

Le Mans Aston and Lambo special

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5 OCTOBER 2023

AUTOSPORT

Aston Martin's Le Mans attack is go!

New **Valkyrie** racer to bid for outright glory in WEC and IMSA from 2025



PLUS

F1 What next for Alonso at Aston?

The **BTCC's** unsung hero of the season

Tanak wins for M-Sport – then shocks **WRC**

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Aston Martin steals the show with Le Mans announcement

It's not every week that Autosport staffers find themselves (metaphorically!) ripping up magazine pages and starting again on a Monday press day. But the confirmation of Aston Martin's return to the top class of endurance racing and (let's be honest, pretty cool) images of the Valkyrie LMH were too good to miss.

This week we bring you news of the exciting project (page 4) and a reminder of Aston Martin's rich endurance-racing history (p20).

Everyone seems to be getting in on the act, including Lamborghini, which does *not* have a big motorsport heritage. As Gary Watkins explains on p26, it's been a long road to Le Mans for the Italian marque but there's no reason to think it can't take on Ferrari, Porsche, Aston Martin *et al* in the burgeoning Hypercar class.

Aston Martin's Formula 1 team did a lot to spark interest in the early part of the season, particularly thanks to the podium-finishing performances of the evergreen Fernando Alonso. But the pace of the AMR23 has fallen away in recent races, so Alex Kalinauckas takes a look at what's going on in our article on p22.

Marcus Simmons also brings you the lowdown on British Touring Cars' unsung star (p32), while Tom Howard reports on Ott Tanak's Rally Chile success (p36) – and the news that he's leaving M-Sport (p12).

• It has come to our attention that some of our subscribers did not receive their free Engineering supplement last week. These will be sent out over the next few days. If you don't receive it and think you should have, please email autosport@autosport.com. We apologise for the error.



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Cover image
Aston Martin

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PIT + Paddock





Valkyrie LMH
will fight
for outright
Le Mans honours in
2025 after a full test
programme

Aston Martin presses green light on Hypercar programme

WEC/IMSA

Aston Martin will be back at the sharp end of the grid at the Le Mans 24 Hours from 2025 as it bids for a first outright victory in the French enduro since 1959. The British manufacturer has reactivated the Valkyrie Le Mans Hypercar project for twin assaults on the World Endurance Championship

and the IMSA SportsCar Championship.

It has partnered with North American entrant Heart of Racing, which has run Aston's GT Daytona machinery in IMSA since its establishment in 2020 and joined the WEC this year, for what at the moment are likely to be one-car assaults in the respective Hypercar and GTP classes of the two championships. Plans for Le Mans 2025

are focused for the time being on the single Valkyrie LMH entered in the full WEC.

Aston's first attempt to win Le Mans outright since the disastrous AMR-One LMP1 programme of 2011 has been firmed up since Autosport outlined the plans in September. An announcement of the full programme was due to be made on the AMR Technology Campus adjacent to »



New racer will be based on the AMR Pro trackday machine that is already up and running





Silverstone on Wednesday (yesterday). The project will be led from the new Aston Martin Performance Technologies division based on the campus that also incorporates the manufacturer's new Formula 1 facility. AMPT will play a key role in the development of Aston's future product lines

“THERE IS FORMIDABLE COMPETITION, BUT ALSO THE RIGHT COMPETITION FOR ASTON MARTIN”

for the road and racing, with the Valkyrie conceived by F1 design legend Adrian Newey intended to both promote those cars and feed into their development.

“At Le Mans and in the WEC and IMSA there is formidable competition, but also the right competition for Aston Martin,” said Adam Carter, who joined Aston to set up AMPT at the start of 2022 and is also now the marque's head of endurance motorsport. “The competition is the same competition that we face in the marketplace, so it is right for us to be involved.

“With this programme we will see our sportscar racing thoroughbred bloodline coming out in new product lines, and people will see that Aston Martin is a



ASTON MARTIN

Ex-Williams man
Carter has Acura
prototype history

sportscar racing company. Part of AMPT's role is to be a portal and a facilitator to get that true motor racing engineering directly linked back into our road cars.”

Aston Martin executive chairman Lawrence Stroll first hinted last September that the Valkyrie LMH programme announced during Le Mans week in 2019, and then mothballed just over six months later, could be revived. Carter, who joined Aston from the Williams F1 team and previously worked for Wirth Research on the Acura LMP prototypes, stressed that it had been “important not to rush into a programme like this”.

“You've got to establish the programme on the right foundation and have all the >>

AMR STAYS WITH PRODRIVE FOR GT

Aston Martin has re-committed to its long-standing involvement in GT racing with Prodrive under the Aston Martin Racing banner and is working on new versions of its GT3 and GT4 Vantages for next season.

Customer GT racing will remain central to the marque's motorsport strategy, explained new head of endurance motorsport Adam Carter. “It goes back to Aston Martin building racing sportscars being part of our DNA,” he said. “GT3 and GT4 are absolutely the places for our cars to be raced. Our customers love racing Aston Martins: they love the cars and they love the brand.”

Prodrive has had a rolling contract to produce Aston's GT racing machinery since 2004, when it developed the DBR9 GT1 car that started racing the following season, and Carter confirmed that this would continue. “The product



JEP/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Prodrive has delivered for Aston Martin over the years has been great: it has been performant and reliable,” he said. “They have done a great job and there is no reason to move away – success should be rewarded.”

Carter explained that there would be input from the new Aston Martin Performance Technologies operation, which will be centred on getting the GT racing programme “cross-pollinating more” with the

firm's road car division.

Aston announced that it will be upgrading the Vantage in both its GT3 and GT4 iterations for next year. Carter confirmed that these would be evolutions rather than new cars, but stated that the “naming of the cars remains a work in progress”. He also reiterated Aston Martin's desire to be on the grid in the new LMGT3 class of the World Endurance Championship next year.

Carter said that he hopes the

FIA and WEC promoter the Automobile Club de l'Ouest will look favourably on a marque that has been involved in the GTE Pro and Am divisions since the establishment of the series in its current guise in 2012. “Aston Martin has got a very long history with WEC and has supported the championship and previously GT racing at Le Mans,” he said. “We absolutely hope to be at Le Mans and in the WEC next year in LMGT3, but we also respect the position of the FIA and the ACO.”

Carter said it remains too early to name the team that Aston will put forward to take up any entries, but Heart of Racing boss Ian James outlined a desire for the team to remain in the series next year. “We would like to be there in the WEC and would hope that we would be one of Aston's favoured teams,” he said.



Racer James heads up the Heart of Racing operation



Unlike the previous plan, the Valkyrie LMH will be a non-hybrid car

right partners,” he said. “That doesn’t happen overnight. It is not an easy thing to do to go and be competitive in what is being called a golden era of sportscar racing, but that’s what we are going out to do.”

Carter revealed that work on reviving the Valkyrie LMH started “about March time” this year: “The question was asked of me whether this was something we could do and could we put a programme together with the clear objective of writing a great new chapter for Aston Martin in endurance racing. It was not only could we do it, but could we do it well. That was the brief put to me by the company leadership.”

Carter insisted that Heart of Racing, which is backed by computer games tycoon

Gabe Newell, was not in the frame as a potential partner at that stage. He said that there “were other people who put their hands up and showed interest”, but that the US team “came into consideration very early in the programme”. Heart of Racing team principal Ian James said that it is “absolutely the right time for us to step into the top classes of WEC and IMSA and challenge for overall honours”. He added that, with the support of AMPT, “we have all the tools to hit the bullseye”.

Aston will continue to work with Multimatic Motorsports on the Valkyrie LMH. The Canadian-headquartered operation was developing the original version of the car, and subsequently

transferred the knowledge from the programme into the AMR Pro trackday car launched in the summer of 2021.

The original Valkyrie race programme took advantage of rules that allowed a manufacturer to develop an LMH from a road-going hypercar or supersportscar. But the car that will hit the track next year is being developed as a pure-bred prototype because the starting point is the AMR Pro rather than the road-going Valkyrie.

“The AMR Pro is essentially a Le Mans prototype that someone can buy and use as a track car – it is a 1000bhp, 1000kg racing car with LMP1 performance,” explained Carter. “We were able to do it because the new race car is based off the AMR Pro,

TIMELINE ASTON’S QUEST TO REPEAT 1959 GLORY

1959

Aston Martin triumphs at Le Mans with the svelte DBR1 prototype, with Carroll Shelby and Roy Salvadori leading home a marque 1-2. Aston goes on to seal the sportscar world championship with a maximum score.



1960

The factory team under John Wyer switches its attention to F1, but a privateer DBR1 run by the Border Reivers team mixes it with the more powerful Ferraris and ends up third in the hands of Jim Clark and Salvadori.



1962-64

Two of the line of so-called Project cars – the DP212 and DP215 – are entered as prototypes, alongside DP214 GTs, and should be viewed as outright contenders. They fail to register a finish, but Graham Hill leads early on in 1962 (below).



1967

Team Surtees enters a pair of Lola T70 Mk3 prototypes with factory-supplied five-litre Aston V8s. The cars struggle for straightline speed and go out early with engine problems. John Surtees retires after three laps!





ASTON MARTIN

the team to “take it one step at a time”. “We are open to running more cars, but it will all depend on how testing goes and whether there could be a commercial element to running two cars in either series,” he explained. “That stuff is not defined.”

Heart of Racing is headquartered in Arizona and runs its programmes from workshops in Florida. James explained that the team will “have a foothold in Europe to service the WEC side”. He didn’t rule out partnering with another team – its WEC car is run by the AMR Prodrive set-up after it took over the NorthWest AMR GTE Am entry from Spa in April – and said that

“WHAT WE ARE 100% COMMITTED TO IS ONE CAR IN WEC AND ONE CAR IN IMSA”

which gives you a number of opportunities.”

The definitive Valkyrie LMH will be a non-hybrid like the original version of the car and the AMR Pro. Running an energy-retrieval system – the road car has a rear-axle hybrid – was considered for the latest car, but “quickly discounted” according to Carter. That means power will solely come from a race version of the bespoke Cosworth V12 developed for the road car.

Carter explained that the AMR Pro will provide a platform to allow Aston to begin testing in preparation for 2025 almost straight away. A more definitive car, he said, is likely to hit the track “in the earlier part of next year”. Aston has “a very solid test programme laid out” for 2024,

according to Carter. Homologation of the car, which will make its race debut in January 2025 at the Daytona 24 Hours IMSA season opener, is planned for late autumn.

The Valkyrie LMH programme with Heart of Racing has been confirmed for two seasons, 2025 and 2026. Its extent could increase either in year one or two, however. “What we are 100% committed to is one car in WEC and one car in IMSA, and we will continue to look at the right opportunities to see if it is possible to put a second car in either championship,” said Carter. “We’d love to do that with Heart of Racing, but the door is not closed on having discussions with other people.”

James stressed that it was important for

“nothing is off the table, but it will be a Heart of Racing team”.

Aston and Heart of Racing have yet to name drivers, but James has stated that the team will follow the model employed by Ferrari and Porsche by promoting GT drivers. “We have seen that in the Ferrari and Porsche programmes where they have really embraced their GT drivers and it has been very successful for them,” said James. “We will look to choose our line-up from the current crop of Heart of Racing and Aston Martin Racing drivers initially, and then we will supplement that as we need to.”

GARY WATKINS

P20 OPINION

1982-84

The quasi-works Nimrods with Aston’s V8 in a Lola chassis fly the flag for the marque at Le Mans in the first three years of Group C. A privateer car entered by Viscount Downe takes a best result of seventh on its debut in 1982.



1989

Aston makes a full factory return to Le Mans with the AMR1 Group C developed by Ray Mallock Limited. Company politics within Ford, which owns a majority stake in the British manufacturer, does for the programme after one year.



2008-10

Aston racing partner Prodrive takes advantage of favourable rules for LMP1 cars with GT1 engines. It puts its DBR9 V12 into a Lola in 2008, then reworks the car for 2009 into the DBR1-2 and claims fourth at Le Mans that year.



2011

Prodrive produces an all-new P1 design, the open-top AMR-One LMP1 powered by a straight-six turbo. The project is a day late and a dollar short: the two cars manage six racing laps between them before it’s canned.



FIA confirms approval of Andretti plan

FORMULA 1

The FIA has finally announced that it has accepted a bid submitted by Andretti Formula Racing LLC to create a new Formula 1 team. Of the candidates – which also included FIA F2 squads Rodin Cars (Carlin, see right) and Hitech, and Asian start-up LKYSUNZ – only the American bid supported by General Motors firm Cadillac has been given the green light after a “thorough appraisal”.

The application will now be passed on to FOM for commercial discussions. But incumbent competitors will vehemently object to having their slice of the financial pie reduced to feed another entry. The governing body was satisfied that Andretti could prove its ability to raise and maintain sufficient funding to participate “at a competitive level”, and that its plans to satisfy sustainability credentials and achieve “a positive

societal impact” also passed muster.

FIA president Mohammed Ben Sulayem said: “The FIA is obliged to approve applications that comply with the Expressions of Interests application requirements and we have adhered to that procedure in deciding that Andretti Formula Racing LLC’s application would proceed to the next stage of the application process. In taking that decision, the FIA is acting in accordance with EU directives on motor sport participation and development. Andretti Formula Racing LLC was the only entity which fulfils the

selection criteria that was set in all material respects. I congratulate Michael Andretti and his team on a thorough submission. I also want to thank all prospective teams for their interest and participation.”

A brief bulletin from F1 read: “We note the FIA’s conclusions in relation to the first and second phases of their process and will now conduct our own assessment of the merits of the remaining application.” If, as is anticipated, F1 tells Andretti that there’s no room at the inn, then expect lawyers for the American parties to start making noise.

MATT KEW



McLaren's Toyota links ignite speculation

FORMULA 1

Toyota is thought to be strengthening its ties to the McLaren Formula 1 team amid rumours that the Japanese manufacturer is considering a championship comeback. McLaren has not long finished correlating its brand-new wind tunnel in Woking, which means it will no longer rent the Toyota facility in Cologne as it has done since 2010. But rather than this signalling that the two firms will go their separate ways, both want to trade engineering knowhow.

Initially, this reignited relationship arrives in the form of McLaren signing 2022 Le Mans 24 Hours victor Ryo Hirakawa as a reserve for next year. Also a Super GT champion and Super Formula runner-up, Hirakawa will take on simulator duties and test the



2021 MCL35M alongside representing Toyota in the World Endurance Championship.

Hirakawa, 29, appeals because of his FIA superlicence. He can jump straight in and help McLaren replace two-time IndyCar

champion Alex Palou, since driver and team are embroiled in a legal battle after the Spaniard appeared to renege on a 2024 deal to drive for Arrow McLaren.

Otherwise, Hirakawa is a leftfield choice. But team principal Andrea Stella has

justified the signing. The Italian said: “We are also interested in a bit of exchange of how we deal with performance, how we deal with driver development. So, we want to sort of expand a bit our horizons.”

Toyota, which bled billions of dollars during its 2002-09 F1 foray, has left the door open to expanded participation over the coming years. Motorsport advisor and ex-Williams grand prix racer Kazuki Nakajima said: “This deal is really purely focusing on a driver, supporting a driver’s dream. At the moment, it really has nothing to do with that. I know, of course, you can think about it, and there are a lot of rumours. But I can clearly say that it’s no, and nothing to do with it. For the future, we never know.”

JONATHAN NOBLE



FORMULA 1 Former W Series racer Jessica Hawkins completed several runs aboard an Aston Martin AMR21 from 2021 at the Hungaroring last week to become the first female to test near-current Formula 1 machinery since Tatiana Calderon in 2018. The 28-year-old team ambassador chalked 26 laps in between inclement weather while sharing the car with Aston reserve Felipe Drugovich. “It’s taken me every bit of blood, sweat and tears to get here,” she said. “Nothing will compare to the acceleration and braking of a Formula 1 car and, having looked at the data, I’m really proud of my performance. I’ll keep pushing for more and, in the process, I want to inspire other women and let them know they should follow their dream no matter what it is.” **Photograph: Ferraro/Aston Martin**

Rodin boss explains failed F1 bid

FORMULA 1

Rodin Cars founder David Dicker has reasoned why his organisation should have got the nod from the FIA to form an 11th Formula 1 team versus sole successful applicant Andretti. The governing body has formally accepted the American bid (see left), although this is expected to be shot down by FOM due to the commercial-based resistance from the incumbent squads.

Australian data billionaire Dicker (right) has outlined why he thinks his bid had the edge, although he writes that it was “anticipated from the outset” that Andretti would be the only proposer to advance to the next stage. He has touted the merits of the New Zealand-based programme establishing a constructor in the Southern Hemisphere. He would have privately

bankrolled the entry rather than rely on outside funding, “had the opportunity of discussions for a Ferrari collaboration”, and the prior acquisition of Carlin would have created a clear junior single-seater ladder from Formula 4 to F1.

But the biggest talking point is that a female driver would have been guaranteed a race seat for Rodin Cars. Dicker has tested AlphaTauri F1 substitute Liam Lawson and current British F4 points leader Louis Sharp, yet he says that W Series champion Jamie Chadwick would have got the nod. He revealed that in light of lapping a Rodin FZed, “which is a car somewhat quicker than a GP2/F2 car, Jamie performed exceptionally well and, if she was available, we would have no hesitation in putting her in a seat”.

MATT KEW



RODIN CARS

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Tanak returns to Hyundai, where his last win came on Ypres Rally in 2022 (inset)



Tanak returns to Hyundai to bid for more titles

WRC

World Rally Championship heavy hitter Ott Tänak is to leave M-Sport and rejoin Hyundai for the 2024 season.

The 2019 world champion's move comes just days after scoring a second victory of the WRC season with the M-Sport Ford Puma squad on Rally Chile last weekend. This will be his second spell with the South Korean marque after sensationally leaving the team with a year remaining on his contract at the end of the 2022 season.

Aside from wins in Sweden and Chile, and a second in Croatia, Tänak's 2023 campaign at M-Sport has been plagued by misfortune and reliability woes. The 35-year-old has been convinced by

Hyundai's new management structure, led by ex-Renault Formula 1 boss Cyril Abiteboul, and its new technical director, former Volkswagen WRC and Williams F1 luminary Francois-Xavier Demaison.

"Since our paths parted exactly one year ago, the team has been working very hard on the new technical structure," said Tänak. "Hyundai Motorsport has a clear vision and target for the near future, and it is something that convinced me to join our forces again. Our goal in this new chapter will be nothing less than to win all the titles and, with the new structure of the team, we have all the tools needed to achieve it. Game on."

Abiteboul told Autosport that the signing of Tänak is a clear statement of intent from

Hyundai and its commitment to the WRC. "For me, signing a world champion and a rally winner is extremely important, but it has also been our target since I joined the team," he said. "It is a way to state our ambition but a way to show that changes that we have done already are starting to be convincing, as Ott is coming back to us with good reasons. There is a bit of a feeling of unfinished business on both sides which we hope we can complete."

Tanak will again team up with Thierry Neuville, who is under contract for 2024. Hyundai's plans as to whether it will run three or four i20Ns are yet to be announced.

TOM HOWARD

P36 RALLY CHILE ACTION

Elite British pair end GT4 season with a victory



GT4 EUROPEAN SERIES

British youngsters Josh Rattican and Tom Emson claimed their maiden GT4 European Series race win in the series finale at Barcelona last weekend.

Rattican led the Saturday race comfortably in their Elite Motorsport McLaren Artura and handed over to Emson, who converted for victory. He headed the Speedcar Audi of Benjamin

Lariche and Robert Consani in a safety car finish, while the sister Elite McLaren of Anglo-Irish pair Jack Mitchell and Alex Denning was fourth behind Alpine duo Antoine Leclerc and Jean-Bernard Bouvet.

Hofor Racing by Bonk Motorsport BMW duo Gabriele Piana and Michael Schrey put the 2023 title to bed with victory in race two, comfortably clear of Mitchell/Denning, with

third going to outside title shots Lariche and Consani ahead of the Mirage Racing Aston Martin of Jamie Day and Ruben del Sarte.

Northern Irish-Turkish duo Tom Edgar and Berkay Besler, points runners-up pre-weekend, stormed their Borusan Otomotiv BMW from 36th to 10th in the opener. Now out of title contention, Edgar was spun out of the battle for fourth by contact late in race two.



Ex-champ di Grassi returns to Abt

FORMULA E

Lucas di Grassi has returned to the Abt Formula E team with which he won the 2016-17 title for next season, and will join forces with the incumbent Nico Muller.

The Brazilian, one of the most successful drivers in the all-electric championship's history, has been a stalwart of the series since its inception in 2014. He has amassed a joint-record 13 wins, 12 of which came with the Abt squad where he spent the first seven seasons.

"It just feels great to be back with Abt," said the 39-year-old. "Not only did I win two titles [including the teams' crown] with this team, but I also have endless

memories with all the people who work there with so much passion. I couldn't be more excited to return after two years and I'm really looking forward to working together. We will give our all to get back, step by step, the results that the whole team deserves."

Di Grassi returns to Abt Cupra after just one season with Mahindra. He achieved a pole and a podium in the opening round before scoring only two more points finishes over the remainder the season.

Muller will combine his FE programme with racing for Peugeot in the World Endurance Championship. The Swiss stays on after taking three points finishes from the final four races in 2023.

DS Penske also confirmed its driver line-up last week, with Stoffel Vandoorne (left) and Jean-Eric Vergne remaining for a second season together. Like Muller, both are Peugeot drivers but have committed to Formula E over the WEC, with three dates currently clashing on the 2024 calendars.

Porsche remains the only team not to officially announce its line-up for 2024, but it is expected to retain Antonio Felix da Costa and Pascal Wehrlein.

STEFAN MACKLEY



DI RESTA TO SPEARHEAD UNITED IMSA ATTACK

IMSA

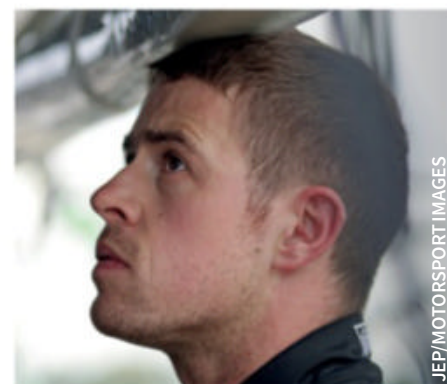
Paul di Resta will contest most of the IMSA SportsCar Championship for the first time next year as he doubles up on his World Endurance Championship programme with Peugeot. The ex-Formula 1 driver will compete in LMP2 with the Anglo-American United Autosports squad.

Di Resta is maintaining a relationship with United that stretches back to 2018 and includes class victory at the Le Mans 24 Hours in 2020 and a campaign in this year's European Le Mans Series. He will drive one of United's pair of ORECA-Gibson 07s alongside mandatory Bronze-rated driver Dan Goldburg, who is moving up from the LMP3 ranks, with ex-Formula 2 racer Marino Sato joining them for the five endurance rounds of the series.

A clash between the IMSA round at Mosport and the Interlagos WEC fixture means di Resta will only be able to contest six of the seven P2 points counters. His replacement has yet to be named.

Di Resta, 37, contested three IMSA rounds in 2018 with United, which is transplanting its WEC team to North America next year after P2 disappears from the world championship.

GARY WATKINS



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The Nankang AR-1 is available in 12" to 21" with more sizes constantly being added. It's a faster, more refined track tyre, designed to combat high intensity circuits such as Nurburgring and Spa, for the track enthusiast who is hunting lap times. With only one compound option and with all tyres being produced with 5.5mm tread depth, the AR-1 is positioning itself in amongst the greats of the track tyre market. The AR-1 is used as a control tyre by championships like BMW 1 series SuperCup, Civic Challenge & Classic VW Cup as well as a podium winning tyre in open tyre series such as Tourismo X, BMWCCR and 750MC Club Enduro. 100TW tyres in 17" and above now contain a kevlar lining to further increase stability and consistency. The AR-1 has achieved EU tyre labelling giving it MSA List 1B approval



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BTCC wins run from Collard's BMW in 2009 to Sutton's Ford

New name and base for the motors from Motorbase

BTCC

Should Ash Sutton succeed in not snatching defeat from the jaws of a 45-point advantage over closest rival Tom Ingram at Brands Hatch this weekend, it looked as though Motorbase Performance was going to finally claim its first British Touring Car Championship title. But even if Sutton wins, that won't be the case.

The team, almost ever-present in the BTCC since 2006 and now running its Ford Focuses under the NAPA Racing banner, has been renamed Alliance Racing with immediate effect. That may sound like an homage to the 1980s middle ground of British politics, but cast aside all thoughts of Davids Steel and Owen cosying up together. Instead, it reflects the next stage for team owner Pete Osborne, who bought Motorbase from founder David Bartrum during the winter of 2020-21.

As well as becoming a BTCC powerhouse and backing a roster of

proteges via its Academy, the team has further ambitions. Osborne states that "we've had strong plans right from the start and now we've done a few years learning and growing within the BTCC and TOCA package, we aim to continue in that vein. The team is made up of fantastic individuals who all echo our desires to grow and expand into other areas of the industry while keeping the BTCC as a flagship programme."

Chief among these 'other areas' is an expansion into GT3. When and where is unclear at present, although Osborne's ultimate ambition in this arena is to enter the Le Mans 24 Hours. The team will also move from its long-time base in Wrotham, Kent to a "30,000 square foot motorsport headquarters in the Midlands in preparation for the 2024 season". Although the deal has not been confirmed, this is expected to be the former Ralliart Mitsubishi WRC premises in Rugby.

MARCUS SIMMONS

MOTORBASE BTCC RACE WINNERS

DRIVER	WINS	STARTS
Mat Jackson	20	225
Ash Sutton	13	57
Dan Cammish	4	54
Rory Butcher	3	39
Andrew Jordan	2	30
Jake Hill	2	33
Rob Collard	2	59
Tom Chilton	2	60
Ollie Jackson	2	117
Dan Rowbottom	1	27
Sam Tordoff	1	29
Steven Kane	1	59
Aron Smith	1	60

KIRKWOOD STAYS PUT

Exciting IndyCar talent Kyle Kirkwood has earned a multi-year contract extension with the redubbed Andretti Global team. The Floridian, two times a winner in 2023, will line up next season alongside Colton Herta and the incoming Marcus Ericsson.

PIRELLI EXTENDS WITH SRO

Pirelli has extended its tyre-supply deal with the SRO Motorsports Group for another five years through to the end of 2028. It will provide tyres for all of SRO's championships, including the GT World Challenge Europe, while it will also become the title sponsor of the GT2 European Series.

MARTIN WINS AT LAGUNA

American-based Brit Will Martin scored his third Carrera Cup North America victory at Laguna Seca last weekend. The Sussex racer ended up in the Corkscrew gravel trap thanks to a tangle with champion-elect Riley Dickinson in race one, won by Aussie Tom Sargent. Martin led all the way from Dickinson in the sequel.

F4 TALENT IN POLE POSITION

Polish talent Kacper Sztuka relieved Brit Arvid Lindblad of the Italian Formula 4 points lead last weekend at Mugello, where he won all three races. Red Bull Junior Lindblad finished third in race one, but a penalty for jumping the start dropped him to fifth. Lindblad crashed out of race two, and the Prema Racing driver was 10th in the finale to trail US Racing ace Sztuka by 1.5 points going into the Vallelunga finale. Prema's McLaren protege Ugo Ugochukwu was second in all three races and is also in the title frame, 18 points adrift.

THE KING IS LEON

Mexican Noel Leon became the first palindromically named Euroformula Open champion at Mugello last weekend, with one round remaining. Motopark racer Leon (below) passed Francesco Simonazzi for victory with four laps to go in the first race. He was third in the reversed-grid sequel, won by British team-mate Cian Shields.



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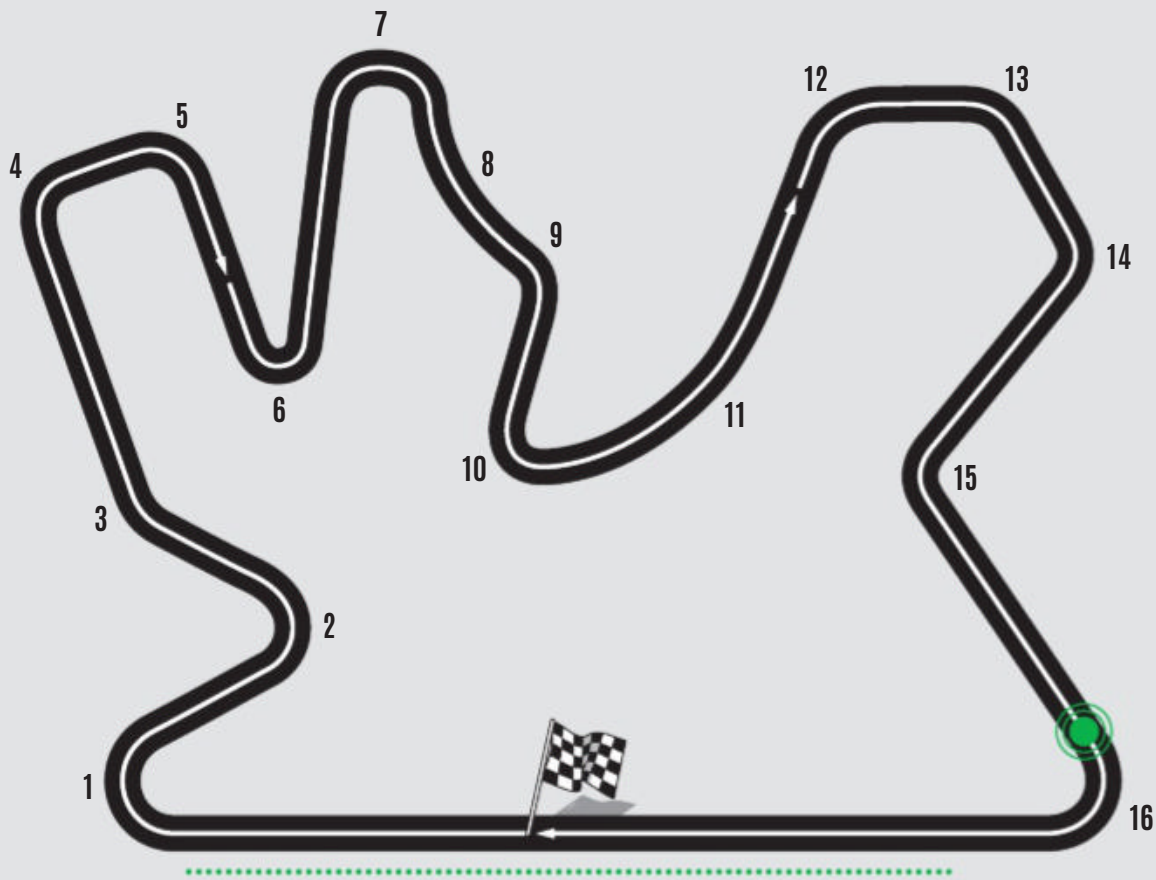
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F1 QATAR GRAND PRIX PREVIEW



Losail
Length 3.367 miles
Number of laps 57

DRS detection
DRS zone

UK START TIMES

Friday 6 October

FP 1430
QUALIFYING 1800

Saturday 7 October

SPRINT QUALIFYING 1400
SPRINT RACE 1830

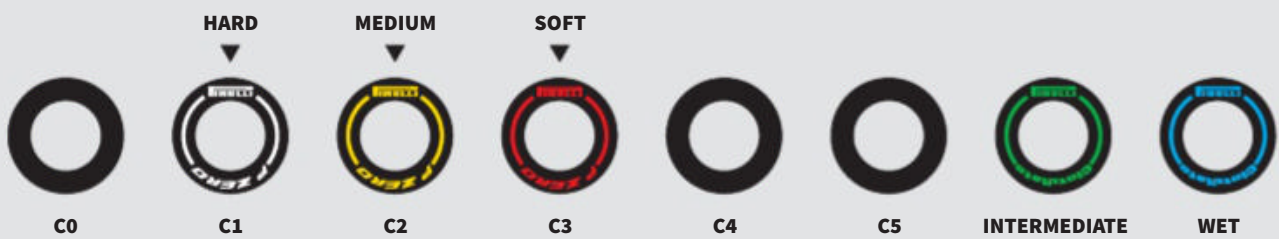
Sunday 8 October

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TYRE ALLOCATION



CHAMPIONSHIP POSITIONS

Drivers

1	Verstappen	400
2	Perez	223
3	Hamilton	190
4	Alonso	174
5	Sainz	150

Constructors

1	Red Bull	623
2	Mercedes	305
3	Ferrari	285
4	Aston Martin	221
5	McLaren	172



TEE

LOSAIL STATS

Previous winner

2021 Lewis Hamilton Mercedes

Laps led

Lewis Hamilton 57



DUNBAR

2021 POLE POSITION
Lewis Hamilton
1m20.827s

POLE LAP RECORD
Lewis Hamilton
1m20.827s (2021)

RACE LAP RECORD
Max Verstappen
1m23.196s (2021)



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A fitting way to finish?

Red Bull may be looking forward to it, but it feels a little off that Max Verstappen is likely to lift his third crown in a sprint race, detracting from the grand prix

MATT KEW

There's no need to feel sorry for Max Verstappen. He's on the cusp of becoming a three-time Formula 1 world champion, after all. But for a driver presently operating at such a consistently high level, perhaps he deserves to wrap up one of his titles in something approaching 'normal fashion'.

The last-lap farce of Abu Dhabi 2021 was met by Mercedes seeking immediate legal counsel to throw the result into doubt. Few could get their points permutations correct for a rain-shortened Suzuka contest last year that left Verstappen to eventually find out his fate courtesy of a parc ferme chat with the FIA. And then there's this weekend in Qatar. Should Verstappen score three points or more on Saturday, regardless of what his competitors might muster, then one of the most outspoken critics of the format stands to seal his third crown in a sprint race.

Maybe that's fitting for the 2023 season, however. In a year when one driver and team have walked all over the competition, where there was no retiring four-time champion and Alpine-McLaren contract saga to spice up the driver market 'silly season', or even a controversial breach of the cost cap to get people talking, a showstopper coronation would feel out of place. On track and off it, this has not been a blockbuster narrative for the ages.

“This will all be a distant memory when next season surely goes down to the wire...”

When a point for fastest lap was introduced for 2019, there were immediate reservations that something so trivial might influence a championship. Had that rule change been introduced 11 years earlier, 2008 champion Felipe Massa wouldn't now be compiling a legal challenge, for example... Then, in 2021, sprint races were adopted. Initially, the winner banked three points. Now it's eight. That they pay out at all and have been scheduled within the final stages of a season means the FIA has already flirted with the idea that the champion could be crowned outside of a grand prix, the sanctity of which has been devalued by the very existence of sprints, let alone the prospect of one deciding the title.

Red Bull team principal Christian Horner, himself a sprint race sceptic (listen to his monotonic radio messages at the chequered

flag), said to Sky Sports: “The fact that it [could be] done in Qatar on a Saturday evening will make the Sunday even more enjoyable – to go into that grand prix, if he achieves it, as the world champion.” More enjoyable for whom? Those clad in Red Bull attire only, it seems. His comments, in essence, suggest that, with the pressure potentially lifted, the Qatar GP will act as something between a testimonial and an extended parade lap for Verstappen. Hardly a thrilling prospect.

Interest wanes when the championship is won with rounds to spare. Should Verstappen get the job done on Saturday, he will technically seal the title with six GPs to run. In doing so, he would match Michael Schumacher's record effort from 2002, when the Ferrari hero seized the spoils at the French GP in July.

This time around, any dip in the audience might even arrive overnight when there's the 'main event' still to play. It's not as though the sheer spectacle of cars charging around the largely unnoteworthy Losail Circuit is reason enough to cancel plans and weld yourself to the sofa.

While comparisons between motorsport and football aren't seamless, at least when the victor is crowned on the pitch with a game or two to spare there are other prizes up for grabs in terms of European qualification or surviving relegation. But where F1 is concerned, although the extra millions that a midfield team might bank by climbing from seventh to sixth in the constructors' championship is critical to them, it doesn't equate to excitement for viewers. And even though Verstappen successfully defending his title is realistically little more than a formality, still a degree of intrigue will be lost when it's mathematically sealed. That it could be converted via the medium of a sprint race diminishes the anticipation that bit more.

Sprint races may well have a place in F1. Certainly, they have a good habit of feeding into the weekend narrative. The headline-dominating Copse crash between Verstappen and Lewis Hamilton at Silverstone in 2021 wouldn't have happened if the duo hadn't dined the day before. Similarly, the best race of 2022, the Austrian GP, wouldn't have featured Charles Leclerc passing Verstappen for the lead three times unless Ferrari had analysed why it had shredded its Pirellis 24 hours earlier. But for a sprint race to crown a champion gives a timetabling quirk far too much prominence.

Then again, since there hasn't been any kind of title race to latch onto in 2023, maybe such a damp squib is a neat snapshot of the entire campaign. Besides, this will all be a distant memory when next season surely goes down to the wire as McLaren takes another leap forward and Mercedes, having ditched its size-zero sidepod architecture, finds its ground-effects feet to make Red Bull sweat... 🍷



Back where it truly belongs

Aston Martin has become a welcome player at the front of the Formula 1 field this year, but sportscar racing is the marque's spiritual home

KEVIN TURNER

Ferrari's impending return to the Le Mans 24 Hours was arguably the biggest motorsport story of 2021, while the famous Italian marque's victory in the French classic will probably stand as this year's feel-good moment. This week's Aston Martin announcement should be viewed in a similar way.

Aston Martin's comeback is a big deal and – whisper it – endurance competition is its true motorsport home.

The Formula 1 team has added some much-needed spice to this season, but Aston's time at the pinnacle of the single-seater ladder stands at four seasons: 1959 and 2021-23, aside from a brief grand prix presence between the world wars. In long-distance racing, Aston Martin has a rich history. For Brits, only Jaguar is as big a name and it doesn't have such a long story at the Circuit de la Sarthe, even though it has seven wins to Aston's one.

Aston Martin was a force in the smaller-engined divisions before overall victories became possible. The 1.5-litre Ulster punched above its weight and managed third at Le Mans in 1935.

An often-forgotten success came at the 1948 Spa 24 Hours, when Jock Horsfall and Leslie Johnson won the first post-Second World War edition of the event in a 2-Litre Sports. That victory came shortly after industrialist David Brown had bought Aston Martin, and he made a concerted competition effort in the 1950s.

The DB2 was a consistent top-six threat at Le Mans in the early 1950s, finishing 3-5-7-10-13 in 1951, while the DB3S was runner-up three times, in 1955, 1956 and 1958.

Aston Martin produced some of the best-handling sportscars, even though they were outgunned by rivals such as Ferrari, Jaguar and Maserati. That helps to explain why, before 1959, Aston had won at Goodwood four times and twice triumphed in the gruelling Nurburgring 1000Km but not yet cracked Le Mans.

That changed in 1959 when the DBR1 scored a 1-2 after the Ferraris overheated. Anyone who has seen a DBR1 in action will appreciate the place of Ted Cutting's design in racing history.

Thanks to Stirling Moss, Aston also won the Nurburgring 1000Km and Goodwood Tourist Trophy again, thereby pipping Ferrari and Porsche to the sportscar world championship. That remains a high-water mark for Aston Martin, but there have been plenty of stories – good and bad – since then.

Brown's series of Project cars promised much but were invariably outnumbered. The last great day of his era came when Roy Salvadori's DP214 beat Ferrari in the 1963 Coppa Intereuropa at Monza following a duel with the 250 GTO of Mike Parkes.

Thereafter efforts involving Aston Martin, usually around its V8 engine, ranged from the disastrous (Lola-Astons in 1960s) to solid-but-unspectacular (Nimrod and EMKA in Group C). The 1989 AMR1 showed promise before the project was abandoned.

Aston Martin's second golden era had to wait until Prodrive and the GT1/GT3 programmes in the mid-2000s. The DBRS9 was a successful racer in the burgeoning GT3 category, but it was its bigger brother, the DBR9, that really grabbed the imagination. The V12 sounded fantastic and provided some of the decade's best battles against the crack Pratt & Miller Chevrolet Corvette team at Le Mans and in the American Le Mans Series. The Corvette came out on top at home, but at the 24 Hours the score was 2-2.

“Its main rivals are in Hypercar. It makes sense Aston Martin joins the ever-growing party”

GT success encouraged the Lola-Aston Martin LMP project that yielded a Le Mans Series title in 2009 and fourth at the 24 Hours that same year. The latter was a victory of sorts since the Gulf-liveried machine was the top petrol runner, behind the Peugeot and Audi turbodiesels that nobody expected Aston Martin to beat. Unfortunately, that then led to the disastrous open AMR-One that abruptly ended Aston's last attempt at outright victory.

Aston's efforts in the hard-fought GT classes continued, at least until the end of 2020. The V8 Vantage scored three GTE Am titles in the World Endurance Championship to go along with its 2016 GTE Pro crown, as well as two Le Mans class wins. Its turbocharged replacement managed the rare feat of *two* class wins at Le Mans in 2020 and the GTE Pro crown, then took a Le Mans and WEC GTE Am double last year with TF Sport. It's therefore great to hear that all-new GT3 and GT4 contenders are part of Aston Martin's agenda.

But many of its main rivals in the marketplace are in Hypercar, taking on WEC and IMSA in the top class. It makes sense that Aston Martin joins the ever-growing party and fans should rejoice.

As well as chasing a follow-up to its 1959 successes, this also provides the opportunity to tick new boxes. A Sebring 12 Hours win would sit nicely alongside the DBR9's GT1 victory on its debut there in 2005, while a shot at the Daytona 24 Hours to follow Heart of Racing's GTD triumph this year would be apt.

Traditionalists were concerned when Lawrence Stroll took over and seemed to put the focus on F1. So fair play to him – and Gabe Newell – for taking Aston Martin back to where it belongs. There's a long way to go before we know how successful this latest chapter in Aston's Le Mans story will be, but the good news is there will be one. And, who knows, perhaps it could enjoy the same fairytale return in 2025 as old foe Ferrari did this year. ✨

YOUR SAY

Fans want to see lots of cars and drivers challenging for the wins. Reintroduce pre-qualification, so 30 drivers and cars are fighting for 20 grid slots

JUSTIN LYLE

Wanted: five new F1 teams

I get Formula 1 is hugely expensive, and as the teams put on the show they should get rewarded. However, fans want to see lots of cars and drivers challenging for the wins.

Therefore, the FIA should negotiate a different commercial split for the teams, to reduce it from the current situation over, say, the next three-five years, having banned the use of wind tunnels and providing a standard rear wing. Reintroduce pre-qualification, so 30 drivers and cars are fighting for 20 grid slots.

They are then able to support new teams, perhaps those they already know from F2 or F3. Or for a new team like Andretti Cadillac to step up. This would keep the fans happy and improve the show.

This also means special talents like Liam Lawson or Oliver

Bearman, young up and coming drivers, can get permanent opportunities to drive as there are enough seats for all the talent.

Justin Lyle

Glasgow

Hard-done-by Berger

I can't help but feel as though Gerhard Berger has been hard done by in your top 10 Benetton drivers feature (28 September) being placed only fifth – he was the man who scored the team's first and last victories after all! Also, it says that Giancarlo Fisichella had no poles with the team but that wasn't the case, he did in fact take pole position in the wet at the 1998 Austrian Grand Prix.

Joe Padgett

By email



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WHAT'S GOING ON WITH ALONSO AT ASTON MARTIN?

After a brilliant start to the season, the double world champion and the team in green have fallen back of late. Time to look at their 2023 ups and downs...

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

PHOTOGRAPHY  **motorsport
IMAGES**

“A

t the beginning of the year, I was voted for nine or 10 points. And now I am four or five. But I am at the same level.”

Given he said this a week on from getting his lowest Autosport race rating score from the 2023 Formula 1 season so far in an off-colour Singapore Grand Prix, we can tell that Fernando Alonso reads our regular driver ratings feature. Or that he checks his own mark at any rate...

But Alonso's slightly sassy assertion after qualifying his Aston Martin AMR23 10th last time out at Suzuka – the fourth time in seven events he'd started on the fifth row – provides a handily spot-on metaphor for his first season in green.

Yes, when it was clear during the early rounds that Aston was Red Bull's closest challenger, while Ferrari and Mercedes again erred in their respective car designs and McLaren was still fighting to escape Q1 with the initially sub-par MCL60, Alonso was scooping up plaudits. His run of six podiums during the opening eight events and occasional coaching of team-mate Lance Stroll combined to highlight the imbalance of Aston's new line-up.

Alonso was mighty, particularly in running Max Verstappen to within just 0.1 seconds of the critical Monaco pole and edging out the equally rapid Charles Leclerc. Only Aston fluffing its lines over pitstop strategy as the late-race rain arrived in the principality let him down, the team acknowledging afterwards that, had it only pitted once, Alonso would have jumped the dominant leader.

Again, Alonso was superb at Zandvoort, scooping his most recent podium with a battling, assured drive in the mixed conditions while even a fellow world champion slipped off the road. But that drive in the Netherlands was rather unexpected – Alonso hadn't visited the podium since five races earlier, when he edged out Lewis Hamilton behind Verstappen in Canada. Aston's once so promising season had simmered off the boil.

As F1 jets off towards its second Qatar GP – the scene of the first podium of Alonso's comeback in the championship in 2021 – the story of Alonso and Aston in 2023 has reached a point familiar from his earlier career exploits.

That “this is a lovely car to drive” radio call from the Bahrain opener is but a distant memory. Now, F1 observers more readily recall Alonso declaring the AMR23 “undriveable” in Singapore, and lamenting that he'd been thrown “to the lions” in pitting early during the tyre-management strategy games in Japan.

Alonso brushed the latter off after the race at Suzuka, saying “it's the same classic theme, the classic FOM radio – completely out of context”. Indeed, while this could be described simplistically as a crack in Alonso's relationship with his new team, the reality is that their honeymoon period had been over for quite a while. In fact, ever since that Monaco near-miss.



“IT WAS MORE OR LESS EXPECTED THAT FERRARI, MERCEDES WILL MATCH OUR PACE AND POTENTIALLY GO AHEAD”

Other than Alonso's Zandvoort heroics, Aston's form and results had been trending downwards since the season's opening third had concluded. And there are several factors at play in explaining this.

The first is something Alonso himself acknowledged at Suzuka – that “it was more or less expected that Ferrari, Mercedes – eventually they will match our pace and potentially go ahead”.

“Mercedes took not too long to be in that position, Ferrari took a little bit longer,” he added. “And McLaren as well, now they are very strong. So, we have to accept that, that we need to raise our level as well. And the rate of development has to be a little bit faster next year.”

It's clear that the battle behind Red Bull got very complicated once Mercedes and Ferrari finally decided to start treading down the ‘downwash sidepod’ route Red Bull had pioneered. Aston made that call in early 2022 and reaped the rewards a year later. Then, with McLaren's various upgrades vaulting it up the order, Red Bull's rivals have contrived to take points off each other, their respective chances limited on differing track types and race >>

circumstances favouring (or not) each design.

But Aston was not among the lead fight on the one real occasion when Red Bull left the door ajar for the rest – in fact, it had only one car in the Singapore GP after Stroll had wrecked his in qualifying. Its development path hadn't matched the in-season gains made by others – particularly McLaren – while Ferrari seems to have got on top of its tyre management weakness at last. It was then revealed after the Singapore event that Alonso's pace had been stymied by sustaining a damaged suspension fairing in the early stages.

"This is a very new team," the Spaniard says of Aston's upgrade plan in 2023, where it has opened the first of three massive infrastructure facilities at its redeveloped Silverstone base – the main building of its expanding new 'campus'. "And this is a new position for us. Even the new factory is just aiming to match this kind of development that other people can do during a season. So, it's not that we accept this and we are OK with the situation. We just know that this is a learning season in many fronts."

That's classic Alonso messaging – bolstering his team while concurrently making it clear where he expects it to improve. Even during the early rounds of 2023, his comments established his belief that such success was just a chapter in a longer quest for much bigger things. Alonso's radio message telling Stroll "not to worry"

"YOU CHANGE A FEW THINGS ON THE SET-UP AND YOU'RE IMPROVING ONE AXLE AND MAKING THE OTHER WORSE"

about an intra-team attack in Spain revealed more than anything that he never really saw himself as a true 2023 title contender. That event also featured the first dip from the brilliant form Alonso had displayed at the start of the year, with his floor-damaging Q1 off.

Just before the summer break, Aston team principal Mike Krack said that "in one or two situations we have done not the right choice" concerning design development choices in the period just as Alonso's podium run came to an end. His Montreal result actually covered these errors up, since that track's low-downforce demands meant that there was less impact from the recently introduced floor and sidepod changes on the AMR23.

Aston has maintained that this season's big rules saga – concerning flexi-wings and flexi-floors, covered by FIA technical directives to reduce these apparently being deployed at various teams – has not had any impact on its car design. Alonso said in Singapore that "we didn't have to adapt anything" on this front.

While the team has not confirmed that it had to make any changes earlier in the season, insiders have admitted that it made



tweaks around the time of late April's Azerbaijan GP in response to FIA probing on teams pushing the boundaries on flexi wings. There is, however, no suggestion that anything Aston may or may not have been doing was illegal.

But the flexi-wing saga ties in with another of Alonso's points on Aston's recent form – one that he was vocally annoyed about in Japan. This is that flexing bodywork can potentially help a team shed drag on the straights, which is something Aston has been concerned about all year.

When he made his "lions" remark, Alonso was agitated at being unable to pass Esteban Ocon's Alpine. And he continued to be annoyed post-race, saying the context for his FOM-radio-broadcast gripe was: "I'm not sure exactly what other drivers say when they are behind a car that is slower and on the straight they are pulling away even when you open the DRS."

Whatever the cause of or solution to Aston's drag problem, Alonso will want it fixed for 2024. But while he is right to highlight that he was previously receiving high marks from those humble





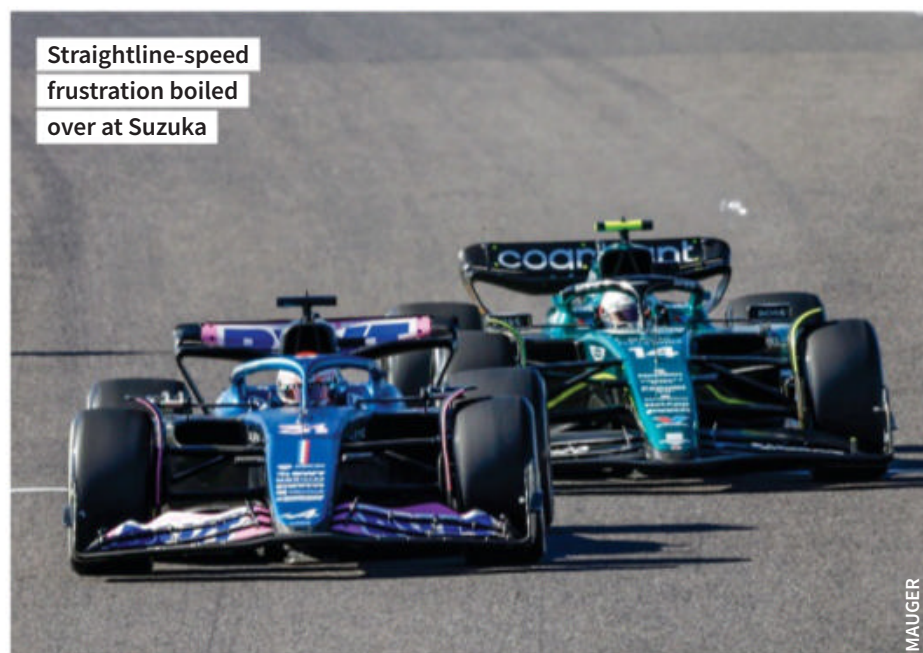
Alonso led the field
for three laps in
Saudi Arabia

MAUGER

scribes tasked with ranking arguably the best 20 drivers in the world from week to week, he might also reflect that the reason he has been scored lower of late is because mistakes have crept in. This is relevant, as much as Alonso might refuse to acknowledge errors at one race, because he did the opposite at another.

Fresh off the Zandvoort podium, Alonso said he'd "felt that I was at my best and have been giving 100% of what I felt and my abilities in a racing car, but maybe in Spa I was not at that level, or in Austria". When Autosport asked him to clarify what had gone wrong with his unexpectedly quiet efforts at the Red Bull Ring (where the virtual safety car undid his contra-strategy gamble, it should be noted) and his Spa sprint race crash, he replied that "there is no clear explanation". At one stage he suspected Pirelli strengthening its tyre constructions had been a factor, before Aston rebuffed this.

"Sometimes you start the weekend and you feel the car is not responding to your inputs, you're not comfortable on the way into the corners or you feel something that is not connected to the car,"



Straightline-speed
frustration boiled
over at Suzuka

MAUGER

Alonso explained at Monza last month. "And then you start changing a few things on the set-up and you're just improving one axle and making the other axle worse. You're just living on a fine line, but you are never happy. So, it happened too often, in July especially [when the Austrian and Belgian races took place]. It could be down to the car performance, to the package that we were running at that time. There were a couple of different thoughts of our difficulties in that month."

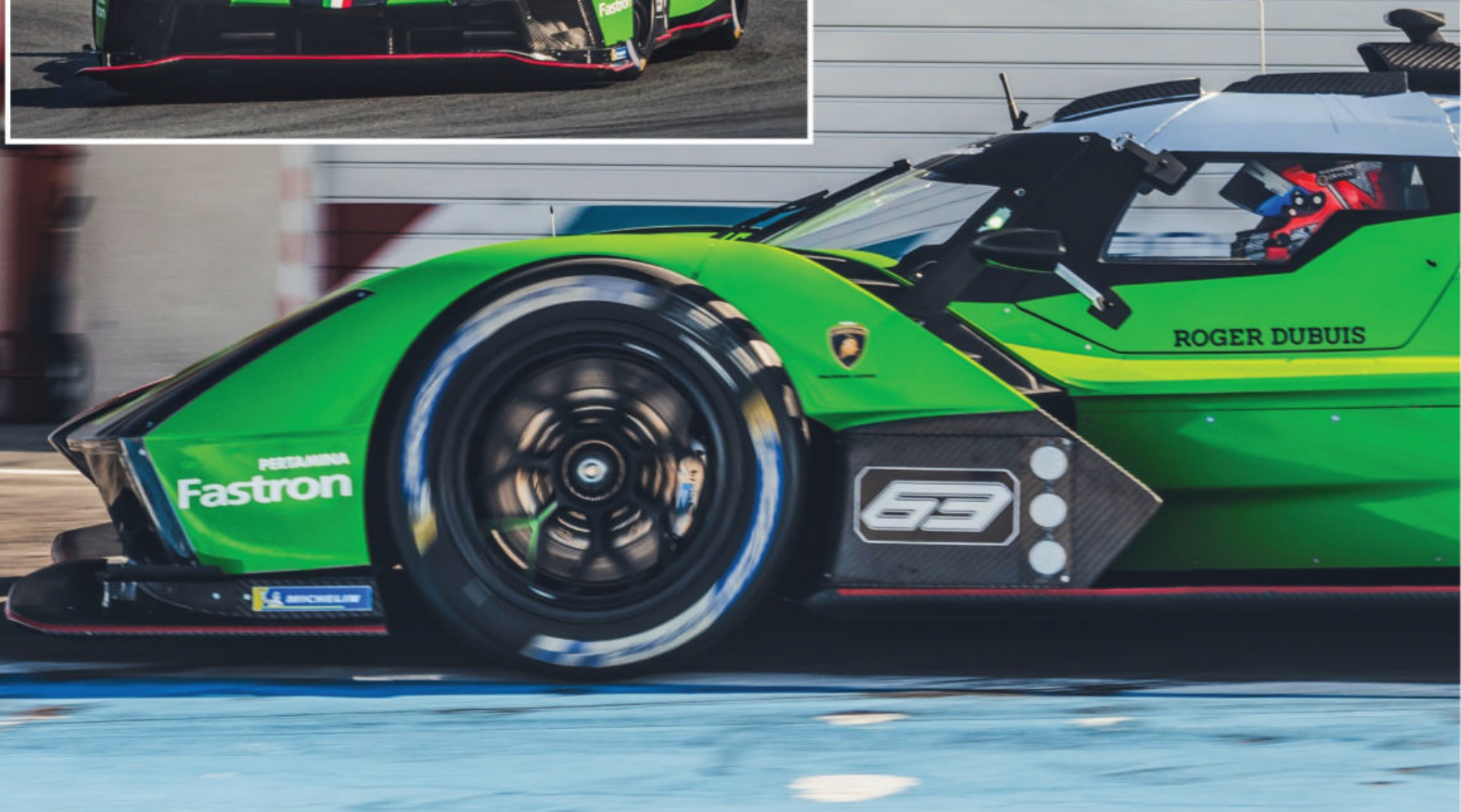
Through this whole campaign, Alonso has been enduring something of a compromise on car handling. The Suzuka drag issue stemmed from Aston's calculation that additional downforce to improve on the tyre-degradation front was worth its straightline-speed trade-off, and Aston rather languished in the speed traps.

Back in Bahrain and through the early rounds, even as he roared to strong results, Alonso was struggling with regular spikes of oversteer that he put down to adjusting to Aston's power-steering design. An alteration in Miami made things better, but he reckoned back at Silverstone that "small tweaks that we can think about for the long term or into next year" would be required to complete his adjustment to the Aston package.

Ultimately, in addition to delivering stunning results in 2023 along with occasional mistakes he will only occasionally acknowledge, Alonso has been right all along. This is a journey for the Aston squad, which is also treading rather unfamiliar ground in its battle to be consistently fighting for F1's leading spots. Not even in its Jordan heyday was it really a regular contender.

In securing what results he has so far in 2023, along with a management implosion at his former team, Alonso has fully justified his decision to abandon Alpine.

Aston has pledged to keep new parts trickling onto the AMR23 across the season run-in to boost the potential of its follow-up design coming in 2024. That is the key for Alonso's immediate F1 future. If he sees progress, he'll big it up. If he does not, expect more team radio angst from F1's most-calculating in-cockpit operator. ❧



WEC/IMSA

LAMBORGHINI'S LONG ROAD TO LE MANS

It's a big name in the sportscar world, but Lamborghini has shied away from taking on its rivals on endurance racing's biggest stage – until now

GARY WATKINS

As Lamborghini celebrates its 60th anniversary this year, it's gearing up to take on the ultimate challenge for a sportscar manufacturer: a bid for outright honours at the Le Mans 24 Hours. The attack on the centrepiece round of the World Endurance Championship with a new LMDh prototype run by the Iron Lynx team will be the first such campaign in those 60 years. It's been a long haul to endurance racing's top table for the marque, both in the context of its storied existence and the project that has resulted in the prototype racer we now call the SC63.

Ferruccio Lamborghini, who branched out from producing tractors and farm machinery, shied away from motor racing.

He built his first sportscar as a result of dissatisfaction with his Ferrari road car, believing that the focus of the Prancing Horse was distracted from creating the ultimate *gran turismo* by its racing efforts. This antipathy was probably tinged by his own unsuccessful exploits in competition. He crashed a modified Fiat Topolino on the 1948 Mille Miglia, his machine ending up inside a bar!

The company founder, who died in 1993, ceded control of Lamborghini barely 10 years after its creation, yet still racing was off the agenda at the Sant'Agata Bolognese headquarters between Bologna and Modena as ownership of the marque passed through various hands. And when it did go racing, it wasn't in the natural habitat for a sportscar brand. Chrysler bought Lamborghini in

Lamborghini is working with Ligier to finally take on endurance racing's top class



GT3 Gallardo (right) was a success

STALEY/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

“Reiter had to buy complete cars from the factory, chucking what it didn't need into a giant warehouse”

1987 and decided that Formula 1 should be its playground. That resulted in the establishment of Lamborghini Engineering under Ferrari design legend Mauro Forghieri and a 3.5-litre V12 used between 1989 and 1993 by Larrousse, Lotus, Ligier, Minardi and an arm's length squad of its own known as Modena Team.

It wouldn't be until the turn of the century that Lamborghinis properly started competing in the burgeoning world of GT racing – and the cars weren't developed by the factory. GT boss Stephane Ratel had pushed through a rule allowing what he called “special tuners” to homologate cars for racing. Reiter Engineering took up the baton, going it alone with a GT1 version of the Diablo in 2000. Lamborghini, now in the hands of the Volkswagen group and

under the control of Audi, initially provided support – financial and technical – when the German operation switched to the Murcielago in 2003. The Murcielago R-GT was a race winner in the FIA GT Championship, but Reiter's big success came with the creation of the GT3 class in 2006. It would deliver a total of 132 GT3 Gallardos in multiple iterations and evolutions, built with tacit support from Lamborghini. Reiter had to buy complete cars from the factory, chucking everything it didn't need from the road car into a giant warehouse, for the first 50 examples. Only then did the manufacturer allow it to buy just the parts it needed.

Lamborghini was waking up to motorsport. It had started its long-running Super Trofeo series in 2009 with a Gallardo >>



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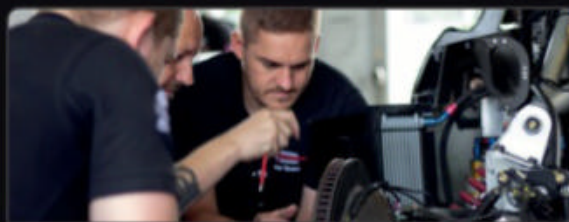
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Grosjean (inset) will be part of the driver line-up in the SC63, which started testing in August



UNICAPISTA

developed by Reiter but built at the factory like two previous iterations of one-make racer, the Diablo SV-R and GTR of the late 1990s and early 2000s. The turning point on the road to a bid for outright Le Mans honours came in 2013 with the establishment of the in-house Lamborghini Squadra Corse operation to develop and build both its spec racers and a new GT3 Huracan.

Squadra Corse was and is headed up by Giorgio Sanna, a sometime Audi Sport Italia works driver in the big-banger Superstars touring car series. Lamborghini's graduation to the pinnacle of sportscar racing owes much to his tenacity. He has been described as "like a terrier" by one insider in his attempts to get the prototype programme across the line.

Sanna's desire to take Lamborghini prototype racing predate the convergence process that created the LMDh pathway into the WEC Hypercar class. The Italian manufacturer was at the table in 2019 as IMSA started working on the successor to the Daytona Prototype international class introduced in 2017.

"We were always in love with the philosophy of IMSA," says Sanna, who points out that the USA is the marque's biggest market. "We started with a strong interest to race in America with very nice cars, sophisticated but sustainable from a cost point of view."

Sanna can't answer whether Lamborghini would have produced a car for a class provisionally known as DPi 2.0 had there been

"The request was to start in 2024: we evaluated all the scenarios and the best one was Ligier"

no convergence. But he suggests that it became "quite an easy decision" once the new class was cleared to race in the WEC as well as in IMSA. Lamborghini will be represented in both series next year with Iron Lynx and the SC63.

But Sanna's comments underplay his efforts to convince his board to take Lamborghini prototype racing. There was a thorough examination of LMDh in 2020 and a proposal to produce a car in conjunction with Dallara. The project was never signed off: it was reputedly turned down more than once.

Sanna then changed tack. He looked to piggyback on the Porsche-led LMDh programme that originally involved Audi. Why Sanna's efforts on this front weren't successful in light of the decision to axe the sister car to the 963 isn't entirely clear, though the consensus is that Porsche said no to Lamborghini joining the party. Sanna will only say that "the group was looking to come up with a strategy that fitted perfectly with the needs of every brand".

When Lamborghini finally got the sign-off, announced in May 2022, it chose to partner with Ligier Automotive, the only one of the four licensed LMP2 constructors without an LMDh deal. Sanna explains that the board decision was independent of the one to align with Ligier. "Until you have the green light you cannot commit to anyone," he says. "The request of the board was to be able to start to race in 2024: we have evaluated all the different scenarios and the best one was Ligier."

He admits that the "others were already committed" by that stage. It appears certain that Lamborghini went back to Dallara at this point, only to be told that its deals with Acura and Cadillac meant it wouldn't be able to deliver a car for 2024.

Ligier, insists Sanna, is a good fit for Lamborghini: "We were looking for a partner like Ligier, which is small but with the right competence, very similar to Lamborghini Squadra Corse."

Squadra Corse has also developed its own engine for the first time. The new 3.8-litre twin-turbo V8 is the first bespoke racing engine produced by Lamborghini since Forghieri's F1 V12. >>

Iron Lynx has been campaigning Lambo against Ferrari and co in IMSA's GTD Pro class



GALSTAD/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

LAMBORGHINI'S HYPERCAR

The partner for the engine project is Autotecnica Motori, which was also involved in developments to the Huracan GT3's V10 in the EVO and EVO2 versions introduced respectively in 2019 and 2023.

The deal for Iron Lynx to be Lamborghini's partner in both the WEC and IMSA's GTP class was announced in November 2022, though it was in the works a long time before that. Iron Lynx, established in 2017 and a participant in the WEC since 2021 in GTE Am, had an eye on Hypercar before the link-up with Sant'Agata. The purchase of a majority stake in single-seater powerhouse Prema in the summer of 2021 by Iron Lynx parent company DC Racing Solutions was made with an eye on the top class of sportscar racing. The first step was an entry into the

“When Prema became part of the family, we started to prepare”

LMP2 arena last year, with twin assaults on the WEC and the European Le Mans Series with a pair of ORECA-Gibson 07s. A new branch of the team known as Prema Engineering will effectively run the LMDh attack under the Iron Lynx banner from new facilities in Vicenza, close to Prema's existing headquarters, as well as in Detroit.

“When Prema became part of the family two years ago, we started to prepare the team that will be our LMDh team,” says Iron Lynx team boss Andrea Piccini. “We wanted to show that we would be ready to be a partner for an important brand in such a programme. The idea of having an LMP2 team started before the contact with Lamborghini.”

The Iron Lynx/Prema set-up is billed as Lamborghini's “reference team” by Sanna. What that actually means is that it will be the marque's only representative in Hypercar and GTP over the

full lifespan of the SC63 up to the end of 2027. That's a departure from the previous intent outlined by Lamborghini. It had stated that it had planned to follow the business model it ploughed in GT3 by providing support to multiple teams on a semi-factory basis.

“We have to keep in consideration the size and the capability of our structure, and we prefer to keep focused on one team whether we are managing one car, two cars, four cars, because the programme is very demanding,” explains Sanna. “We are also the rookie in the field.”

The programme in year one will be for a single car in WEC and another in IMSA, though only in the endurance rounds starting with the Sebring 12 Hours in March. Further US outings will follow at Watkins Glen, the new Indianapolis long-distance race, and Petit Le Mans at Road Atlanta. The IMSA car will also join the full-season WEC entry for a two-car attack at Le Mans.



UNICAPISTA

NOT SUCH AN ILLUSTRIOUS HISTORY



Diablo-based Jota GT1 tested but never raced

Lamborghini and Le Mans haven't been happy bedfellows over the years. No-shows, non-qualifications and retirements – two after a single lap – have featured in the marque's sporadic appearances or non-appearances at the Circuit de la Sarthe.

A Lamborghini first graced the hallowed asphalt in 1975 when French privateer Paul Rilly, who wanted to fulfil a life's ambition by racing at Le Mans, ended up taking a Lamborghini Islero entered in the GTX class for production GT cars after abandoning plans to drive first a Ferrari and then a Porsche. A road car purchased in the run-up to the event was hastily converted into a racer, the modifications including a suspension and brake sports kit sold to Rilly by the factory.

The car shared with friend Roger Le Veve was beset by problems through qualifying and didn't come close to making the cut. Its best lap was only just under five and a half minutes.



SC63 will hit both the WEC and IMSA next season, with two cars expected at Le Mans

LAMBORGHINI'S HYPERCAR

he will focus on IMSA.

The SC63 was given a shakedown at Vallelunga pretty much on schedule at the start of August, which was followed by a first proper test at Imola. The car racked up approximately 1500km over two days with Bortolotti, Caldarelli and Kvyat driving. The test programme then hit a setback when Bortolotti crashed the first car at Paul Ricard.

Lamborghini hasn't revealed the extent of the damage, though it forced the cancellation of a subsequent run at Spa at the start of September. A resumption of testing is imminent, with one more run in Europe planned before the programme



CHARLIE MAGEE PHOTOGRAPHY/LAMBORGHINI

A full IMSA programme and an expanded two-car attack on the WEC in 2025 appear likely, though Lamborghini and Iron Lynx are playing their cards close to their chests for the moment. "Running two teams is already quite ambitious, which is why we committed only doing one car on each side, and only the endurance races in IMSA," says Piccini. "We want to do things step by step."

Four drivers have so far been revealed for what will be a six-strong squad. Mirko Bortolotti and Andrea Caldarelli, both members of the factory line-up since the Huracan entered competition in 2015, were first to be named, followed by ex-F1 drivers Romain Grosjean and Daniil Kvyat. The final two will be announced at the end of this season. Mercedes GT star Raffaele Marciello was due to be one, but he has been poached by BMW. How they will line up across the two programmes hasn't been revealed, though Grosjean's bid to stay in IndyCar means that

decamps to the USA. The official line from Lamborghini is that the crash has resulted in a delay of only a couple of weeks.

Lamborghini never planned to take in the first round of the Michelin-sponsored Endurance Cup segment of the IMSA series, the Daytona 24 Hours in January, though it had hinted that it could reverse that call based on the results of testing. That appears unlikely now, which means the race debut of the SC63 will be at the opening WEC round in Qatar in early March.

Finally, a marque that began without racing aspirations will go head to head with Ferrari at the top of the sportscar racing tree. 🏁



JLOXHAM/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

A Lamborghini developed in Britain might sound like heresy, and certainly was regarded as such in some quarters in Sant'Agata Bolognese. A British operation known as Amos International Motorsport had it in writing that it could develop the Diablo into a GT1 car in 1995 and the promise of a supply of racing engines from the factory.

The engine wasn't ready when the unfinished car, known as the AIM Lamborghini Jota GT1, was shown in the pits at the Le Mans Test Day at the end of April. After a single test at Paul Ricard with a hack engine, the Le Mans assault was shelved. A legal case followed and the Jota GT1 never raced.

Reiter Engineering's Murcielago R-GT raced at

Le Mans every year between 2006 and 2010. Or perhaps that should be 'raced'. Four of the entries were made by the Japan Lamborghini Owners' Club, which on two occasions managed but a single lap before retirement. The first of those early baths came in 2007 when the driveshafts JLOC had developed for the car pulled out of the hubs.



BTCC

TRYING TO ROCK IN A HARD PLACE

Small budget, underdog team, big talent... Bobby Thompson is increasingly recognised as a potential BTCC star of the future. He just needs a secure drive in a stable situation

MARCUS SIMMONS

“I think there’s probably six really elite standout drivers in the championship at the moment, and I’d put Bobby in that six, definitely. He’s very fast, he’s deceptively quick, and he’s got a very calm head on his shoulders. He doesn’t get flustered, he looks inwardly at himself before blaming other things and other people and the car and everything, which is refreshing. He gets on with the job, and he’s a good racer as well.”

That’s three-time British Touring Car champion Matt Neal talking about the current *cause celebre* of the series, Bobby Thompson. You’ll know the 27-year-old Essex man as the guy hustling around in the middle of the pack in his Team Hard Cupra Leon, sometimes breaking through to the sharp end, often a victim of incidents or

mechanical strife. That bloke who is there thanks to the faith of others – principally Team Hard chief Tony Gilham – yet who recently has had to sit on the sidelines when the squad realised the budget he’d been providing wasn’t enough to make ends meet.

Through 2022 and early 2023 there’d been a growing consensus that Thompson, now finally armed with a relatively new car after an early career hauling around the pensionable Hard Volkswagen CC and Trade Price Cars Audi S3, is potentially the BTCC ‘real deal’. Yet he had to stand down during the summer and miss three rounds because Gilham could no longer continue with the heavy subsidisation of his drive. Now he’s back for the final two events: at Silverstone recently, and Brands Hatch Grand Prix this weekend.

With the exit for 2023 of his own Team Dynamics squad, Neal has been “helping out” Team Hard, with his long-time technical director Barry Plowman engineering Thompson and another Dynamics techie, Tom Hunt, looking after the sister Cupra of Dan Lloyd. Thompson lies way down the points table – missing races, plus points penalties for engine changes, haven’t helped – yet he has the eighth best median average ‘supertime’ (each driver’s weekend best lap expressed as a percentage of the overall best) of the season. That’s impressive.

“For me, 2022 was all about trying to give results for Team Hard that they deserve with the work that they’ve put into that car, and showing people that the Cupra can be a really, really good car,” explains Thompson, who returned after a year out in 2021 to win the Jack Sears Trophy sub-division. “It just needs a bit of love and maybe a little bit more engineering expertise. And I think we achieved that. That’s why on the jump from 2022 to 2023 you saw some new names that maybe wouldn’t have come across to Team Hard joining. That was job done, and the start of 2023 was all about ‘right, we’ve done that, now



Thompson qualified old Audi fifth at Croft in 2020 – but then disaster struck

Thompson leads Sutton at Brands, and finished within a second of him (left)

ALL PHOTOGRAPHY: JEP
motorsport
IMAGES



“At the start, like any relationship, Barry doesn’t know if I’m an annoying diva race driver”

let’s actually go and fight at the front with this thing.’ And to be honest that’s all we did for the first half of the season.”

The liaison with Plowman has been key to this. “Whenever the nose would dive on a touring car it was always a Team Dynamics Honda,” laughs Thompson. “You could always see its front splitter dragging on the ground on entry to corners. When Barry came along from Team Dynamics, I knew I was going to have a car that does just that. There’s no getting around it – we lucked into having these guys, and I was lucky enough to get Barry.

“At the start, like any relationship, he doesn’t know if I’m an annoying diva race driver, and I don’t know how he looks at motorsport, so in that first day or two in the car you’re more or less trying to work each other out and see what each other’s goals are. And I think by our first session we were well into what we needed for each other, and we’re quite similar. We all throw our toys out of the pram when things don’t go our way, but he’s quite relaxed how he looks at motorsport in a very objective way, and I think I am too.”

There have been some great performances. Thompson qualified in the top six at Brands Indy and was second to Ash Sutton in the reversed-grid race, all with what was perceived as a down-on-power engine; he was fourth quickest on the Saturday at Oulton Park, and looked set for a strong Sunday before getting taken out at the start of race two in a clash with Josh Cook, who at the time he was potentially fighting for the Independents title. “If I didn’t either have an engine go, I throw it off or we get taken out, we were in the top five at the start of the year,” muses Thompson. “The chassis and Barry’s efforts – absolutely faultless. I said a number of times that I feel we have the best front-wheel-drive traction on the grid, absolutely incredible.

“Yes, we did have engine issues, but I don’t think that’s a fault of



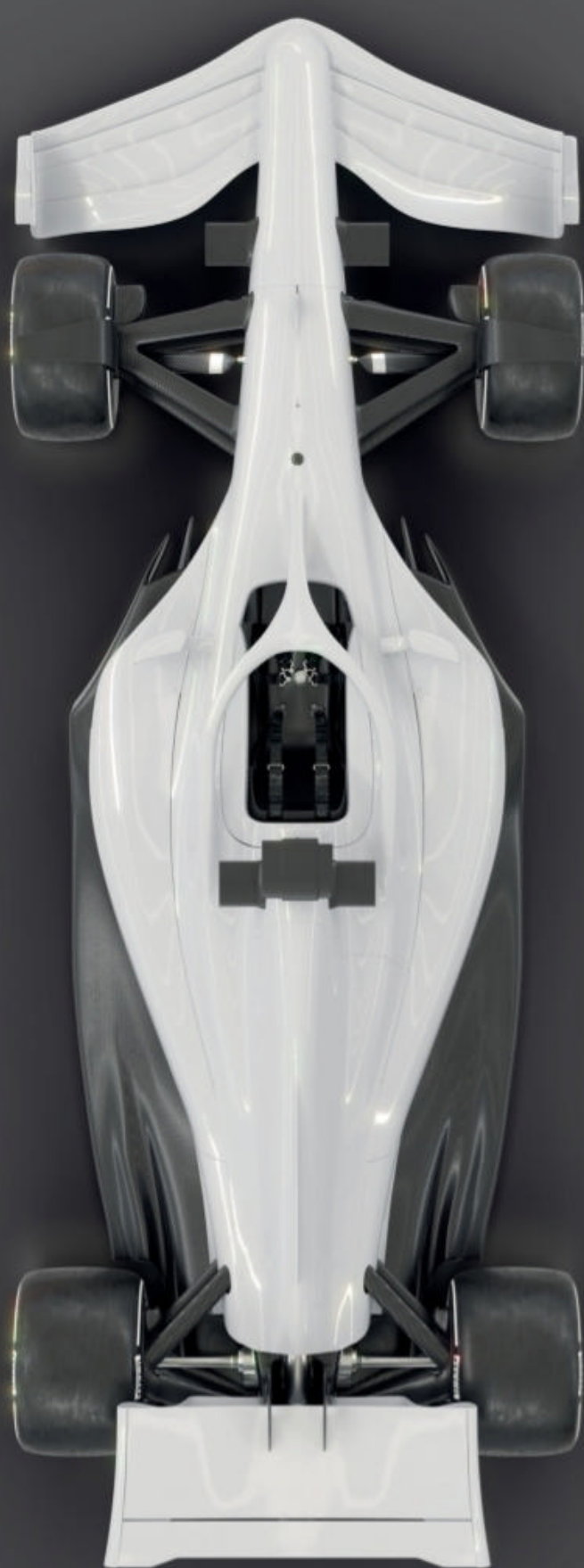
M-Sport’s [the customer TOCA engine supplier] at all – I’d say that’s more they’re trying as much as they can on my car to get me further than where I already was, and with engines the more you push it the more they’re going to go bang. When you’re playing that game you’ve got to accept there’s going to be a risk of failure.”

You may be getting the impression that Thompson is highly philosophical about his racing. In his financial situation, what can be controlled is very limited. He doesn’t lose any sleep; it’s just the way this sport is. Take his enforced absence from three rounds this summer: “Obviously I dislike the decision, but everyone expects me to dislike the team and maybe have a bit of bad blood, but there wasn’t at all. Motorsport’s a cruel game, and everyone on the grid, all 27 of us, we’re all there on our own specific little deals. Whether they’re fronting the cash themselves or whatever, there’s some crazy deals involved to enable you to drive around 10 times a year. My one is I’m there as part of Team Hard, and eventually when the team’s pot of cash goes dry something’s got to give.

“Tony’s got six cars on that grid and if one of them’s not bringing as much cash as someone else, that’s the one that’s got to go. I understood that risk when I signed at the start of the year. I think >>



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Cupra has featured in front of some of the BTCC heavyweights this season

I was more gutted that we were going for an Independents championship. In terms of motorsport and leaving, that wasn't too much my worry – I do this every day; I'm always going to drive a race car, it just wasn't a touring car for a couple of rounds."

Ah yes, he's referring to the other string to the Thompson bow: his successful driver coaching business. "Most of my work is Ferrari Challenge, Radicals... usually your gent driver market," he says. That can lead to opportunities... "To be honest I'm just going with it, going with the flow, doing whatever I can to stay working within the sport because I realise how lucky I am just to earn a living out of it. Even if that's not driving a race car, but still doing the cool things that go with it.

"I've got customers that I can probably lean on a bit harder and go, 'Come on, let's go and do some pro-am stuff', but this bloody touring car thing's got me all wrapped up. I just want to have a crack at the Independents. I mean, everyone says they want to have a go at the proper championship, but it's hard, isn't it? I just want to keep up the old touring car bit whilst I've still got age on my side."

Thompson's end-of-season BTCC reprieve came in the wake of Nic Hamilton leaving Team Hard in July. Rob Huff filled in at Knockhill, and Gilham needed to keep the car on the grid to not forfeit the TBL entrants' licence. But it does mean Thompson is in the well-worn 2021-built Hamilton Cupra rather than his new-for-2023 machine of the early season. Most drivers would use that as an excuse. Not him though. "From the moment I got let go I said I wouldn't jump back in the car unless it was my one with Barry," states Thompson. "But the mechanics I keep in contact with all the time at the team assured me that there's nothing wrong with it [the Hamilton car], it just needed a bit of work here and there to adapt it back after Nic's equipment [to allow for his disability] was on it.



First BTCC steps in 2018 with Team Hard VW CC, as reigning VW Cup champ



“The trouble is you’re up against people with money; I’ve got to make teams believe I’m worth having”

“It felt exactly the same. To be honest, for Silverstone I think we were just slightly out of the window set-up wise. I think we had something that was a little bit too on edge – it turned really well, maybe *too* well. Now I wish we’d maybe numbed the car down a little bit and focused on keeping a higher minimum speed. But at least I know we’ve got something good for Brands.”

Brands GP is where, in 2022, Thompson was running a genuine second in a non-reversed-grid race, a fly in the ointment of the overall title battle, “when I had an engine blow up. I think we’ve got some unfinished business, myself and M-Sport, just to get the job done that didn’t get quite finished last year. I’m just going to try and put on a good show. This for me is to ensure I get a seat next year really. The trouble I’ve got is you’re up against people who are able to bring in a lot of sponsorship or personal money, and at the moment I’m not lucky enough to do that, so I’ve got to make teams believe that it’s worth having me. We’re all just marketeers at the moment in touring cars. Everyone on that grid, Monday to Friday when they’re not at the circuit, is on laptop and emails, making sure they can just keep their bum in the seat.”

If Dynamics was still in the BTCC, would Neal as a team boss be open to recruiting Thompson? “I’ve watched him over the last few years, and he got into a few accidents, but that’s almost a victim of being in the middle of the pack,” ponders the lanky Brummie. “It’s not pretty racing there, and you get involved in so many other people’s melees. Before this year would I have entertained him? Maybe not. After spending a season with him? Definitely. I like him. He’s a nice guy, nice family, he’s got a good attitude. “He’s like the George Russell of touring cars – how George was [at Williams]. Everyone knew he was pretty quick but didn’t know how quick he was. Tony’s been fantastic in giving Bobby opportunities, as have others, but he’s never been able to get his arse in a frontrunning car and really show that.” Let’s hope that, one day, he finally can. ❧



Neal reckons Thompson is “George Russell of BTCC”

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RACE CENTRE

A full-page photograph of a rally car, likely a Ford Puma, driving on a dirt road. The car is kicking up a massive cloud of brown dust that fills the center of the frame. To the left, there are green pine trees. To the right, a group of spectators is visible, some holding up phones to take pictures. The sky is a clear, bright blue.

WRC

Tanak and M-Sport leap back to the top in Chile

*The Estonian and his Ford Puma-equipped team had
the speed and looked after their tyres on the
challenging South American stages*

TOM HOWARD

PHOTOGRAPHY MCKLEIN

WRC
50
YEARS



I can't remember an event like this before." That was Ott Tanak's summary of a particularly challenging Rally Chile that ultimately ended a character-building eight-month barren run for the Estonian and M-Sport in the World Rally Championship.

It's fair to say that Tanak has witnessed pretty much everything the WRC can throw at you over a 14-year career at rallying's highest level. But Chile's welcome return to the calendar after a three-year hiatus offered up a vastly different prospect than back in 2019, a rally also claimed by Tanak.

The South American country boasts stages that tick a lot of boxes for drivers, combining attributes of the fast-and-flowing roads you can find in Wales, New Zealand and Finland. But nobody anticipated quite how abrasive Rally Chile's virtually all-new route would be, and that turned the event into a strategic affair where tyre management was paramount. "Normally every year you have events where you need to manage, but this one was management throughout the weekend," reckoned Tanak. "It needed a very different approach." It was Tanak and M-Sport that mastered this to firmly close the door on a run of heartbreak, misfortune, and reliability woes this year.

The event build-up was mainly centred around the fact that this was Toyota driver Kalle Rovanpera's first match point to seal a second world title. The chance admittedly was slim. Equipped with a 33-point lead over Toyota team-mate Elfyn Evans, the Finn would need to win the rally and for disaster to strike the Welshman. Likewise, Toyota could also wrap up the manufacturers' crown.

But Rovanpera knew that his chance of victory would be limited by road position, with cleaning duties much more time-sapping than at other rallies. "I think the key will be to try and manage with opening the road and a lot of loose gravel, but I think there will be quite a lot of tyre choices – the ones we have to make will be crucial," he predicted. Rovanpera's words would turn out to be quite prophetic. He was unable to repeat his Acropolis Rally sweeping masterclass of just three weeks prior; here, the stages were even messier on the second pass thanks to loose gravel.

"That was maybe one of the worst stages for driving from me this year," grumbled Rovanpera after the first test. "It was loose, more loose than we expected." He drove admirably to limit the time loss across Friday to 38.7 seconds to earn fifth overall, with his title prospects very much taking a back seat. If anything his highlight was saying hi "to a really cute dog on the road section"

"We just underestimated the rate of wear. It was a stupid choice and there's no hiding from that"

Suninen starred for Hyundai until late crash out of second



that "hopefully gives us some good luck at least".

Rovanpera fared much better than his compatriot, Hyundai's Esapekka Lappi, and M-Sport's Pierre-Louis Loubet, who were both lucky to emerge unscathed from frightening rolls and became the first retirements. Lappi clipped a concrete culvert at the final corner of the opening test, sending his i20N into a series of rolls before coming to rest with the finish line in sight. "I guess I braked late and there was no chance to make the corner," he related. "The rollcage is quite damaged, so there is no chance [of continuing]."

Loubet had impressed through the first two stages to put his M-Sport Ford Puma in fourth before it came undone in a scary crash. The Frenchman exited the road at high speed, triggering a spectacular aerial crash before the car came to rest on its roof near trees. "Unfortunately on a very fast section, maybe we did not understand something with Nicolas [Gilsoul, co-driver] and we did a mistake, and unfortunately there was a big crash," said a dejected Loubet. "I didn't feel like I was over-pushing, so it is big disappointment as it was not a proper mistake." The car wouldn't rejoin the rally, with M-Sport team principal Richard Millener stating: "I appreciate that's sad for people that have come to see these cars, but we've got to be conscious of us as a team and the budgets we have for the rest of the season."

Loubet's shocking exit was contrasted by rare joy for M-Sport team-mate Tanak, who ended Friday with a 4.2s lead over Hyundai's Teemu Suninen, the pair benefiting from road position. Tanak's day started by winning the opening stage. But a heavy landing from a jump in stage two knocked out his Puma's hybrid power, alongside a damper issue and a spin that dropped him to third. Two out of three stage wins from the afternoon restored the lead from an impressive Suninen, with Evans only 12.7s adrift in third. "It was very fast in places, but also quite blind, so with the grip as it was, the pacenotes were really critical," explained Evans, who had started second on the road. "But given our starting



position this morning, it's quite OK to at least be in the fight."

It made a change for Tanak to be enjoying a Friday, although he was cautious: "One day doesn't mean anything but it is good for motivation. For the team, I'm very happy. It is much more abrasive tomorrow and the tyre choice will be tricky to make. It will be worse and today [Friday] was already quite bad."

But perhaps the recovery of the day belonged to M-Sport Rally1 debutant Gregoire Munster, who arrived at the first stage without a pacenote book. Co-driver Louis Louka had left it behind, but his quick thinking resulted in photos of the notes being sent to his phone, and the device became a makeshift pacenote book. The pair ended the day seventh behind Toyota's Takamoto Katsuta.

As Tanak had predicted, Saturday's roads were kryptonite for tyres. Strategy was crucial, and it was the tyre choice between Pirelli's soft and hard compounds that provided the platform for victory. M-Sport opted for four hards and two softs, ditto Hyundai. Toyota 'put everything on black' and selected only softs. The diverging strategies delivered striking results.

It was M-Sport that hit the jackpot in this round of tyre roulette, while Toyota was left red-faced after a rare mistake. Even equipped with hard tyres, Tanak and the Hyundais of Suninen and Thierry Neuville were forced into tyre-preservation mode early in Saturday's loop. The softs, meanwhile, spelled disaster for the Toyota trio of Evans, Rovanner and Katsuta, which hit home on stage nine (Maria de las Cruces) – at 28.72km the longest of the rally.

The Toyotas simply ran out of rubber. The first warning sign came when Katsuta's rear tyres delaminated. Reduced to a crawl, Rovanner admitted he was lucky to reach the finish with bald tyres, ceding 46.7s, while Evans's rears delaminated in the final 10km and he lost almost a minute, plummeting from second to fourth – one place ahead of Rovanner – and undoing his work to reduce the gap to his title rival. "[The tyre decision] is quite a mistake, that's true," mused Evans. "I think we just underestimated the rate of wear. We knew it was more abrasive and, looking back



now, it was a stupid choice and there's no hiding from that fact."

Toyota team principal Jari-Matti Latvala held his hands up over the error. "I think it was still a surprise that the stage was that bad," he admitted. "We did a mistake with the tyre choice but where it came from is we had a lot of data. This year we have done maybe 70 to 80 tyre choices and more than 70 we have succeeded, but this time our data was not good enough."

As Toyota was left floundering, M-Sport's inspired tyre call to take four hards helped Tanak to a stage win that came with the added bonus of a 47.8s lead over Suninen as Neuville jumped to third. Unsurprisingly, all crews took hard tyres for the afternoon loop, but again it was Tanak who judged the gamble of knowing when and where to push. Four fastest times from the day's six stages left him with a 58.3s advantage over Suninen.

"Clearly most of it [my drive] was decided last night in the »

container,” declared Tanak. “This 40-50s this morning was clearly because of the tyre choices and the differences we did compared to the others. Initially I thought I was maybe driving a bit too slow [in the afternoon] and saving the tyres too much as my tyre wear was less than this morning, but we had good tyres for the next two stages.”

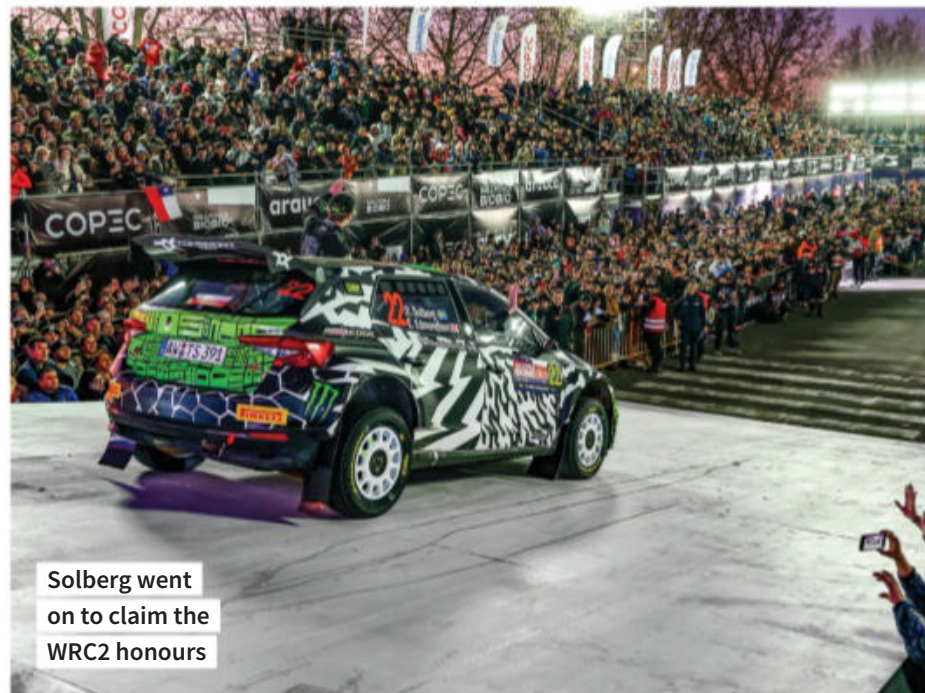
After providing drama in the morning, the second pass through Maria de las Cruces delivered yet more incident. Munster clouted the bank with his Puma, causing front and rear-right punctures. A seven-minute stop to change tyres meant he rejoined in front of Rovanner, who caught his dust trail and was left fighting for visibility for 18km. Drivers in the past have hit the rev limiter over this cardinal sin of failing to pull over to let the fast car through. Not Rovanner. “It’s a bit like driving in Super Mario Kart when someone is throwing bananas or smoke bombs in front of you,” he smiled. “I was definitely losing a lot of time, let’s see how much we get back.” Rovanner was awarded an amended time, while Munster was fined €500 for failing to pull over and dropped outside the top 10. After surviving two wild moments, Neuville ended Saturday in third, 13.9s behind Suninen, despite suffering a puncture in the morning followed by an electrical issue on his Hyundai in the afternoon.

Bad luck has swirled around Tanak for much of the season since his Sweden win in February, but there was not a hint of misfortune on Sunday. He was able to cruise through the final four stages to complete his Chilean masterclass by a margin of 42.1s. In doing so, rarely seen smiles returned to not only he and co-driver Martin Jarveoja, but the entire M-Sport team. “It’s great to finally have some positive outcome,” stated Tanak. “Thanks to mechanics and everybody in the container who came here. We are a really small bunch of people but they did a great job.”

“It’s a bit like in Super Mario Kart when someone is throwing smoke bombs in front of you”

Chile did have one final twist when the battle for second between Hyundai duo Suninen and Neuville intensified. With the gap down 6.7s, Suninen cracked. The Finn clipped a tree stump on the penultimate stage, sending him into an agonising retirement. “I was just a few centimetres too tight with my line and hit a tree stump, which was game over,” he sighed. “Thankfully we are unhurt. I’m very sorry to the entire team.”

Suninen’s exit promoted Neuville to second, Evans to third and Rovanner to fourth ahead of Katsuta. Rovanner then reeled off his now customary Power Stage win ahead of Evans, which



Solberg went on to claim the WRC2 honours



Tanak’s victory is a massive fillip for the M-Sport squad

secured Toyota a third consecutive manufacturers’ crown. Rovanner’s championship lead was only reduced to 31 points with two rounds remaining.

“I’m not really [happy with the result for the championship], but I was happy Elfyn was close and not far away and he only caught up a few points,” said Rovanner. Evans added: “It’s hard to be happy in these circumstances but it could be a lot worse. It’s still a fight in the championship even though the gap is marginally reduced, but of course it’s still open.”

A largely faultless drive from Oliver Solberg in his Skoda sealed the WRC2 honours in sixth overall, with Gus Greensmith 26s adrift.

While Chile will be remembered as a victory for Tanak, this was perhaps an even more significant win for M-Sport after a particularly challenging period. With the team’s very existence in rallying’s top tier yet to be secured, the win could mean a whole lot more than 25 points.

“Within the team the result is massive for us,” enthused Millener. “The motivation was low and the frustration was high but now everyone’s mood has been lifted. The team did the best they can to help Ott and Martin along, but ultimately Ott showed again his ability and his class this weekend. I think this shows why we were so desperate to have Ott in the team at the start of the year.

“We can only prove that we have a team and a car capable of winning and we will be pushing to use that to make sure we have the strongest line-up possible next year, and obviously hope that we are competing next year. It can only help when we get a result like this.”

TOYOTA MAKES IT
THREE IN A ROW



Rovanpera, fourth in Chile, leads the points

Toyota has hailed a third consecutive World Rally Championship manufacturers’ title as “unique” in the series’ fiercely competitive modern era.

Team principal Jari-Matti Latvala (below) has pinpointed reliability as the defining factor that has earned titles from 2021-23. In the past three seasons, Toyota has won 24 of 36 rallies, while its only failure to score a podium finish this season came at Rally Sweden in February. Its most dominant display arrived in Kenya, where it recorded a 1-2-3-4 on the Safari for the second successive season.

“First of all I’m really proud of the team and the drivers and all the work we’ve done during the season,” said Latvala (below). “It has been an incredible job because we are getting the title two rounds before the end of the season, and it’s the earliest that we have ever won the title as Toyota Gazoo Racing, so it shows that we’ve done things right and also the drivers have done a great job.

“Of course there is excitement now because our drivers [Kalle Rovanpera and Elfyn Evans] are still fighting for the title and it’s exciting to see who it’s going to be. I would say this is a relief and some weight is off our shoulders now we have this manufacturers’ title.”



RESULTS ROUND 11/13, RALLY CHILE, 28 SEPTEMBER-1 OCTOBER

POS	DRIVER / CO-DRIVER	TEAM / CAR	TIME
1	Ott Tanak (EST) Martin Jarveoja (EST)	M-Sport Ford WRT / Ford Puma Rally1	3h06m38.1s
2	Thierry Neuville (BEL) Martijn Wydaeghe (BEL)	Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT / Hyundai i20 N Rally1	+42.1s
3	Elfyn Evans (GBR) Scott Martin (GBR)	Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT / Toyota GR Yaris Rally1	+1m06.9s
4	Kalle Rovanpera (FIN) Jonne Halttunen (FIN)	Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT / Toyota GR Yaris Rally1	+2m11.0s
5	Takamoto Katsuta (JPN) Aaron Johnston (GBR)	Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT / Toyota GR Yaris Rally1	+4m41.5s
6	Oliver Solberg (SWE) Elliott Edmondson (GBR)	Skoda Fabia RS Rally2	+8m18.5s
7	Gus Greensmith (GBR) Jonas Andersson (SWE)	Toksport WRT / Skoda Fabia RS Rally2	+8m44.3s
8	Sami Pajari (FIN) Enni Malkonen (FIN)	Toksport WRT 2 / Skoda Fabia RS Rally2	+9m20.6s
9	Yohan Rossel (FRA) Arnaud Dunand (FRA)	PH Sport / Citroen C3 Rally2	+9m53.9s
10	Nikolay Gryazin (RUS) Konstantin Aleksandrov (RUS)	Toksport WRT 2 / Skoda Fabia RS Rally2	+10m08.2s

OTHERS

13	Gregoire Munster (LUX) Louis Louka (BEL)	M-Sport Ford WRT / Ford Puma Rally1	+16m39.7s
15	Alberto Heller (CHL) Luis Ernesto Allende (ARG)	M-Sport Ford WRT / Ford Puma Rally1	+20m02.9s
R	Teemu Suninen (FIN) Mikko Markkula (FIN)	Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT / Hyundai i20 N Rally1	SS15-accident
R	Pierre-Louis Loubet (FRA) Nicolas Gilsoul (BEL)	M-Sport Ford WRT / Ford Puma Rally1	SS4-accident
R	Esapekka Lappi (FIN) Janne Ferm (FIN)	Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT / Hyundai i20 N Rally1	SS1-accident

STAGE TIMES

STAGE	FASTEST	LEADER	SECOND
SS1 Pulperia 1 (12.28 miles)	Tanak 10m16.8s	Tanak	Suninen +2.1s
SS2 Rere 1 (8.29 miles)	Evans 6m52.9s	Evans	Suninen +0.1s
SS3 Rio Claro 1 (14.49 miles)	Evans 12m32.0s	Evans	Suninen +2.6s
SS4 Pulperia 2 (12.28 miles)	Suninen 9m58.7s	Suninen	Tanak +3.8s
SS5 Rere 2 (8.29 miles)	Tanak 6m39.8s	Tanak	Suninen +1.1s
SS6 Rio Claro 2 (14.49 miles)	Tanak 12m12.2s	Tanak	Suninen +4.2s
SS7 Chivilingo 1 (16.92 miles)	Rovanpera 17m20.7s	Tanak	Evans +13.8s
SS8 Rio Lia 1 (13.10 miles)	Tanak 13m59.0s	Tanak	Evans +20.6s
SS9 Maria de las Cruces 1 (17.85 miles)	Tanak 17m40.9s	Tanak	Suninen +47.8s
SS10 Chivilingo 2 (16.92 miles)	Rovanpera 17m07.5s	Tanak	Suninen +41.7s
SS11 Rio Lia 2 (13.10 miles)	Tanak 13m47.8s	Tanak	Suninen +44.5s
SS12 Maria de las Cruces 2 (17.85 miles)	Tanak 17m20.5s	Tanak	Suninen +58.3s
SS13 Las Pataguas 1 (8.20 miles)	Neuville 7m43.4s	Tanak	Suninen +52.3s
SS14 El Ponen 1 (8.61 miles)	Neuville 7m22.9s	Tanak	Suninen +51.6s
SS15 Las Pataguas 2 (8.20 miles)	Neuville 7m33.0s	Tanak	Neuville +44.6s
SS16 El Ponen 2 (Power Stage – 8.61 miles)	Rovanpera 7m06.7s	Tanak	Neuville +42.1s

DRIVERS’ CHAMPIONSHIP 1 Rovanpera 217; 2 Evans 186; 3 Neuville 155; 4 Tanak 146; 5 Sebastien Ogier (Toyota) 99; 6 Lappi 98; 7 Katsuta 77; 8 Dani Sordo (Hyundai) 63; 9 Suninen 34; 10 Solberg 33.

MANUFACTURERS’ CHAMPIONSHIP 1 Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT 466; 2 Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT 360; 3 M-Sport Ford WRT 247.



Tyres were the story of Rally Chile

NEXT REPORT
Central European Rally
2 November issue

Shwartzman, Nielsen and Rovera led home sister AF car behind penalised Mercedes

Ferrari 1-2 as Merc crew wins title

**GT WORLD CHALLENGE EUROPE
ENDURANCE CUP
BARCELONA (ESP)
1 OCTOBER
ROUND 5/5**

Multiple full-course-yellow periods and a late-race penalty ensured that the GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup season ended in slightly chaotic fashion at Barcelona, with Nicklas Nielsen leading an AF Corse Ferrari 1-2.

Victory on the road in the final three-hour bout of the year had gone the way of the GetSpeed Mercedes trio of Maro Engel, Luca Stolz and Fabian Schiller, but a five-second penalty for contact with the Iron Lynx Lamborghini of Jordan Pepper on the opening lap – delivered inside the final 12 minutes – demoted them to fourth.

Quite why the punishment took 80 laps to be delivered is a question perhaps only

race officials will be able to answer, but the timing of it, plus a pair of safety cars inside the final hour, gave Stolz the impossible task of building a sufficient margin to deny Nielsen at the finish.

Amid all the drama, Jules Gounon and Raffaele Marciello secured a second successive Endurance Cup title with a safe drive to fifth place alongside co-champion Timur Boguslavskiy in their ASP Mercedes. It also ensured the overall GTWCE crown for Marciello and Boguslavskiy.

Ferrari had prevailed in qualifying on Sunday morning, with Nielsen, Robert Shwartzman and Alessio Rovera beating the Lambo of Pepper, Mirko Bortolotti and Andrea Caldarelli to best combined time. Rovera led off the rolling start from the sister AF Ferrari of Daniel Serra, who had leapfrogged Pepper. The Lamborghini's race soon unravelled when it was tipped into a spin at Turn 4 by Engel.

The opening hour was punctuated by three FCY periods. First Charlie Fagg suffered a puncture on his McLaren while the BMW of Charles Weerts lost its rear bumper after contact with Michele Beretta's Gold Cup-leading Lamborghini at Turn 1. Towards the end of the hour, Alex Malykhin spun his Porsche at Turn 12 and was hit by the Audi of Adam Eteki. Then Valentino Rossi spun his Team WRT BMW at the exit of Turn 7 shortly after the restart, adding to the stop-start rhythm.

The bunched-up field meant Rovera couldn't streak clear, leaving him vulnerable to the Mercedes, now with Schiller at the wheel. The German jumped past both Ferraris to lead following the first round of stops and held onto the advantage, much to the frustration of Shwartzman, who had taken over from Rovera. Schiller kept ahead throughout the stint despite the attentions of Shwartzman, while Boguslavskiy moved into third at the expense of the second Ferrari of Davide Rigon.

The order remained the same once Schiller had handed over to Stolz, but the final stint was heavily impacted by another two FCY periods, preventing the German from building enough of an advantage. Oil from the Attempto Audi of Ricardo Feller transformed the Turn 10 braking zone into something akin to an ice rink, leaving Christopher Haase a passenger as he slid into the gravel. Action had not long resumed when the Dinamic Porsche of Daniele di Amato crashed on the exit of Turn 3.

AF Corse therefore claimed a simple 1-2, with Thomas Preining, Laurin Heinrich and Dennis Olsen completing the podium in their Rutronik Racing Porsche.

STEPHEN BRUNSDON



Left to right: Marciello, Boguslavskiy and Gounon are Endurance champions

Blaney pips Harvick – with a little help

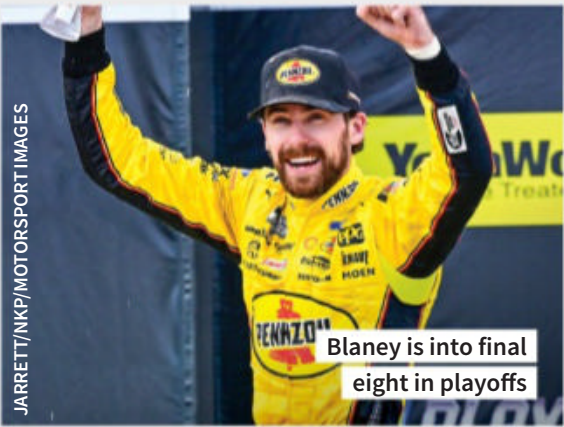
NASCAR CUP
TALLADEGA (USA)
1 OCTOBER
ROUND 31/36

Ryan Blaney emerged from a head-to-head battle with a photo-finish win over Kevin Harvick in an important NASCAR Cup playoff victory at Talladega.

As Sunday’s race wound to a finish, Blaney and Harvick found themselves swapping pushes and the lead – Team Penske Ford racer Blaney was looking for a win to advance in the playoffs, and Stewart-Haas Racing Ford veteran Harvick was trying for a victory in his final season as a driver.

With two of the 188 laps remaining, Harvick appeared to have grabbed control of the race but saw Blaney edge past him for the lead thanks to help from the Ford of Riley Herbst. Blaney and Harvick raced side by side virtually the entire final lap but, as they drove through the trioval, a wreck erupted behind them. This included Herbst, who had now been helping Harvick.

After a quick NASCAR review of the film, Blaney was declared winner over Harvick by 0.012 seconds and grabbed his second win of the 2023 season.



“It was a pretty wild restart, let alone the last couple of laps losing momentum and getting it back, just getting clear to the bottom to get to the front row and drag-race it out with Kevin,” Blaney said. “I have to give a big thanks to Riley Herbst. He did a really good job there the last couple restarts. He doesn’t have a lot of Cup starts, but he did a great job and pushed me so thanks to him.”

The victory sends Blaney into the semi-final round of the playoffs regardless of his finish in this weekend’s race at the Charlotte Roval. It’s the ninth win of his career, with a third of them coming at the 2.66-mile Alabama superspeedway.

Harvick was disappointed to miss out on a win by a few feet and then lost second when he was disqualified because his Ford had unsecured windshield fasteners.

William Byron thus finished as runner-up in his Hendrick Motorsports Chevrolet, ahead of the Joe Gibbs Racing Toyota of Denny Hamlin, with Corey LaJoie fourth in his Spire Motorsports Chevy.

The four drivers lowest in points without a win and in danger of being eliminated from the playoffs with one race remaining in this round are Kyle Busch, Bubba Wallace, Ross Chastain and Tyler Reddick.

JIM UTTER

WEEKEND WINNERS

GT WORLD CHALLENGE EUROPE ENDURANCE CUP

BARCELONA (ESP)
Alessio Rovera/Robert Shwartzman/
Nicklas Nielsen
AF Corse (Ferrari 296 GT3)

NASCAR CUP TALLADEGA (USA)

Ryan Blaney
Team Penske (Ford Mustang)

GT4 EUROPEAN SERIES BARCELONA (ESP)

Race 1 Josh Rattican/Tom Emson
Elite Motorsport
(McLaren Artura)
Race 2 Michael Schrey/Gabriele Piana
Hofer Racing by Bonk (BMW M4)

EUROFORMULA OPEN MUGELLO (ITA)

Race 1 Noel Leon
Team Motopark (Dallara-Spiess)
Race 2 Cian Shields
Team Motopark (Dallara-Spiess)

EUROCUP-3 ESTORIL (PRT)

Race 1 Esteban Masson
Campos Racing
Race 2 Mari Boya
MP Motorsport



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Martin closes in as rain stops play in Japan

MOTOGP
MOTEGI (JPN)
1 OCTOBER
ROUND 14/20

The odds of MotoGP getting its fourth new champion in as many seasons shortened again at Motegi when Jorge Martin closed to three points adrift of series leader Francesco Bagnaia after victories in the Japanese Grand Prix sprint and rain-shortened main race.

With six weekends to go, Martin is looking very much like the form man on his Pramac Ducati, with five wins out of six (including sprints) from the past three events. His factory-run counterpart Bagnaia had to do his best to put a brave face on seeing what had been a more than 60-point advantage all but evaporate.

Indeed, Bagnaia arrived in Japan insisting that his focus was not on his shrinking points lead, down to 13 after his crash in India, but on conquering the braking woes that have threatened to derail his title defence. After Friday practice, he claimed to have regained his confidence in this area, but he couldn't stop Martin sauntering to pole.

In Saturday's sprint race, Martin simply checked out at the head of the field, while Bagnaia slipped from second on the grid to fourth behind the two KTMs of Brad Binder and Jack Miller, and was only able to repass Miller to salvage third with a handful of laps left.

Like the sprint, Sunday's main race also ended up running to 12 laps thanks to the notoriously fickle Motegi weather gods. After the whole field departed the grid



Martin emerged from the murk to take his third GP win of 2023

on slicks, the rain started falling on the opening lap, prompting 16 of the 21-strong field to pit for their wet-shod bikes immediately and leading to the surreal sight of Ducati substitute Michele Pirro being credited with leading the first three laps despite starting last.

As the five slick holdouts either pitted or were swallowed up by the pack, it was Aleix Espargaro who took the lead, but the Aprilia man could do nothing to hold back an inspired Martin, who picked off both Bagnaia and Espargaro in the space of two corners on lap six.

Bagnaia cleared Espargaro moments later and seemed to be catching Martin when the rain became heavier, leading to the red flags being shown. An attempt at a restart was abandoned and the race declared over, with full points awarded.

The final place on the podium went to Honda's Marc Marquez, who dominated the headlines all weekend with his future still not officially confirmed at the time of writing. Unable to manage better than seventh in the sprint, he was allowed by the rain to transcend the limitations of his RC213V and score his first top-three result since last year's Australian GP.

Despite that, it looks more likely than ever that what Marquez was keen to call a "special relationship" with Honda has finally run its course and that the six-time premier-class champion will ride a Gresini Ducati next year. Indeed, Ducati technical chief Gigi Dall'Igna dropped a strong hint in that direction when he told Italian TV: "The fact that [Marquez] strongly wants to get on a Ducati can only be pleasing."

Behind Marquez, Marco Bezzecchi was



Bagnaia has seen his lead to Martin shrink to three points



Marquez scored a brilliant third but looks set to leave Honda

RESULTS **ROUND 14/20, MOTEGI (JPN), 1 OCTOBER (12 LAPS – 35.798 MILES)**

POS	RIDER	TEAM	TIME
1	Jorge Martin (ESP)	Pramac Ducati	24m06.314s
2	Francesco Bagnaia (ITA)	Ducati	+1.413s
3	Marc Marquez (ESP)	Honda	+2.013s
4	Marco Bezzecchi (ITA)	VR46 Ducati	+2.943s
5	Alex Espargaro (ESP)	Aprilia	+3.181s
6	Jack Miller (AUS)	KTM	+6.837s
7	Augusto Fernandez (ESP)	GasGas Tech3 KTM	+7.587s
8	Fabio Di Giannantonio (ITA)	Gresini Ducati	+8.602s
9	Raul Fernandez (ESP)	RNF Aprilia	+11.229s
10	Fabio Quartararo (FRA)	Yamaha	+12.244s
11	Takaaki Nakagami (JPN)	LCR Honda	+14.714s
12	Joan Mir (ESP)	Honda	+14.924s
13	Cal Crutchlow (GBR)	Yamaha	+16.057s
14	Stefan Bradl (DEU)	LCR Honda	+17.253s
15	Pol Espargaro (ESP)	GasGas Tech3 KTM	+24.921s
16	Michele Pirro (ITA)	Ducati	+33.962s
17	Franco Morbidelli (ITA)	Yamaha	+1m14.934s
18	Miguel Oliveira (PRT)	RNF Aprilia	-1 lap
19	Maverick Vinales (ESP)	Aprilia	-1 lap
NC	Johann Zarco (FRA)	Pramac Ducati	+6.191s
R	Brad Binder (ZAF)	KTM	5 laps-accident

Winner's average speed 89.105mph. **Fastest lap** Zarco 1m55.903s, 92.659mph.

QUALIFYING 2 1 Martin 1m43.198s; 2 Bagnaia 1m43.369s; 3 Miller 1m43.551s; 4 Bezzecchi 1m43.624s; 5 Binder 1m43.709s; 6 Di Giannantonio 1m43.808s; 7 Marquez 1m43.812s; 8 Vinales 1m43.815s; 9 A Espargaro 1m43.822s; 10 Zarco 1m43.851s; 11 R Fernandez 1m44.054s; 12 P Espargaro 1m44.096s.

QUALIFYING 1 Marquez 1m43.997s; R Fernandez 1m44.049s; 13 A Fernandez 1m44.129s; 14 Quartararo 1m44.138s; 15 Mir 1m44.150s; 16 Oliveira 1m44.427s; 17 Morbidelli 1m44.521s; 18 Nakagami 1m44.626s; 19 Crutchlow 1m45.273s; 20 Bradl 1m45.451s; 21 Pirro 1m45.707s.

SPRINT RACE (12 LAPS – 35.798 MILES)

1 Martin 21m00.734s; 2 Binder +1.390s; 3 Bagnaia +5.279s; 4 Miller +6.194s; 5 Zarco +6.315s; 6 Bezzecchi +8.919s; 7 Marquez +9.298s; 8 Di Giannantonio +10.189s; 9 Vinales +12.404s; 10 R Fernandez +15.366s; 11 P Espargaro +15.473s; 12 A Fernandez +15.592s; 13 Mir +17.052s; 14 Oliveira +18.092s; 15 Quartararo +19.333s; 16 Morbidelli +19.645s; 17 Nakagami +21.862s; 18 Crutchlow +26.026s; 19 Pirro +27.911s; 20 Bradl +28.178s; R A Espargaro 8 laps-engine. **Winner's average speed** 102.221mph. **Fastest lap** Martin 1m44.033s, 103.231mph.

RIDERS' CHAMPIONSHIP 1 Bagnaia 319; 2 Martin 316; 3 Bezzecchi 265; 4 Binder 201; 5 A Espargaro 171; 6 Zarco 162; 7 Vinales 139; 8 Luca Marini 135; 9 Miller 125; 10 Quartararo 111.

CONSTRUCTORS' CHAMPIONSHIP 1 Ducati 490; 2 KTM 272; 3 Aprilia 240; 4 Honda 142; 5 Yamaha 131.

WEEKEND WINNERS

MOTO2

MOTEGI (JPN)

Somkiat Chantra
Honda Team Asia
(Kalex)

MOTO3

MOTEGI (JPN)

Jaume Masia (below)
Leopard Racing
(Honda)



NEXT REPORT

Indonesian GP
19 October
issue



fourth on his VR46 Ducati at the end of a fraught weekend during which he crashed in qualifying and escaped unpunished for hitting Maverick Vinales's Aprilia at Turn 1 in the main race. He now trails Bagnaia by 54 points, though is well clear in third.

Completing the top five was Espargaro, who was left incensed by another reliability issue in the sprint when one bank of cylinders of the Aprilia V4 simply stopped. "The problems of the past are coming back," he seethed, after also suffering technical problems in India the week before.

Miller was sixth and the best of the KTM riders, while Binder crashed out. Had the race been dry, the Austrian marque would have likely been Ducati's nearest challenger. Binder gave Martin a run for his money in the sprint after breaking Jorge Lorenzo's eight-year-old Motegi lap record in Friday practice using the new carbon-fibre chassis.

If Honda's home race delivered an unexpected positive result, the Motegi weekend was frankly an embarrassment for Yamaha. In the sprint, Fabio Quartararo led the Iwata marque's charge in 15th, complaining afterwards that he had "no turning, no power, no downforce" on his M1. The Frenchman was a marginally more respectable 10th in the main race after a failed gamble on staying out on slick tyres for an extra lap compared to the majority.

Wildcard Cal Crutchlow was second of the three Yamaha riders home in his first MotoGP outing since last year's Valencia finale. The British rider picked up three points for 13th after opting for the same strategy as Quartararo.

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ENGINE SYSTEMS DESIGN ENGINEER
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We have an exciting opportunity for experienced Design Engineers to join the team responsible for the design and development of varied mechanical and composite components within our Engine Systems group.

The group is responsible for the design of all aspects related to the powertrain installation in the car, including the cooling and fuel system. A role in this group offers exposure to many engineering disciplines to ensure these systems are structurally and aerodynamically optimised and provides an opportunity to make tangible improvements to the performance and reliability of the car.

Key skills:

- Have a good understanding of the design and associated production requirements for both metallic and composite components and assemblies.
- Be able to demonstrate an innovative and flexible approach to problem solving and possess the ability to work through problems in a scientific and analytical way.
- Be able to plan and progress multiple projects concurrently.
- Be able to integrate quickly into existing teams and be actively involved in many aspects of each department.
- Have good communication and analytical skills and be able to work to tight deadlines & under pressure.
- Possess a positive attitude and be keen to deliver high quality schemes and designs for deadline driven tasks.

All applicants must have:

- A good quality degree in Mechanical, Automotive or Motorsport Engineering.
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DESIGN ENGINEER
EY3 Engineering

EY3 has a number of ongoing and upcoming projects such as TCR Touring cars, Formula E, Nürburgring Supercars and Motorbikes – several being full EV powered. To support this we are looking to increase our design capacity as follows:

Permanent Design Engineer – An ideal opportunity for an engineer with a few years of experience who likes a diverse challenge and wants to move to the next level.

Contract Design Engineer – A role that can be tailored to suit experience, with an emphasis on surfacing / composites.

Roles will typically include some or all of the following:

- Modelling and drafting of components and assemblies for a variety of Motorsport and high performance projects.
- Working on all areas of the car, from mechanical parts for IC/EV Powertrains and suspension, to surfacing and composites for bodywork and interior.
- Hand calculations and/or simple FEA to ensure parts are fit for purpose and robust. Liaising with internal production departments and external suppliers to ensure solutions are cost efficient, high quality and designed for assembly.
- Producing BOM exports and other information to assist our production department and creating build manuals for car build and spares ordering.

General:

- Candidates need to be highly skilled users of 3D CAD, preferably Siemens NX. Including modelling, drafting, assemblies and sheet metal, with FEA being an advantage.
- A minimum of 2 years post graduate experience is required, preferably within some form of professional Motorsport. Working in a fast paced environment, tight deadlines need to be met, whilst achieving a high level of quality.

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DUTY MANAGER
F1 Drive London

Job Purpose:

With a primary focus on managing the on-site visitor experience for F1 DRIVE London, the Duty Manager will play a pivotal role in ensuring the seamless operation of our facility across all visitor touchpoints. Your key responsibilities include maintaining a consistent level of service excellence, exceptional customer engagement, revenue optimization and health and safety of the track and experience.

Key Responsibilities:

- Operational Leadership:
- Ensure the smooth, efficient, and productive operation of F1 DRIVE London in collaboration with the senior management team and marshals.
- Take full responsibility for the health and safety of the facility, including conducting risk assessments, staff training, and enforcing safety protocols.
- Coordinate track maintenance and facility upkeep to provide an exceptional experience for customers.
- Collaborate with the mechanic to schedule and plan track moves and changeovers.

Personal Attributes:

- Leads by example, embodies the Spurs Way values, and fosters a positive culture.
- Values and respects others, builds effective relationships, and collaborates seamlessly.
- Demonstrates a strong work ethic, delivering results to the highest standards, and taking ownership of responsibilities.

Experience and Skills:

- Experience in a supervisory role in a Karting Track or similar is essential.

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Haas F1 Team

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- Collaborate and work cohesively with R&D Lead Team Leader, reporting any issues and finding solutions in a timely manner.
- Complete and develop non-destructive test processes for on car and off car components.
- Ensure the NDT equipment is suitable and fit for purpose.
- Complete test procedures for service and proof testing of on car and off car components.
- Operate R&D test equipment, loggers and sensors.
- Operate and develop load frame test equipment and procedures.
- Document and publish reports on test results and fault finding.
- Work with the R&D Team Leader to implement research and development tests as required.
- Have a good mechanical understanding of the design of jigs, fixtures and tooling ensuring fit for purpose use.

Education and Work Experience:

- GCSE, High School diploma or equivalent required. Further education including Trade
- School, Apprenticeship or University Degree desired. Five years of work experience within a professional motorsport environment and experience of Non-destructive testing preferably with professional qualifications for Penetrant and Ultrasonic Testing methods.

Specialized Knowledge and Skills:

- NDT with experience in UT and Penetrant inspection. Eddy current testing is also an advantage, but training can be provided for the right candidate.

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SENIOR VEHICLE PERFORMANCE CONTROLS ENGINEER
Mahindra Racing

Role Overview:

A Role is available for a Senior Vehicle Performance Control Systems Engineer in a refreshed department at Mahindra Racing. We are looking for a highly qualified and experienced engineer to join us on a full-time basis reporting to the Head of Control systems. This engineer will be responsible for developing chassis and performance related control systems. The role will involve track support and travelling to races.

Main Responsibilities:

- Develop Chassis Performance Control Systems and analysis tools.
- Research and develop new control strategies based on modern control design techniques.
- Specify and peer review new control strategies with control and performance engineers.
- Collaborate with the Simulation department to carry out more complex investigations.
- Implement control software for the ECU environment.
- Test, calibrate and validate software using DIL or HIL.
- Work with Race drivers both in DIL and on track to optimise and calibrate control systems.
- Document and communicate new control strategies to relevant departments.

Qualifications, skills and experience required:

- Masters or PhD. in Vehicle Dynamics and Control systems however, experience and proven track record will be considered.
- Excellent understanding of Vehicle dynamics, Control systems and Vehicle Performance. Specifically experience of developing Kalman filters and control systems using methods such as PID, LQR, MPC etc. for chassis performance.
- Experienced working with Matlab and Simulink.

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CHIEF ENGINEER
MGI Engineering

Reporting directly to the CEO, this position will involve:

- Forming and evolving Engineering teams
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- Analysing and interpreting customer requirements
- Engaging with existing and new candidate suppliers for sustainment, upgrade and replacement of existing systems and acquisition of new systems
- Forming close and effective partnership with customers and key industrial partners
- Interaction with all departments to ensure full compliance with concept intent and structural integrity.
- Continuous development of designs and process to keep best practices
- Comply with company quality standards AS 9100D (training will be provided)

Successful candidates will be expected to:

- Comprehensive understanding of engineering processes and practices and tools
- Ability to establish and inspire an engineering team and provide direction to subsidiary leads to achieve technical objectives and solutions. Including the ability to manage tasks and priorities to ensure that assigned workload is delivered when required.
- Demonstrated history of technical management of subcontract third party suppliers

Desired skills, qualifications and experience:

- Experience as a Chief Engineer
- Educated to Minimum HND level /Mechanical Engineering or equivalent

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RACE ENGINEER
United Autosports

Main responsibilities:

Race Engineer

- Define the race car setup in partnership with the engineering team.
- Define the run plans in partnership with the engineering team to allow efficient program delivery and overall team learning.
- Deliver the race strategy as defined to ensure a best race finishing position.
- Communicate effectively with all team members and functions using company standard communication protocols.
- Work collaboratively with the other race engineers within the team to promote overall team performance.
- Responsible for the maintenance of the race car safety, legality, reliability, and performance.

Engineering team

- Work within the engineering team to manage assigned work as part of the company projects and task list.
- Work collaboratively with colleagues to deliver performance and operational improvement projects.
- Positively contribute ideas and feedback to the management of the company projects and tasks list.

Company Reputation

- Ensure the company's reputation is always maintained at the highest level.

Requirements and Skills

- Degree level engineering or relevant science qualifications.
- This role is full-time based at our business headquarters in Leeds in addition to extensive foreign travel to events.
- Demonstrate previous competence and success in an engineering role in a top-level motorsport discipline with experience of endurance racing with GT and Prototype preferred.

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Porsche Carrera Cup GB Junior finalists revealed

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Ward to race restored
Ralt RT3 **F3** car



Ingram to enter
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Finalists revealed for 2024-25 Porsche Carrera Cup GB Junior shootout

PORSCHE

The four drivers selected as finalists for the 2024-25 Porsche Carrera Cup GB Junior shootout have been revealed.

A dozen candidates were interviewed by series organisers at the end of last month and those drivers have now been whittled down to four who will go head-to-head at Silverstone on 1 November.

British GT racers Josh Rowledge and James Wallis, Porsche Sprint Challenge GB points leader Joe Warhurst and European GT4 competitor Tom Edgar have been selected to progress to the final stage.

Rowledge, 17, won the Ginetta Junior title last season and stepped up to a McLaren in British GT4 for this year, taking a best result of second so far. Wallis, 17, meanwhile, has been racing in the series' GT3 division and has also been a frontrunner in the GT Cup.

Warhurst, 18, landed his first Sprint Challenge wins at Silverstone last time out and heads into this weekend's Brands Hatch finale with a slender points lead, while former British GT4 driver Edgar, 18, has scored one win after progressing



Finalists bid to follow in Smalley's footsteps

to European competition this year.

"We received a high number of applications for the role of 2024-25 Junior and the overall standard was exceptional, making the selection of our semi-finalists even harder than usual," said Porsche GB motorsport manager James MacNaughton. "We wish all 12 the best of luck for the future, but we are especially looking forward to welcoming James, Joe, Josh and Tom to our Junior Shootout at Silverstone. It will be exciting to see who emerges ahead; the winner will be announced at our Porsche Night of Motorsport in November and we look

forward to working with them over the next two years."

The quartet will face a range of driving, fitness and media assessments at Silverstone next month to determine who will follow in newly crowned Carrera Cup GB champion Adam Smalley's footsteps as the Junior. The winner will receive £85,000 towards their budget in each of the two seasons of the Junior programme, as well as benefiting from a range of support and experiences from Porsche. All of the past five Juniors have won the Carrera Cup title.

STEPHEN LICKORISH

New Fiesta Junior scholarship

BRSCC

The British Racing & Sports Car Club has launched a new Fiesta Junior scholarship for next year to win a fully funded season in the category, worth an estimated £65,000.

The prize package includes use of the latest Mk7 Fiesta Zetec car for a year, along with entry

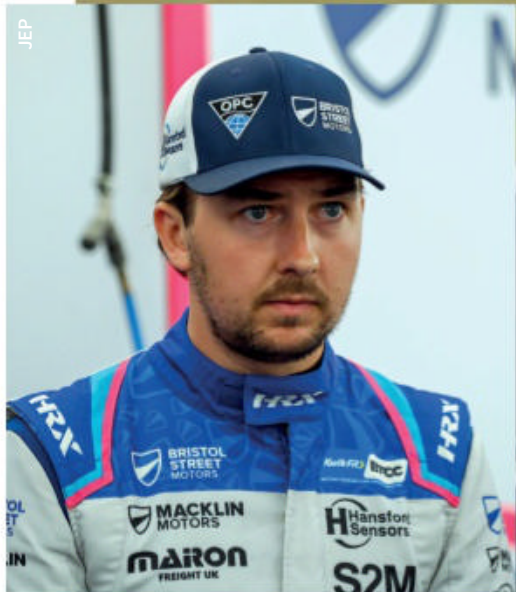
and registration fees, professional team support, all consumables, mentoring from British Touring Car ace Josh Cook and the cost of taking an ARDS test. Drivers born between 1 January 2007 and 8 March 2010 that have no previous car racing experience are eligible to enter the scholarship, which costs £595, plus VAT.

Two qualifying days will

be held at Blyton Park on 13-14 February, with the top three drivers from each progressing to the final shootout. All drivers that make it to the final but are unsuccessful will still be given free entry and registration to three 2024 Fiesta Junior events (worth £2500) and all drivers taking part will get free entry to their first race.



Scholarship will give free entry to growing Fiesta Junior grid



Ingram to make British GT debut in Aston at Donington

BTCC champion Ingram (inset) will race Aston Martin Vantage GT4 with Johnson

BRITISH GT

Reigning British Touring Car champion Tom Ingram will make his British GT debut in this month's season finale at Donington Park.

Ingram will race MKH's Aston Martin Vantage GT4 alongside Ron Johnson as the team, which has previously raced in the British Endurance Championship, also lines up on the grid for the first time.

Ingram, who heads into the BTCC finale at Brands Hatch this weekend with

an outside title shot, raced alongside Johnson in a GTC-spec Ferrari 458 in the GT Cup two years ago.

"Ron and I have done bits and pieces together for quite a few years, he's just a good mate," Ingram told Autosport. "I've raced with him in the [Citroen] C1s, we raced with FF Corse together at Snetterton in a Ferrari, and with Speedworks in the Supra. He's a nice guy to be around. He phoned, as he does, and said, 'Shall we go and do this?' and I said, 'Why not?'"

"The first time I drive it will

be in the test, probably on the Thursday, so I won't get a huge amount of time in it."

Ingram played down any expectations. "We're not doing anything serious, this is just to have a play more than anything else," he said. "We're under no illusions that we're going to win, and I'm not interested in ruining anyone's day just to prove anything. Hopefully, we can just stay out of trouble and have some fun."

"They'll put a good car under us, and Ron and I can have an enjoyable weekend."

It's awkward though – I'm officially listed as a gold but I'm not really gold in sportscars. We got a bit screwed there!"

Johnson will be making his first BGT appearance since the Donington finale in 2014.

"I've been looking at British GT for a while and would love to do a full season again," he said. "Donington feels like the perfect opportunity to see how I stack up against GT4's usual suspects. And there's no one else I'd rather share the car with than Tom."

SAM HALL & MARCUS SIMMONS

Adam to miss season finale but GT3 title win still possible

BRITISH GT

Jonny Adam's hopes of a reprieve from his European Le Mans Series commitments to gun for a fifth British GT crown in the Donington Park decider have been dashed, but he could still claim the GT3 title.

The Scot, who with the 2 Seas Motorsport Mercedes squad is on the cusp of a fifth British crown, is being forced to skip the season finale due to his clashing date as an Aston Martin factory driver in the ELMS finale in Portugal. He will be replaced alongside co-driver James Cottingham by fellow

veteran Phil Keen.

Adam had hoped to be at Donington with the title on the line, but he has been unable to secure a release.

Adam and Cottingham hold a 13-point buffer over Century Motorsport BMW pair Darren Leung and Dan Harper ahead of the two-hour season finale. This means that Adam could still win the title as long as Leung and Harper fail to overturn that deficit and Cottingham does not score points.

It would not be the first time that Adam misses out on a crown while his co-driver is successful. In 2013, Andrew Howard was the sole winner of the title



No Donington outing for Adam in British GT

after Adam was deducted points for a collision earlier in the season.

Keen stood in for Jules Gounon in the sister 2 Seas Mercedes at Portimao – ironically the venue where Adam is 'cup-tied' – earlier this year. The veteran holds the record for most British GT race wins jointly with Adam.

The new fencing was supposed to be installed at the start of 2023



Upgrades at Brands Hatch as new debris fencing added at Paddock

MSV

New debris fencing has been installed at top Brands Hatch viewing spot Paddock Hill Bend ahead of the barrier up Hailwoods Hill being pushed back.

The tall, tightly meshed fencing encroaches on the popular area and has been erected in recent weeks, delayed from the original plan of being put in place for the start of the season.

The work has been described as part of circuit operator MotorSport Vision's "continued commitment to improving venue safety".

"The fence line has been adjusted to accommodate an upcoming widening to the run-off area at the exit of Paddock

Hill Bend," said circuit manager Mike Lally. "This will allow us to move the barriers back and extend the distance between them and the circuit itself as well as reducing the angle of any impact. Work was initially scheduled to begin early in 2023, but supply-chain issues delayed work until the summer."

Lally added that the fencing's height – similar to that installed on the Grand Prix loop in 2018 – was determined by the latest FIA safety standards.

He added: "Whilst there has been a small reduction to the existing spectator area, the changes aren't too significant, and we're planning to improve the extent of the viewing banks as the work develops."

BURRELL RESIGNS

Scottish Motor Racing Club chairman and director Rich Burrell has resigned from the positions with immediate effect "due to changes in my personal life". In his resignation letter dated 2 October, Burrell stated that he wanted to nominate vice-chairman Nic Boyes to the role of chairman "until the board can appoint another director". He added: "I would like to take the opportunity to thank the club and everyone that has given support to me during my time as a director."

HARVEST FOR DROUGHT

Ireland's Nicole Drought last Saturday became the first woman to win an EnduroKa race, courtesy of an inspired two-hour final stint for the Pro-AM Racing team after taking over from team-mates Jason Roberts and Will Hillyard at Oulton Park. After charging up from 10th, Drought tracked down leader Teddy Wilson before snatching the lead on the outside into Cascades.

LEGENDS AT SNETTERTON

Legends race winner Steve Whitelegg will return to the championship for the penultimate round of the season at Snetterton this weekend. The event will also feature the debut for 16-year-old Harri Musselle, who will take over the #28 machine from father Paul.

CLIO CHAMPION STEPS UP

Newly crowned 750 Motor Club Clio Sport champion Chris Lawrence plans to bid for another title in 2024 aboard a Renault Clio 197, after claiming the top spot last month at Donington Park with a 182 model. "For next year I've acquired Nick Brady's 197 so, all being well, I'll be defending my title in that," he said. "It'll be an interesting challenge."

Fox to return with Eaton and Seale



BRITISH GT

Fox Motorsport will return to British GT at the final round of the season at Donington Park this month fielding a GT3 entry for Abbie Eaton and John Seale.

The Silver-Am duo will race a Lamborghini Huracan GT3 Evo2 at the two-hour season finale on 22 October.

The team returns to the championship where it has

been a race winner in the GT3 and GT4 classes, most recently at Spa last year with a McLaren 720S GT3.

"Donington's going to be good fun," said Seale, whose most recent British GT outing came in 2020 at Oulton Park. "I've had a couple of days in the Evo2 Lamborghini and I'm still dialling myself in, but it's a beautiful car to drive and I'm looking forward to getting as much practice as possible

before we race."

Eaton, who has raced in Lamborghini Super Trofeo Europe this season, last competed in British GT in 2017 and had her first taste of Fox Motorsport's Lamborghini this week.

"I haven't done an awful lot of GT3 racing, but I've spent the year in the Super Trofeo car, which has different characteristics, so hopefully it won't take long to adjust," she said.

Ward to return to racing after 20 years with Ralt

CLASSIC F3

Former British Formula 3 and F3000 driver Gary Ward will make a return to racing after an absence of 20 years at the wheel of a Ralt RT3.

Ward, who has not raced since contesting a pair of EuroBOSS outings in a Jordan 197 powered by a Judd V10 in 2003, has spent the past year restoring the Ralt in which Belgian Didier Theys contested the 1983 European Formula 3 Championship with Ravarotto Racing.

He will make his debut in the car at the Historic Sports Car Club finals meeting at Silverstone next weekend in the Classic F3 event. Ward explained that he had been motivated to buy the car previously raced by Paul Smith due to his love of Ralt's all-conquering RT3.

"I didn't get to race one in period – I started out in the later RT30 in 1986 – but I was lucky enough to see great drivers like Ayrton Senna and Martin Brundle going at it hell for leather in them," said Ward, 60, who now works in



Ralt RT3 was raced in European F3 in 1983

driver management after a spell as team manager in Formula 4 with Arden. "They are extremely pretty cars.

"I wanted one with history and to restore it as sympathetically as possible. I can still race it in its Marlboro livery because it ran like that in period. It's got a Volkswagen/Spiess in it now rather the Alfa Romeo/Novamotor that Theys used but, when I was racing in F3,

I always wanted one of those Spiess engines."

Ward, who has continued to demonstrate racing cars for the Morgan family and won the shoot-out in a Leyton House-Judd CG901B at the Goodwood Festival of Speed in 2012, is planning a programme of HSCC appearances as well as outings in the F3 Classic Interseries in Europe next year.

GARY WATKINS

Mini champions-elect switch classes for finale



Smith has essentially claimed Miglia title

RICHARD STYLES

MINI 7 RACING CLUB

Provisional Mini 7 Racing Club champions Aaron Smith and Jonathon Page will switch to different classes for this weekend's Silverstone finale, where seven-time Miglia champion Peter Baldwin will be honoured.

Smith has scored

enough points to secure a fourth Miglia title but, rather than risk picking up a penalty in the season-closer, he has instead switched to the Se7ens division. Similarly, Se7en S-Class champion Page will make his Miglia debut.

A bumper entry of 65 cars across the club's two grids has been received

and the drivers will gather to pay tribute to Baldwin, who died in August, including being able to contribute to a book of remembrance. "We've got an amazing entry and it should be a very fitting tribute to Peter," said the club's commercial manager Colin Peacock.

STEPHEN LICKORISH

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Sullivan and Houk will
tackle Festival and WHT



STEVE JONES

Team USA Scholarship winners make UK debuts at Silverstone

FF1600

Team USA Scholarship drivers Jack Sullivan and Ayrton Houk made their UK racing debuts at Silverstone last weekend in the final National FF1600 round of the year as part of their build-up to the Formula Ford Festival and Walter Hayes Trophy.

Sullivan, 17, and Houk, 20, won their places in a shootout held at the Polecat Training Centre in Tennessee. They arrived in the UK a week prior to testing the Ammonite Motorsport-run Rays for the first time the day before the Silverstone races.

“The biggest takeaway is how competitive it is,” said Houk after his first race on Saturday. “We’re both still getting used

to the Avon tyres – they are less grippy than the Hoosiers we used in the States, and the cars slide more.”

Both Houk and Sullivan competed in F1600 in the US in 2023, finishing second and third in the points respectively, while Houk also has experience of racing Midgets on dirt and asphalt ovals. There was little to choose between them on their UK debuts, Sullivan finishing just ahead of Houk in both races and securing a best result of 10th.

The Team USA Scholarship pair head to Castle Combe this weekend to gain further experience ahead of the Festival at Brands Hatch two weeks later.

IAN SOWMAN

MOYERS BACK ON TRACK

Michael Moyers warmed up for a tilt at winning back the Walter Hayes Trophy with a guest appearance in the final National Formula Ford 1600 event of the season last weekend at Silverstone. Moyers, who took the second of his two WHT wins five years ago, almost missed out on taking part after an engine failed in testing.

EQUIPE SUPER SPRINT

The third edition of Equipe Classic Racing’s innovative Super Sprint event is due to take place at Silverstone on Saturday. It features a series of short 10-lap heat races through which drivers progress so that several finals held at the end of the day feature car/driver combinations of similar pace. Prize money has been added this year, with each final winner receiving £500, and there are also rewards for podium finishers.

COMBE’S TITLE SHOWDOWNS

Two of Castle Combe Racing Club’s three resident championships will be decided at this Saturday’s Grand Finals meeting. Reigning Formula Ford conqueror Felix Fisher (TM Racing Ray) can match works Swift rival Luke Cooper’s tally of two crowns, while GT class champions Jamie Sturges (VW Golf TCR) and Alan Hamilton (Westfield Race Aero) dispute overall honours.

BRADLEY CROWNED WINNER

Damien Bradley has been confirmed as the 2023 British Hillclimb Championship Tin-Top Challenge winner. The new initiative for the fastest closed-cockpit cars was held over six run-offs at three events. Bradley shared his 800bhp Subaru Legacy with friend Steven Darley, and Darley was on target to win the title until he spun on the final run-off at Loton Park.



STEVE JONES

Hilton eyes more outings in Alfa 4C

ALFA ROMEOS

Mike Hilton is planning to develop his Alfa Romeo 4C – believed to be the only racing example in Europe – for outings in the Britcar Trophy in 2024.

The 53-year-old from Esher gave the striking-looking car (left) its fourth outing of the season in the 750 Motor Club’s Alfa Romeo Championship at Donington Park last month, where he took a second-place

finish before encountering mechanical glitches in race two.

“It had been imported as a trackday project before I bought it two years ago,” said Hilton. “I’ll keep racing it in this championship but fancy a go in the Britcar Trophy as well.

“It will need some more work to get it competitive – this is only its fifth ever race meeting – but, when it’s behaving, it is great fun to drive.”

CARL MCKELLAR

MG Trophy first to become CSCC championship

CLASSIC SPORTS CAR CLUB

The MG Trophy will move across to the Classic Sports Car Club's portfolio next year as the club begins to administer championships for the first time while the MG Car Club ceases to organise race events.

The MGCC closed its competition department at the start of this season and announced earlier this year that its July Cadwell Park meeting would be "the last to be independently organised by the club". Many of its series have now been seeking partnerships with other clubs. The MG Trophy for ZR models will switch to the CSCC but retain its championship status.

A vote was held among drivers to approve the move and series coordinator Pete Macwaters believes there is now the potential to grow grids again, while expressing sadness at the end of the MGCC's 70-year race history. "The CSCC have welcomed us with open arms," said Macwaters. "The good thing is they're likely going to circuits that we haven't done for a while – I sincerely hope we will have two 'new' tracks and I think that will rejuvenate the championship. It's been a bit of



RICHARD STYLES

a rebuilding process and I want to build it back up."

Macwaters added that the ability for drivers to contest a second CSCC series, such as its Tin Tops category, with a half-price entry is another positive. Exact details of the race format and calendar for the MG Trophy are due to be revealed in the coming weeks.

CSCC director David Smitheram says the MG Trophy is the first of several championships joining its ranks for 2024 as it shifts its approach

for the new season. It is due to take on slightly more UK track time as a result, although some of its series will have one round fewer than in 2023.

"We've reversed that policy of just having our own homegrown series and we've got a number of championships coming on board," said Smitheram. "From chatting with Pete Macwaters, one of the advantages we will give them is more in the way of livestreaming. We want to make it as attractive as possible."

STEPHEN LICKORISH

BMW engine-building guru shuts up shop

HISTORICS

BMW guru Lester Owen has called time on his engine-building business after servicing the German marque's racing fraternity for 47 years.

Apprenticed as a mechanic in the early 1960s, Owen ran a garage and opened a bodyshop before leaving Halesfield Motors in Telford, which folded after running Hillman Avenger GTs for Bernard Unett, Adrian Boyd and Jenny Birrell on the 1975 Avon Tour of Britain.

The Shropshire engineer, who founded LH Owen Automotive in 1981-82

(under John Beasley's BAT Motors umbrella), cites "workforce problems" for his decision to retire. "I'm 79 now, and still have it [the ability to work], but need staff to sustain it," he said. "It's too much for just one man."

Owen is most widely known for his BMW M10 (2002-type) SOHC engines, which have powered myriad Chevrons, plus Crossle, Elva and Ginetta models in historic racing. The last of a run, coded LHO 164, was dyno-tested on Tuesday, before being shipped to a customer in the US.

"The [Chevron] B8 has



JEFF BLOXHAM

been my best friend," said Owen (above), owners of Derek Bennett's iconic design having underpinned his work since he rebuilt Beasley's in the late 1970s. He subsequently ran Beasley's Porsche and De Cadenet Lola-DFV in World Championship for Makes

events and at Le Mans.

Owen has also built many two-litre M12 DOHC units for Historic Formula 2 – including Matthew Watts's title-winning units – and sports-prototypes, and S14 engines for Super Touring-specification E30 M3s.

MARCUS PYE



Bulk of Caterham's series to switch to Toyo Tires after Avon's demise

CATERHAMS

The majority of the manufacturer-backed Caterham championships will switch to using Toyo Tires next season following the planned closure of the Avon Tyres factory.

Caterham has enjoyed a long partnership with Avon but, with the Goodyear-owned brand set to disappear in the coming months, the Academy series will now switch to running Toyo CF2 tyres, while the Roadsport, 270R and 310R divisions will use the Toyo R888R from next year. The top-tier 420Rs of the Caterham Seven UK Championship will continue to use Avon slicks for the next two seasons.

"We're hugely grateful for the support Avon have given us – they've been fantastic so it's a real shame to see them go, but we're very grateful to Toyo for stepping up," said Caterham chief motorsport and technical officer Simon Lambert.

"We've secured a supply of the current specification of slicks for the 420R cars for two more seasons. That car is such a great car to drive on that tyre, so using them for two more years should allow sufficient time for an alternative supply route to be found. We looked at a lot of potential partners but, for many, they're going away from the 13/14-inch tyres."

STEPHEN LICKORISH

New TCR UK class for older models

TCR UK

TCR UK will introduce a new class for first-generation machinery next year.

The Gen 1 Cup will cater for older cars such as the original Cupra TCR, Audi RS3 LMS, Volkswagen Golf GTI and Vauxhall Astra.

Newer machines, including second-generation models developed by the Volkswagen Audi Group, have become increasingly dominant this

year. All 13 races so far in 2023 have been won by either the Hyundai i30 N, Cupra Leon Competicion or Audi RS3 LMS Gen II.

Ahead of the final race weekend of the season at Brands Hatch later this month, eighth-placed Brad Hutchison is the only driver of a first-generation car in the championship's top 10, and Hutchison himself took the opportunity to borrow a Cupra Leon for the previous

round at Donington Park.

"We've recognised now that there need to be some changes going forward to help drivers be part of our platform and be recognised for their participation," said promoter Stewart Lines. "These changes will generate opportunities for people in older TCR cars who want to be a part of the TCR family and give them a chance to win a TCR championship in their own right."

MARK PAULSON

CAMP'S CIVIC TITLE BID SUFFERS WITH STRING OF CAR WOES

CIVIC CUP

Former Civic Cup championship leader Alistair Camp's bid to repeat his 2021 title took a severe blow at Silverstone on Saturday when he dropped to third in the standings after a string of car issues.

The Derbyshire man had qualified on the second row for the first and third races of the day – the second had a grid set by the result of the opener – but disaster struck before his car got to the startline.

"I was just about to go out when the team spotted a cracked brake disc," he said. "It was better to change it and start from the back than risk having to come in."

He climbed to 11th in that race, but worse was to come in the second encounter when his engine failed in the early stages. His Pro Alloys Racing team changed the engine and gearbox in a bid to get him out for race three. "I got lent an engine, and the guys have smashed it out of the box to change it in two hours," he said.

Camp (below), who will switch to TCR UK full-time next season after winning in a Hyundai on a one-off appearance at Donington Park earlier in September, finished fourth in that final race. But he has fallen to third in the standings, 42 points behind new leader Daniel Thackeray (a double winner in Northamptonshire) ahead of the final double-header at Brands Hatch later this month.

IAN SOWMAN





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Meeke, Solberg and Ingram enter the R.A.C. Rally

HISTORIC RALLYING

International rally stars Kris Meeke, Chris Ingram and Oliver Solberg have all confirmed plans to contest the Roger Albert Clark Rally next month.

The trio have committed to the five-day marathon, which takes in 350 stage miles in the forests of Wales, Scotland and England from 23-27 November. With a near capacity entry of 175 cars and unrivalled spectator interest, the event promises to be the biggest rally of the year in the UK as it recreates the spirit and atmosphere of the original RAC Rallies of the 1970s.

Five-time World Rally Championship event winner Meeke (below) will drive a freshly built historic-specification Ford Escort Mk2 from the Wales Motorsport team, while 2019 European Rally champion



MCKLEIN/MOTORSPORT IMAGES



PAUL LAWRENCE

Ingram will tackle the gruelling event in a TR7

Ingram will drive a replica works Triumph TR7 V8 built by David Appleby Engineering. WRC2 ace Solberg will drive the Ford Escort Mk2 of his father Petter and will tackle the rally with the Viking Motorsport squad of Petter's former WRC co-driver Phil Mills.

Northern Irishman Meeke will be part of an eight-car team from Wales Motorsport. "For sure it's going to be a huge challenge," Meeke said. "I have a real thing from my childhood for old-school rallies and the way it used to be. To say I'm excited to do it is an understatement as it's been on my bucket list for a long time, but the opportunity to do it has never presented itself before."

Ingram added: "It will be an amazing

once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Everyone's raving about how the rally is just like the old days and it will be five full days on legendary stages in a legendary car. It will be so much fun and a hell of a challenge. I've never done a rally in a historic car so it will be brilliant. We've got to go and try to win it!"

Solberg has heard about the original RAC Rally from his family. "It's always been a dream to do this rally," he said. "I heard so many stories about the rally and the stages which are used. I was telling my grandpa [Per-Inge Walfridsson] about it and he straight away said, 'You will be going to the Kielder forest; this is one tough place to compete!'"

PAUL LAWRENCE

Blomqvist and Evans star at Rally Festival

HISTORIC RALLYING

Rally aces Stig Blomqvist and Gwyndaf Evans, as well as over 80 rally cars spanning the history of the discipline, made for a fantastic spectacle during the Historic Rally Festival based at the Weston Park venue in Staffordshire.

Last weekend's event featured an entry including a host of Group B and Group A cars of the 1980s and 1990s. Blomqvist (pictured) was back at the wheel of an

early Group B specification Audi Quattro, like the cars he drove 40 years ago, while Evans handled a Ford Escort Mk2 with typical aplomb.

"Everybody's here with the right attitude to have some fun in some very nice cars and that suits me to the ground," said Evans, as he kept abreast of son Elfyn's progress in the World Rally Championship on Rally Chile.

Sadly, the British weather did its best to wreck the event and Sunday's feature day, with six stages planned



PAUL LAWRENCE

in Weston Park, had to be curtailed early as heavy rain, dropped oil, mud and waterlogged run-off areas led to a sensible decision by the organisers.

However, while it lasted, the spectacle was outstanding and a big crowd turned out to enjoy

the action during the demonstration special stage event, with MG Metro 6R4s, a Peugeot 205 T16, a gaggle of Audi Quattros and more all taking part. Organisers from the Rallying History club have plans to expand the event further in 2024.

PAUL LAWRENCE



Priaulx adds Spa GT40 glory to his September success

SPA SIX HOURS ROADBOOK 28-30 SEPTEMBER

For Andy Priaulx, September 2023 has represented another golden patch in his glittering career. Fewer than three weeks after the triple World Touring Car champion piloted a Jaguar E-type to victory in Goodwood's wet RAC Tourist Trophy Celebration, the Guernseyman added the Spa Six Hours crown to his CV on his event debut, relaying Miles Griffiths and Gordon Shedden to a repeat of their 2019 win in Philip Walker's Ford GT40.

Priaulx's event was a baptism of fire. "I was working for Multimatic in Detroit until Wednesday night and arrived at Spa late on Friday," he explained. "I'd not driven an historic GT40 before, so my first experience of it was in heavy rain and in darkness during qualifying. They decided

I should start Saturday's race [from fifth on the 91-car grid] so my first dry laps were fighting for the lead on full tanks, which was interesting!

"It's quite hard to get a feel for the car in the wet, with its heavy old engine in the back – very different to the perfectly balanced modern Ford GT I put on pole at Spa for my penultimate race in it in 2019 – and you have to be very careful with the gearbox [the GT40's Achilles' heel], particularly on downchanges. But I got ahead [on lap 14] and managed to hold it until the first stop, when Miles took over. From the start of Gordon's stint, he was managing everything because we were very light on fuel strategy. To win the race was an amazing team achievement against very tough opposition."

Indeed, the 30th edition of Roadbook's classic endurance race for cars ostensibly running to pre-1966 specification featured

teams from as far afield as Japan and the US, and a record 22 GT40s. Twenty-one started after 2003 winner Christian Glaesel sustained a broken vertebra, which subsequently required surgery, when his Pescarolo LMP1 crashed at very high speed in qualifying for the Masters Endurance Legends races.

The GT40 of German Marcus Graf von Oeynhausen and Belgian Nico Verdonck annexed pole by two seconds from fellow previous winners Olly Bryant and James Cottingham. It proved academic when, with conditions worsening, most crews were content with the bare minimum of running before calling it a day. That included Sam Tordoff/James Dorlin/Andrew Jordan, whose Lotus Elan gridded 31st. Only the Jaguar E-type of three-time victor Jon Minshaw and Phil Keen prevented a GT40 top 10 lock-out. But, as they say in all the best films, tomorrow is another day...



Barton impressed on debut, just missing out on GTS12 gold



Keen/Minshaw E-type and Tessaro Fiat were two very different Spa class winners



Priaulx joined Shedden and Griffiths for victorious run in Walker's GT40 (leading)



Tordoff/Jordan/Dorlin Elan was surprise interloper among GT40s



Six hours of flat-out endurance racing, three after dark, with no noise limits around the one of the most iconic circuits in Europe would decide the outcome. Five hundred miles – or 800 kilometres – with compulsory driver changes, fuel stops and the inevitable intervention of safety cars left the result wide open. At 1555 on Saturday, the field surged towards La Source, plunged down through the open left and right at Eau Rouge before climbing steeply over Raidillon onto the maximum-speed Kemmel Straight. The top 14 runners after an hour were GT40s, after which their numbers thinned out considerably.

Keen in the Jaguar was 16th, while Tordoff's Elan was gaining places hand over fist, as was the TVR Griffith of young Harry Barton, driving his first Six Hours. At one-third distance, Bryant's GT40 took the lead, with Keen eighth, Barton 10th with Ollie Reuben and Nigel Greensall awaiting their stints, and Jordan not far behind.

Bryant set the pace for a while, until fuel-system problems intervened but, as the race evolved, nothing looked like stopping the #14 Ford. Triple British Touring Car champion Shedden brought

it home a lap clear of the Tordoff/Jordan/Dorlin Elan, which, while its best lap was 10s off the seven quickest GT40s in the 2m43s and three shy of the best Lotus time, was more consistent and fuel-efficient.

Tony Wood/William Nuthall/Michael Lyons didn't have the smoothest of runs in Wood's GT40, but Lyons forged past Count Oeynhausen on the final lap to snatch the third podium step. After a race-long fight, the Minshaw/Keen Jag beat the Barton Racing TVR to GTS12 class gold by 21.833s.

The big touring car battle was initially headed by Armand Adriaans's Ford Mustang, before the Falcon of Karsten Le Blanc/Christiaan van Lanschot/Chris Milner showed its pace, but the Mustang of Jac and Ties Meeuwissen/Bas Jansen eventually prevailed by a lap over the cosmopolitan-crewed Falcon of German Bernd Georgi, Italian Manfredo Rossi and Belgian Vanina Ickx.

Against the odds, and having survived a spin at Les Combes, the intrepid Tessaro trio's Fiat Abarth 1000 finished a class-winning 57th. In the Spa Six Hours every finisher is a winner.

WEEKEND WINNERS

SPA SIX HOURS (115 LAPS)

1 Andy Priaulx/Miles Griffiths/Gordon Shedden (Ford GT40); **2** Sam Tordoff/Andrew Jordan/James Dorlin (Lotus Elan) -1 lap; **3** Tony Wood/Will Nuthall/Michael Lyons (Ford GT40); **4** Marcus Graf von Oeynhausen/Nico Verdonck (Ford GT40); **5** Luco Sanchez/Nick Salewsky/Michael Funke (Ford GT40); **6** Simon Evans/James Littlejohn (Lotus Elan); **7** Dario Franchitti/Marino Franchitti/Jimmie Johnson (Ford GT40); **8** Goncalo Gomes/James Claridge/James Denty (Lotus Elan); **9** Jon Minshaw/Phil Keen (Jaguar E-type); **10** Harry Barton/Nigel Reuben/Nigel Greensall (TVR Griffith).

Class winners Tordoff/Jordan/Dorlin; Minshaw/Keen; Pierre-Etienne Bordet/Emeric Bordet (Marcos-Volvo 1800GT); Jac Meeuwissen/Bas Jansen/Ties Meeuwissen (Ford Mustang); Simon Orebi Gann/Rick Bourne/Calum Lockie (Morgan +4 Super Sports); Ivor Miller/Les Goble (Aston Martin DB4); Graziano, Andrea & Francesco Tessaro (Fiat Abarth 1000).

Fastest lap Priaulx/Griffiths/Shedden 2m43.081s (96.06mph). **Pole** Graf von Oeynhausen/Verdonck. **Starters** 91.

MASTERS RACING LEGENDS

Race 1 Michael Cantillon (Williams FW07C)

Race 2 Christophe d'Ansembourg (Brabham BT49)

MASTERS SPORTSCAR LEGENDS

Diogo Ferrao/Martin Stretton (Lola-FVC T292)

MASTERS GENTLEMEN DRIVERS

John Spiers/Nigel Greensall (TVR Griffith)

MASTERS ENDURANCE LEGENDS

Race 1 Stuart Wiltshire (Peugeot 90X)

Race 2 Christophe d'Ansembourg (Dallara ORECA DO-05)

HISTORIC GRAND PRIX CARS ASSOCIATION

Race 1 Tim Child (Brabham BT3/4)

Race 2 Michael Gans (Cooper T79)

PRE-WAR SPORTSCARS

Ross Keeling/Calum Lockie (Delahaye 135)

MASTERS GT TROPHY

Craig Wilkins (Lamborghini Huracan Super Trofeo)

For full results visit:

roadbook.alkamelsystems.com

Brace gives Kelly National FF1600 title as Romanek is disqualified

SILVERSTONE
BRSCC
30 SEPTEMBER

Jordan Kelly secured the National Formula Ford Championship with two victories at Silverstone last weekend as the title aspirations of Lucas Romanek crumbled.

Nine points separated the pair before race one, and Romanek's bid to overturn Kelly's advantage started brightly when he led the first half as the rest squabbled behind. On lap 10 of 20, the Oldfield Motorsport Van Diemen JL13 driver got sucked back into the pack, however. As Romanek tried to reclaim third from Kelly's Team Dolan team-mate Chris Middlehurst at Luffield, there was a collision. Romanek was disqualified from third but reinstated on appeal, so still in the hunt at the start of race two.

Kelly had a more straightforward run to victory later, protected by fellow Van Diemen driver Middlehurst. Romanek

retired after another brush with Middlehurst and was later disqualified from the meeting due to a post-race incident. On track, Esports star Lucas Blakeley was delighted to claim third (after Josh Smith's track-limits-related demotion) after climbing through the pack.

Leon Bidgway's hopes of taking the Supersport Endurance title literally went up in smoke, his Lotus Exige destroyed by fire after he pulled off at the exit of Becketts with 45 minutes of the two hours remaining.

From the point at which Bryan Bransom's BMW M3 suffered a differential issue in the early laps, the BMW 1 Series of Keir McConomy and Bart Horsten had been in control, with SEAT Cupra pair Simon Mason and Chris Bialan their nearest challengers, but both were disqualified for overtaking behind the safety car prompted by the Bidgway conflagration.

Ricky Coomber's Honda Civic therefore took the win ahead of the M3 of Julian McBride, who also picked up fastest lap



within his class. That point meant that he finished the season level with Stuart Mead and Tim Hartland, who were also class winners in their VW Scirocco, with the latter pair provisionally claiming the championship on a tie-break.

It was a good day for Dan Thackeray in the Civic Cup, winning two of the three races to go from third to first in the standings with two rounds remaining. "We've either had wins or a terrible race, with no in between," he said after claiming his fourth of the season in Saturday morning's contest which, while tight, was lacking in place changes in the front group.

Rain fails to dampen thrills in Martin Donnelly Trophy

KIRKISTOWN
500MRCI
30 SEPTEMBER

There was no doubt that rain was on the horizon as teams gathered for last weekend's Martin Donnelly Trophy meeting, the 500 Motor Racing Club of Ireland's largest event of the year.

Dry conditions during morning qualifying may have given some a false sense of security, but rain was always forecast, although not before Ronan

Doherty chalked up what turned out to be the first of two convincing Formula Vee wins, the second of which also netted him the Emerson Fittipaldi Trophy.

Anthony Cross took the runner-up spot in race one ahead of Dan Polley but the sequel, run in very wet conditions, finished with a red flag with several cars stranded at the Hairpin. Jack Byrne took second spot ahead of Polley and Cross, the last-named demoted from third for a yellow-flag infringement.

Rain was present for both Formula

Ford encounters and that suited Jordan Dempsey (Van Diemen RF00), who, after being pipped to pole by Noel Robinson's Van Diemen, found himself in front when it mattered.

Teenager Jason Smyth was a revelation in his Ray. In the first encounter, he and Alan Davidson (Mondiale) battled for second spot – advantage Smyth at the flag – and he almost went one better in the Donnelly Trophy, leading until a handful of laps from the finish when a spin dropped him to fourth behind Dempsey, David McCullough





Max Edmundson – who remains second in the standings – seemed slightly more threatening in the third race, but again finished behind the in-control Thackeray although this time ahead of Dave Marshall, flying the flag for the FN2 chassis among the EP3 hordes and claiming his second podium of the day.

The middle, reversed-grid, race provided the most entertainment, with several lead changes before Sam Kirkpatrick came out on top from Harvey Caton, while Thackeray and Edmundson progressed to fourth and sixth.

Rhys Claydon took his Metro Cup victory tally to six by twice beating

championship rival Mike Williams. Claydon was a comfortable winner in race one, but Williams kept him honest after solving a power issue in the sequel. “I think it’s a fuel pump switch – I had a bit more oomph about the car that time,” he explained.

IAN SOWMAN



(RF00) and Robinson.

A determined charge brought Smyth back to a disappointed but highly creditable second place at the flag with McCullough in third. The field may not have been very large compared with previous Martin Donnelly Trophy races, but the talent was there nonetheless, and a surprisingly large crowd braved the rain to enjoy it.

Elsewhere in a packed programme, there were back-to-back victories for Steven Larkham (Radical PR6) and Graham Moore (GMS Honda) among a large amalgamated sportscar field, which also included a healthy selection of Global Lights, where Peter Drennan and Cameron Fenton took a win apiece.

Fiestas provided Shane Rabbitt with a double despite the very close attentions of Derek Graham each time, with Michael Graham completing the podium. The

concurrent Mazda MX-5 tussles went to Francis Allen and David Cousins, who took a win apiece.

Saloons provided plenty of excitement and a lot of spray, through which Gareth Blaine and his SEAT Leon Supercopa twice emerged triumphant. Race one ended under red flags after an incident at the Hairpin when Keith Wray’s BMW was torpedoed by Raymond Finnegan’s aquaplaning SHP Supercar. Through it all, the Ford Escort Millington of Gerard O’Connell scythed to a brace of emphatic wins overall.

The Mini Coopers were a little less dramatic, but not much, with Darren Gilmore eventually heading Johnny Titterington and Peter Bennett across the line in the first race, while the second fell to Titterington from Bennett and Gilmore.

RICHARD YOUNG

WEEKEND WINNERS

SILVERSTONE

NATIONAL FF1600

Races 1 & 2 Jordan Kelly (Van Diemen RF06)

SUPERSPORT ENDURANCE

Ricky Coomber (Honda Civic)

CIVIC CUP

Races 1 & 3 Dan Thackeray (EP3)

Race 2 Sam Kirkpatrick (EP3)

METRO CUP

Races 1 & 2 Rhys Claydon

For full results visit: tsl-timing.com

KIRKISTOWN

NI FORMULA VEE

Races 1 & 2 Ronan Doherty (Sheane FV94)

NI FORMULA FORD 1600

Races 1 & 2 Jordan Dempsey (Van Diemen RF00)

ROADSPORTS/NI SEVENS/GLOBAL LIGHTS

Races 1 & 2 Steven Larkham (Radical PR6)

MAZDA MX-5s/FIESTA ZETECs

Race 1 Francis Allen (MX-5)

Race 2 David Cousins (MX-5)

LIBRE SALOONS/GT

Races 1 & 2 Gerard O’Connell (SHP Ford Escort)

MINI COOPERS

Race 1 Darren Gilmore

Race 2 Johnny Titterington

For full results visit: beta.speedhive.com

Racing has taken place on the Bonneville Salt Flats for over 100 years

THE REMARKABLE MACHINES PEPPERING THE UTAH SALT

A diverse range of cars and characters flock to the States for Bonneville Speed Week, even including a Jensen C-V8 from Britain

CHRIS TARLING

PHOTOGRAPHY CHRIS TARLING

In early August each year, Bonneville Salt Flats in the extreme north-west of Utah provide the stage for a spectacular, otherworldly meeting of people and machines. Racing on the vast, blindingly white plain first took place in 1914, with something akin to an auto-racing exhibition. What is now known as the Bonneville Speed Week, held under the auspices of the Southern California Timing Association (SCTA), first took place in 1949. The event has been run (weather and pandemic-affected years excepted) annually ever since.

It has become the mecca for the curious art of land speed trials; the challenge of making a wheel-driven vehicle go as fast as budget, rules and ingenuity will allow. Located on an area at the western edge of the salt flats christened the Bonneville Speedway, it is uniquely suited to the task. Here, there's enough space to set out an arrow-straight nine-mile course; the surface is flat and hard, but retains enough moisture that tyres run much cooler than on mud, Tarmac or concrete.

This year featured the 75th running of the Bonneville Nationals Speed Trials. Typically excellent preparation by the SCTA had resulted in the creation of two high-quality courses, and everything looked set for a classic meeting. Mother Nature had other ideas, though, and sent a thunderstorm to dump a significant amount of rain on the area over the night of 1 August. By the following morning, the 'end of the road' (literally where the access road finishes and the salt begins) was under 1-1.5 inches of water, with a depth of 0.5 inches in the pits. While not at the level of

rainfall that forced the complete cancellation of the 2022 running, this was enough water to cause a serious setback.

Fortunately, no further rain fell and this, along with some hot and sunny weather, meant the water level subsided. Access to the salt was finally granted by the SCTA on 7 August and racing got under way on a single shortened three-mile course the next day. While not the situation anyone present had hoped for, there was very real relief that racing was able to go ahead at all.

“Thirty-two records were broken, the fastest a 236.882mph by Jim Hoogerhyde in his electric streamliner”

With proceedings under way, the sun shone, cars ran and records fell. In fact, 32 records were broken, the fastest of which was a 236.882mph average set by Jim Hoogerhyde in his on-trend electric-powered streamliner. Fastest speed of the event was set by Speed Demon, a blown fuel streamliner, at 333.360mph.

Racers come from all over the world to test themselves and their machines on the salt. The experiences of three teams at this year's event illustrate their diverse approaches, fortunes and backgrounds. But all three had the same aim: to go as fast as they could on this magical crystalline plain.



IAN NORTHEAST AND THE WORLD'S FASTEST JENSEN

Ian Northeast and his 1965 Jensen C-V8 are no strangers to the salt or land speed racing. Northeast was involved in the Bloodhound SSC project and last ran his Jensen at Bonneville in 2018, achieving a maximum velocity of 148mph and learning much in the process. Bought for a 'bargain' £5000 as a 250,000-mile classic, the inspiration to make it the world's fastest Jensen originated over a pint in his local pub in 2016.

The list of modifications over the seven years Northeast has been working on this project is extensive. With a nominal goal of achieving 200mph in mind, both the engine and aerodynamics have received serious work. The original block is retained but the stroked engine now has a capacity of 496ci (8.1 litres), runs modified heads and cams, features multi-point electronic fuel injection, a strengthened bottom end to hold it all together, and a large single turbocharger complete with ice-cooled intercooler. The transmission proved to be an Achilles' heel in 2018 so, in its 2023 guise, a Tremec T56 manual transmission is mated to the engine via a ballistic bell-housing and NASCAR clutch package. Aerodynamically, the car sports a completely revised front end with no cooling apertures, side skirts, a flat floor, front splitter and rear wing. The front



The Jensen is inspected ahead of its first salt runs

suspension configuration and geometry is of Northeast's own design, while the rear now consists of a four-link arrangement and coil-over dampers. Much of the rest of the modifications are concerned with meeting the SCTA's rigorous safety rules.

Indeed this year the SCTA inspectors found several (relatively minor) safety items they wanted to see improved before signing the car off. Although there was nothing major that needed rectifying, it did mean the team lost running time while searching around for parts and undertaking the work. A further complication was the expiry of Northeast's 150mph+ 'C' licence, meaning he had to complete fresh qualifying runs. With only one course available, there were long wait times for competitors. As a result, the team only managed two runs on the Thursday. The good news is that these were trouble free – a huge contrast to the trying problems that

plagued their last visit in 2018, and a vindication of the modifications made since.

Northeast achieved 136.876mph on his first run, but experienced a near-150mph sideways moment on his second, leading him to pull the parachute early and abort. The soft salt course had deteriorated significantly at this time. Back on the startline the next day, he completed another successful run to qualify for his 'C' licence, the car clocking 157.999mph at its fastest. Unfortunately, the event was now out of time.

"By any measure, it was a successful Speed Week for us, much more so than 2018," he says. "Within what was a very curtailed event due to weather we achieved two successful licensing runs, three runs in all with absolutely no running issues, we ran in a brand-new engine, and our aero and cooling designs worked well." Buoyed by this, he plans to run at El Mirage in November.



C-V8 achieved 157.999mph at Bonneville this year



Heideman has largely created Hemi-powered car himself over seven years



Stilwell achieved the event's fourth-fastest time, reaching 223.362mph



Valve gear checks are conducted in the pits

GEOFF STILWELL AND TEAM 7707

Geoff Stilwell is an affable Briton who owns and drives '7707' – in SCTA terms, a blown-fuel rear-engined modified roadster. Officially listed as a 1927 Ford Model T base, it looks anything but as it sits in its pit area resplendent in gorgeous red paint. The car, running a 496ci BAE supercharged V8 on nitro fuel and putting out in the region of 5000bhp, requires top-class preparation and handling if it's to give its best. Stilwell has a workshop in Pomona (LA), which is the car's permanent home; adjacent to his shop is Mick's

Paint, which built the car and looks after it. Last time out at Bonneville in 2018, Stilwell set the record for his class at 258.569mph. Since then, the car has run at El Mirage (an SCTA land speed event on a dry desert lakebed), where earlier this year it clocked two sub-200mph runs that highlighted several areas needing attention. There has now been further fettling. Additional lead ballast has been added in the nose, an issue limiting throttle travel has been fixed, and the rear-wing mounting has been stabilised.

RANDY HEIDEMAN AND THE WORLD'S FASTEST INDUSTRIAL HEMI

Randy Heideman and his car #5151 are both new to the salt. Heideman has visited before, but this year he was in Utah with a car he has built himself over the past seven years, with the sole aim of fulfilling his ambition of competing on the salt at Speed Week. A long-time motorcycle racer (he won the Pikes Peak Hill Climb Vintage class in 2004), the dream to race at Bonneville first took hold when he was a freshman just into high school. His seven-year build typifies the stories of many who come to the salt.

"I've put the car together myself over the last seven years – what you see here is largely the result of my own sweat," he explains. "The motor came first. It's a 1953 industrial 33ci Hemi made by Chrysler, and this particular one was used to pump irrigation on a farm. At first, I didn't want to spend much money on it but, when I sent it in for a look-see, I realised that if I was serious about running at Bonneville, I had to commit to a full rebuild, and give the motor the best of everything I could.

"Next came the body. I knew I wanted to build an old Coupe. I found this 1934 Chevy 3-Window Coupe rotting in a farmer's fence line. When I got it out, I realised that actually I didn't have much left to work with, especially as the Chevys have a wooden frame. But my background is in



The Chevy is prepped while up on the lift

autobody and paint so I was able to slowly bring it up to what you see. The frame was the biggest challenge and not something I could do myself. Riley's Frame in Denver made a new frame for it.

"The body has Ford patches in it, the trunk lid is Ford, the trunk lid hinges are 1938 Buick. So it's a kind of Chevy mongrel with suicide doors, a bunch of Ford stuff to make the body look good, and it's got a complete Mopar driveline."

Tech inspection highlighted several areas where the car needed to be modified before it

could get to the startline. Parts were needed but, most significantly, the rollcage had to be modified, requiring a welder and welding gear that Heideman didn't have. This is where the community that is land speed racing really came together. Hearing about this need, another team quickly lent their welder and equipment. Serendipity played a further part when, quite by chance, 'Bonneville Dave' parked his rig, with its four-post vehicle lift, behind Heideman's 'pit'. As soon as introductions were made, the Coupe was up in the air, greatly easing the work.

Onto the salt and Heideman was ready to make his licensing runs. "It was an awesome experience feeling the car accelerate on the loose surface, feeling the slight drifting under acceleration," he says. "It was a cool but yet controllable feeling as a newbie. The first run was a little intimidating combined with the first-time nerves but, as the speedo approached 140, the carburetors popped a bit, which caused me to let off the gas, until I remembered I was on my 150 licensing run! I hit the throttle again just before the timed area to get me qualified for my first licence. On my second licence run for 175mph, the door somehow popped open and I had to abort! All in all, I'm still considering my rookie attempt a personal success."



In essence a detuned dragster engine, it's not a simple case of brimming the fuel tank and heading for the startline. Prior to each run, the team works through a list of checks: valve lash, spark plugs and data-logger output are all scrutinised. At least once during a race day, a leakdown test is performed to monitor engine health. After a full engine oil change, the motor is started and carefully warmed through in the pit. Only then is the car ready to tackle the salt.

Pushed smartly off the startline by the F450 rig

truck up to 60mph or so, there is a spinetingling crack as Stilwell accelerates down the blindingly white track. A solid 223.362mph speed at the three-mile marker is the result. In understated fashion, he summarises: "7707 is actually a remarkably easy car to drive. The key challenge is staying focused and maintaining the high level of concentration needed to drive on the salt at over 220mph. I just make sure I don't do anything stupid and hit my shift points – it's critical I don't over-rev the engine."

But this was the last Bonneville pass that Stilwell was able to complete in 7707 as the aluminium fuel tank had ruptured during the run – fortunately, the fuel did not find its way onto the hot exhausts. Fourth fastest time of the event was some consolation. Now back in the LA workshop, the team has wasted no time in starting work on a new 45-gallon stainless steel tank in preparation for an attempt on the mile record at the SCTA's final meeting of 2023 at El Mirage in November.

FINISHING STRAIGHT

Forza Motorsport is well worth a download to up your online driving level



Mistaken identity with multiplayer



VIDEO GAME
FORZA MOTORSPORT
PC and Xbox
RRP £69.99

Forza Motorsport is a big deal, because it's the sort of video game that can help

racing attract a new audience thanks to its ubiquity. This is even more of a draw than ever thanks to Microsoft's Game Pass subscription service that acts like Netflix for gamers.

Due, in part, to being on the service, 2021's open world driving game *Forza Horizon 5* has amassed well over 10million players. So now, here's a reboot of the circuit-based sibling, *Forza Motorsport*. Despite the lack of a numbered title, this is the eighth in the franchise with a lineage back to 2005.

As expected, there are real-world-

licensed cars recreated in luscious detail, with Cadillac's V-Series.R LMDh a cover star. You drive on faithfully recreated venues such as Road America and Laguna Seca alongside some fictional additions.

Unlike previous releases, however, each car in your garage has a level. This increases by earning experience points during events. The level of your car determines which modifications you're allowed to enact, not the level of your bank balance. Cash earned in races is used purely to buy further vehicles, but upgrades use a second in-game currency, that of car points.

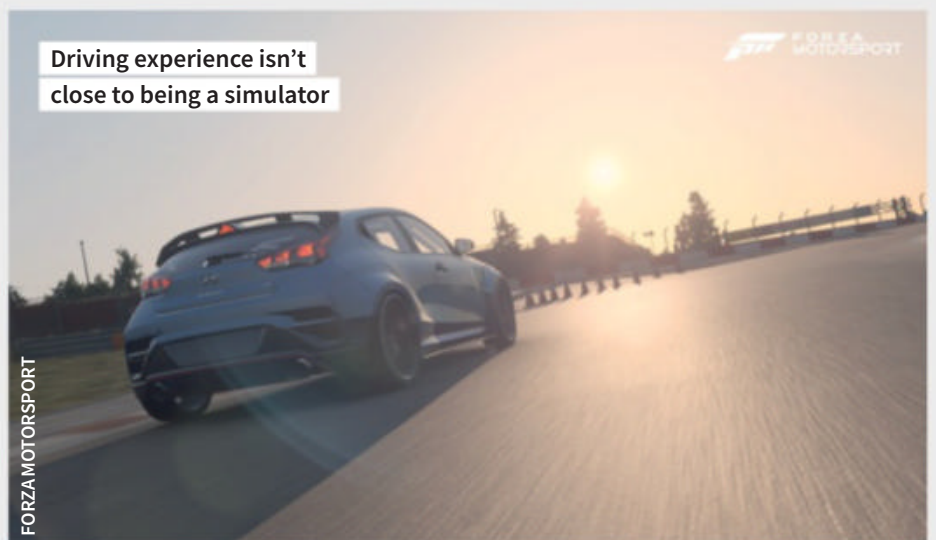
If that all sounds like a *Final Fantasy* game and not a racing simulation, you'd be correct. We suspect that the aim here was to make you drive each car for longer, slowly improving its abilities and growing a bond. Sadly, as it stands, each group of events requires you to buy another themed vehicle, so in the career alone you never have the chance to fully upgrade a

machine. This renders the system, for the most part, superfluous.

Still, ahead of its release, the development team went to great lengths to explain the all-new tyre-physics system that has eight times the number of contact points and a refresh rate that is six times quicker than its predecessors.

While that may be true, the driving experience isn't even close to being a simulator. In the six years between *Forza Motorsport 7* and this reboot, the rest of the sim racing space has seemingly moved on at a quicker pace. There is a reassuring solid feeling when driving racing cars, but rear-wheel-drive road cars exhibit wayward characteristics. There's corner-entry understeer by default, followed by snap oversteer that often results in a spin at the exit. Thank goodness for the ability to rewind time.

You can use a steering wheel peripheral, but the game behaves best when you use a gamepad, keep the driving assists switched





saving grace

on, and your rival's abilities to a medium level. This is enjoyable, just so long as you don't take it too seriously. Under scrutiny, it doesn't live up to the serious pretence. In some ways, the development team could have leaned into the more explosive nature of racing, such as Codemasters' *GRID Legends*, instead of something po-faced yet shallow beneath the skin.

The online multiplayer is its saving grace, however. Ranked events start every few minutes across three main categories. They offer close and clean racing with an element of tyre strategy. Penalties are handed out for overly aggressive manoeuvres to try to keep a lid on anti-social behaviour, plus there's an overall rating based upon your race results. At last, the car-building progression system makes more sense, since you can carry across experience points between single-player and multiplayer.

A first for the *Forza* series, the featured multiplayer mode delivers much-needed competitive racing without the need to sift through forum threads and Discord groups to find like-minded racers. It just works, and the racing so far is brilliant.

While we have our reservations about where it sits in the market – after all, it releases on PC where there's a wealth of more detailed simulators we'd recommend over and above this – if you only have an Xbox, *Forza Motorsport* is worth a download to try to raise your online driving level.

THOMAS HARRISON-LORD

For daily racing game news, visit **traxion.gg**



youtube.com/AUTOSPORTdotcom



Will the Andretti name return to F1?

After months of speculation, the FIA has given Andretti Formula Racing the green light to join the F1 grid from 2025. Sam Hall is joined by Jake Boxall-Legge to go through what this all means and the challenges facing Andretti. Is this what F1 wants? How will it unfold? This and more on the Autosport YouTube channel.



WHAT'S ON

INTERNATIONAL MOTORSPORT

Qatar Grand Prix
F1 World Championship
Round 17/22
Losail, Qatar

7-8 October
TV Live Sky Sports F1
Sat 1730, Sun 1755
TV Highlights Sky Sports F1, Sun 2130, Channel 4, 2300

Bathurst 1000
Australian Supercars
Round 10/12
Mount Panorama, Australia
8 October
TV Live TNT Sports 3, Sun 0045

NASCAR Cup Series
Round 32/36
Charlotte, USA
8 October
TV Live ViaplayXtra, Sun 1900

NASCAR Xfinity Series
Round 29/33
Charlotte, USA
7 October
TV Livestream via Viaplay

World Rallycross
Round 7/8
Cape Town, South Africa
7-8 October
TV Live TNT Sports 2, Sat 1500, TNT Sports 4, Sun 1500

Indianapolis 8 Hour
Intercontinental GT Challenge
Round 4/5
Indianapolis, USA
8 October
TV Livestream via YouTube, Sun 1715

UK MOTORSPORT

Brands Hatch BARC
7-8 October
BTCC, British F4, Mini Challenge, Porsche Carrera Cup, Porsche Sprint Challenge
TV Live ITV4, Sun 1045

Silverstone MSVR
7 October
BCV8s, Equipe Super Sprint

Castle Combe CCRC
7 October
CCRC (FF1600, GT, Hot Hatch, Saloons), Hyundai Coupe Cup,

Mighty Minis, Monoposto

Oulton Park 750MC
7 October
116 Trophy, 750 Formula, F1000, Formula Vee, Locost, MR2s

Snetterton MSVR
7-8 October
Bell Sport Challenge, Boxster Cup, GT Cup, Legends, Porsche Club, Z Cars & Production GTIs

Silverstone BRSCC
7-8 October
CityCar Cup, Clubsport Trophy, Fiesta ST150s, Fiesta ST240s, Mini Miglia, Mini Se7en, Mazda MX-5 (Championship, Clubman, Supercup), Modified Fords

Pembrey BARC
7-8 October
British Trucks, MGOC, Pickups, Welsh Sports & Saloons
TV Livestream via barc.net

Knockhill SMRC
8 October
C1s, Classics, Fiesta STs, Minis



FROM THE ARCHIVE

The Lancia Delta HF Integrale 16V of Juha Kankkunen and co-driver Juha Piironen kicks up a storm of dust and gravel en route to victory in the 1991 Rally Australia – his third in a row on

the Perth-based event. The Finn spent most of the rally up front as ‘road sweeper’, although he ceded the lead briefly to team-mate Didier Auriol before the Frenchman’s engine expired. Any challenge

from championship points leader Carlos Sainz (Toyota Celica GT-Four) was extinguished when he crashed for a third and final time. Kankkunen was chased home by the Mitsubishi Galant VR-4 of Kenneth Eriksson.



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Felipe Massa

Heidfeld says Massa “put a good vibe” in the team...

Had Nick Heidfeld’s career path gone to plan, he’d never have spent the 2002 Formula 1 season at Sauber with Felipe Massa. The long-time Mercedes protege had blazed a trail through the junior categories and joining McLaren appeared a matter of when, not if, until Kimi Raikkonen’s rapid emergence prompted Ron Dennis to instead pick him as Mika Hakkinen’s successor.

Heidfeld therefore stayed at Sauber, joined by another newcomer in Euro F3000 champion Massa. But far from any bitterness over what could have been overshadowing their time together, today Heidfeld picks out the “all-round good guy” as his favourite team-mate.

“He’s loved all over the world not only for his skills but also for his personality,” explains Heidfeld, eight times a runner-up from 183 F1 starts. “As a team-mate, I can only echo that he’s just a really nice guy. He was also really honest, which was not the case with everybody.”

Heidfeld maintains that being overlooked by McLaren didn’t alter his approach, but acknowledges that “from a fun and non-racing perspective” the Brazilian’s presence was a welcome tonic “especially when outside the car”. Heidfeld cites a pre-race routine of Massa’s as an example of how he “put a good vibe in the team”. “It sort of developed over the year,” adds Heidfeld,



...and was a “fair” rival in on-track battles

who edged their qualifying head-to-head 11-5 and outscored Massa 7-4. “Before the race, he’d sit in the meeting and go through the race by saying, ‘The start I overtake him, then this happens and then we have a fantastic pitstop’ – and in the end of his monologue he won the race. On each event!”

Massa wasn’t kept on for 2003, with veteran Heinz-Harald Frentzen replacing him alongside Heidfeld. But after a year as Ferrari’s tester, Massa was recalled for 2004 before joining Ferrari in 2006, going on to win 11 grands prix and narrowly miss the 2008 world title.

Heidfeld enjoyed going up against Massa on track, citing him as a “fair” rival to race with. And although his record “reminds myself a little bit of what chances I did not have”, Heidfeld was happy to see a “team player” succeed.

JAMES NEWBOLD



IN NEXT WEEK’S ISSUE

F1 returns to Qatar

VERSTAPPEN ON BRINK OF THIRD CROWN



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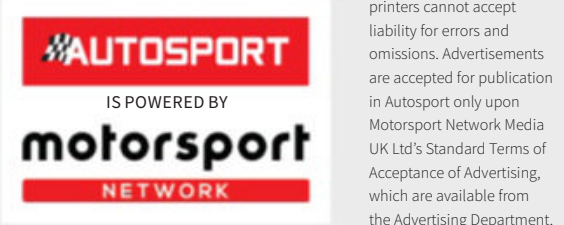
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