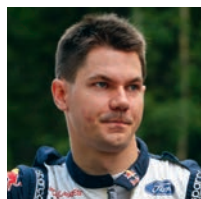
The absolute favourite for this season, having demonstrated massive speed through the second half of last year – and he's in the fastest car. But it's not always that simple, is it? Let's see, but we'd definitely stick a fiver on him to break his championship duck. He came close in 2018, and few doubt he can do it this time.



**JARI-MATTI
LATVALA** (FIN)

#10
Age 33
Starts 195
Wins 18
Titles 0
Co-driver
Miikka Anttila (FIN)

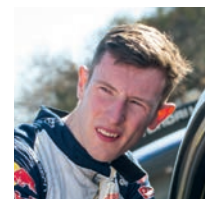
Last year, and maybe the one before that, was supposed to be his big one. But neither of them – or his last VW campaign in 2016 – turned out to be *the* year. He's in great shape with his head in the right place and plenty of speed. Keep all of that together and he'll be a force. This year? Definitely maybe.



**TEEMU
SUNINEN** (FIN)

#3
Age 24
Starts 40
Wins 0
Titles 0
Co-driver
Marko Salminen (FIN)

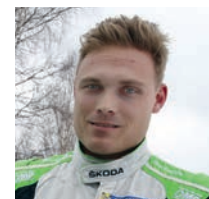
First full season at this level starts with a maiden Monte in a World Rally Car, which will be an interesting introduction to 2019. He's spent a couple of seasons learning from Ogier at M-Sport, and now he needs to show the speed we know he has more consistently. Needs to be pushing for podiums regularly.



**ELFYN
EVANS** (GBR)

#33
Age 30
Starts 76
Wins 1
Titles 0
Co-driver
Scott Martin (GBR)

New co-driver in Scott Martin; new team leader in himself; new team principal in Rich Millener. This has to be a clean sheet of paper for Evans. And on it he has the ability to write a beautiful story. M-Sport is committed to keeping the car quick, and Evans has to put the results down nice and early.



**PONTUS
TIDEMAND** (SWE)

#7
Age 28
Starts 45
Wins 0
Titles 0
Co-driver
Ola Floene (NOR)

Currently only committed to Monte and Sweden, but there is talk of him finding the cash for more than half of the season. Having ditched his professional ride with Skoda, he's rolling the dice in the big time this year. Monte will be a chance to learn the car, but Sweden could offer much, much more.

WRC
SEASON
PREVIEW





Citroen starts this week's Monte Carlo Rally searching for a first home win since 2013. Fortunately it's got Sebastien Ogier – the man who's won the last five Montes – aboard its C3 WRC this season. The Versailles-based team completed its preparations for the season opener in the French Alps last week.

BASTIEN ROUX PHOTOGRAPHIE

DAYTONA
PREVIEW

FLORIDA KEYS: WHAT TO EXPECT AT DAYTONA

Alonso and Zanardi are just part of the story, as the international sportscar season kicks off this weekend with one of its classic races

GARY WATKINS

PHOTOGRAPHY



motorsport
IMAGES



ALONSO DRIVING A POTENTIAL WINNER

Fernando Alonso's maiden assault on the Daytona 24 Hours one year ago with United Autosports also happened to be his first sportscar race. So it was more about learning ahead of the start of his World Endurance Championship campaign with Toyota than trying to win the event. This weekend he's driving with established IMSA SportsCar Championship frontrunner Wayne Taylor Racing, so his expectations are entirely different.

"Last year, it was about preparing for the Le Mans 24 Hours," says Alonso. "This year it is about winning. Everything was new last year: I was driving for the first time with different categories [of car] on track, driving in a closed cockpit, driving at night and doing pitstops with driver changes.

"I'm in a more competitive environment than I was this time last year. The targets are maybe a little bit higher."

Alonso and his fellow rookie team-mates, Lando Norris and Phil Hanson, probably overperformed 12 months ago aboard their United LMP2 Ligier-Gibson JSP217. They led the race four times early doors and were established in the top six

when problems hit as early as the eighth hour.

This time, he is driving a Daytona Prototype international Cadillac DPi-V.R for a team that won the race two years ago, the same season that it claimed the IMSA title. And he is part of a top line-up alongside team regulars Jordan Taylor – the son of Wayne, and who was on the winning squad in 2017 – and Renger van der Zande, plus none other than his Toyota WEC team-mate Kamui Kobayashi.

Wayne Taylor went after Alonso's services for 2019 in the immediate aftermath of Daytona last year – he called McLaren boss Zak Brown two weeks after the race. A deal looked likely early in the summer, only for it to disappear. Which is when the team sought Kobayashi's services. "When I rang Kamui for the first time I realised it was three in the morning in Japan, so I put the phone down," recalls Taylor. "But he called straight back. I said, 'Is that Mr Kobayashi?' He said, 'Yes'. I asked him if he wanted to drive for me at Daytona, and he said, 'Yes!'"

Another phone call resulted in Alonso's subsequent signing. "I got a call from Zak, who asked if there was still a seat for Alonso," explains Taylor. "I said there's always a seat for him."

FASTER DPi CARS



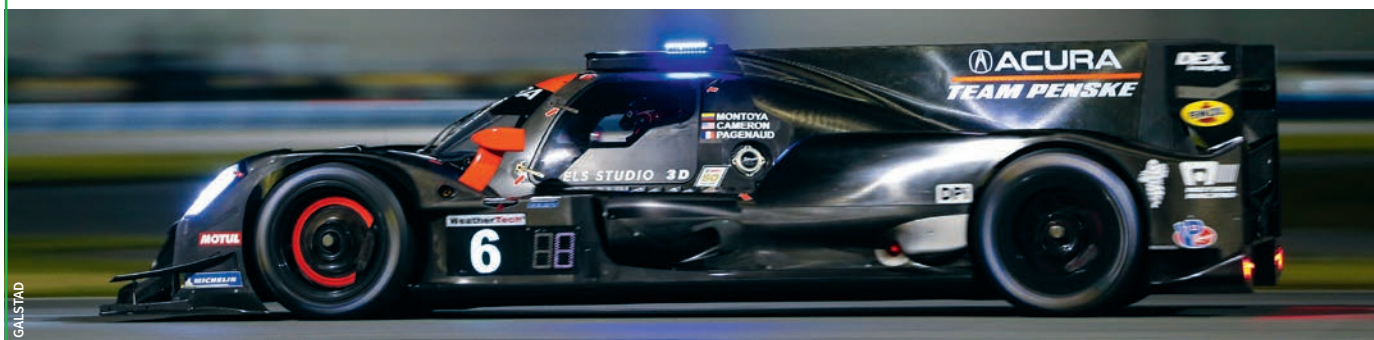
The DPis will be going faster this year after IMSA opted to hive off the manufacturer cars from the LMP2 machinery to create a new stand-alone top class. They've been given more power in the drive for what the organisers are calling 'class separation' and are consequently going quicker.

During 'qualifying' at the pre-event Roar test earlier this month, which determined the pit allocation for the race, the best DPis lapped 2.5 seconds faster than in the corresponding session last year. That's a big chunk. How much of that is down to the increase in engine performance, generally reckoned to be 10-15bhp, and how much to the new-specification rubber from Michelin, which has replaced Continental as the championship's tyre supplier, isn't clear.

Mazda driver Harry Tincknell, who ended up second aboard his RT24-P behind team-mate Oliver Jarvis in qualifying, reckons it could be as much as "60/40 in favour of the tyres". "They are definitely stickier," says Tincknell, who was within a 0.1s of Jarvis and 0.8s clear of the next best car, the Penske Acura ARX-05 qualified by Ricky Taylor. "The car is more reactive to set-up changes with this tyre, or at least our car is."

Mazda has been insistent that it showed its hand at the Roar, though Tincknell (left) isn't entirely convinced that the opposition did.

"There's no way we are a second up the road from everyone else," he reckons. "We were not afraid to push the envelope and show our performance. I'm not sure everyone else did."



LMP2 CARS THAT CAN'T COMPETE



The best of the LMP2 cars went quicker at the Roar than 12 months ago courtesy of the new Michelins, but the gap to the DPis has almost doubled from 1.4 seconds to 2.5s. That's because the P2s have been pegged back in the name of class separation.

Elton Julian, whose DragonSpeed team has two ORECA-Gibson 07s entered with Pastor Maldonado and Ben Hanley among the drivers, reckons there will be no chance of an LMP2 mixing it with the DPis, and it has nothing to do with the fact that P2 is now a secondary class for Pro-Am line-ups.

"They have mandated that our rear wing is set at maximum downforce, which you would never run at a place like Daytona," he explains. "They've given us an extra 10kg, they aren't allowing us to use full revs and they've taken five litres away from our fuel capacity. There's no way we can challenge."

"I thought they were going to allow us to pick off some of the slower DPis, but it appears that they want the slowest DPi to be quicker than every P2."

MAZDAS AT THE FRONT

Mazda is the big underachiever in the IMSA prototype ranks, and bringing in the multiple Le Mans 24 Hours-winning Joest Racing team for last season didn't entirely change that. After five years of trying (though not very hard in 2014-15 with a turbodiesel engine), Mazda has yet to notch up an outright win in the series.

The IMSA programme run by the US arm of the Japanese manufacturer has undergone another overhaul during the winter. The car has been reworked in key areas during an intensive test programme, and the team behind the two Mazda RT24-P DPis revamped.

The changes to the RT24-P are centred on the installation of its AER in-line-four turbo engine, while Mazda has been allowed to make some bodywork tweaks to improve aerodynamic efficiency. "It's been a busy off-season for us," says Mazda America motorsport boss John Doonan. "We put a lot of time into looking into the engine installation, as well as refining the whole package, and then went out and did a lot of testing. We also sat down and asked ourselves some hard questions about our personnel and processes after the 2018 season."

That has resulted in Multimatic, which developed the RT24-P out of the Riley Mk30 LMP2 it helped build, stepping up its involvement to



take over the engineering of the cars. It has brought in former Audi engineer Leena Gade to look after the #77 entry shared by series regulars Olivier Jarvis and Tristan Nunez, and Timo Bernhard and Rene Rast.

The structure at Joest, which has its US base in Atlanta, has also changed. Long-time Joest man Ralf Juttner, formerly team manager and then managing director, is no longer involved in the Mazda project, while engineer Jan Lange has stepped up to become overall boss of what is known as Mazda Team Joest. "We could have won races last year — there were four where we had a real chance," says Harry Tincknell. "But we didn't manage to get that elusive first victory, so I'd have to say we did underachieve. We've taken big steps forward in a lot of areas for this season and there's no doubt that we're going to Daytona with our best ever shot of winning overall."

THE IMPACT OF MICHELIN'S ARRIVAL

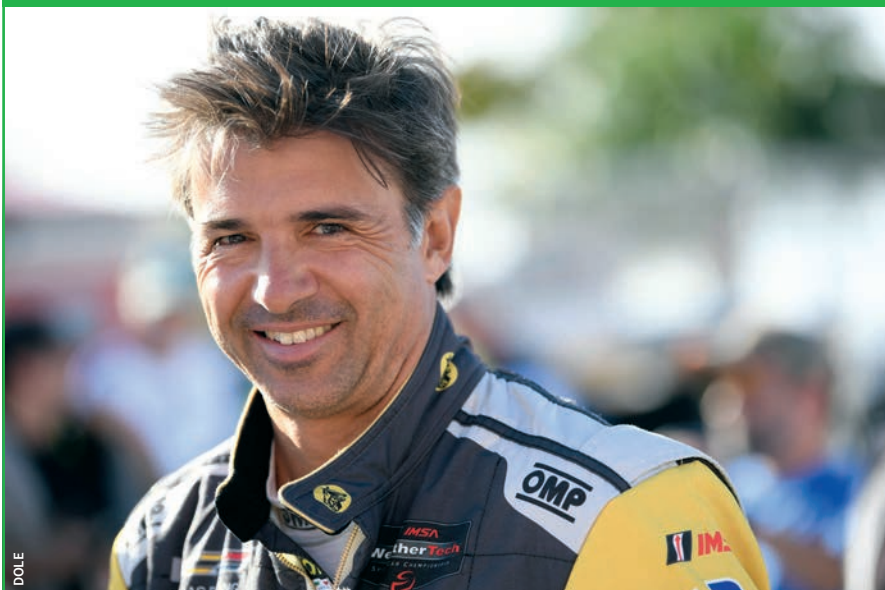
The new Michelin control tyre is faster, at least at the start of the stint, than its Continental predecessor. It also comes up to temperature quicker. How this affects the dynamic of the race at Daytona remains to be seen.

Action Express Cadillac driver Christian Fittipaldi offers a hint that we may witness some strategic variations in the race: "There are a couple of situations we are foreseeing right now, but we won't know until the race starts to unfold. And I'm not going to say what they are."

There are new Michelins in the GT Le Mans class too. The French supplier is bringing its IMSA tyres closer to the specification used in the World Endurance Championship for the coming season. The WEC requires teams to double-stint on a set of rubber and also allows for tyre warmers, something that isn't permitted in IMSA. What effect this will have on the race is still unclear.



FITTIPALDI'S FAREWELL



DOLE

It will be an emotional farewell from Christian Fittipaldi as he hangs up his helmet after the Daytona 24 Hours, a race in which he has achieved amazing success. Not only has he won it three times, but he has finished on the podium on a further three occasions. Which made it the obvious place to stop after an eight-season run with Action Express Racing.

"When I told the team at Mosport [last July] that I wanted to retire, I told them I wanted to do Daytona one last time," says the veteran of 40 grand prix and 135 CART starts.

"I've always liked Daytona from my first time in 2003. There's an energy about the place, and for me that has only built since 2011 with all the success I have enjoyed with Action Express."

Fittipaldi, now 48, has enjoyed a golden final chapter to his career after joining Action Express

ahead of the 2011 Grand-Am season. He added Daytona victories in 2014 and 2018 to go with his 2004 triumph in a Bell Motorsports Doran, and notched up two IMSA titles after Grand-Am's merger with the American Le Mans Series. He was partnered with Joao Barbosa for all his successes with the team and shares his Cadillac DPi-V.R with the Portuguese, Filipe Albuquerque and Mike Conway for his final race start.

"We know as a team how to get the job done, but this is a 24-hour race so there are always challenges along the way," says Fittipaldi. He would join sportscar legends Pedro Rodriguez, Bob Wollek, Rolf Stommelen and Peter Gregg on four wins should he bow out with a victory: "It would be awesome to win it one more time — there's no doubt that we're in it to win it."

A MULTI-CAR BATTLE IN GT LE MANS



JEP

Ford pretty much dominated the GT Le Mans class at last year's Daytona 24 Hours. No one else got a look-in, though at least its two cars put on a show. Twelve months on, every indication is that it will be close between all the manufacturers.

The five manufacturers in the class – Ford, Chevrolet, Porsche, BMW and Ferrari – were within 0.5 seconds in qualifying at the Roar. What's more, the evidence of last season's Petit Le Mans finale at Road Atlanta suggests that IMSA can get its sums right on the Balance of Performance, something Ford's rivals questioned at Daytona in 2018.

"Petit last year was probably the closest battle we've ever had in our class," says long-time Chevrolet driver Oliver Gavin (above right), who is again teamed with Tommy Milner and Marcel Fassler aboard the #4 Corvette C7.R. "Any of the



LEVITT

cars on the grid could have won that race, though Daytona is a very different track to Road Atlanta."

Gavin reckons the "German manufacturers", meaning Porsche and BMW, start Daytona as favourites. BMW is also Porsche driver Nick Tandy's pick. "At the end of last year they were the dominant car in the straightline," he says. "And they've been given more boost again for Daytona."

ZANARDI'S RETURN TO US RACING

GALSTAD



Alex Zanardi is making what has to be judged a sensational return to US motor racing. It's not just that he is back racing in the country in which he made his name with consecutive CART titles in 1997-98, for the first time since losing his legs in 2001, it's that he's doing it at the age of 52 aboard one of the two regular factory Rahal BMWs that are going for GT Le Mans class honours.

The Italian will drive the Rahal BMW M8 GTE he shares with John Edwards, Jesse Krohn and Chaz Mostert using hand controls, including

a steering wheel that has to be changed each time he hands over to one of his colleagues. Zanardi likens the pitstops to a strictly choreographed dance in which everything has to be done in the correct order.

The pitstops make impressive viewing. Zanardi swings himself from the pitwall into the cockpit using the massive upper-body strength that has taken him to four Paralympic gold medals in hand-cycling. "Switching the steering wheel in particular takes a little time," he says. "But I'm very fast getting in and out and can make up for it there."



A DAYTONA DEBUT FOR A PROLIFIC 24-HOUR WINNER

The Belgian WRT team has made a habit of winning 24-hour races during its short history. Since it was established in advance of the 2010 season it has notched up victories at Spa (twice), the Nurburgring, Dubai and Zolder with Audi GT3 machinery. It's also won the Bathurst 12 Hours for good measure, and now it's going for a class win at Daytona.

It's a big race in which GT3 cars – WRT's staple – are eligible, so why wouldn't it want to win? That's team boss Vincent Vosse's explanation of WRT's one-off IMSA entry in the GT Daytona class this weekend. "It's the one important GT3 endurance race in the world that we haven't done, so it's a good challenge and we like challenges at WRT," he says. "If

you've got the chance to go there with a competitive package, you've got to take it."

Vosse's solo Audi R8 LMS will be raced by factory drivers Kelvin van der Linde and Frederic Vervisch, and two silver-rated racers in Ian James (who manages WRT driver Alex Riberas) and Porsche GT3 Challenge USA frontrunner Roman De Angelis.

The line-up looks good, but the BoP for the Evo version of the second-generation R8 doesn't, according to Vosse. He's also not underestimating what lies in front of the team for its maiden event in a new racing environment. "It's a bit like playing tennis all year and then playing one game of squash," he says. "We know we've got a lot to learn."



LEVITT

STAT

18

Porsche has more wins at the Daytona 24 Hours than any other marque. Hurley Haywood and Scott Pruett share the drivers' record on five.

THE SAFETY CAR – BLINK AND YOU COULD MISS IT



CANTRELL

The safety car is not quite as ubiquitous at the Daytona 24 Hours as it once was. The days during the Grand-Am era when you could guarantee a last-gasp yellow period – cynical or otherwise – disappeared in the early years of the merger with the American Le Mans Series. Remarkably there were only four safety car periods over the 24 hours last year! ❧

AN AMERICAN LEGEND'S ONLY DAYTONA SUCCESS... SO FAR

Penske is one of the greatest motorsport teams, but the 24 Hours has proved a tricky challenge over the years

KEVIN TURNER

More than 200 open-wheeler race wins, 15 Indycar drivers' titles, and success in the heydays of Can-Am and Trans-Am. US racing behemoth Penske even has two victories in NASCAR's Daytona 500. But when it comes to the US's

blue-riband sportscar event, the pickings have been slim.

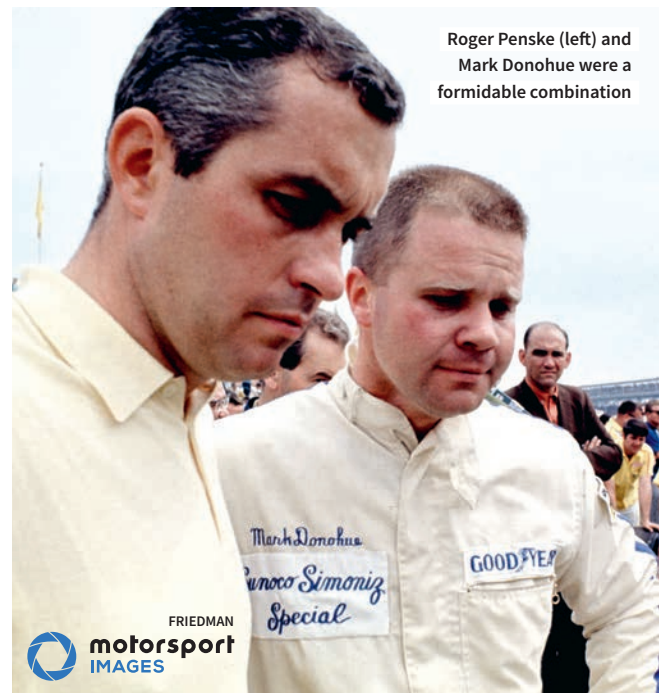
In the early days, founder Roger Penske used to like starting his season at the Daytona 24 Hours. His Ferrari 512M was the pacesetter in 1971, and Mark Donohue/George Follmer were in contention in '73 before their blue Porsche 911 Carrera RSR's engine failed. After years focusing elsewhere, Penske had American Le Mans Series success with the LMP2 Porsche RS Spyder, but Daytona wasn't part of the calendar.

All of which means that it's now 50 years since Penske's one and only victory in the Daytona 24 Hours. And that success gave a hint of what one of sportscar racing's iconic cars could have been capable of with Penske had fate not intervened.

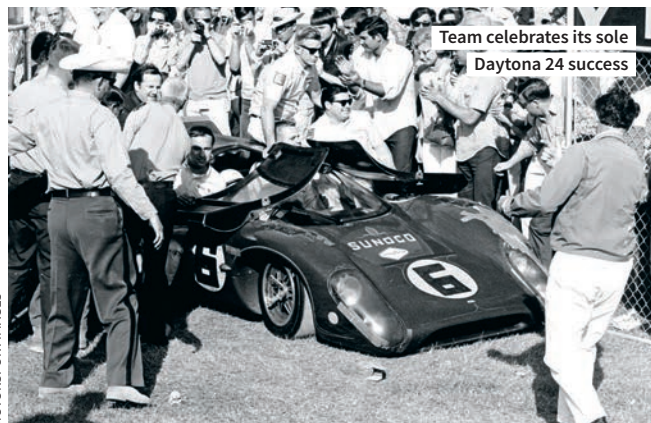
"After winning the United States Road Racing Championship and the Trans-Am title with Mark Donohue in 1968, we reached an agreement with Lola founder Eric Broadley to run Lolas across a number of series for '69," recalls Penske, now 81. "We decided that Mark would race a Chevrolet-powered T70 in the Daytona 24-hour race, the Sebring 12-hour race and the 24 Hours of Le Mans."

According to his book *The Unfair Advantage*, written with Paul Van Valkenburgh, Donohue picked up the new Mk3B with Roy Gane on New Year's Day, a month before Daytona. After initial tests, new springs were required because all of Penske's were incapable of taking the loads on the banking.

Problem sorted, Donohue described the Lola as "a very good-handling car". For Daytona, Penske also ran an asymmetric rear-spoiler set-up. Autosport described the Lola, with Traco-tuned Chevrolet five-litre V8, as "a joy to behold, so magnificently was



Roger Penske (left) and Mark Donohue were a formidable combination



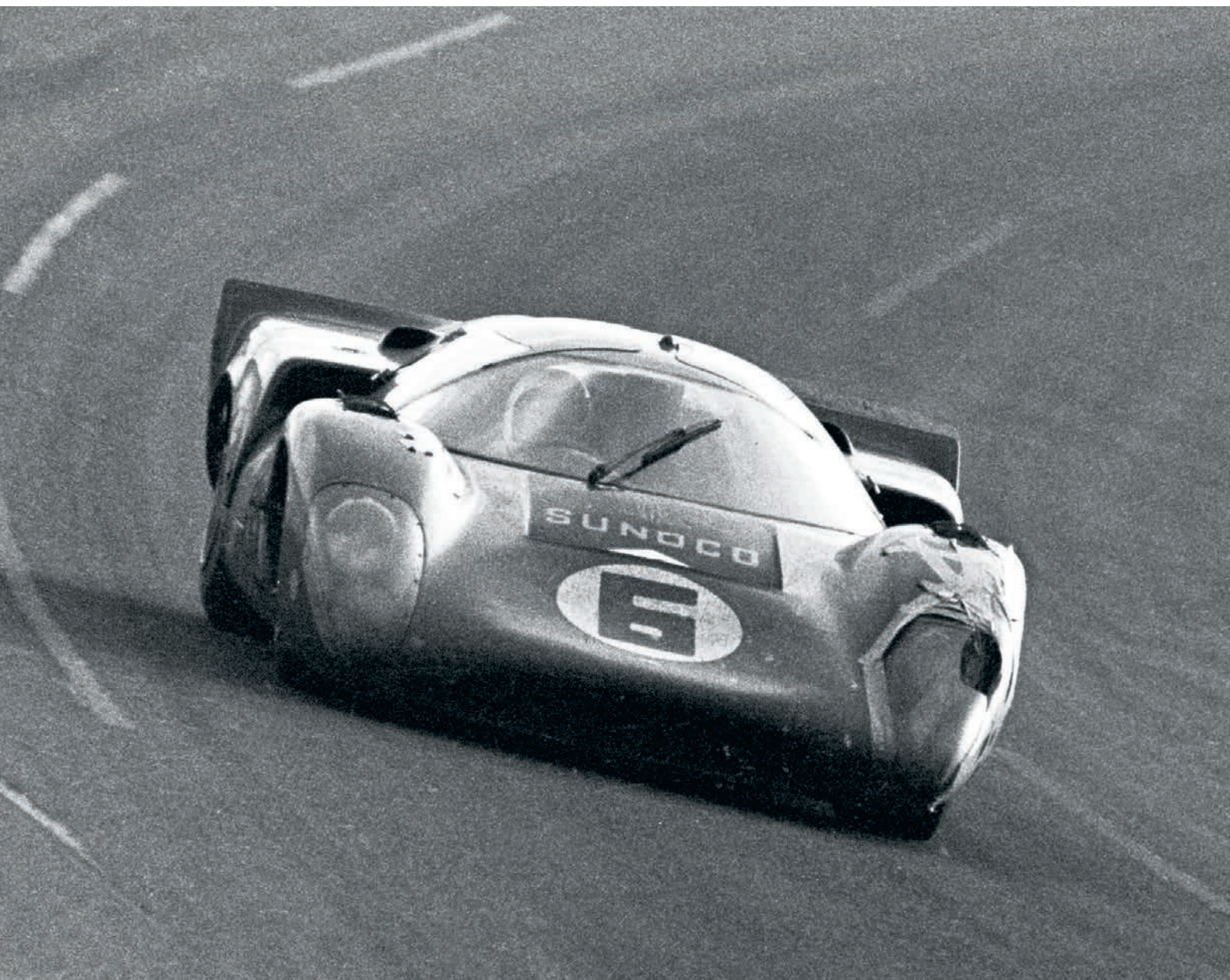
it prepared" in its Daytona race report. Ronnie Bucknum was originally down to co-drive with Donohue, but he broke his thumb and was replaced by experienced sportscar pilot Chuck Parsons.

Despite not being out when he thought conditions were at their best, Donohue qualified second, 0.5 seconds behind the Vic Elford/Brian Redman works Porsche 908. He then engaged in "quite a big dice" with the factory Porsche team until fuel starvation issues intervened and the exhaust manifolds started to deteriorate. "It took almost an hour and a half in the pits to get them cooled, off, welded, and back on again," wrote Donohue.

At one stage the Lola was 44 laps down in 11th and the problem reappeared later in the race – albeit costing less time – but it didn't matter because Porsche suffered a total disaster. Exhaust manifold and then camshaft gear issues scuppered the five-car German challenge, and the JW Automotive Gulf Ford GT40s also retired.

Donohue and Parsons thus came through to win, 30 laps ahead of the older Mk3 T70 of Ed Leslie/Lothar Motschenbacher, and now had a lot more knowledge of the car. It was also Lola's first big endurance-racing success.

With new headers and a V8 switched from fuel injection to carburetors for better throttle response, the Penske Lola outqualified all the Porsches at Sebring. It was still second on



the grid – Ferrari entered its new 312P for Chris Amon/Mario Andretti, and beat Donohue to pole by 0.78s – and Penske was clearly the fastest challenger to the works teams. The quickest of the other three Lolas in the top 10 was more than two seconds slower.

“We tried to choose our ratios so that we could use all five of the Hewland’s ratios in the race, instead of reserving the lowest one for starting only,” explained Donohue. “By knowing the power curve on our engine, we were able to graph rear-axle torque in each of all the available gears and cleverly select the ones that gave us the greatest net acceleration.

“This was the first time we used a mathematical approach, and it seemed to give us the Unfair Advantage we needed over the Porsches. To combat the strain from all that extra shifting, we went to a bigger Borg and Beck clutch from the seven-litre engine, and we adapted the softer Salisbury clutch-pack locking differential.”

Amon was slow away and four 908s led the field initially, but the 312P soon recovered. It seemed obvious the solo Ferrari and Penske entries were the main threats to the five-car Porsche onslaught. Donohue and Redman battled for the lead, with the Lola gaining an advantage when Redman had to pit with suspension damage.

But the Penske team had a concern. “One of the things we had doubts about was the point where the upper rear control arm

“BEFORE I’D GONE HALF A LAP I COULD TELL THE REAR SUSPENSION HAD BROKEN”

mounted to the chassis,” wrote Donohue. “Because the tub was so low, there was a little tower there, and we thought it looked weak. The guys welded a cap over it, but there wasn’t much else we could do in a hurry.”

Sure enough, in the fifth hour Bucknum brought the car in with strange handling. Donohue went out and came straight back in, his fears having been realised: “Before I’d gone half a lap I could tell the rear suspension was broken. One of our mounting towers had broken.”

The Porsches hit troubles as well (with cracked chassis) and the Ferrari suffered with overheating after picking up debris. It eventually came home second, behind the venerable JWA Gulf Ford GT40 that had qualified 12th.

Nevertheless, the Lola’s pace had been encouraging and >>



TTX 36 ILX FOR THE WINNERS...

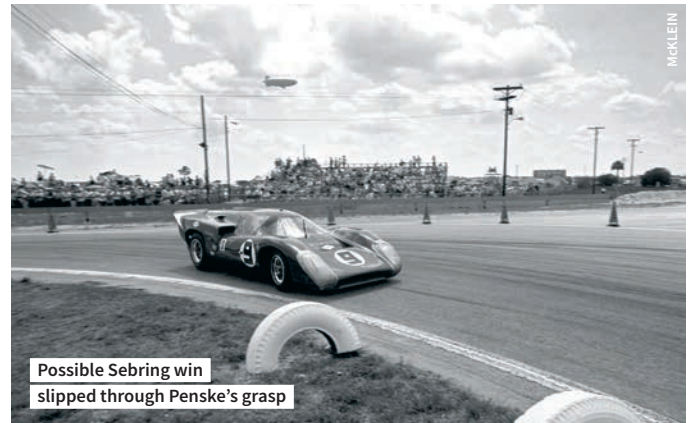
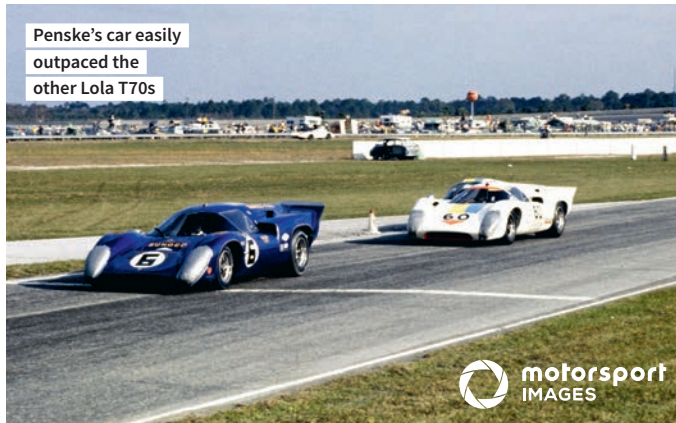
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Chevrolet became interested in the Le Mans assault. There was even a plan to use Chevrolet's facilities to improve drag and conduct durability testing.

But things never got that far. "We needed to make some repairs after Sebring and prepare the car for Le Mans, but before it made it back to Pennsylvania it was stolen from where our crew was staying at a hotel in Florida," explains Penske. "What was left of the car and the truck towing it was found the next day in a marsh but there was really nothing left to salvage."

Despite its deal with Lola — which also included running in Indycars and Can-Am — Penske elected not to continue the T70 programme. "Once the car was stolen and virtually everything was gone, we made the decision to move on," he says. "About a month after the car was taken, we were notified that some of the missing equipment was located in a barn somewhere in Florida. We were able to recover some of the parts but it just wasn't practical to try to race the T70 again."

That denied Penske a shot at Le Mans. And, perhaps just as importantly, the chance for the T70 to show its worth against the GT40. Broadley had been involved in the early stages of Ford's project, but had quickly fallen out with management, and the T70 was closer to the sportscar he had envisaged.

It was lighter, more modern and fundamentally faster than the GT40, but lacked a top team to run it. JWA had brought the International Championship for Makes to Ford in 1968 with the ageing machine, despite an onslaught from Porsche, and was still

"WE WERE LOOKING FORWARD TO RACING AGAINST PORSCHE, BUT IT WASN'T MEANT TO BE"

a threat in the longer races the following year. As it would later prove with its Ferrari 512M, Penske was a match for the highly rated JWA team and could have underlined the T70's pace in France.

At Sebring Donohue had outqualified the fastest JWA GT40 by 6.5s. Even though qualifying speed was not a priority for JWA boss John Wyer, it seems reasonable to assume Penske's T70 would have been quicker at Le Mans. It would have at least matched all the frontrunning cars, with the exception of Porsche's new 917s — all of which retired. Instead, the famous Ford scored its fourth, final and most famous Le Mans success, Jacky Ickx/Jackie Oliver beating the Hans Herrmann/Gerard Larrousse Porsche 908 by a matter of yards.

"The Lola T70 was a good car and we were excited to see what we could do at Le Mans after the success at Daytona," adds Penske. "Our team was looking forward to the challenge and the opportunity to race against the Porsches, but I guess it just wasn't meant to be."

But at least Penske's Lola had enjoyed one day in the sun at Daytona, a success the team is still waiting to add to. *W*

WORLD OF SPORT

Al-Attiyah breaks Toyota's Dakar duck

DAKAR RALLY
LIMA (PER)
JANUARY 7-17

Nasser Al-Attiyah secured Toyota's first Dakar Rally win in dominant fashion when the marathon finished last Thursday.

One year after taking the Hilux – built and run by Toyota Gazoo Racing's South African arm – to second place, Qatari Al-Attiyah led the general classification of this year's event at the end of every stage but one. He completed the Peru-based rally with a lead of nearly 47 minutes over

second-placed Nani Roma to wrap up his third Dakar win, each of them achieved with a different marque.

X-raid driver Roma, a former Dakar victor on both two and four wheels, drove a steady event in one of the squad's Mini 4x4s, but never looked like challenging for the win.

Instead, after the opening stretch had ruled out 2018 winner Carlos Sainz and Al-Attiyah's Toyota team-mate Giniel de Villiers, it was Sebastien Loeb and Stephane Peterhansel who seemed the biggest threats to the runaway leader on pure pace.

Ultimately, neither could keep the

intrigue alive for long. Loeb, trying to mount a comeback from a roadbook-induced navigational mishap on day three, was thwarted by a power shutdown in his privateer Peugeot on the seventh stage. The nine-time World Rally champion then suffered two transmission failures in the ninth stage and ended the rally a distant third.

Loeb's podium chances had been preserved by Peterhansel's first retirement from this event in a decade. After the 13-time Dakar winner's Mini buggy got stuck in the sand twice on stage eight, which ended his already fading hopes of challenging Al-Attiyah, he then had a heavy impact with a dune in the early kilometres of the following day. The collision forced Peterhansel to withdraw as new co-driver David Castera was taken to hospital with back pain. Castera was ultimately diagnosed with a contusion but had escaped any fractures, with the X-raid team relaying that his injuries are expected to "heal without consequences".

FIA Cross-Country world champion Jakub Przygonski took over in fourth place with his Mini buggy after Peterhansel's exit, and retained it until the finish to secure his best Dakar result. The Polish driver had also benefited from penultimate-day woes for Cyril Despres, as the five-time Dakar



Despres stopped to help injured Castera



Which way to Lima? Al-Attiyah led the Peruvian desert race almost all the way

FLORENT GOUDEN/DPP/RED BULL CONTENT POOL

winner in the bike class put his Mini buggy on its side while trying to avoid a motorcyclist just as he looked set to snatch third place from the stricken Loeb.

Despres carried on after the accident but could only round out the top five in the end, ahead of the Ford Raptor of former WRC regular Martin Prokop.

Sainz, whose quest for back-to-back Dakar victories was derailed by an unsighted ditch as early as the third day of competition, saw out the marathon as he continued to rack up mileage in the Mini buggy. While a penalty for a late start on stage nine – necessitated by lengthy repairs after a power-steering failure – denied the Spaniard a top-10 finish in the general classification, Sainz ended the rally by picking up his first Dakar stage win in a Mini.

VALENTIN KHOROUNZHIY

RESULTS

1 Nasser Al-Attiyah/Matthieu Baumel (Toyota Hilux) 34h38m14s; 2 Nani Roma/Alex Haro (Mini Cooper Buggy) 46m42s; 3 Sebastien Loeb/Daniel Elena (Peugeot 3008 DKR); 4 Jakub Przygonski/Tom Couslou (Mini); 5 Cyril Despres/Jean-Paul Cottret (Mini); 6 Martin Prokop/Jan Tomanek (Ford Raptor); 7 Yazeed Al-Rajhi/Timo Gottschalk (Mini); 8 Boris Garafulic/Filipe Palmeiro (Mini); 9 Giniel de Villiers/Dirk von Zitzewitz (Toyota); 10 Ronan Chabot/Gilles Pillot (Toyota).



STANDINGS

1	Rinus van Kalmthout (Hitech)	133
2	Yifei Ye (Absolute)	104
3	Alessandro Ghiretti (Hitech)	73

Van Kalmthout (left) and Ye battle into first turn

‘Veekay’ OK; Ticktum toils

**ASIAN F3 WINTER SERIES
SEPANG (MYS)
JANUARY 19-20
ROUND 2 / 3**

Two more wins have put Dutch teenager Rinus van Kalmthout into pole position for series honours, while another disastrous weekend for Dan Ticktum means the Red Bull Junior cannot claim the title, which culminates back at Sepang in a month's time.

‘Veekay’, who won the Pro Mazda title on the IndyCar support package in 2018 and graduates to Indy Lights this season, claimed pole position for the opening race in his Hitech GP car. He then led all the way from Formula Renault Eurocup star Yifei Ye, who mounted a bid for the lead early on, but then suffered overheating tyres on his Absolute Racing machine.

Ticktum had qualified his Hitech car third, but was a dismal 10th in the second session, which decided the grid for race three, and sat out the opening race later that afternoon with apparent car problems. Reigning South East Asian F4 champion Alessandro Ghiretti (Hitech) took advantage to complete the podium, with Asian F3 regular Tomoki Takahashi rising in style

from 11th on the grid to fourth.

With fastest laps from race one deciding the grid for Sunday's second race, that put Ticktum and team-mate Max Fewtrell – the reigning FRenault Eurocup champ having retired early on his Asian F3 debut – at the back. Ticktum charged through to claim fifth, with Fewtrell in sixth.

Up front it was a carbon copy of the opener: van Kalmthout won; Ye chased, then overheated his tyres and took second; Ghiretti was third; and Takahashi finished fourth.

Ye finally got the better of van Kalmthout in the finale, the Chinese racer making his move at Turn 1. Van Kalmthout pursued him all the way, but front-wing damage sustained on the opening lap scuppered his chances.

Ghiretti was third yet again, while Fewtrell rose from eighth to fourth. Ticktum stormed onto Fewtrell's tail, but locked his wheels and dropped behind former GP3 racer Akash Nandy in the closing stages. To compound his gloom, Ticktum dropped from sixth to ninth when he was given a 10-second penalty for overtaking during an early safety car period, which was called due to the stranded car of David Schumacher following a clash with Amaury Cordeel.



WEEKEND WINNERS

**ASIAN F3 WINTER SERIES
SEPANG**

Race 1 Rinus van Kalmthout
Hitech GP

Race 2 Rinus van Kalmthout
Hitech GP

Race 3 Yifei Ye
Absolute Racing

For full results visit:
motorsportstats.com

Left to right: Ye, ‘Veekay’ and Ghiretti on podium

Nordic superstars too much for the Ferrari Germans

**RACE OF CHAMPIONS
MEXICO CITY (MEX)
JANUARY 19-20**

For the first time in its 31-event history, the Race Of Champions set up camp in Latin America for 2019. The Terry Grant-designed pursuit course was a snug fit inside the Foro Sol stadium – the former baseball venue that dominates the final sector of Mexico's grand prix circuit. But despite the new backdrop and a host of rookie entrants, the Nations Cup on the opening day looked like business as usual when Team Germany made it through to the final in pursuit of a ninth event win.

For those of a more romantic disposition, the fact that Germany was represented by Sebastian Vettel and M Schumacher – like the partnership that bore six straight wins between 2007 and 2012 – meant that history appeared all the more likely to repeat itself.

But Team Nordic's Tom Kristensen and Johan Kristoffersson put paid to any such formalities as they beat Vettel and Michael's boy Mick Schumacher in a best-of-three tiebreaker. Nine-time Le Mans winner Kristensen, who equalled double event winner Stig Blomqvist's record of 15 ROC appearances, drew first blood by winning his shootout against Vettel by two heats to one.

Pitched against one another in Rallycross Supercar Lites, Vettel clipped the advertising barriers on the final corner and came away with a banner wrapped around his front-left wheel. In a game of fine margins, it ultimately cost him the victory by 0.9 seconds. After a switch to a fresh set of machines and another Kristensen

victory, Team Nordic had the advantage as Schumacher and Kristoffersson teed up in Mexican-built Vuhl 05 trackday cars. But Kristoffersson, who won 11 out of 12 rounds on his way to a second World Rallycross title in 2018, couldn't wrap up the spoils. After losing two-nil to the European Formula 3 champion, it came down to a three-leg decider between ROC rookie Schumacher and elder statesman Kristensen in KTM X-Bows. But only two races were needed as a scruffy Schumacher lost by a cumulative 0.8s and handed Team Nordic the honours.

"That was a very tight fight, as you saw with my race with Sebastian," said Kristensen. "Then Mick had a brilliant fight

with Johan that took it to the decider. He should be very proud of himself on his first visit to the Race Of Champions – and I'm always proud any time I beat a Schumacher."

"It's obviously special to have teamed up with Mick today," added Vettel. "I remember my first Race Of Champions appearance and looking up to Michael. We all know it would be more special to have Michael here to witness Mick's performance today, but I'm sure he would be proud of his son."

The absence of Schumacher Sr didn't get in the way of the event being a family affair for the new Ferrari F1 junior. In his semi-final against three-time Indianapolis 500 winner Helio Castroneves, Schumacher had his sister Gina riding shotgun in the RX Lite car on the way to victory.

Reigning ROC drivers' champion David Coulthard and Team Britain stablemate Andy Priaulx were unfortunate casualties of the group stages. Although Coulthard was handed a time penalty for twice knocking the barriers in the 600bhp Stadium Super Trucks, Kristensen prematurely gave up on his loop after spinning, allowing Coulthard to win by default.

After a pause for track repairs, three-time World Touring Car champion Priaulx lost both of his races. Too big a slide against Kristoffersson in the KTM's cost him victory, then he too spun the Stadium Super Truck to lose to 2012 IndyCar champ Ryan Hunter-Reay and send Britain crashing out.





Left to right: Schumacher and Vettel gave best to Kristensen and Kristoffersson



Kristensen lines up against Vettel in rallycross cars

Coulthard fared no better in defence of his Champion of Champions crown on the Sunday, as he failed to get out of the group stages. When Vettel suffered a similar fate, it meant a brand new winner would be feted.

But few expected that to be World Rally Championship WRC2 class competitor Benito Guerra, who prevailed over Loic Duval two-nil to take a shock victory in front of his home crowd.

Guerra had previously only entered the ROC in 2012 after winning the Production World Rally Championship, but this year he beat Formula 1 stars Vettel and Pierre Gasly on his way to the semi-finals. There he edged out Mercedes simulator driver Esteban Gutierrez by a mere 0.1s in the

custom-built ROC buggies.

Meanwhile, Duval's run to the final followed a win against 2018 Indy Lights champion Pato O'Ward in KTM X-Bows. With Guerra, Gutierrez and O'Ward making it to the semis, that meant three Mexicans at this stage, but it was O'Ward who was the standout driver of the competition. Most notably, he beat Kristoffersson at his own game, winning in their quarter-final meeting in the RX Lites.

The other half of Team Nordic fared even worse. Kristensen was also toppled by O'Ward, so didn't make it beyond the groups. But he did admit to feeling less than race-sharp after celebrating his Nations Cup victory with one or two tequilas... 🍸

FROM GAMING TO THE REAL THING



The Race Of Champions continued its impressive integration of Esports and 'real-life' competition by fielding a team of gamers in the Nations Cup.

Although the Team Sim Racing All Star squad of Enzo Bonito (above) and James Baldwin crashed out in the group stages, they still claimed some impressive scalps along the way. Pitched against one another in the Vuhl 05s, last year's eROC title winner Bonito beat Formula E champion Lucas di Grassi by an impressive 0.7 seconds. And with the same machinery, Bonito triumphed over IndyCar star Ryan Hunter-Reay by 1.3s.

While Baldwin (below) didn't grab the headlines in quite the same vein, he did muster a 0.3s win against NASCAR K&N Pro Series East driver Ruben Garcia Jr in Ariel Atoms only hours after beating reigning Formula 1 Esports champion Brendon Leigh in the eROC World Final.

Neither driver disgraced themselves on the biggest stage of their careers so far. And with ROC president Fredrik Johnsson continuing to pour his full support into the crossover between Esports and genuine competition, there's every chance that the virtual world can produce a Nations Cup winner down the line.

"This was the second eROC World Final but it's still just the beginning," said Johnsson. "Last year's inaugural event was purely invitational, but this year we were determined to expand the search to find the 'best of the best' from all over the world. If you are good enough, you could find yourself racing at the Race Of Champions against some of the world's best drivers in identical cars."



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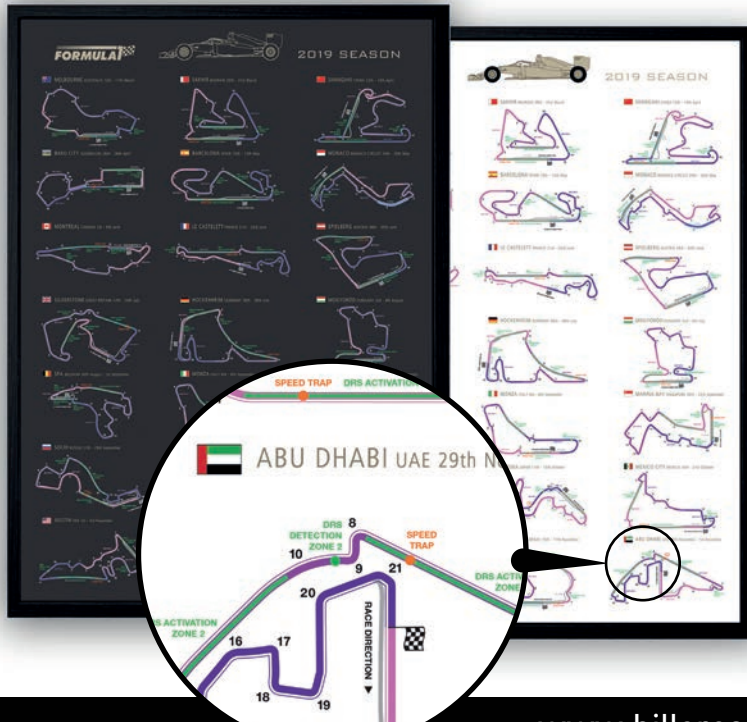
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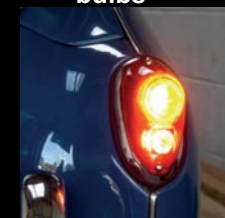


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F4 CHAMPION JEWISS GRADUATES TO BRDC BRITISH F3

BRDC BRITISH F3

Reigning British Formula 4 champion Kiern Jewiss will step up to the BRDC British F3 Championship with Douglas Motorsport this season.

The 16-year-old, who took six wins last season with Double R,

will rejoin Douglas having contested the 2017 Ginetta Junior Championship with the squad.

Double R won the 2016 and 2018 British F3 drivers' titles with Matheus Leist and Linus Lundqvist respectively, but Jewiss has opted for Wayne Douglas's outfit after testing with both teams last year.

Thiim returns for title push

BRITISH GT

Aston Martin factory driver Nicki Thiim will remain in the British GT championship this year, resuming his partnership with Mark Farmer at TF Sport that yielded two victories and third in the standings in 2018.

As the best-placed returning pairing – 2018 champion Jonny Adam has a new co-driver in Graham Davidson and runner-up Phil Keen will partner GT3 newcomer Adam Balon – Thiim and Farmer will be expected to launch a strong title challenge, having finished 19.5 points adrift of Adam and Flick Haigh after a costly DNF at Spa.

There remains a question mark over Thiim's participation in the first of British GT's two visits to Donington Park on June 22-23, because it clashes with the Nurburgring 24 Hours, which the Dane

won in 2013 and has contested for Aston Martin in each of the past three years.

"Last year was the first year for me [in British GT] and I had never been to most of the tracks," said Thiim. "This year I know the tracks and know which buttons to push and not to push to get the best out of Mark, so I'm definitely looking forward to it."

"There's always room for improvement – I can see Mark is really busy driving here and there. That's typical of him, he's a very hungry guy. He has days where he is over-motivated and days where you have to pump him up, so this season we go in with a good base."

Thiim expects the new Vantage GT3 to be a considerable step forward for Am drivers over the old V12 model, which bowed out after seven years with a fourth drivers' crown in British GT.

JAMES NEWBOLD

Karter Connor joins Arden in British F4

BRITISH F4

Highly rated karter Alex Connor will graduate to car racing in British Formula 4 with Arden this season.

The UAE-born Briton, who has won multiple karting titles in the Middle East, has embarked on a testing programme over the winter ahead of his move.

Because he will not turn 15 until April 11, Young Racing Driver Academy member Connor will miss the opening races of the season at Brands Hatch.

"The guys at the YRDA have put a lot of effort into helping me in the simulator and in the gym," said Connor (below). "This has meant that the testing programme has gone well and I'm getting more confident with the car with each test."

"I know that the championship attracts the best young drivers from around the world, but I am certainly going to do my best and hopefully achieve some podium finishes along the way."

STEPHEN LICKORISH



Jewiss won British F4 title at Brands Hatch finale

"It wasn't an easy decision," said Jewiss, who was a finalist in the 2018 McLaren Autosport BRDC Award. "There wasn't anything really between them, they're very similar teams and I think both cars are very similar."

"The first few days were quite a big learning curve with the downforce. I would say understanding that is the single biggest thing."

"It's just getting used to what the car's like. Obviously it stops better because it has better brakes [than the F4 car] and it's just fine-tuning everything to get the most out of it."

"With the F4 car there's not as much to it, you can get your head around it, but with the British F3

[Tatuus-Cosworth] car there's a lot more to fine-tune."

Jewiss had been looking at a potential move to Europe, but uncertainty regarding the FIA's new Regional F3 concept prompted him to choose British F3, becoming the first British F4 champion to join the series full-time.

"I think we had eyed the series up for quite a while, especially with everything going on with other F3 series in Europe," added Jewiss.

"It's not easy to jump into a car where everything is new and when you've got to make each year [in your career] count."

STEFAN MACKLEY



Fire at Spa hindered 2018 title assault



Dane has high hopes for new Aston GT3

Historic frontrunner to F2

HSCC HISTORIC F2

Historic Formula 1 frontrunner Miles Griffiths will compete in the HSCC-organised Historic F2 championship this season, when he debuts Philip Walker's Ralt RT1.

The Ralt was discovered by its previous owner in France. Its history is unclear, but it is believed to have lain dormant since being hillclimbed in continental Europe some years ago.

An uprated F1 Atlantic chassis, the classic Ron Tauranac design is being rebuilt by Griffiths's stepfather Mick Moberley's Hi-Tech Motorsport concern in Kidderminster.

"We have had the car since

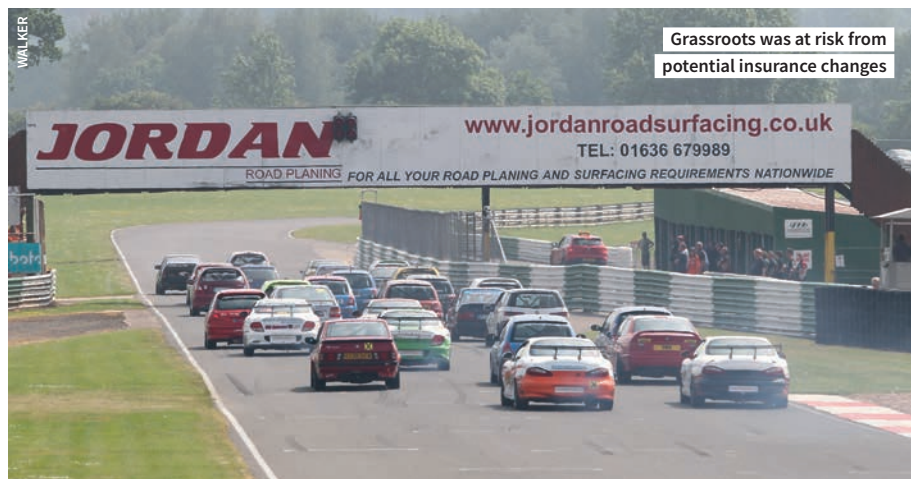
November, and are getting into it now," said Griffiths, who has previously won Historic Grand Prix Cars Association races in a Cooper T51 and sportscar events sharing Walker's Lotus 11 and 15.

"We're waiting on a few bits, but all of us are very excited about the car."

"Geoff Richardson is building a two-litre Cosworth BDG engine and we're aiming to get out testing a couple of times before the first round [at Hockenheim's Jim Clark Revival on April 27-28]."

"Historic F2 is full of enthusiastic guys and great cars and deserves to succeed. I'm really looking forward to being part of it."

MARCUS PYE



Motorsport wins crucial EU insurance vote

VNUK

A vital EU vote on an insurance law change that could have been catastrophic for motorsport has gone in the sport's favour.

The 2014 Vnuk court case determined that the Motor Insurance Directive (MID) was being interpreted incorrectly. It set a

precedent that all vehicles in the EU should have insurance, even if they are being used on private land.

That would have meant all cars competing in motorsport events in Europe would need to be insured individually. A further unintended consequence was that cars colliding on a race track could be

treated as road traffic accidents and involve the police.

Dan Dalton, an MEP for the West Midlands, is the son of a former marshal and timekeeper put forward the motion of excluding motorsport from the amended wording of the MID to the EU Parliamentary committee on which he sits.

The internal market committee voted on the amendment on Tuesday and sided with excluding motorsport from the implementation of the new insurance law.

Dalton had previously said that the potential outcome was "too close to call".

The amendment still needs to be passed by the main parliament. But that body rarely goes against the decisions of its internal mechanisms, so the vote by the committee is highly significant.

"I am relieved that my fellow MEPs from this committee listened to my concerns about the risk this draft law poses to British motorsport," Dalton told Autosport.

"As the son of a former marshal, I know that this is a way of life for many people in the UK. This is a victory for common sense regulation.

"All MEPs will vote on this compromise at one of the next meetings in Strasbourg. This could be as early as February.

"As a general rule, they will follow what has been agreed by our committee."

JACK BENYON

National FF1600 for Scottish champion

FORMULA FORD

Double Scottish Formula Ford 1600 champion Ross Martin will contest a full National FF1600 campaign this year after signing with Team Dolan.

Martin, who claimed successive Scottish titles with Graham Brunton Racing in 2017 and 2018, will drive the Van Diemen RF99 that Niall Murray used to win last year's championship, as well

as the engine used by Northern Irish champion Matt Round-Garrido.

"I'm really happy to be racing for Bernard [Dolan] this year," said Martin. "We started talking at the Mazda Road to Indy Shootout in Arizona in December and things just progressed from there."

It is Martin's first full season in the National championship after a planned title assault last season fell through

on the eve of the opening round at Silverstone.

• Graham Brunton Racing will field Arden Young Racing Driver Academy member Logan Hannah in Scottish FF1600 this season. Hannah made her debut at last year's season finale before taking part in the Walter Hayes Trophy. "I feel like this is the best championship to continue my development," she said.

STEPHEN BRUNSDON



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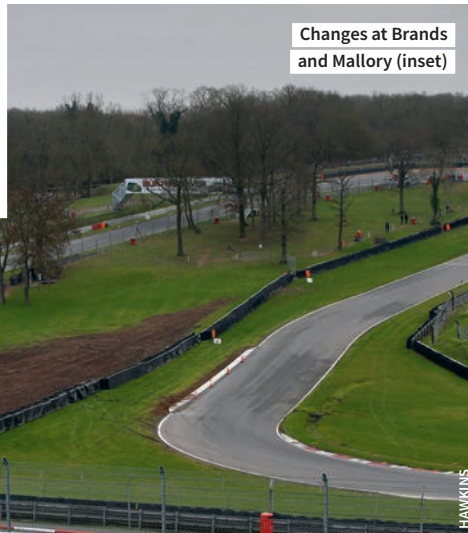
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Upgrades for UK tracks

CIRCUITS

Changes have been made during the off-season to the Brands Hatch, Donington Park and Mallory Park circuits to improve safety and accessibility for competitors, marshals and spectators.

MotorSport Vision is making a number of refinements to the approach to Graham Hill Bend at Brands Hatch. It is adding “up to a maximum of 15 metres” of runoff on the right-hand side (above), as well as undertaking repair work at the exit.

“MSV continually reviews circuit safety and this is an area where some more space could help to reduce the number of incidents, for motorcycles especially,” said Giles Butterfield, group operations and engineering manager for MSV.

Butterfield confirmed no new catch-fencing would be added since “the area of work is not near a spectator viewing area”. Other changes include resurfacing work

where the Grand Prix loop rejoins the Indy circuit at Clearways, while new kerbs are being laid at Paddock Hill Bend.

Safety improvements have also been made at Mallory Park, where barriers have been moved closer to the circuit on the inside of the final corner, Devil’s Elbow.

The barrier now runs parallel to the start/finish straight from the exit (above, inset), where previously the footbridge over the circuit created a funnel effect.

Circuit director Stuart Hicken confirmed there were no concerns about the barrier being on the outside of the circuit’s oval layout, which will be reused for the first time since 2005.

Changes are also ongoing at Donington Park, which MSV acquired in 2017. These include a new main paddock entrance for pedestrians, a new hard surface for paddock three, relocation of the race winners’ podium, and new marshal posts.

STEFAN MACKLEY

Gore joins Mittell Cars

F1000

Mittell Cars will expand into F1000 this season as well as Bikesports.

The RGB Sports 1000 regular unveiled a new car for Bikesports at Autosport International earlier this month. Following F1000’s decision to move to the 750MC, Mittell will now run in a third bike-engined category.

Mittell will enter former Caterham racer Dan Gore — who finished third in the Caterham Tracksport standings in 2015 — in the series.

“F1000 has been on my radar for a while, as the cars offer huge performance on a sensible budget, and the big kid in me has always loved single-seaters like this,” said Gore.

“It’s a big step up from Caterhams, but I’m looking forward to getting to grips with slicks and wings.”

This year F1000 will become the first one-make category to adopt the SpeedMarshal safety system. It uses GPS and lights on the rear of a car to indicate if it goes below a certain speed.

STEPHEN LICKORISH

IN THE HEADLINES

BRSCC TO PEMBREY

The British Racing and Sports Car Club will make its first visit to Pembrey for eight years this season. Mazda MX-5s, Ford Fiesta and Fiesta Junior will be among the categories at the April 20-21 meeting. “Following a very constructive discussion with circuit management, they are putting in additional facilities for our priority, including electricity in the paddock and the use of garages,” said BRSCC chairman Peter Daly.

MG RACER TO GINETTAS

MG Trophy Class B champion Ryan Firth will switch to the Ginetta GT5 Challenge this season with the EDF Motorsports squad. “This championship is incredibly competitive and, with packed grids, it should make for an amazing season,” said Firth. “Moving up to this championship is the best step to achieving my dream of becoming a GT racer.”

BENTLEYS FOR CLASSIC

The biggest-ever field of Pre-War Bentleys will celebrate the marque’s centenary in a special Pre-War Sports Car race at the Silverstone Classic in July. On Saturday evening the Bentley Centenary Trophy will happen 100 years after WO Bentley founded the company in July 1919. More than 30 Bentleys are expected within a capacity field. The grid will also feature Alfa Romeos, Aston Martins, Bugattis, Frazer Nashes, Lagondas and MGs.

RICHARD WILLS 1950-2019

Credited by Delta Race Cars owner Nick Crossley as the driver who put the marque on the map, Richard Wills has died of leukaemia following a 10-year battle with illness. Wills won races in FF1600 before scraping together the money to drive a works Delta — designed by Patrick Head before his move to Formula 1 — in 1977 and immediately set poles and fastest laps. He ran a garage in Beaconsfield for many years, and is survived by wife Jan and two sons.

KENNY ALLEN 1937-2019

Seven-time Scottish hillclimb champion Kenny Allen passed away in his sleep on Monday morning having suffered ill health for some time. Tenacity personified, the driver from Crossford, Lanarkshire first competed in a Mini but was tough to beat in everything he prepared and drove, on hill, airfield or circuit. To his wife Mary, daughters Margaret and Grizel, and on behalf of the entire speed event fraternity, Autosport extends its condolences.

JANUARY

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MINI CHALLENGE: FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH

Organisers are working hard to offer incentives for 2019 Mini Challenge competitors as the series gears up to join the BTCC package in 2020

JACK BENYON

Club motorsport loves an anniversary, and this year we can expect to enjoy plenty of celebrations to mark the Mini's 60th birthday. The diminutive machine changed the face of motoring, and had a huge impact on the world of racing and rallying.

The modern-day Mini might have little in common with its minimalist forebear, but it too has racing history and something to cheer. The Mini Challenge – the fastest one-make series for Minis in the UK – recently received the best news of its 17-year existence when it was announced at the Autosport Show that it would replace the Renault UK Clio Cup on the British Touring Car Championship support package in 2020. It's a big step up in terms of prestige for the series, which has spent its recent years supporting British GT. Not only does the TOCA package offer more spectators, but its ITV4 deal makes it the most attractive berth for a series in the UK in terms of promotion, too.

The Mini Challenge cars offer more power and more aero than a Clio Cup car, making the series a great stepping stone towards

"DOES THE NEWS MEAN THE CHALLENGE ENTERS A HOLDING PATTERN UNTIL 2020?"

the BTCC as well as a destination in itself. "They're just awesome," says BTCC race winner and ITV4 presenter Paul O'Neill, who enjoyed a guest drive in the series last year.

"The JCW is probably the most difficult front-wheel-drive car I've ever driven. They're really stiff and keep you on your toes, and it reminds me of the Chevrolet Cruze S2000. There are too many front-wheel-drive cars now that are just a bit numb to drive because they have such a wide track. With the Mini it's the opposite and you have to be careful, which I think is excellent.

"There are lots of changes you can make – it's not just tyre pressures and camber. They're really fast and the competition at the front is immense. I'm really happy it's supporting the BTCC and I'd love to do a round of it while it's on the TOCA package – that would be mint."

Antony Williams, who took over as series boss in 2013, had been angling for the series to join the TOCA support package for

some time. "It's a defining moment," he says. "As Alan Gow [BTCC boss] often says, it's the only show in town. It has unrivalled media coverage, unrivalled pedigree, unrivalled exposure for drivers and teams alike. Alan is a loyal guy and ultimately, until Renault decided it didn't want to be there, there was no slot for us.

"When we envisaged the car and developed the car, we wanted it to be a mini touring car, and we wanted to make it as close as possible to driving a real touring car at a fraction of the budget. We achieved that. It has its own idiosyncrasies but ultimately it's an amazing car and it's such fun to drive."

So what does 2019 hold for the Challenge? Does the news mean that it enters a holding pattern until the real stars join in 2020? The series has clearly considered this, since there are a host of incentives on offer to get feet in the door. It will reduce testing next year, so getting into the series early will be key to hitting the ground running in front of the big crowds. Those who compete this season will get a 20% entry-fee discount for 2020, and they will be given first refusal on a place on the entry list should it be oversubscribed. Teams who have been with the series for longer will receive an even bigger discount.

Perhaps one of the biggest attractions for the series is that, unlike many other manufacturer-backed single-make categories, the current car is in play until at least 2024, meaning there's a steady run with the present machine and no massive cost implications of new wheels anytime soon. That's also good for the flow of spare parts – which are in high demand in a series that has been accused of having a fair few red flags over the years.

"For me it's typical of club racing, very welcoming and very friendly," adds O'Neill, who has competed in myriad grassroots series since his last outing in the BTCC in 2013.

"You have a range of people – the difference from Clios is you have a bigger percentage doing it for fun. The only issue I have, and I've voiced my opinion on this to the drivers as Rob Collard has before, is there are a few too many red flags in the series. It improved towards the end of the year, but because the cars don't heat the rear tyres up very quickly it's tough to handle them at full pace early in the race. I have to say, though, the drivers were really receptive to feedback."

So 2019 is certainly not a write-off year for the Mini Challenge, as it prepares for the biggest chapter in its history next season. And once it joins the TOCA grid, it will no doubt attract more 'serious' drivers, rather than those looking for fun, so driving standards are likely to improve even further. *JB*

KEEPING THE AMERICAN DREAM ALIVE

John Mickel took his fifth UK Legends title in 2018, but still has his sights set on a return to racing in the United States

STEFAN MACKLEY

"I have got to up my game, and I'm in the process of doing that because I think I've been a bit lax last year, maybe the last two years."

How or why John Mickel thinks he's been "a bit lax" in recent seasons is anyone's guess, because in 2018 he made history by becoming the first five-time UK Legends Cars National champion. It was also his fourth title success on the bounce — no small feat in a series where more than 30 cars regularly compete across a six-race weekend, and with randomised grids.

"If people say it's easy to win this championship then they want to come and have a go, because we do six races in a weekend and you've got to keep that consistency going," says Mickel, who won his first UK Legends title in 2001. "Week in, week out, making sure the car is reliable, keeping it on the track... there's a lot of work involved and I don't think people realise how hard it is."

People on the outside looking in could perceive that Mickel's domination is a sign that the series is competitively weak or that numbers are dwindling. But in fact the championship, which celebrates its 25th anniversary in 2019, is proving to be just as tightly contested and popular as ever. The final meeting of last season — always a good barometer of how healthy a series is — at Brands Hatch in November attracted 32 entries, while Mickel's title was sealed that same weekend. The series also shared five of its nine rounds in '18 with the highly popular British Truck Racing Championship, which attracts thousands of spectators.

Mickel isn't surprised that the Legends series and cars — based on pre-war Ford, Chevrolet and Dodge bodies, with 120bhp and the aerodynamic properties of a barn door — continue to be so popular. "They've got loads of power and no grip," says the 47-year old, who

"IF PEOPLE SAY IT'S EASY TO WIN THIS CHAMPIONSHIP THEN THEY WANT TO COME AND HAVE A GO"



has also taken Legends World Championship (2001 and '15) and World Series (2001, '15 and '17) honours. "It's not like they have slicks and wings, where you put your foot down and it goes where you want it to go. We're on the knife-edge all the time with them, and there's a fine line between keeping it on the track or putting it off. That's why they're so fun to drive. And that's why I think anybody who goes from Legends into a different formula really does shine because they've got the car control and skill to handle something that does handle when they move into it."

Racing has always been in Mickel's blood — his dad Brian was a stock-car racer and, by the age of 10, Mickel was competing in Ministox. He was Superstox World and European champion on short ovals by the age of 19, and then made his move into Legends in 1998 as "that was the only thing we could afford".

He founded Horsham-based Mickel Motorsport in 2000 with his wife Lisa, who is a former Legends driver. His first UK Legends title followed the next year, as well becoming world champion for the first time and the inaugural ASCAR champion.

But it's in the United States where Mickel has been looking to break in for more than a decade. He made his NASCAR Truck Series debut in 2005 at Texas Motor Speedway, and the following season contested the final five rounds of the calendar. In '10 he also won the inaugural American Speed Association Free State 500 race



STYLES

in South Africa. In the process, he became the first Englishman to win a NASCAR race outside of the US.

"I still want to do a year in America, it's just finding the sponsor to get us there," says Mickel. "But I'm not getting any younger. It would be Trucks or Xfinity Series. If we can raise the budget to do that for a season, then when I'm old and grey I can hang up my crash helmet and boots and say, 'You know what, at least I've had a go.' We've done four or five races out there. But because you're new and you jump straight into it,

you get two races underneath your belt and you just get into the swing of things and then you're coming home."

Even if the American dream doesn't come true, Mickel still plans to return to UK Legends this season to try to claim what he refers to as the 'drive for five' titles in a row. Even so, he believes there are "10 drivers who, on their day, could win the championship".

But based on his success over the previous four seasons, you'd have to be brave to bet against Mickel in 2019. ❖



Mickel won Free State 500 race in South Africa in 2010



Brit has already raced in NASCAR Truck Series



Job well done: Mercedes celebrates title-winning end to DTM campaign

THE SILVER ARROWS' DTM

YOUTUBE DOCUMENTARY 30 YEARS DTM: TO THE VERY LAST SECOND

"We have the most awesome job in the world," says Toto Wolff as he rallies his troops ahead of Mercedes' final race in the DTM after more than three decades.

That pride is manifest throughout a special free-to-watch (via YouTube) 90-minute documentary recently released by Mercedes to mark the end of its time in the German touring car series.

Not only was Mercedes a key stakeholder, underpinning the series' success since its 2000 relaunch, it was one of the most

successful entrants. The film chooses, however, to focus on the ups and downs of Mercedes' final season rather than trying to encompass the full sweep of history.

A large proportion of the running time is devoted to a recap of long-serving Mercedes driver Gary Paffett winning his second title, punctuated by archive footage and seated interviews with drivers and personnel from the past. Cameras follow key members of the team, facilitating more access to the drama of 2018. The monsoon-induced Hungary chaos, fallouts in Misano and BMW driver Timo Glock's uncensored outburst unfold in detail, along with one lesser-known internal problem — that Mercedes was giving away almost a second in the pits early last season. Here, you discover that changing the fuel flap colour halved the margin, besides squad rotation.

It's fortuitous that Paffett, having been with Mercedes for 15 years, is the lead figure of the documentary. The many setbacks he's had in his career — such as missing out on the title in 2010 and 2012 — gives the final fairytale triumph added emotional impact.

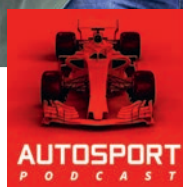
The cinema-based sections, led by a freshly suited Norbert Haug and Wolff, are the most welcome interjection. You feel that passion for success early on by those who started the journey full-time in 1986.

As the narration emphasises during an early trophy-polishing scene, the news that Mercedes was quitting DTM in 2018





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GARY ANDERSON LIVE FROM AUTOSPORT INTERNATIONAL

In a special live recording from Autosport International at the Birmingham NEC, Gary Anderson and Stuart Codling join Edd Straw to discuss the big topics in Formula 1, including Maurizio Arrivabene's ousting as team principal at Ferrari, Arrivabene's replacement Mattia Binotto, plus the new regulations for 2019.
Go to <https://www.autosport.com/podcast>

SWANSONG

**"WE'RE RUTHLESS.
PRESSURE IS THE BEST
FEELING. EMBRACE IT"
- TOTO WOLFF**

shocked the motorsport world. For years the fortunes of the car maker and the series had appeared intertwined. Daimler board members Hans-Werner Aufrecht and Professor Jurgen Hubbert kick off the tale from revitalising a struggling Mercedes in the 1980s through the 'win on Sunday, sell on Monday' approach.

It's these brief reels of past and present DTM footage that deliver what you come for. Klaus Ludwig's calmness when describing his helpless position in a 1989 Nurburgring shunt epitomises his character, and that of many involved in the story.

Moments such as the first victory are a visual education, others harking back to times when drivers were simply in their element with a Mercedes around them.

Take Estoril 2004 as an example of a fine victory forgotten by many. Christijan Albers might have been a Formula 1 flop, but replays of his bold double overtake around the outside at Turn 1 to seal a hard-fought victory demonstrate his talent.

'Die Legende' himself, Bernd Schneider,



MOTORSport IMAGES/IRLMEIR

earns many plaudits from peers during a touching section dedicated to him. It reveals a more human perspective to a driver whose success seemed almost mechanical. Even with six titles to his name across the various iterations of the DTM (including his 1995 International Touring Car crown), the story of his personal pressure to maintain that success is eye-opening, whether coupled with footage of him holding a handstand during a pre-season unveiling, or trading celebrations with rival Bruno Spengler in the crucial 2006 campaign.

Pressure is the key word you hear uttered most. "We're ruthless" says Wolff. "Pressure is the best feeling. Embrace it. Love it."

That love is plain to see, and the statistics create their own story. From 436 starts, Mercedes won 190 times and racked up 11 drivers' titles. Quite a legacy.

DAN MASON

To watch the documentary, head over to Mercedes-AMG DTM YouTube channel or visit <http://bit.ly/MercDTM>.

WHAT'S ON

INTERNATIONAL MOTORSPORT

Rally Monte Carlo

World Rally Championship

Rd 1/14

Gap, France/Monte Carlo, Monaco

January 24-27

TV Live BT Sport 1, Thurs 1830, Sat 1300.
BT Sport 3, Sun 1100. Red Bull TV, Sat 1250.

Live coverage on wrc.com.

All live service via WRC+.

TV Highlights BT Sport 3, Fri 2145.

BT Sport 1, Sun 0045. BT Sport 3, 2300.

Red Bull TV, Fri 2100, Sat 2100, Sun 2100.

Daytona 24 Hours

IMSA SportsCar

Round 1/12

Daytona, Florida, USA

January 26-27

Formula E

Round 3/12

Santiago, Chile

January 26

TV Live BT Sport 3, Saturday 1830

Eurosport 1, 1830.

BBC Red Button, iPlayer, online

Toyota Racing Series

Round 3/5

Hampton Downs, New Zealand

January 26-27



FROM THE ARCHIVE

Graham Hill's Lotus-Ford 49B passes the remains of Pedro Rodriguez's BRM P133 en route to victory in the 1968 Monaco Grand Prix. Hill, who started from pole,

was chased home by the BRM P126 of fastest-lapper Richard Attwood, just 2.2 seconds behind at the flag. The race's three other finishers – Lucien Bianchi and Ludovico Scarfiotti

(both Cooper-BRM T86B) and Denny Hulme (McLaren-Ford M7A) – were a minimum of four laps adrift. Rodriguez was one of the race's many casualties, crashing out at Mirabeau on lap 17.



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TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

QUIZ

WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN?



WHO IS THIS?

From a small stream flowed a long career but, despite considerable success, arguably it never lived up to its early promise.

He took the well-trodden path into the sport, teaming up with a national hero as a precious stone merged with a blossoming flower. From here he joined a would-be supergroup, complete with the usual intra-band bickering. The trio dominated the charts and were promoted together.

Things seemed to stall in the second strata, but a move to a new star in a new series gave fresh momentum and, powered by his home star, his rise to the top was complete.

A number of starring roles persuaded the kingmakers of the time to anoint him, but it took a serpentine switch for him to rise to the fore. But when it lost its venom he was forced to go hunting in less fertile grounds before returning home for a final tour.

ON THIS DAY

1 Today is 2012 GP2 champion Davide Valsecchi's birthday. Who finished runner-up in that year's series?

2 Scott Speed is 36 today. In 118 NASCAR Cup races, what was his best result?

3 On this day in 2005, the Jordan team was bought by Midland. Who were its drivers in that first season?

4 US racer Art Cross was born on this day in 1918. What was significant about his appearance in the 1952 Indy 500?

5 Who won the 1986 Monte Carlo Rally, which finished on this day?

NAME THE HELMET



LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

Who, what, where, when Jacky Ickx, Mercedes G-Wagon, Paris-Dakar Rally, January 1983. **Who is this?** Ari Vatanen. **On this day** 1) Elie Bayol. 2) Juan Manuel Fangio, Onofre Marimon, Jose Froilan Gonzalez, Roberto Mieres, Jorge Daponte. 3) Silverstone. 4) Alvaro Parente. 5) 1998 Safari Rally. **Name the helmet** JJ Lehto.

IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE

WHAT RED BULL HAS DONE FOR MOTORSPORT



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