

F1's newest star The real Oscar Piastri

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AUTOSPORT

F1 2025

Has Ferrari already proved Hamilton right?

...and can Lewis deliver next year?



'If Lewis chose Ferrari, it confirms we can have the right car'

FRED VASSEUR



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Has Hamilton pulled off another career masterstroke?

When Lewis Hamilton announced his switch from Mercedes to Ferrari for 2025, it seemed like a good idea for everyone except the seven-time world champion. It was great for Formula 1, fantastic for Autosport as interest skyrocketed, and a coup for the famous Italian team. But was Ferrari *really* more likely to give Hamilton something to fight Red Bull with than Mercedes, with which he's scored six drivers' titles in the time since Ferrari won an F1 crown of any sort?

But things have changed since the start of 2024. As Jake Boxall-Legge shows on page 14, the fluctuating fortunes and developments at Ferrari and Mercedes currently make Maranello appear the better option. Not only has the SF-24 won three of the past six races, but the strategic miscues that characterised Ferrari's 2022 have all but vanished under the leadership of Fred Vasseur.

Hamilton, on the other hand, has really struggled with the tricky W15, leading some to ask whether *Ferrari* has made the right move! But Hamilton's brilliant British Grand Prix victory and all-round superb Spa performance this season are just two reminders of what he can do when he gets a sniff of success. The 39-year-old might be past his best, but a 95% Hamilton is still very much worth having.

At the other end of his career is Oscar Piastri, who will surely be a title contender in the years to come. Ben Hunt hears from some of those who have worked with the Australian to find what makes him tick (p22), while Gary Watkins speaks to Andrea Bertolini about how the Italian secured what could be the best job in the world (p28).



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PIT + PADDOCK

Audi F1 team poised for buy-in from Qatar

FORMULA 1

Audi is on the verge of selling a shareholding in its Formula 1 Sauber team to Qatar, with an announcement potentially coming later this month ahead of the country's Grand Prix.

Autosport sources have suggested that the deal could be announced imminently and amount to a larger investment than initially anticipated. In March this year, Audi announced that it would be buying 100% of the Sauber team from Finn Rausing for an estimated price of around €650million. But the situation for the German manufacturer appears to have changed in recent weeks, with Audi owner Volkswagen AG in the throes of an economic crisis that could lead to plant closures and the loss of up to 30,000 jobs. Audi is facing similar challenges on the world market while it is expected to keep pouring significant resources into rebuilding the underperforming Sauber team and preparing its in-house hybrid engines for 2026.

Given the crisis surrounding VW, fresh capital from Qatar would be welcome and help to push ahead with the development of the F1 team. Qatar would be a logical investor for Audi – it already owns a 17% stake in the Volkswagen group, occupying two of the 20 seats on the group's supervisory board. Via Qatar Holding LLC, the country is the third-largest shareholder of the Volkswagen Group, after Porsche (53.3%) and the state of Lower Saxony (20%). The state-owned airline Qatar Airways is already a key sponsor of F1.

Even though talks are at an advanced

stage, there is no clear information on how Qatar intends to join Audi's F1 programme. There are suggestions that it could be a minority investment without significant changes to the team's public image, while a larger investment could mean an adjustment to the team name.

Meanwhile, Sauber has confirmed the signing of Formula 2 series leader Gabriel Bortoleto to partner Nico Hulkenberg in 2025, as predicted last week in Autosport.

"This is one of the most exciting projects in motorsport, if not in all of sports," the 20-year-old Brazilian said. "Joining a team that combines the rich motorsport history of Sauber and Audi is a true honour. Beyond simply being a member, I aim to grow with this ambitious project and reach the pinnacle of motorsport."

Bortoleto, who is managed by two-time world champion Fernando Alonso's agency and was released by McLaren's junior



Bortoleto has starred this season in F2...



...and Bottas is now looking elsewhere



programme to allow the Sauber deal to happen, won the FIA F3 Championship as a rookie in 2023. “Gabriel has already demonstrated in the junior categories that he has what it takes to be a winning driver,” said Sauber chief Mattia Binotto. “Nico and Gabriel represent the ideal combination of experience and youth, positioning us strongly for the future.”

Valtteri Bottas and Zhou Guanyu will therefore both leave Sauber after what has been a woeful 2024 for the Swiss team, with no points so far. The squad was in contention for points at the start of the season, but crippling pitstop issues prevented it from scoring, before being outdeveloped by all of its rivals. Bottas’s active F1 career could be over, but the Finn is understood to be close to returning to Mercedes as a reserve from next year. At the Brazilian Grand Prix, the 35-year-old said a return to what he called the “Mercedes family” was “for sure one option and I would consider it”. Bottas claimed all of his 10 wins and 20 pole positions for the Silver Arrows, where he partnered Lewis Hamilton between 2017 and 2021.

CHRISTIAN NIMMERVOLL & ALEX KALINAUCKAS



Domenicali is having to wave away interest in hosting grands prix

Domenicali: European GP rotation is now imminent

FORMULA 1

Several European Formula 1 races are set to join a rotation system, series CEO Stefano Domenicali has revealed.

F1 is enjoying unprecedented interest worldwide from countries and venues keen to join its packed calendar. But with the series setting a limit of 24 races, which has already stretched travelling F1 personnel to its limits, a rotation between some of Europe’s long-running races now looks inevitable.

Speaking to Wall Street analysts in an earnings call, Domenicali said: “We have some news to share very, very soon with regard to the possibility in the mid-term to have some rotational European grands prix and some other new options coming later. It is true that we have a large demand of new possible venues that want to come in and our choice will always be balanced between the right economical benefits that we can have as a system and also to leverage in the growth on the market that we can see potential

that will be beneficial for us to grow even further our business.”

Some of the races in F1’s heartland that are under pressure are both Italian races at Monza and Imola as well the Belgian and Dutch Grands Prix, which all have contracts that expire after their 2025 edition. Monaco, too, is only signed on for 2025 but there is very little chance of one of F1’s most prestigious races having to share its slot. Barcelona looks set to host its final F1 race in 2026 unless it can find a new deal, with the venue losing its Spanish Grand Prix title to the new Madrid race.

Opinions among promoters are divided over the prospect of organising races biennially. The privately operated Dutch GP at Zandvoort welcomed the idea, while organisers at Spa have been pushing for an annual race on a long-term contract. On the other side of the spectrum, races at Silverstone, the Hungaroring and the Red Bull Ring all have long-running deals into the next decade.

Some of the venues to have shown concrete interest in staging a GP include Thai capital Bangkok and South Korean port city Incheon. A return to Africa has also been mooted, with interest in Rwanda and South Africa. A delegation from Argentina was present at the recent Brazilian GP for initial talks with F1 over a return to Buenos Aires, keen to capitalise on the exploding interest in the country following Franco Colapinto’s first races with Williams.

MARK MANN-BRYANS & FILIP CLEEREN



GPDA calls out Sulayem over swearing edict

FORMULA 1

Formula 1 drivers have written an open letter to FIA president Mohammed Ben Sulayem to express unease over his crackdown on swearing and interventions in other matters.

Through a Grand Prix Drivers' Association statement posted on Instagram, the drivers urged Ben Sulayem to "consider his own tone and language" after what was felt as a heavy-handed approach in recent months. Following an Autosport interview in September in which Ben Sulayem urged F1 to go further in weeding out any form of swearing from its coverage, world champion Max Verstappen was given a community service order by the FIA for swearing in a Singapore GP press conference. Charles Leclerc was fined €10,000 for

swearing in the Mexican GP post-race press conference, half of which was suspended for 12 months should there be no repeat offences.

Verstappen staged a protest in Singapore against his punishment, reserving any detailed answers for impromptu media gatherings held inside the paddock rather than the FIA's official press conferences, while most other drivers joined the Dutchman in criticising the clampdown.

In the open letter, the GPDA stated that the FIA should treat the drivers as adults, referencing missives handed out during 2022 on wearing jewellery in the car – which appeared to be targeted at Lewis Hamilton. The statement read that, although the drivers accepted they must abide by the "referee's decision", the GPDA wished to collaborate with F1 and the FIA to



Verstappen held his own protest in Singapore

ensure that all decisions are to the benefit of the championship and its spectacle. The GPDA also suggested that it was unhappy with the levying of fines, saying they are "not appropriate for our sport", particularly since the use of those fines was not fully transparent. It asked that Ben Sulayem should "provide financial transparency" for the application of any

money from fines, and that all stakeholders – FIA, F1, the teams and the GPDA – should be in agreement of where that money should go.

Furthermore, the GPDA cited that it felt it was playing its part in helping to ensure F1 was well promoted for the benefit of everyone involved in the championship, and called upon other stakeholders to do the same.

JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE

Hypercar manufacturers argue for weight rethink

WEC

New rules designed to offset the advantage of lighter drivers in the World Endurance Championship's Hypercar class are under discussion for next year.

The driver is not included in the minimum weight of a Hypercar, and BMW

is among the manufacturers calling for a change. It has suggested a reintroduction of a rule in force in LMP1 from 2015 forcing cars with an average driver weight below 80kg to carry ballast up to that amount.

"There should be a compensation for driver weight as there was in the past in LMP1 and we are pushing for that," said

BMW M Motorsport boss Andreas Roos. "We shouldn't get to a situation where the manufacturers are looking for the lightest drivers; there should be a situation where every driver can be competitive."

Roos pointed out the dangers of drivers trying to lose excessive amounts of weight in what is an endurance category. They were brought into focus by James Calado, who revealed that he was hospitalised after the Qatar season-opener in March.

"I was sick this year because I lost so much weight – I went to hospital with malnutrition," the Briton revealed. "I was on medication because I was running and not eating. It's too dangerous for me to go down to the weight I want."

The FIA and the Automobile Club de l'Ouest, which jointly administer the WEC, have confirmed that the move is under discussion. "When people have ideas, we and the FIA look at the pros and cons and see if they need to be adopted or not," said ACO technical director Thierry Bouvet.

GARY WATKINS



Calado got dangerously thin while slimming down to drive Ferrari



FORMULA 1 Two-time World Rally champion Kalle Rovanperä may not be contesting the full WRC this season, but he's certainly keeping busy. The latest outing for the Finn was a long-awaited opportunity to test a Red Bull Formula 1 car, which he did at the Red Bull Ring. "The F1 was something I had been looking forward to for a long time, so it was really cool to finally get to drive it," said Rovanperä, who has raced in Carrera Cup Benelux this year and got up to speed in F4 and Formula Renault 3.5 machinery before driving a 2012 RB8. "The day went well, and I was left with very good feelings." **Photos by Jurtin/Red Bull Content Pool**

Pourchaire in frame for Peugeot role

WEC

Reigning Formula 2 champion Theo Pourchaire is under consideration for a test and reserve role with Peugeot's World Endurance Championship squad along with former sparring partner Clement Novalak.

The pair were given their maiden runs in Hypercar class machinery with the French manufacturer earlier this month at the WEC rookie test in Bahrain. Peugeot has stated that it wanted to take a look at some new drivers and confirmed that they are both in the frame to take the position filled by Malthe Jakobsen, who is moving up to a race seat in 2025.

"It is always interesting to evaluate drivers for the future," said Peugeot Sport technical director Olivier Janssonie. "You have seen what we did with Malthe and we are very happy with that. The idea of the rookie test for us was to test some proper rookies. We looked at some potential drivers: we wanted someone with strong single-



seater experience and recent prototype experience, and that is Clement. Theo is bit of a different profile, but obviously very talented."

Janssonie confirmed that Peugeot will go into 2025 with a seventh driver, but he stressed that no decisions have been made.

Pourchaire stated that he is open to a reserve role with Peugeot alongside a proper return to competition after a season in which he started in Super Formula with Team Impul and then took in a disjointed IndyCar campaign with Arrow McLaren.

"A reserve driver role in Hypercar,

why not?" said Pourchaire, who holds a similar position in Formula 1 with Sauber. "It could help me have a full-time role in the future, but for sure I am looking for a drive to actually race."

Novalak, a race winner in F2 in 2023, has the same ambition. "If I could dream of anything it would be getting a reserve role [in Hypercar] and doing the European Le Mans Series and the IMSA SportsCar Championships," said the London-based Franco-Swiss, who raced for Inter Europol Competition in the European Le Mans Series this season.

GARY WATKINS

GRIFFITHS/MOTORSPORT IMAGES



Wehrlein leads Rowland and Guenther in the dress rehearsal race...

Evans and Jaguar lead the way in Gen3 Evo test at Jarama

FORMULA E

Mitch Evans posted the fastest time for Jaguar during Formula E pre-season testing at Jarama last week as teams got up to speed with the new Gen3 Evo machines.

The Kiwi set his quickest lap on the fourth and final morning of running at the FIA Grade 2 listed track, which was picked after a last-minute venue change with just 72 hours' notice. FE was due to run at the Ricardo Tormo Circuit just outside Valencia, but organisers moved the test due to the devastating floods in the region that have killed more than 200 people.

"I believe that operationally, it was doable, but it was more on the sense of we couldn't be taking resources out of that city, at that particular moment, where there are still people missing," said championship co-founder Alberto Longo.

Dan Ticktum set the second fastest time, also during the final morning on Friday, with the newly rebranded



GRIFFITHS/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

...but it was Evans who topped times

Kiro team, formerly ERT. The second Kiro machine driven by FE rookie David Beckmann was fastest on Thursday morning, with the team switching to Porsche powertrains for the upcoming season. Neither Ticktum nor Beckmann has been confirmed so far for the upcoming season, which gets under way on 7 December in Sao Paulo.

Reigning champion Pascal Wehrlein finished third fastest after the six sessions, which equated to 21 hours of track time, less than 0.2s behind Evans's best. The German had earlier led home a Porsche 1-2 during the 24-lap simulation race, where the 'pit boost' pitstops were trialled, before a decision on whether they will be implemented for the upcoming season due before Brazil.

Wehrlein's team-mate Antonio Felix da Costa, Jake Hughes (Maserati MSG), Maximilian Guenther (DS Penske) and Nyck de Vries (Mahindra) also topped sessions.

STEFAN MACKLEY

TOP 10 TIMES		
POS	DRIVER (TEAM)	TIME
1	Mitch Evans (Jaguar)	1m27.461s
2	Dan Ticktum (Kiro)	1m27.602s
3	Pascal Wehrlein (Porsche)	1m27.658s
4	David Beckmann (Kiro)	1m27.755s
5	Taylor Barnard (McLaren)	1m27.780s
6	Antonio Felix da Costa (Porsche)	1m27.813s
7	Oliver Rowland (Nissan)	1m27.973s
8	Stoffel Vandoorne (Maserati)	1m28.005s
9	Nyck de Vries (Mahindra)	1m28.010s
10	Max Guenther (DS Penske)	1m28.070s

Musical chairs for F2 run-in

FORMULA 2

The lengthy gap in between the end of the European leg of the Formula 2 season and the final two stop-offs in the Middle East has unsurprisingly led to a smattering of driver changes, with multiple race winner Richard Verschoor on the move and two new drivers stepping up from the Formula 3 ranks.

Verschoor has effectively returned home to the Dutch MP Motorsport team with which he has enjoyed much success during his career, dating back to his two F4 titles in 2016 and encompassing his Macau Grand Prix glory in 2019. He has upped sticks from Trident for the trip back to MP, which has confirmed that the Dutchman will remain on board for the 2025 season.

Verschoor stands in for Dennis Hauger. A disappointing season for the Norwegian has left him ninth in the standings, and he has now set his sights on a career across the Atlantic. Hauger is already confirmed as part of the Andretti Global line-up in Indy NXT for 2025.

Replacing Verschoor at Trident for the Losail and Yas Marina rounds is American Max Esterson. The 2022 Formula Ford Festival winner has raced this season in Formula 3 with Jenzer Motorsport. With fellow F3 graduate Christian Mansell only just having replaced Roman Stanek in the sister car, Trident's F2 line-up will have a grand total of one weekend of competition in the series under their belts.

Meanwhile, DAMS has parted company with Juan Manuel Correa and installed two-time F3 race winner and Ferrari F1 protege Dino Beganovic alongside Jak Crawford for the final two rounds.

"My aim for these two races is to learn as much as possible and to be scoring points," said the Swede, who is expected to graduate full-time to the series for 2025 after two seasons in F3.



Verschoor won in F2 with MP in 2021

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Allison at the Goodwood Festival of Speed in 2008

Bobby Allison 1937-2024

OBITUARY

Bobby Allison was the leader of NASCAR's famed 'Alabama Gang', a Cup champion, a three-time Daytona 500 winner, was involved in the infield punch-up that elevated his form of motorsport to a mainstream American following, and is fourth on the all-time wins list. Allison, who died last Saturday at the age of 86, also experienced more than his fair share of tragedy.

Allison was born in Florida and began racing at the age of 17 in 1955. For some time this was under a pseudonym since his parents would not allow him to race while living at home – until he did well enough for his picture to make the local Sunday newspaper... At the dawn of the 1960s he and younger brother Donnie along with veteran racer Red Farmer relocated to Alabama, where the paved ovals signposted NASCAR's way ahead.

Allison's first of 85 top-flight career wins came in 1966 at Oxford Plains Speedway, and he would go on to take race victories in 10 consecutive seasons. Along the way, he also competed in several Indycar races for Penske, including the Indianapolis

500 in 1973 and 1975.

The infamous Daytona 500 fight between the Allison brothers and Cale Yarborough occurred in 1979, a year after Allison had taken his first victory in the NASCAR blue riband. He was now established as a consummate superstar of NASCAR, but it was not until 1983 that he beat Darrell Waltrip to claim his first Grand National (now Cup) crown at the wheel of DiGard Racing's Buick machinery.

Allison's final Daytona 500 win came in 1988, an emotional triumph since he led home son Davey, who was already blazing a trail as a star of the future. Four months later, a huge accident at Pocono ended his career thanks to a broken leg and ribs, plus concussion that led to gaps in his memory – including that last 500 victory.

In 1992, younger son Clifford was killed in a practice accident at Michigan, and the following year Davey fatally crashed his helicopter at Talladega.

"Bobby Allison personified the term 'racer,'" said NASCAR CEO Jim France. "As the leader of the famous 'Alabama Gang', he connected with fans in a profound manner. He gave his all to our sport."

TRAVIS DAYE

ALPINE'S MERC SWITCH

Just as we went to press, the Alpine Formula 1 team confirmed its switch to Mercedes engines for the 2026 season in place of Renault. The team will also use Mercedes gearboxes.

PULLING PUSHING ON

Formula E's all-female test session, which took place last Friday afternoon at Jarama, was headed by current F1 Academy points leader Abbi Pulling for Nissan. Pulling, who had never driven an FE car before, set a time 3.4s slower than Mitch Evans's overall best from the week (see left). The 21-year-old Briton finished 0.320s ahead of Jamie Chadwick (Jaguar), with Bianca Bustamante (McLaren) third of the 17 drivers who took to the track.

BROWNE'S GANASSI SEAT

Ex-Formula Ford Festival winner Jonathan Browne has secured a ride with Chip Ganassi Racing for the American motorsport powerhouse's return to the Indy NXT ranks in 2025. The Irishman finished 13th in the standings as a rookie this season with HMD Motorsports, and will be joined by Dutchman Niels Koolen.

ANOTHER TITLE FOR PADDON

Fresh from winning the European Rally Championship crown, Hayden Paddon added the Asia Pacific title to his collection last weekend with victory on the Rally of Whangarei in his native New Zealand in his Hyundai i20 N Rally2. Over 246km of special stages on the North Island, Paddon (below) defeated local Ben Hunt's Skoda by almost five minutes in what doubled up as the final round of the NZ series.



STEVE RITCHIE

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FENESTRAZ SET FOR JAPANESE RETURN AFTER FE EXIT

SUPER FORMULA/SUPER GT

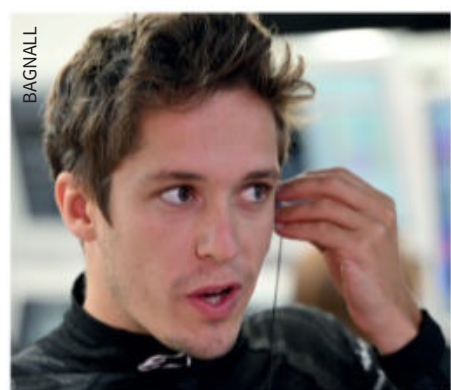
Ex-Formula E racer Sacha Fenestraz is poised to land a plum TOM'S drive in Super Formula next year as part of a deal with Toyota to return to Japan's top two categories. The Franco-Argentinian is in line to replace Ukyo Sasahara, who ended up scoring no points this season while team-mate Sho Tsuboi won the title.

Fenestraz was abruptly dumped by the Nissan Formula E team in early September and, with no options remaining to stay in the all-electric series, he turned his attentions towards a return to Japan. Toyota and Nissan are both understood to have made Fenestraz (below) offers for a double programme encompassing Super Formula and Super GT, with the former winning the battle for his signature. His most likely destination in Super GT appears to be SARD, where he could reunite with 2020 team-mate Yuhi Sekiguchi.

Toyota could yet hand Sasahara a Super Formula lifeline in the form of a chance to drive for Kondo Racing at next month's Suzuka rookie test, in what would amount to an audition to replace Kazuto Kotaka.

Meanwhile, TGM Grand Prix is in danger of dropping off the SF grid as it struggles to find drivers who can bring funding. The Honda-powered team scored points just once this year with Nobuharu Matsushita in the season opener. Should TGM not return, the size of the field would likely fall to 19 cars, the lowest level since 2021.

JAMIE KLEIN



BAGWALL



Toyota star trails but claims title

SUPER FORMULA

Sho Tsuboi wrapped up the Super Formula title last weekend with a pair of second places in the final double-header of the season at Suzuka, which was swept by Kakunoshin Ohta.

TOM'S Toyota driver Tsuboi carried a 14.5-point lead into the weekend, and he all but sealed the deal in Saturday's first race when he jumped main title rival Tadasuke Makino during the mandatory pitstops to extend his lead to 18.5 points with only 23 left to play for on Sunday. That meant Makino had to win the finale with Tsuboi failing to score, but for a second race in succession the points leader finished second to a dominant Ohta, while Makino's challenge ended with a limp run to eighth from 10th on the grid.

Tsuboi, the driver who was used as a launchpad by Sophia Florsch in her horrific 2018 Macau Grand Prix accident, therefore made it back-to-back drivers' titles for TOM'S, succeeding last year's champion Ritomo Miyata, and goes into next month's Super GT finale in a strong position to become only the sixth driver to do the 'double' in Japan's top two series.

The combined efforts of Ohta and Makino ensured the teams' prize for

Honda-powered Dandelion Racing.

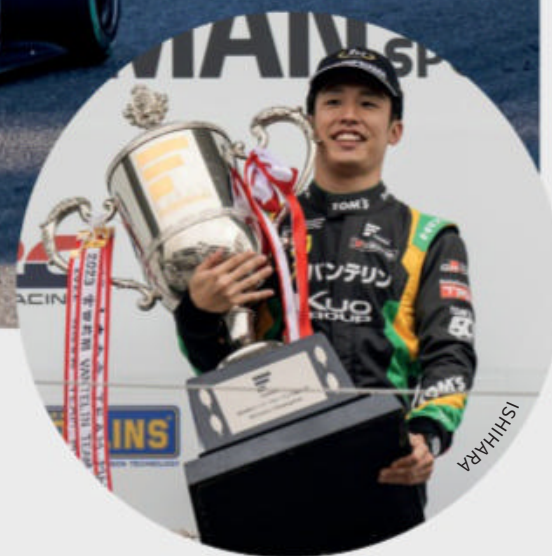
Tomoki Nojiri's hopes of a third title were extinguished on Saturday when he qualified 14th after a red flag in Q1 that left him with insufficient time to warm his tyres for his flying lap. The Team Mugen driver squarely blamed Ohta, who passed his Honda-engined car on his warm-up lap, with the two sharing a tense press conference the following morning in which Nojiri's attempts to apologise for his pointed remarks to the media were squarely rebuffed.

Nojiri made a strong recovery to fifth and then scored pole on Sunday, but lacked pace in his first stint and slipped to fourth behind the Toyota-powered KCMG machine of Nirei Fukuzumi.

Red Bull junior Ayumu Iwasa's season ended in disappointing fashion by finishing ninth and seventh across the two races, although he did his Mugen team-mate a favour when his last-lap pass on Makino on Sunday gave Nojiri the runner-up spot in the championship by a single point.

Honda's three-time champion Naoki Yamamoto bowed out of Super Formula by finishing seventh and sixth in his final two races for Nakajima Racing.

JAMIE KLEIN





A sad end to something great?

Comments made ahead of Lewis Hamilton's final three races for Mercedes risk casting a cloud over the conclusion of a fabled F1 partnership

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

Here it is, then. After 243 Formula 1 races, there are just three remaining of what is statistically the greatest ever driver/team partnership. Lewis Hamilton and Mercedes: the end.

Ever since Hamilton made his decision to jump ship to Ferrari for 2025, the current campaign was destined to be very different to the 11 that had come before, with all those wins and titles. Inevitably, given the heavy PR side of the F1 game, it's been quite the year in message management.

This started with Mercedes making a conspicuous effort to avoid scrutiny at the launch of the W15. This meant that, after two years of many promises preceding much disappointment, the team built itself something of a shield. But it also meant questions about Hamilton's future in another team's colours were handily stymied too. That approach has continued. But, of late, the messages coming from both sides stand out more starkly, with something of a sour flavour.

At the Brazilian Grand Prix, after struggling to 10th in the main event, Hamilton said he was "looking forward to Christmas" after "a disaster of a weekend" with "the worst the car has ever been". In the past week, Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff has been quoted saying "everyone has a shelf life" in explaining why Hamilton was only offered a one-plus-one-year contract in mid-2023, which in part drove the Ferrari switch after just the first of those seasons.

"The messages from both sides stand out more starkly, with something of a sour flavour"

The 2024 campaign has been far from the glorious ending either side was nevertheless targeting when Hamilton made his decision. Indeed, the seven-time world champion's struggles when team-mate George Russell has regularly made a fist of it with the W15 have given rise to awkward conspiracy theories about Mercedes equipment. That's one thing, but the timing of this new shift in messaging is interesting given it comes so close to what will no doubt be an emotional ending in Abu Dhabi.

To understand what is really going on, timing – again – is key. In January, Wolff stated that he'd heard "rumours a couple of days earlier" that Hamilton would be heading to Ferrari. Now, on the High Performance podcast, he claims "the old man Sainz [Carlos Sr] called me and said, 'This is what's happening'". All this ties together with comments Wolff has made regarding his instinct

to pick Andrea Kimi Antonelli as Hamilton's replacement.

Wolff has a whole team to shield, plus an image he hones delicately. But the main thing to remember here is that Mercedes currently has a book to sell and such quotes are very handy promotion. He just hasn't stuck the boot in as he could have. Indeed, the tone of his HPP appearance is notably warm when it comes to his relationship with Hamilton. Perhaps getting all Sun Tzu – as Wolff's predecessor Ross Brawn did in his *Total Competition* book – is still to come, once Hamilton is finally suiting up in Scuderia scarlet. But the scale of feeling at this stage, at least, suggests not. Wolff just doesn't have to outline again how the Abu Dhabi 2021 saga crosses his mind "every week". And yet, he does.

That might come at a risk of upsetting a selectively delicate driver Wolff is currently taking a pause from courting: Max Verstappen. That Wolff chooses his words very carefully when discussing other elements of that 2021 campaign and his subsequent relationship with Verstappen emphasises the tricky nature of the topic for him, with a possible 2026 lure from Red Bull still at play. But, overall, it reinforces the takeaway that Wolff's beliefs over the Abu Dhabi officiating saga are genuine.

Hamilton's response to what was an awful Brazil weekend came minutes after a hard and painful race. F1 has long known he wears his heart on his sleeve in such moments, and with that context his misery is understandable. His resolve, otherwise, has just about held in this disappointing year. His "if this is the last time I get to perform it was a shame it wasn't great" comment, delivered seconds after he'd crossed the line, makes for very different listening. It gives unfortunate rise to those conspiracy theories, where it's worth noting how bafflingly self-harming this would be for a team where staff have a financial incentive for both drivers to score as many points as possible. The current explanation for Hamilton's radio message is that it refers to how Mercedes is shuffling its pitcrew around the climax of F1's longest-ever season.

Returning to timing ahead of the year's final triple-header, there's still a chance for the Hamilton/Mercedes era to end with a final taste of glory. In its middle lies Qatar – that track returns F1 to a truly high-speed setting for the first time since Spa and Silverstone on the eve of the summer break. Hamilton was victorious at both (albeit with Russell's post-race disqualification at Spa). The outpouring of emotion in his record-extending British GP triumph ticked the vow to end his Mercedes era back at the heights at which it predominantly endured.

All the current messages boil down to the same bare truth: what is happening now for both Hamilton and Mercedes is simply the *process* of their ending. ❧

➔ **P14 HAMILTON AND FERRARI**



Taking the positives

The current Young Driver of the Year Award winner and BRDC SuperStar reviews what's been a tough season, and considers his prospects for 2025

JOSEPH LOAKE

Winning the Aston Martin (now Silverstone) Autosport BRDC Award at the end of 2023 was something I didn't expect after GB3, where I didn't manage to win the championship. I gave it everything and to win the Award was awesome, and it was the main thing that helped me get into FIA Formula 3 for this season with Rodin Motorsport. It was a dream come true, so I can't thank Aston Martin, the BRDC and Autosport enough, because without that I probably wouldn't have had the opportunity this year.

I was definitely thrown in at the deep end, but I think everyone at Rodin knew that I was going to be on the back foot at some of the rounds. There were some areas where I made mistakes that I shouldn't have, but there were so many times when I would turn up at a circuit not knowing the place, and I'd have to be on top of it within five push laps in practice, then go straight into qualifying. Imola, for example, everyone had been at the post-season test the year before, so it was an uphill battle, but places like Monaco showed that, when I was on an equal playing field, I could be at the front.

Monaco was cool. I really enjoyed the circuit, and I found a rhythm a lot sooner than I thought I would. It's a really flowing track, considering it's on public streets. I didn't expect to qualify so well (eighth) – obviously I wanted to, but I was going into every weekend just trying to do the best I could, knowing that I was very, very under on mileage compared to everyone else.

We got a little bit of luck in qualifying with the red flag, but I think we'd have still been up there. We could be quite happy with that weekend – it's just a shame I couldn't replicate it anywhere else. It's an experience I was glad to have had, because I was struggling at that point, and it was a good confidence booster.

The Silverstone event is something that I wish I could

experience again, because I don't think I really took it in; that stands for the whole year. There were so many times when I was so fixated on trying to find half a tenth somewhere that I wasn't really taking in how special it was, and I think results would have come if I'd just enjoyed it and appreciated it a bit more. Seeing the support I had was quite a confidence booster though. It's a shame the results didn't come on home soil, as I was expecting to be further towards the front, but that's how it goes in motorsport.

To race in front of so many British fans was special. While people did recognise me at other races, at Silverstone there were some people that were actually there just to support me, and it was really cool to see that. Standing on the stage and seeing thousands of people is incredible, and some are literally shouting for you to go and sign a hat, which is something I never thought I'd experience. It's really cool to know that you're on such a big stage and performing in front of the world, which is something that every kid dreams of.

At times during the season, I really struggled. There were points where I was just burying my head in a pillow and wondering what was going wrong. It was very difficult, especially after Silverstone and Spa, when Callum [Voisin, Rodin team-mate] was at the front. There were different reasons for me not being at the front and the really frustrating thing was that I knew I had the same pace as Callum, and I knew that I could have put in good results.

I've recently been to the USA. It's not where I thought the season would take me, but it's an option that I'm looking at for next year. The USF Pro 2000 car is like the one used in GB3, from what I could tell. It would be a slight step back if I was to go down that route, but I think it would be one step back to take two steps forward, and that's what my career needs, in a way. I've got to a point in European racing where it's now quite difficult to keep progressing. I'm still pushing to finding an F3 seat for next year, but the chances are slim.

When I finished one of my sessions, Louis Foster, a fellow BRDC SuperStar, came over to say hello and give me the odd tip, which was nice. I'll definitely be in touch with him, because he's gone through the US ladder already and done really well. With the scholarship schemes and things like that, it is quite a good option, but I'm still looking into everything and don't want to jinx anything at the moment!

The BRDC has been a massive help in my career so far, and they're continuing to support me even with it being such a rough year. I can't thank them enough for continuing to believe in me, which is something that sometimes I don't even do. It's also helped me as a person as well. There are people I can go to if I need support or advice, and all of that adds up to making me a better driver and individual. 🍀



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YOUR SAY

The youngsters were kept honest by some of the more seasoned campaigners, something you will never see in the current junior formulas, unfortunately

ANDREW CRIGHTON

In praise of Formula Ford

Once again the Formula Ford Festival at Brands Hatch provided some superb single-seater action, and while no longer quite what it was in its heyday, nonetheless it made one realise just how much racecraft can be learned in these cars and the wide variety of audience that they attract.

Congratulations to the BRSCC for their efforts this year, aided and abetted by the irrepressible Graham Fuller (ex Minister Racing Engines) for persuading the organisers to recognise the success of one of the nicest guys in racing, Gerrit van Kouwen. The GvK 200 FF Festival was made very special through all their hard work as it celebrated 40 years since Gerrit took the laurels.

Not to be outdone, two weeks later James Beckett's love for the

Formula was showcased brilliantly at Silverstone. Nail-biting to the end, the Walter Hayes Trophy was thankfully dry and treated all those who braved the slightly cooler weather to a superb display of driving, with the youngsters kept honest by some of the more seasoned campaigners, something you will never see in the current junior formulas, unfortunately.

With such entertainment it is surprising, is it not, that Motorsport UK and the FIA seem to believe that the starting point for a single-seat racing career will cost you £250,000 a year in their ladder of opportunity and there is little promotion of the excellence we have seen in these two weekends.

Andrew Crighton
Pewsey, Wiltshire



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How Ferrari has already vindicated Hamilton's move

The seven-time champion's decision to head to Italy is looking better by the day, but can he vindicate Ferrari signing him?

JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE

PHOTOGRAPHY **MOTORSPORT IMAGES**





“I

'm looking forward to Christmas,” Lewis Hamilton mused wistfully in the wake of this year’s Sao Paulo Grand Prix. Owing to his admiration of Ayrton Senna, highlighted this year by an opportunity to drive the revered Brazilian’s McLaren MP4/5B before the grand prix, races at Interlagos are usually convivial affairs for Hamilton. In fact, so much so that Hamilton was granted honorary Brazilian citizenship.

This year was anything but. The Briton endured a thankless trudge to a 10th-place finish, complaining that his Mercedes W15 was at its “worst” all weekend. And, in a season where Mercedes’ smattering of promising results have scarcely been followed by consistent performances, Christmas is on Hamilton’s mind. And, wrapped neatly in scarlet paper under the tree, there’s a 2025 Ferrari.

When Hamilton’s Ferrari move – and departure from Mercedes after 12 seasons – was announced on 2 February this year, the only immediate impact was levied on the driver market; a now-free Carlos Sainz had a wealth of suitors attempting to secure his services for 2025, and it ignited a flurry of driver changes over the next nine months. For Hamilton’s own decision, the pay-off would have to wait until next year. If, of course, there is a pay-off.

Hamilton’s move was huge for F1. This was not your common, garden »

BAGNALL



Ferrari took its last F1 success with 2008 constructors' title...

driver transfer that barely registered outside of the championship's own ecosystem; this was global news, and everyone and their mother wanted a slice of the action. Example: Tottenham manager Ange Postecoglou sat down to talk about his team's activity in 2024's winter transfer window, having signed only Radu Dragusin from Genoa and Timo Werner on loan from RB Leipzig. He began as if to reveal the details of a failed bid, before indulging in a breakneck turn towards the recent news.

"Probably the only disappointing one was yesterday [on transfer deadline day]," the pithy Australian began. "I thought there was a really good opportunity for us, but the club just didn't feel it was the right move for us. I'm disappointed with that, but he ended up at Ferrari..."

That was the scale of the news outside of F1 but, inside, a handful of people were questioning whether it was really such a good idea. Hamilton would be turning his back on a team with which he'd won six of his seven world titles, and a manufacturer with which he'd been linked during his entire F1 career. And, if the pre-season noises from Mercedes were to be believed, the team felt that it now had a good concept for the ground-effect floors introduced in 2022.

Ferrari, on the other hand, appeared to be a risk. This was a team that, until recently, had been synonymous with strategic gaffes and developing cars with a great appetite for Pirelli rubber. New team principal Fred Vasseur had just concluded his first year in charge at the squad and, although Sainz had interrupted Red Bull's attempt to win every race in 2023 with his lure-and-defend tactics in Singapore, the SF-23 had proved to be an adept qualifying car that usually fell short on a Sunday.

Of course, Vasseur played an indelible part in making

Hamilton's signing happen. The two enjoyed success together across 2005 and 2006, first at Vasseur's ASM F3 operation, then his ART team in GP2 co-owned with Nicolas Todt. Titles in both championships led to Hamilton's F1 debut with McLaren in 2007, but that admiration for Vasseur's continued achievements, those that equipped the mirthful Frenchman for his own future in Formula 1, never faded.



Hamilton has admired Vasseur since their success in F3 and GP2

...at the same time as
Hamilton scored the first
of his seven drivers' crowns



There's always an element of risk in timing an announcement before the current season has even started, let alone 2025. Although Ferrari had ended 2023 with the second-fastest car overall, there was always the chance that the competitive order could swing in the following season. Had Mercedes come out of the blocks to challenge Red Bull at the sharp end, Hamilton's brow might have furrowed slightly at the prospect of a misstep.

The fluctuating forms of Mercedes and Ferrari

As it stands on current form, Hamilton's decision at last appears to be vindicated. With three races left, Ferrari remains in contention for the constructors' championship, a position it has worked itself into with a late-season flourish that returned three wins in the most recent six races. In that sextet of grands prix, Mercedes has accrued just one podium and its 2024 looks set to end with barely a whimper.

There's been a tangible ebb and flow between both teams, neatly segmented into the following categories: Bahrain to Monaco, Canada to Belgium, and the post-summer stretch to the season's finish line. In that first subset, Ferrari had evidently turned up with, again, the second-fastest car since McLaren had not yet embarked upon its ascendancy until its Miami upgrades arrived in early May. Mercedes, by comparison, was distinctly fourth-fastest.

But it had been given some leeway with its W15, an all-new concept that had fully turned the page from its unsuccessful 'zeropod' sidepod solution from 2022 and 2023. It was said that the new car's baseline was higher than its predecessors', but needed some time to mature into a more legitimate contender. Hamilton spoke at the end of 2023 of Mercedes now having a "North star" to follow with its W15 design, but here was the point of contention: if Mercedes was truly finding its way out of the woods, why would he leave?

Ferrari took a second win of 2024 through Charles Leclerc in Monaco, but Mercedes had made a vital step forward with a new front wing design that almost paid off next time out in Canada. George Russell's third place in Montreal could very easily have been first, had he continued his conversion of pole position, but he nonetheless felt that Mercedes had made considerable »





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progress after the opening flurry of races.

It was Hamilton's turn on the podium at Barcelona, after pouncing on early leader Russell in the final third of the race. This coincided with Ferrari's mid-season slump, kicked off by its Canada misfortune in the wet and exacerbated by a new floor developed for Barcelona. This provoked bouncing in the SF-24 during high-speed corners, something that made the red cars particularly difficult to handle during moments where drivers require full commitment to make up the time.

Mercedes' form improved significantly. Russell picked up the pieces of the Max Verstappen-Lando Norris crash in Austria to win, while Hamilton fittingly grabbed his first victory since 2021 at the British Grand Prix. He won again at Spa, albeit after Russell was disqualified for being underweight after calling his own winning one-stop strategy from his cockpit.

This was the point at which Hamilton could be forgiven for feeling he'd made a wrong turn. But equally, there were parallels to his decision to depart McLaren for Mercedes in 2012; McLaren was the more competitive of the two teams in the middle portion of the year, while Mercedes' early promise had tailed off. Yet, McLaren's continued mistakes proved increasingly irksome, culminating in his Singapore retirement through a gearbox quality control issue...

But Ferrari had been quietly beaver away at Maranello on understanding the root cause of its high-speed bouncing. A new floor for July's Hungarian GP was a course-correction, although did not immediately yield an overwhelming swing in fortunes. Post-summer, Ferrari was surprised by its own race performance at Zandvoort, but rode the wave at Monza with another step in its underbody design.

And here was the real clincher for Ferrari; it had not only given its SF-24 more ammunition to work with, but the team also shrugged off its reputation for strategic misfires by pouncing on the opportunity to one-stop. It led to Leclerc taking victory in front of the tifosi, and he very nearly doubled up in Baku, only to encounter a terrific defence from eventual winner Oscar Piastri.

Singapore would have been better without Sainz's qualifying crash and Leclerc's deleted lap time, but Ferrari at least recouped positions in the city-state race, while Mercedes could not quite rekindle its qualifying form in Sunday's night-time affair.

But Ferrari was awaiting its true test of how its upgraded aerodynamics would perform at a more 'conventional' circuit;

Monza, Baku and Singapore have their own peculiarities that masked the efficacy of that new floor. Austin delivered that litmus test. Despite struggling with the sector one bumps at the Circuit of The Americas in qualifying trim, Ferrari rocketed to a commanding 1-2 finish in Texas. Sainz then dominated in Mexico, further demonstrating those improvements.

As Ferrari waxed, Mercedes waned. Russell managed third in Baku, albeit through attritional means once more after Sainz and Sergio Perez crashed in the dying stages of the race. But the younger Briton has nonetheless outperformed Hamilton across the races since the summer break, and has now climbed ahead of his elder team-mate in the drivers' championship by two points. Had the Spa disqualification not come to pass, Russell would have managed that feat sooner.

There's an old adage in sport: form is temporary, class is permanent – even if Hamilton is no longer at the peak of his powers. But it does beg the following question: Hamilton's decision to move to Ferrari may have been vindicated, but is Ferrari vindicated in signing him? >>

Can Hamilton reverse his current slump?

Taking Hamilton's current issues at face value, there's a clear imbalance in the Mercedes W15 that has become of increasing irritation to Hamilton. When a car is balanced, a driver can place it into corners as they please, safe in the knowledge that the rear end will comply and deliver the requisite traction to exit a turn quickly.

Watching Hamilton of late, and supported by his radio messages, that car/driver simpatico is conspicuously absent. It's not exactly present for Russell either, but it seems to be hurting the seven-time champion more.

Russell has been able to contend with a tricky and unpredictable car a little better than Hamilton; perhaps there's still a bit of muscle memory of pedalling uncompetitive Williams machinery in Russell's game.

Hamilton, for his part, has had moments with troublesome cars before – but never for such an extended period. The psychological effects of the mid-season promise and subsequent drop-off appear to have taken their toll, leading to further mistakes – for example, that second-lap off at Austin – that have been largely uncharacteristic of his 17 years in F1.

This is partly due to Mercedes' capriciousness with the interaction between tyres and downforce. Speaking about his Austin crash, Hamilton explained that "there's a small window where the downforce is perfect, and it gets too high then you fall off the peak, and the other side, you go over the peak", and this was worsened by Mercedes' own struggles with bouncing in the car.

Because of the high spring rates required to operate the current F1 cars to maintain a consistent window for the floors to work, the cars are prone to coupling effects between the sprung (the chassis and, by extension, the aerodynamics) and the unsprung (tyres and uprights) masses. At certain wind speed frequencies, the car begins to excite its pitch and heave modes, thus inducing bouncing.

This puts inconsistent loads through the tyre, a quality that Hamilton disliked greatly in Mercedes' 2022 W13 chassis. The W14, and early-season W15, appeared to iron those issues out – but they're back, and with a vengeance.

That's let defeatism creep into Hamilton's attitude. After Monza, he stated that "qualifying has been my weakness for a minute now and I can't figure it out", and this has led to a string of below-par performances in recent events. After Brazil, in which a Q1 exit was followed by a difficult race, Hamilton effectively stated that he was no longer worried about performing over the rest of the year. "I just put my focus on something else. I'm not fighting for the championship. Doesn't matter, really, where we finish in the championship," he said, knowing that Mercedes was certain of fourth in the constructors' standings.

"I don't care if I finish ahead of George or behind George. It doesn't make a difference to me. I just want to keep the car out of the wall and try to score points if I can for the team, if I can finish, whatever.

"If they give me a car that doesn't bounce off the track in the next few races, then hopefully we can get a better result."

But it's reversible. A fresh environment will give Hamilton energy, particularly as he fulfils his dream of racing in red for the final chapter of his F1 career. Ferrari has also battled with bouncing this year and, crucially, appears to have succeeded in that challenge. And, at Maranello, the team is fully focused on making its union with Hamilton a success – and it has given its 2025 chassis plenty of attention to make that happen.

"A driver like Lewis does not come to us on vacation. I think we are in the right place in terms of performance"



Hamilton's defeatism more evident especially after struggles in Brazil

How will 2025 go for Ferrari and Hamilton?

Speaking in October about Hamilton's move to the team, Vasseur explained that the driver's decision to move to Ferrari was very much a seal of approval that the team could start challenging for honours on a more consistent basis. "He always had this desire in mind, but of course he is a driver who wants to have guarantees in terms of performance, for him this aspect is always in the first place," Vasseur remarked.

"If he chose to join Ferrari, it confirms to me that we can have the right car. This is the ultimate goal. A driver like Lewis does not come to us on vacation and from my side I think we are in the right place in terms of performance.

"We need a step forward and I can say that we are devoting a lot of resources to our next project."

It entirely depends on how Ferrari can continue its current sequence of performances and transfer that beyond the winter. Teams are finding diminishing returns with the current ruleset, and tentative predictions of greater convergence next year are being made by those in the know; so 2025 will be the culmination of everybody's efforts over the past three seasons.

Ferrari has already installed former Mercedes engineer Loic Serra as technical director to replace the Aston Martin-bound Enrico Cardile, which it hopes will ensure that the team continues to grow in Vasseur's image. The trackside operation is looking increasingly ship-shape by the race and, while the technical side at Maranello has been largely unchanged, Vasseur has tinkered with the hierarchy in the hope that he finds the magic formula.

Even with a competitive car, there will be subtleties that Hamilton will need to get his head around. Exclusive experience of Mercedes' power delivery might prompt a slight mental retune to how he applies the throttle, as will Ferrari's internal systems and procedures in the car.

But there's a strong chance that he'll like the Ferrari. The current lineage of cars have all enjoyed a similar trait of compliant behaviour over kerbs and bumps, which will allow him to benefit from a responsive front end and consistent feeling from the rear under traction. But it's also a car that allows itself to be hustled; Leclerc loves to wring the neck of a car in qualifying and, although he occasionally surpasses the limit of the car on a hot lap, the bar that makes the Ferrari more irascible appears to be much higher than the current Mercedes.

It's unlikely that Hamilton will get a chance in the post-season test to try the SF-24, and he'll probably have to wait until testing in 2025 to deliver his verdict on Ferrari's efforts so far.

And what chance an eighth title? Both parties would dearly love to make it so – but if next year is as competitive as we expect it to be, it's going to be a hugely challenging task to work those wonders immediately. And yet, stranger things have happened. ❁



ASENOV

HOW HAMILTON'S ARRIVAL WILL BENEFIT LECLERC

When Charles Leclerc was promoted to Ferrari after just one season in Formula 1 with Sauber, it did away with the Prancing Horse's perceived conservatism in the driver market. Here was a team that had declined to replace Felipe Massa with an up-and-comer, and instead reinstated Kimi Raikkonen to the line-up. And, although the Finn was past his best, he stayed for five seasons.

Leclerc's arrival shook things up at Maranello. The Monegasque very quickly put Sebastian Vettel in the

shade and became top dog, and Vettel was replaced for 2021 by Carlos Sainz. And Sainz has, throughout his four years alongside Leclerc, largely kept up with his team-mate. But there's a small glimmer of star quality that separates the two drivers; Leclerc might be the more peaky of the two versus Sainz's impressive consistency, but the eight-time grand prix winner is the one more predisposed to the moments that make an athlete special.

So, if Leclerc felt that he was Ferrari's go-to man,

surely he'd be aggrieved at Hamilton coming in to capture some of the limelight – right? Not so.

"When you have a seven-time world champion joining the team, it's always good news," Leclerc remarked. "I can learn from one of the best-ever Formula 1 drivers, and I'm super-motivated to show what I'm capable of doing against Lewis in the same car."

And that's exactly the right attitude. Leclerc might be the best one-lap specialist on the F1 grid, but there are still a few rough

edges to his repertoire in a race. Hamilton, who perhaps these days is a better racer than qualifier, can help to knock those rough edges into shape.

Truth be told, Leclerc doesn't need much tutoring. His old reputation as a mercurial talent, one who was blessed with considerable speed but a penchant for hurling his car into walls, has largely dwindled. But there's still a smidgen of inconsistency.

Take his recent races for example. He was excellent at Zandvoort, Monza and Baku, and then had an iffy

Singapore race. He starred at Austin, and then paled versus Sainz in Mexico. It might just be the ebb and flow of close-run team-mates, but Leclerc can do no harm by elevating himself to a more consistent level.

And, although recent form has deserted Hamilton, his string of championship wins nonetheless show that he's

"HAVING A SEVEN-TIME CHAMPION JOINING THE TEAM IS ALWAYS GOOD NEWS"

capable of title-worthy runs of consistent high notes. Unlocking that, while also teaching him the special sauce recipe of maximising results on off-days, will be a significant boon to both Leclerc and Ferrari long-term.

Hamilton won't be there forever: two years, perhaps three at a push. Leclerc has signed his long-term future up to Ferrari and, if he can beat Hamilton over their time as team-mates, he'll truly have completed the final boss before a championship tilt. It's just up to Ferrari to deliver a car capable of more than occasional victories...



TEE



WHAT MAKES OSCAR PIASTRI TICK?

He's only in his second F1 season but already Piastri looks like he could become Australia's third world champion. Time to talk to some of those who've known him since before he first stepped into a race car

BEN HUNT

“O

scar's brain is a supercomputer,” says Oscar Piastri's early mentor James Sera, who helped the McLaren driver navigate his early career in his native Australia. It's an unusual response when asked about the McLaren Formula 1 driver's most crucial characteristics.

When posed the same question, the man who oversaw Piastri's career when he moved to the UK latches onto the same theme. “It's his feel, his dexterity – the supercomputer; the brain,” responds Rob McIntyre.

Two people independent of each other using the exact same term to characterise the 23-year-old might be somewhat unusual. But perhaps it is not so unusual, for Piastri at least. The Melbourne native's ascent to the top of the F1 podium has been so rapid that it is perhaps understandable to forget that he is only in his second season. Not only that, but F1 observers have also been blindsided by the incredible levels of maturity that defy his age, alongside a remarkable degree of calmness.

When McLaren was trying to manage the outcome of the Hungarian Grand Prix, Piastri was measured in his reaction to the situation. More supercomputer than superhuman, processing away behind the wheel and apparently detached from emotion.

Piastri is an undeniable talent and one that those who know him best saw at an early age when he raced radio-controlled cars in Australia, winning the second class and progressing to the top level when he was nine years old. It was then, around 2011, when he first met Sera, who had been sought out by Piastri's father, Chris, to help with his fledgling career.

“A mutual friend involved in karting and RC racing had told Chris to come in and see me about getting Oscar into karting, as at the time he was racing RC cars,” recalls Sera. “I was running a business in karting, selling, servicing and coaching drivers all around the country. So after a very short conversation with Chris, he committed to buying Oscar his first go-kart. »

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"I was then involved in Oscar's early career between the ages of nine and 14 before he left for Europe to race for Ricky Flynn. Oscar was a great kid. From the moment we met, it was a great relationship and we went away karting most weekends of the year together.

"He was exactly as he is now: calm, quiet and extremely willing to learn. He has a persona like no other kid I've ever been involved with and, because of his outstanding attitude, he is just such a likeable kid. I was blown away by his calm attitude and how extremely intelligent he was for his age."

Sera says he quickly identified characteristics that set Piastri aside from his competitors and recognised that he would need to move to Europe to develop his career. "I knew early on that Oscar had something different to the other kids I had coached and mentored in Australia," he adds. "He got an opportunity to go race the 2014 IAME International Final, where Oscar grabbed third place. From there it was clear he should race some more in Europe and although there were no F1 talks that early, I definitely encouraged his family to send him to Europe, which for a 14-year-old is no easy feat."

Piastri leaving Sera's stewardship to move to the UK with his father led to a chance encounter with McIntyre, who had previously run karting teams, worked in scouting programmes unearthing talent and as a driver manager. "My background is professional go-kart racing," McIntyre explains. "Having worked in motorsport all my life in various guises, my real passion is working in karting because it's more about the driver, and you can see what's going on."



SUTTON/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Early potential shone though in karts – here the 2022 Alpine reserve driver steps back



DE MATTIA/DPPI

Formula Renault
Eurocup crown added to Piastri's tally in 2019

"Typically, I go to two or three big international races a year, even now, and I go watch. So, back in 2016, I went to a European championship race and saw this little Aussie kid batting round and I thought, 'OK, yeah, you're quite good'. He was driving for Ricky Flynn Motorsport. Ricky was my best man at my wedding and I said, 'So, the little Aussie kid is pretty fast. What do you know?'

"Oscar would have been 15. Rick basically said, 'Yeah, really fast, very technical, super-smart'. When I looked at his data, the way he uses the steering and the way he uses pedals, he was so dexterous. He's got an amazing feel. I thought, 'This kid is going to go really well in a car.'

"At the time, I was helping Arden International, owned by Garry and Christian Horner and they had a young driver academy. So I was helping those guys out, doing a little bit of mentoring, a bit of spotting. So I got Oscar's father's telephone number, rang him and said, 'Hey, you don't know me. This is what I do. This is my background. I work with Arden International and when you want to go in a car, give me a shout.' Simple as that.

"We had lunch outside of Hertford where I used to live because they had an apartment in Hoddesdon the next town down. We talked, because of my knowledge about intelligent electronics – I'm not an engineer, I should say – but I did my due diligence. I tried to understand what Oscar's father's business was. So straight away, there was a rapport, and also my racing passion and enthusiasm. >>

THE ONE THAT GOT AWAY

For all the success Oscar Piastri enjoyed in his glittering junior single-seater career, there was one title that eluded him. If you cast aside his part-campaign in the short UAE Formula 4 season that preceded it, the only championship the Australian failed to win was British F4 in 2017.

While Jamie Caroline beat Piastri to the crown, the season was somewhat overshadowed by Billy Monger's devastating crash in the second round at Donington Park that resulted in Caroline's close friend having both of his legs amputated. That left all of the drivers in an unsettling situation and, with it being Piastri's first full year in single-seaters in unfamiliar territory and up against a rival with three years already in cars, it always meant he faced a tough task.

With the mighty Carlin operation guiding Caroline to success, he was one of the favourites heading into the year and enjoyed an impressive first four events that included making history by winning all three races at Thruxton. Piastri began more modestly with a couple of podiums at Brands Hatch but, unsurprisingly, the Arden racer grew



JEP/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Piastri grew stronger as the 2017 British F4 season progressed

stronger as the year wore on.

As Caroline started to falter, his 90.5-point lead at the head of the standings after Oulton Park's fourth event was halved by Piastri over the next two meetings. Piastri then scored another two wins at Knockhill only for his challenge to come to a crashing halt at Rockingham. He made contact with team-mate Ayrton Simmons in the opener, before a controversial clash with Caroline at the Tarzan hairpin in race two. "He was defending the inside line so I went to the outside," Piastri told Autosport at the time. "But he just moved across

and there was nowhere I could go."

It was deemed a racing incident and a further tangle with Linus Lundqvist of Double R Racing in the finale, along with car woes, left Piastri scoring just one point all weekend. Despite Caroline only needing to outscore Piastri by half a point at Silverstone to wrap up the title, the Australian insisted it was still to play for. And a fighting performance ensured it did go down to Brands, where Caroline finally sealed the deal and Piastri's sole defeat was confirmed.

STEPHEN LICKORISH

OSCAR PIASTRI

“Oscar sat there as a 15-year-old eating his fries and not saying a word. Chris was looking for somebody to give him a little bit of guidance. So we started to talk. We started to set things up. I got him into Arden and he went on the simulator, and the guys at Arden are like, ‘Wow’.”

Despite initially impressing the Arden engineers on the simulator, it was not until his debut in a car that he did something that set him apart. McIntyre recalls the moment he realised Piastri was a class above: “We organised for him to go to Anglesey and he’d never been in a racing car before. We had an old BRDC F4 car, it was damp. He went out straight away and the left past the pits on his second run, there were five big seagulls sitting there. As Oscar comes roaring past, they limber into the air and he caught one of the seagulls with his wing mirror and it took the wing mirror off!

“When he came in, we looked at the data and he had not even lifted. The Arden engineers kept saying to me, ‘He’s definitely been



I was just down the road, not that he needed me, because he was unbelievably independent even as a 15-year-old. Very calm, cool and collected, just really sensible. Occasionally I’d get a call saying a flight has been cancelled and can I help.

“Through 2017, Chris started to talk to me about a bit more help and asked me

in a car before.’ I had to say, ‘Guys, he hasn’t been in a car before.’

“They set a benchmark time for him; Jack Aitken had been in the car and set a time. They said, ‘Listen, if you can get within three seconds of this time, happy days.’ By the end of the day, he was faster than the benchmark.”

With their son’s career looking promising, Piastri’s family had to make the difficult decision. While Oscar was racing in Europe, his father needed to return to Australia for his business and family commitments. The future F1 ace was offered the choice of returning to Australia, but decided that he would remain in the UK at boarding school to further his education and racing career.

McIntyre adds: “Chris started to talk about how it was going to work. For all the success of all the Australians [at home], you have to race in Europe if you’re going to make it. So he said, ‘OK, can he go to school here?’ He went Haileybury College and a lot of racing drivers went there, because they are missing so much school.

“Oscar came to the UK in September 2016 and went to Haileybury;

whether I’d I be interested in working solely with Oscar and help on the journey. The British F4 season went unbelievably well. He won loads of races. The championship went down to the last weekend and Oscar finished second. Jamie Caroline won the championship.”

Piastri juggled his racing career with his education, skipping a testing day at Silverstone while he sat a GCSE exam before turning up for the races. With McIntyre by his side, he progressed through the junior categories, opting to race in the Formula Renault Eurocup in 2018 rather than the Formula 3 European Championship that had launched Max Verstappen directly to F1.

“We knew if we went to Euro F3, we were going to be with a mid-level team, it was going to cost €900,000,” explains McIntyre, who placed his charge at Arden for 2018 before joining R-acce GP for 2019. “The following year, guess what’s going to happen? We’re going to do exactly the same again. You’ve got to be in the right team.

“So I worked with [R-acce GP boss] Thibaut de Merindol. With a new car, the new engine, he won the [2019] championship and my phone was ringing non-stop. People offering him drives for very little money, and then [Prema team principal] Rene Rosin contacted me.

“Oscar and I went to Prema and had a fantastic meeting. When I got back into the hire car, I asked Oscar, ‘What do you think?’ And he said, ‘It’s a no brainer, isn’t it?’ And absolutely it was because they’d come 1-2-3 in the [Formula 3] championship.”

It was at this time that McIntyre and Piastri’s father decided to seek some extra help in masterminding the racer’s career to F1. They turned to nine-time grand prix winner Mark Webber and his wife, Ann Neal, to ensure that the money they had ring-fenced for Piastri’s career was being spent well.

“Even though the top teams want you, you still have to write a big cheque and trying to find sponsorship or support outside of your own nation is impossible,” McIntyre continues. “Oscar was doing some work with [exercise physiologist and sports scientist] Simon Sostaric, who knew Mark. So through Simon, I asked Mark and



Piastri has demonstrated in no uncertain terms his F1 world champion potential



HONE

“HIS BRAIN, AND HIS COMPOSURE. WHEN YOU PUT THAT TOGETHER, HE’S ABLE TO SEE THE BIG PICTURE”

Ann if they want to get involved.

“We went to meet Mark and Ann and Chris is very, very laid back. This is early 2019 and by now the Prema deal is all done and dusted. But Chris turned up in a shirt – I’ve never seen him ever in a shirt! We built a relationship with Mark and Ann and then we did the deal, and so through F3 and F2 we used their contacts.”

Piastri’s success in the Eurocup had opened up a spot with the Alpine Academy. He’d finished his GCSEs and A Levels and was now free to concentrate on his racing career. He travelled with McIntyre during the COVID-hit 2020 season, when he won the F3 title. He repeated the achievement in 2021 with victory in the F2 championship and was voted Autosport Rookie of the Year for the second consecutive time.

By now his achievements had caught the eye of McLaren, who succeeded in poaching Piastri from Alpine by offering an F1 seat for 2023. Piastri has since thrived at McLaren under Andrea Stella and, with the benefit of Webber and Neal now guiding his career, he is being moulded into a superstar F1 driver.

“He’s super-calm, super-composed,” concludes McIntyre, who has now taken a back seat. “To say, what are his strengths through the period of time that I worked with him? His brain, and it’s his composure. When you put that together, he’s able to see the big picture.

“When he’s talking to the engineers, the engineers say XYZ, he will go out and do XYZ. It’s his ability to replicate and do that. He can also go back X amount of years, and talk about a particular corner on a certain lap, it’s just mindblowing.

“When Oscar wins, you’ll see there’s a smile and a little bit of jubilation. But straight back he looks at ‘what could I have improved?’ Mark and Ann have been fantastic mentors, but he is the same as the 15-year-old that arrived here from Australia. He’s just got that passion and enthusiasm for it. Only he does not show it externally.”



Measured, composed
Piastri keeps his celebrations in check

ROMNEY



Mentor Webber has helped nurture young countryman’s talent

TEE



F1 Clienti
shakedown driver
has piloted a
stunning variety
of grand prix
machinery



ANDREA BERTOLINI

THE BEST JOB IN THE WORLD?

In a 30-plus-year career with Ferrari, test driver and multiple sportscar championship winner Andrea Bertolini is the embodiment of living the dream

GARY WATKINS

Andrea Bertolini might just have the best job in the world. He gets to race Ferrari sportscars at international level and also drive its Formula 1 machinery of all vintages on a regular basis. No wonder a man who as a child used to be hoicked up onto his father's shoulders to see what was going on over the walls of the Fiorano test track sometimes has to pinch himself.

Bertolini has worked for Ferrari man and boy: he joined the Italian marque as an apprentice aged 17 and has fulfilled a multitude of roles since: road car development driver; factory sportscar racer (and a successful one at that); a tester for the F1 team and its lead simulator man. He also gets to shake down the chassis for Ferrari's F1 Clienti programme that allows the most loyal – and wealthy – of the marque's customers to own and drive a piece of F1 history. Which is why he is able to say that he has driven every Ferrari F1 car from the 1974 312B3 right up to the SF21 of three years ago.

Yet it wouldn't be quite right to claim that Bertolini, now 50, is a Ferrari guy through and through. The biggest prizes he's picked up in endurance racing have come not at the wheel of machinery bearing the Prancing Horse, rather the Tridente of then sister marque Maserati. He will always be remembered for his role in the Maserati MC12 programme: he led development of the design and was its most successful driver, with 15 victories and four titles across the FIA GT Championship and GT1 World Championship. He still has an involvement with Maserati: he was loaned out to develop its GT2 racer – based on the MC20 sportscar – introduced for the 2023 season and the MCXtrema trackday version of the machine.

Bertolini's is an amazing story. It's much more than a tale of local lad made good. Not least because he didn't start racing, cars that is, until he was 27. And when he did it was at the wheel of a Porsche, despite having been in the employ of Ferrari for nearly 10 years at that point. »



Bertolini had to book holiday to race a Porsche in 2001...



...but his success ensured he was in a Ferrari the next season



Two wins in Maserati's four-race non-points outings at the close of 2004 FIA GT season



He was brought up just three miles from Fiorano in Sassuolo (and now lives the same distance in the opposite direction). Hence the trips to Fiorano as a child. “It seems like yesterday,” he remembers of his time peering over the wall at Fiorano to see the likes of Gilles Villeneuve and Michele Alboreto at the wheel of Ferrari F1 machinery. “I remember Gilles flying in aboard his helicopter to test, and then later Michele,” he adds.

He could never have imagined back then that one day any clandestine spectators at Fiorano would see his helmet poking out of the very same cars. Nor that he would go on to have such a long and illustrious career racing for the marque he loves.

Bertolini’s ambition as the kid craning to see over the walls of Fiorano wasn’t to race for Ferrari. He kind of ended up there by accident. He kartered from the age of 10, but his aspirations never stretched beyond becoming a works driver in that discipline. That dream ended when, at the age of 16, his father told him

“I cried every day for a week when my father said I couldn’t race anymore. We didn’t have the money”

the money had run out. “I cried every day for a week when my father said I couldn’t race anymore,” he recalls. “It was like a light had been turned off. I was at the point where I was getting free chassis and engines, but we didn’t have the money for the running costs. My dad ran a coffee shop.”

His karting connections, however, were pivotal in Bertolini’s shift from Ferrari apprentice – his first role was in the dyno department where he worked on, among other things, the 333 SP World Sports Car V12 – to Ferrari test driver. “There was a team I knew from karting which was going to move up to the Ferrari Challenge,” he explains. “They asked me to do a few laps at Fiorano in their new chassis.”

Present at the track that day was famed Ferrari road car tester Dario Benuzzi. “After five laps, Dario came to me and said, ‘I know you are with Ferrari already, but would you like to come to work for me in the experimental department and eventually become a test driver?’” recalls a man universally known as ‘Berto’ in racing circles. “I had to ask him to say it again because I thought I was dreaming. Two days later the people from human resources told

me I was moving to the experimental department.”

Bertolini, who didn’t have a licence for either track or road when he was approached by Benuzzi, went on to work on a number of projects. The first was developing power steering for the 512 TR, the first from beginning to end was the 360 Challenge Stradale. Bertolini was still working on road cars as he progressed through his twenties. A return to karting with a new chassis builder – Maranello Racing Kart – in 1998 set him on course of the job he has today.

Bertolini’s achievements on his competition comeback included runner-up position in the Italian 125cc Formula C gearbox series in Italy in 2000 and victory the year before in that category at the prestigious end-of-season tournament – the Torneo Industrie – at the Parma track. That same year, Lewis Hamilton took the crown in the ICA (Intercontinental A) division.

Those results led to an invite to race in FIA GT with the ART Engineering squad. But there was a problem. It wanted him to race its Porsche. An N-GT class 911 GT3-R to be exact. “A friend recommended me to the team, which knew about what I did at Ferrari,” he recalls. “I asked for a meeting with my big boss, the technical director [Amedeo] Felisa, who went on to become Ferrari CEO. I was really scared. I told him what I wanted to do, and he asked me if I was joking. He agreed I could race, but told me, ‘When you are competing you have to take the time off as holiday.’”

“After three or four months and a few races, he called me back into his office. I thought, I’m f***** here. He was really serious again and asked me how the racing was going. Then he told me that at the end of the year I would be coming back home to race.”

It was explained to Bertolini how Ferrari was establishing Competizioni GT, the motorsport department that has masterminded its GT programmes ever since, and now the double Le Mans 24 Hours-winning 499P Le Mans Hypercar project. “He told me, you will be our development driver, a factory driver,” remembers Bertolini. “So don’t take any more drives with Porsche or other manufacturers!”

The new role for Bertolini resulted in a campaign in 2002 at the wheel of the first of a line of Ferrari GT racers that stretches to today’s 296 GT3. He raced in FIA GTs for the factory-backed JMB Racing squad at the wheel of the new 360 Modena with Andrea Garbagnati. The following year he fell just short of winning the N-GT class title while sharing with Fabrizio de Simone.

It was a momentous year in Bertolini’s history with Ferrari. At the start of the season he received a call from F1 team boss Jean Todt. He wasn’t expecting what he heard: “From today you are a Ferrari F1 test driver.” Bertolini subsequently learned >>





First full season in 2005 aboard the MC12

SUTTON/MOTORSPORT IMAGES



Victory in the 2006 Spa 24 Hours

STALEY/MOTORSPORT IMAGES



Fifth place at Silverstone in 2007

SUTTON/MOTORSPORT IMAGES



GTE Am class win at Le Mans in 2015

GILBERT/MOTORSPORT IMAGES



2018 end-of-season Ferrari celebration at Monza

FERRARI

Michael Schumacher had requested that he join Luca Badoer on the test team. “It was Michael who really pushed for me,” explains Bertolini. “People told me that he went to Todt and said, ‘Listen, we need this guy as part of the F1 family.’”

Over six years from 2003 to 2008, Bertolini would complete upwards of 10,000km per year of private testing, mostly at Fiorano, Monza and Mugello at the wheel of contemporary F1 machinery in the days of unlimited testing. It was only in 2008, when the first restrictions were placed on private running, that his involvement scaled back. Bertolini was deeply embedded in the F1 team for those years and beyond: he was also its first simulator driver. Ferrari’s initial experimentation with simulation came at Fiat’s research centre in Turin (Centro Ricerche Fiat) in the days before Ferrari’s independence on the flotation of the company in 2016.

“Michael got sick driving it, and so did Luca,” says ‘Berto’. “And Rubens [Barrichello, Schumacher’s team-mate at the time] didn’t really like it either. When we started in 2003, it was really hard work. The graphics were not very good and by the end of a day in the sim I was destroyed. The level of graphics today is another world.”

“Michael Schumacher went to Jean Todt and said, ‘Listen, we need this guy as part of the F1 family’”

Only at the end of 2009 did Ferrari open its first simulator at Maranello – and Bertolini was the first to drive that one, too. He continued as a member of the simulator team right up until 2019.

But there is a twist in Bertolini’s story at Ferrari just as he was getting going with the F1 team. Key members of the Competizioni GT department, former F1 engineer Giorgio Ascanelli included, moved over to Maserati. The result was the MC12 GT1 racer, a car that was successful and controversial in equal measure. Bertolini was lead development driver on the project and part of the factory roster of drivers throughout its frontline career between 2004 and 2010. It was a busy time for him: “I would do one week in the F1, normally four days, and then four days in the MC12. Then it was back to the F1.”

It was with Maserati that Bertolini notched up his most prestigious achievements as a driver. Two FIA GT wins from four races when the car competed on a non-points, invitational basis with AF Corse at the back end of 2004 were followed by a title near-miss in its first full season with JMB, where Bertolini shared with Karl Wendlinger. Notwithstanding his subsequent accomplishments with the MC12, he has the strongest recollections of his first championship assault with the car in 2005.

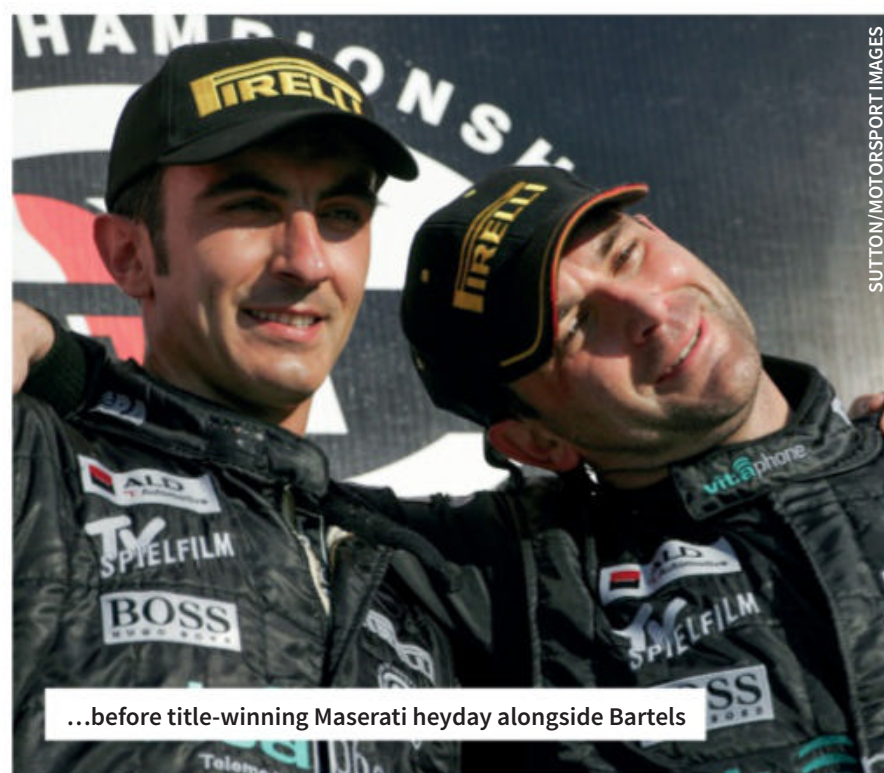
“I have the better memories of that year because it was the first full season with the car and I had done all the development,” he states. “We should have won the championship but we had a problem with the gearbox after only a few laps at the last race in Bahrain. I had been unlucky in 2003 with the 360. Fabrizio and I had a throttle problem at Anderstorp; we could have won the championship easily. After 2005 I started to think, ‘Andrea, you are fast and a good development driver, but are you one of these unlucky guys who never wins a championship?’”

Bertolini proved he wasn’t the following year. And proved it again and again over two stints with the Vitaphone Racing squad. He won four titles at the wheel of the MC12: three in FIA GTs (2006, 2008 and 2009), and one in the short-lived FIA GT1 World Championship (2010) that succeeded it. All four were notched up alongside Vitaphone team boss Michael Bartels, as were his two triumphs at the Spa 24 Hours double-points FIA GT round in 2006 and 2008.

He would win another title with Maserati, the 2011 International Superstars Series at the wheel of a Quattroporte, before moving back full-time to Ferrari. The successes in top-level sportscar racing didn’t stop. He has won titles in the Asian and European Le Mans Series, in 2013 and 2014 respectively, and took the World Endurance



Fond memories of 2005 near-miss with Wendlinger...



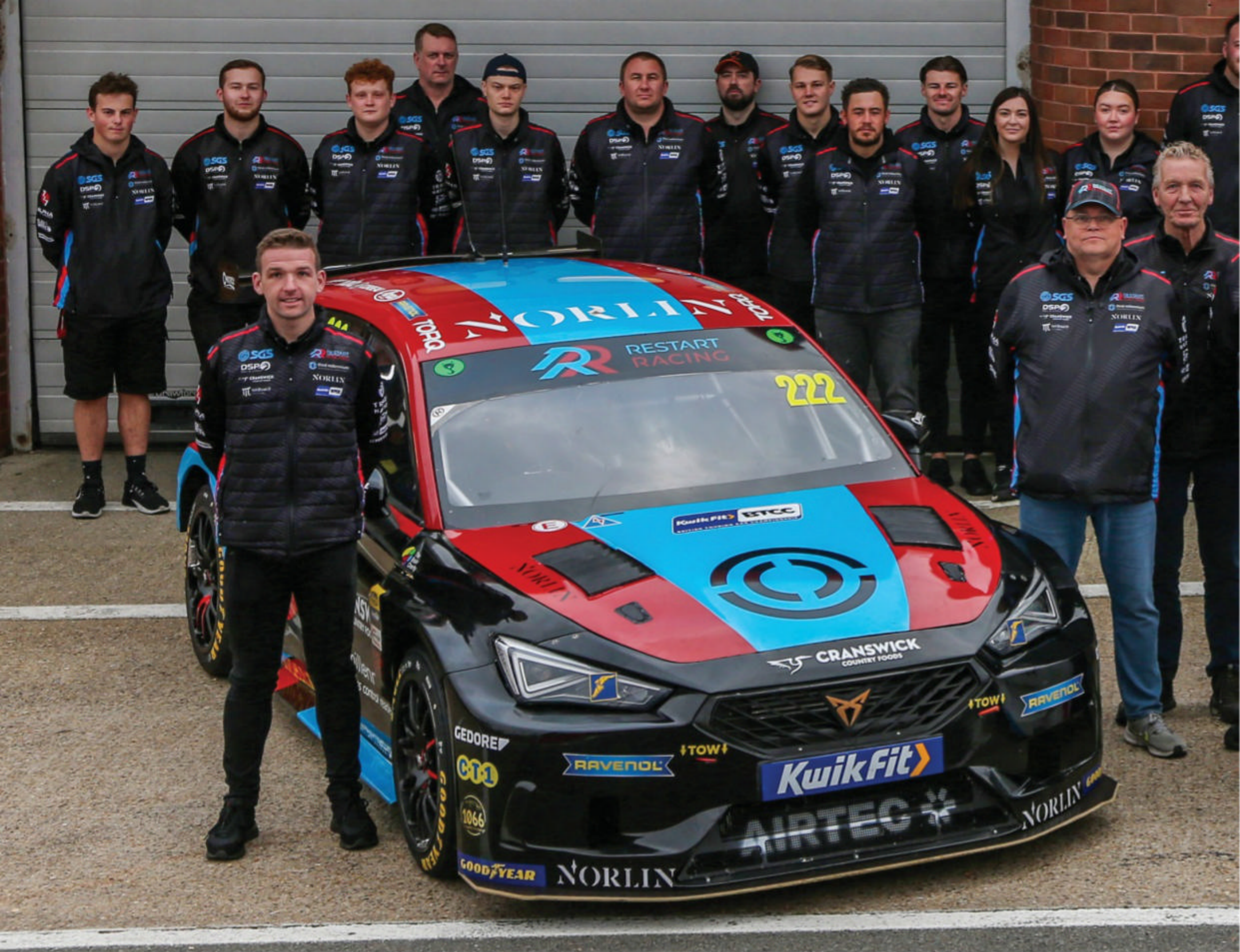
...before title-winning Maserati heyday alongside Bartels

Championship GTE Am crown in 2015 and the class at Le Mans the same year. His most recent championship triumph came in the GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup with victory in the Pro-Am Cup in 2022. And he’s still in the running for the Bronze Cup category this year as the series goes into its Jeddah finale in Saudi Arabia at the end of this month. All were notched up with AF Corse, the 2015 WEC and Le Mans wins under the banner of SMP Racing.

But the best part of the job over the years? It has to be, he says, getting the chance to drive the old F1 cars either from the museum or the F1 Clienti fleet. “I have a photograph of every test and some videos, too,” he smiles proudly. “I collect everything.” That’s a lot of photos. At the time of writing he had completed 564 shakedown runs but, when you read this, that number should be pushing 570 – there were a handful or runs scheduled for this week.

Bertolini has driven Ferraris from the 1950s and 1960s, and very soon he will complete a set of sorts by getting behind the wheel of every type from the past 50 years. Missing from his list is the 1982 126C2. A 126C3 is being converted back to 1982 ground-effect C2 spec and, on its imminent completion, Bertolini will put the first laps on the restored Harvey Postlethwaite-designed beauty.

He picks his very first run in an F1 Ferrari as his favourite moment from his 30-plus years with the marque. A shakedown for the nascent Clienti programme in 2001, it was a 1995 412T2, though the model type was irrelevant. “It was an emotional moment for me, more than winning any championship or race,” sighs Bertolini. “I was thinking about how I used to be a kid looking over the fence, and here I am driving an F1 car at Fiorano.”



A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF A NEW BTCC TEAM

Restart Racing's main aim for its first 12 months in the UK's tin-top elite was to get established. Its main players explain how that happened

MARCUS SIMMONS

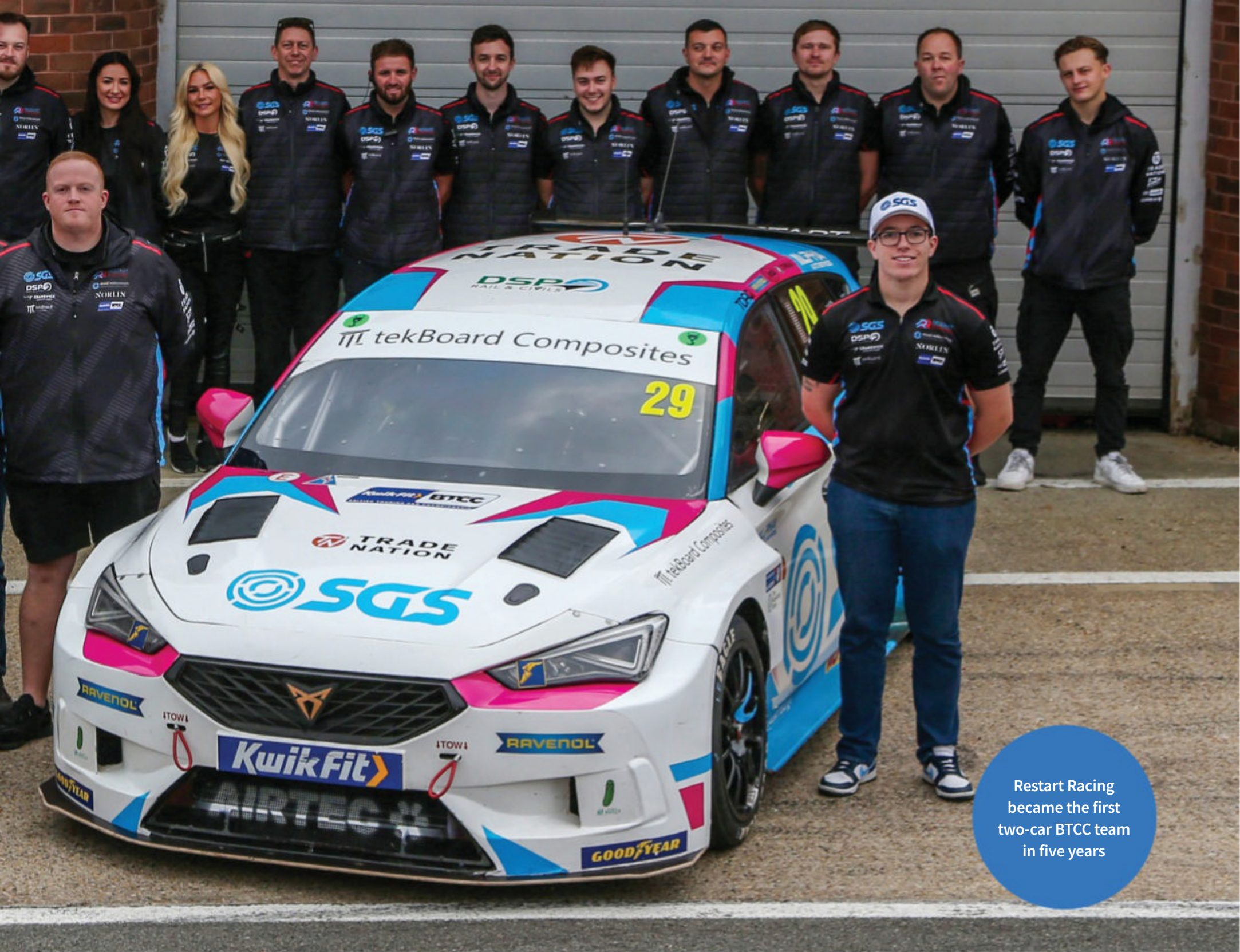
It was one of the biggest eruptions of joy from the British Touring Car Championship season. When Jake Hill plucked out ball number '6' from his reversed-grid draw at Silverstone in late September, he installed Chris Smiley and his Restart Racing Cupra Leon on pole position for the final race of the day. The crew from the little Essex squad cheered wildly. And so they might, because 12 months earlier they hadn't even pressed the green light on their project.

Restart's two-car entry to the BTCC with Smiley and Scott Sumpton looked set to make the team the first to join the series since Excelr8 Motorsport back in 2019, although as things transpired it would end up sharing that honour with single-car Unlimited Motorsport, like Restart running the ex-Team Hard Cupra model. It was the realisation of a dream that Smiley and

engineer Ben Taylor, who had worked together with Taylor's father Bert at BTC Racing, had harboured since they exited the series at the end of 2021 when the Northern Irish racer's two-year stint with Excelr8 came to a close. They regrouped in 2022 in TCR UK under the banner of Restart, won the title with Honda's trusty Civic Type R FK7, then had a trickier 2023 developing the new FL5 model.

The final member of the triumvirate required to make the BTCC commitment was commercial chief Pete Jones, the logos of whose Third Millennium security systems company are prominent on the Cupra. As an out-and-out racing enthusiast, Jones had been a backer of Excelr8 in the BTCC and struck up a friendship with Smiley and Taylor Jr during their 2020-21 stint at the team.

"It got to Easter in 2022 and I didn't know what was going on," relates Jones. "Ben's dad Bert put something cryptic out on social media, and the only way I could find out what the hell was going



Restart Racing became the first two-car BTCC team in five years



on was to ring Charlie [Smiley's father]. He said, 'I've just come back from Milan with a Honda TCR, we're out racing next week, are you coming?' I took my son along and he got embedded in the team, and he's obviously moved on to different things." Indeed, Nathan Jones (not to be confused with the 1971 Supremes hit – insipidly covered by Bananarama in the 1980s – of the same name), worked as data engineer for Restart and is now Pirelli's tyre technician for the Ferrari Formula 1 team.

Things progressed in a BTCC direction towards the end of

“IT OPENED OUR MINDS TO COMING BACK TO BTCC AND EVENTUALLY WE MADE IT HAPPEN” *Pete Jones*

the 2023 season. “I was looking for a club race for Nathan to do, so I went to Silverstone in September to see the Mini Challenge Clubsport because we've got a Cooper for him and he drives that regularly with Chris,” continues Jones. “I walked into the cafe at Silverstone and Pete Osborne [owner of the Alliance-run NAPA squad] was sitting there with an empty chair at the table, so I thought I'd invite myself to lunch. We started having a conversation, that didn't lead to anything, but it opened our minds to actually coming back to BTCC and eventually we made it happen.”

Osborne at the time was keen to supply Focus STs to a new >>



BTCC team. “We even went and had a look,” adds Jones, “and we went down to Team Hard and the demise of them created an opportunity for us to get a lower-cost entry to the championship, and that’s what we did. That was literally a year ago, just before the final BTCC round of 2023.”

“I was sort of pushed away [from the BTCC], and it left a bad taste in my mouth,” recalls Smiley. “We’ve done this for long enough to know if we’re being treated fairly or unfairly. For us to come back and do it again, I felt like we needed to do it ourselves. We’ve always worked hard at it, and it always felt that whenever we were getting somewhere, someone would grab it and snatched it off us. My dad ran British Superbike teams, and

we’ve always tried to do things to the best of our ability. The way we felt at the end of 2021, we just wanted to go racing, and the best option that we had was to go TCR. It was good for us all, because it gave Ben a chance of running his own team.”

The team took possession of two of Hard’s new-for-2023 Cupras, one of which has been raced by Bobby Thompson for the first half of the season and Michael Crees in the second, the other by Dan Lloyd. “It must have been a fortnight after the last race,” reckons Taylor. “We collected the one car and some other bits and bobs that Tony [Gilham, Hard boss] had there that we needed to run it, and then a few weeks later we got the other car. That part of it all came together quite sharp.”

As happens quite frequently, the move of an incumbent engineer seemed to come hand in hand with the transfer of the BTCC’s TBL entrants’ licences. In this case, ex-Team Dynamics man Tom Hunt, who had worked with Lloyd in 2023 at Hard, came on board. “By the time we’d done all that it was like end of November, and we were looking to do a load of development that had been started via Tom and Team Hard that we wanted to proceed with,” says Taylor. “So we had to get the ball rolling quite quick so we could make the testing deadline for end of February, early March. Tom did the winter upgrade stuff and it was good because the ball was already rolling; we just finished the process.

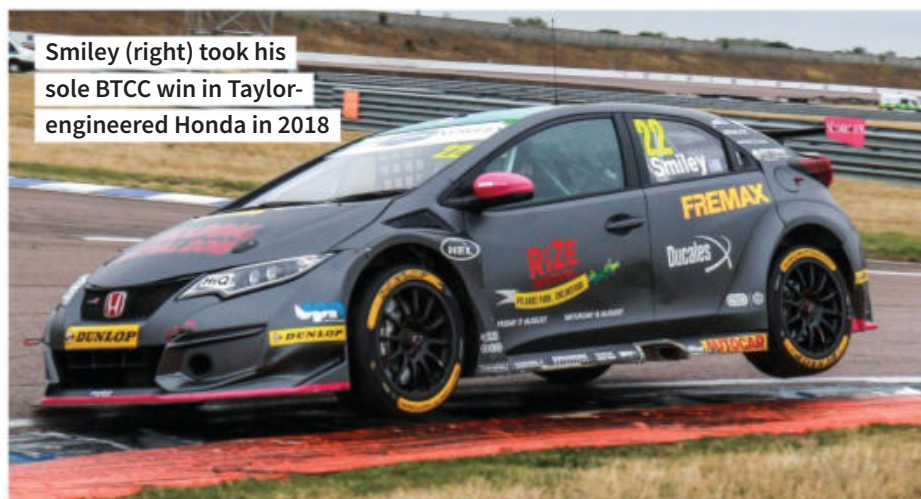


“IT’S BEEN A MASSIVE ENGINEERING CHALLENGE. BUT THE CAR’S IN A REALLY GOOD PLACE” *Ben Taylor*

The first TOCA test we were probably not really prepared enough for, because of the amount of work we’d done on the cars, but by the time we rolled up to media day we were in a nice place.”

Jones was working away on the non-technical stuff: “I got to see [at Excelr8] what goes on in the paddock and how the commercial side works – that’s my contribution to this project, to put that extra layer on top of the trackside operation. You have to have hospitality, you have to have great partners, and this year has really been about getting the team bootstrapped in BTCC

Taylor put together team after success with Smiley in TCR



“IT’S NOT THAT I DON’T KNOW WHAT TO DO, IT’S JUST THAT MATT [NEAL] GETS YOU THERE QUICKER” *Chris Smiley*

because you can’t sell it if you’re not here.

“I wanted the challenge. I wasn’t surprised by anything because I’d watched teams for five years before doing this. The ability to consume money was slightly more than I expected. It doesn’t matter how much money you’ve got, you can always spend more. My objective was to hit Donington next year in far better shape than we were at the start of this season, and I think that’s mission accomplished. We’ve got an effective team that all works. You always need more money, so me and Chris and his dad Charlie are constantly on the phone talking to potential partners. Every now and then you click a good one and that builds the sustainability in the team, the resilience to be able to go racing. At the end of the day we just want to go racing and compete.”

How does the bang-for-buck of the BTCC’s NGTC machinery compare to TCR? “It’s very hard to compare it because the TCR cars do 14 races and this is 30 over 10 weekends,” points out Smiley. “If you ran a TCR car to the level that these cars are being run at, with the same amount of tyres and race weekends, there’d be very little difference in the price.”

One key difference is that TCR is customer racing where competitors get technical support from their manufacturer, whereas you’re on your own in the BTCC – notwithstanding the assistance from suppliers of the control parts. “Yeah for sure,” sighs Taylor. “It’s been a massive engineering challenge running these, because we had previous BTCC data pre-hybrid, but since hybrid was introduced [for 2022] we had none. So it’s taken us a long time, longer than we expected, to really get on top of that. But we are there now and the car’s in a really good place.”

Smiley, who is frequently bullish, asserts that apart from the sixth place at Silverstone that preceded the reversed-grid pole, “there’s other weekends where we’ve had silly little things go wrong that have cost us proper results. I was lying seventh at Snetterton when the passenger door opened; at Donington we had a faulty hybrid battery when I was in the top 10; a similar thing at Croft. Just silly little things, not necessarily anybody’s fault, but have cost us. There’s more weekends where we should have been in that position to get the reversed grid for race three, and that’s where we are at the minute.”

One figure who has assisted Restart in its first steps in the BTCC is three-time champion Matt Neal, Hunt’s former boss at Dynamics. “Matt’s been a great help to me on the driving side,” enthuses Smiley. “It’s not that I don’t know what to do, it’s just that Matt gets you there quicker on a race weekend. He just sees four or five things that you’re doing in free practice, and you go into



qualifying with a clear mind of what you need to do.”

And Smiley waxes lyrical about Taylor, who took on engineering duties when their pre-season tie-up with veteran Geoff Kingston “just didn’t align. Ben has engineered me for the last seven years and he’s picked up the role and done a great job. And Ben day-to-day manages looking after the cars and the reprep. Without him doing the job he has done this year, it wouldn’t have been possible to do it. There’s very few people who could have taken on that project of getting those cars when he did and turn them around so we have working cars.”

The next project is a move, which Taylor hopes happens at the end of this month, into the old Van Diemen factory in Norfolk, just across the road from Snetterton – and which is still owned by the Firman family. But don’t start thinking that we might see Dave Coyne or Paulo Carcasci joining the team, even if the amiable Sumpton is moving on after a tough rookie season... While Jones – who is philanthropically helping some tin-top youngsters on their road towards the BTCC – has been a personal backer to Ronan Pearson, it appears that this former Excelr8 driver is moving elsewhere. Meanwhile, Nic Hamilton has been spotted in the Restart hospitality. Then there’s Lloyd, an ex-team-mate of Smiley who is also pals with Taylor and Jones. “Two drivers of a similar standard makes a big difference,” offers Smiley cryptically. “And you can infer something from that...” grins Jones.

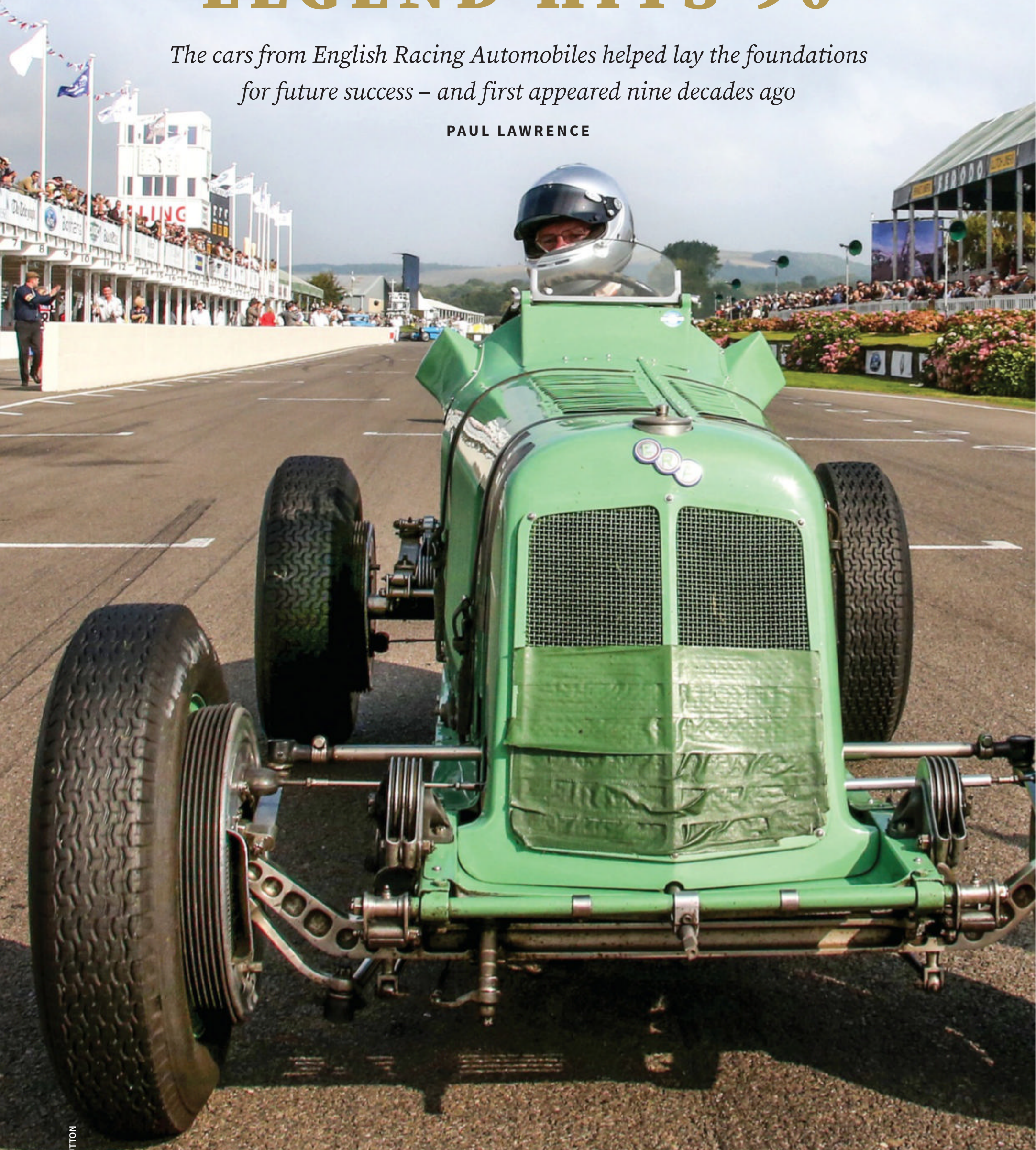
If the number one target for a new BTCC team is to get established – and, after all, look at what Excelr8 has achieved since its tough fledgling steps in 2019 – then Restart has clearly succeeded. But, at a time when series boss Alan Gow is seeking to boost his grid to 24 from the depleted 20 of this season, would the boys recommend it to others thinking of following suit?

“If you want to make sure that you’ve got something on your mind every day, and some form of hassle every day, and something going wrong, join the BTCC, and make sure you’ve got plenty of money in the tank to keep going that way!” laughs Smiley, before Taylor replies, “But it is the place to be in British motorsport, isn’t it?” Smiley: “And we enjoy it and we live for it.” Jones: “I always go back to Jim Clark being on the trophy. That’s what makes it special, that history.” ❄

AN ENGLISH LEGEND HITS 90

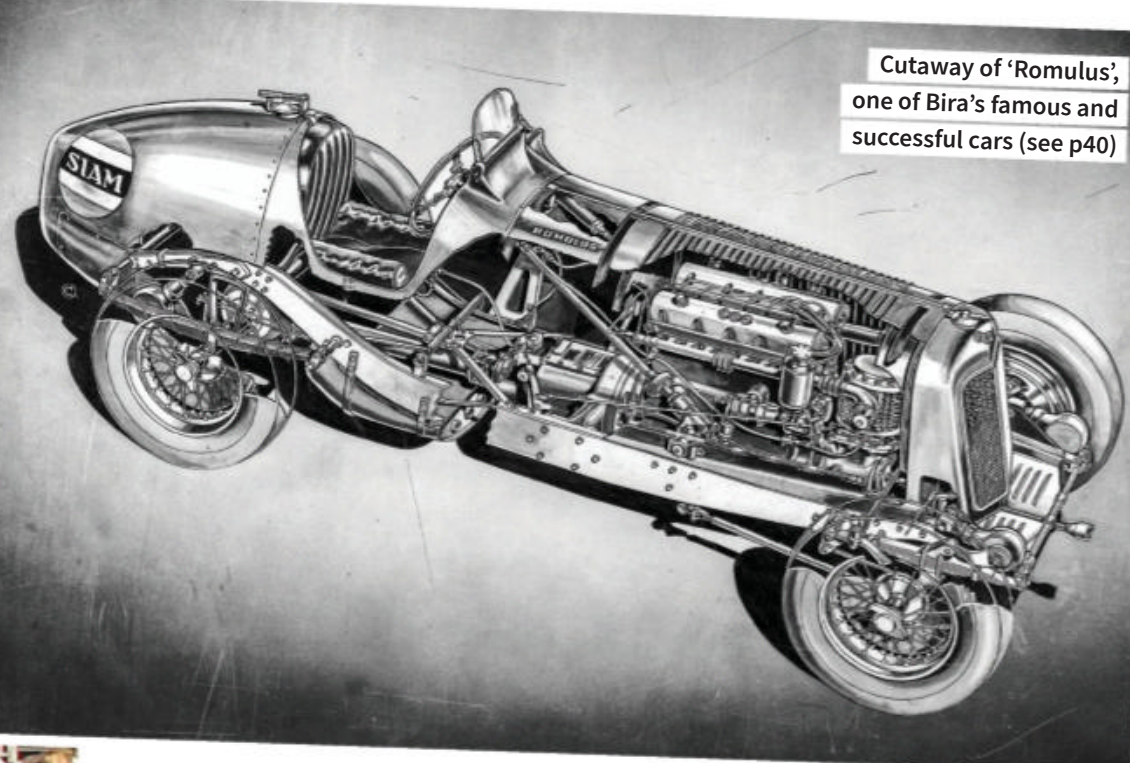
*The cars from English Racing Automobiles helped lay the foundations
for future success – and first appeared nine decades ago*

PAUL LAWRENCE





Cook and Mays were two of the key figures behind ERA project



Cutaway of 'Romulus', one of Bira's famous and successful cars (see p40)



R3A is one of several ERAs that have raced successfully at Goodwood in recent years

For 90 years, the voiturette racing cars produced by English Racing Automobiles in the 1930s have engendered passion and national pride. Motor racing in the 1930s was dominated by German and Italian marques, but in 1933 three British enthusiasts decided to get their country into the spotlight. ERA was the brainchild of designer Peter Berthon, racer Raymond Mays and financier Humphrey Cook.

Rather than try to go head-to-head with Maserati, Bugatti and the fast-emerging German teams, ERA aimed at the second-tier voiturette racing, loosely the Formula 2 of the time. Built in Bourne in Lincolnshire with engines based on the six-cylinder Riley unit, the first car was unveiled at Brooklands in May 1934.

Through until the outbreak of the Second World War, ERA won many races as well as the hearts of British fans. Thanks to changing regulations, they also appeared in top-level grands prix after the end of hostilities and, not much later, became part of the new historic-racing scene. Some have therefore remained active almost continuously and the passion for these front-engined racing cars, which could be regarded as the genesis of British single-seater success, remains 90 years after they arrived.

Just 17 such cars were built and all but one survives. Most are still competing, though some are only raced sparingly at high-profile events.

The original: R1A

Chassis R1 was unveiled to the public in May 1934 and so began the ERA dynasty. The first machine was very much a works car and was later badged as R1A when the 'B'-type emerged. As befits its status as the first ERA, it has a long, continuous and well-documented history.



Over the balance of the 1934 season, Mays took R1A to a string of race and speed event successes. Cook did much of the 1935 season in R1A, but Richard Seaman took the car over for a Donington Park race and finished second while awaiting completion of his own R1B. Tim Rose-Richards also used it to give ERA a first international result with third place in the Eifel Voiturette GP at the Nurburgring.

Jean Trevoux and Bill Humphreys were owners just before the Second World War and notable early post-war owners included Reg Parnell, David Hampshire and Ron Flockhart. It then passed through many hands before Sandy Murray owned it for more than two decades. During his tenure the body was restored to original dimensions.

In 1998, Dean Butler acquired the car and raced R1A himself, as well as entering it for Martin Walford and Julian Bronson in major historic race meetings across a decade. »»



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R1A went to auction at Goodwood in 2008 and was bought for £359,000 by a private collector in Dorset. To the general dismay of enthusiasts across the world, R1A has not been seen in public for the past 16 years.

R2B ‘Romulus’

There are few, if any, ERAs that have been developed and changed less than the 1500cc R2B, known as ‘Romulus’, the mythical character raised by a wolf along with his twin brother ‘Remus’.

R2B was built in 1935 and was a 21st birthday gift to Prince Birabongse of Siam who, like his elder cousin and guardian Prince Chula, had moved to the UK to study at the age of 13. The young prince was drawn towards competition and proved to be a talented pilot who raced simply as ‘B Bira’, with the car prepared at the White Mouse Garage in Hammersmith.

At the wheel of R2B, Bira was competitive across the 1935 season, and claimed second place at Dieppe and fifth in the Donington GP in October. For 1936, Bira moved on to R4B, known as ‘Remus’, and then later to the ex-Whitney Straight Maserati 8CM. R2B remained with the team, was successfully campaigned in Britain, and eventually stayed in the ownership of the Chakrabongse family for more than 70 years.

In 2007 it was sold to American collector and former Microsoft executive Dr Greg Whitten, who has mainly raced it in the USA.

Aside from a change of damper brand in 1937 and a move from a blue to a blue-and-yellow colour scheme in 1939, the car remains highly original. In the 1970s, marque expert Bill Morris extensively rebuilt the car – faithfully to the original specification – for a return to competition use.



THE REMAINING 12



R1B

The 1500cc R1B was built for Richard Seaman (above) and he raced it successfully in 1935 before driving a Delage and then moving to the factory Mercedes-Benz grand prix team. R1B was then owned and raced before the Second World War by band leader Billy Cotton. Subsequent notable owners included Cuth Harrison, Patrick Marsh and, since 2007, German racer Michael Gans.



R2A

When new in 1934, R2A was fitted with a supercharged 1100cc engine and mainly raced by Humphrey Cook for the factory. When sold to Greek Nicky Embiricos at the end of 1935 it was upgraded to a 1500cc engine and soon had new independent front suspension fitted, both of which it retains. Long-term owners have included Brian Classic, Rodney Smith and now Paddins Dowling.



Two-litre power: R3A

R3A started life as one of the first two-litre cars for works driver Raymond Mays and, after a spell with a 1500cc engine, has been back in two-litre trim for nearly half a century.

R3A delivered ERA's first international win at the Nurburgring in 1935, and two years later Charlie Martin took it to a voiturette win at the high-speed Avus circuit in Germany. Tommy Wisdom was another early pre-war driver of R3A, which was then sold to Roy Hesketh in South Africa, where it stayed until 1957. Notable post-war owners of this very original car include Hamish Moffatt, Rodney Smith and Dick Skipworth.

It continues to be driven regularly by racer and journalist Mark Gillies, who has campaigned R3A for both Smith and Skipworth over more than two decades. "The quick way around in an ERA is to brake a little early, get on the power early to dial out the understeer, and then just balance it on the throttle," says Gillies. "It's one of the best feelings you can have in a car."

"With R3A you know who sat in the cockpit and what they did, and that makes it even more special. So I'm just very, very lucky to be able to drive it. ERA is very special because it was one of the first purpose-built British racing cars, before BRM. From an early age, I just loved the way they looked." >>



R3B

Remarkably, only one ERA has not survived in some form or been rebuilt into another identity, and that one is R3B. It was a works car in 1935 and 1936 but was crashed by Marcel Lehoux (above) at Deauville in July 1936 following contact with Giuseppe Farina's Alfa Romeo, with fatal consequences. The car was destroyed in the accident and the remains were later broken up and discarded.



R4A

Made famous by Bob Gerard in the immediate post-war era, R4A was the first customer car for Pat Fairfield. It has mostly been a two-litre car although used 1100cc and 1500cc engines at points and, during a spell in South Africa, it was briefly fitted with a Chevrolet motor. Nick Topliss now campaigns the car, which ex-British Touring Car ace Anthony Reid drove for an Autosport track test to celebrate the ERA's 80th birthday!

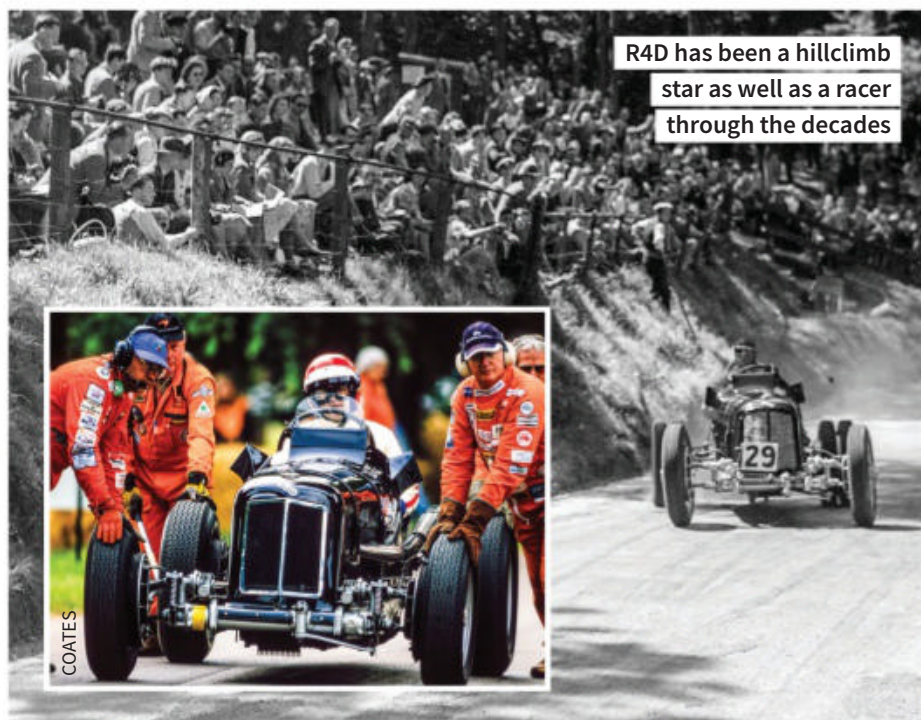
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Hillclimb star: R4D

R4D remains one of the best known and most successful ERAs of all and was a famous pre-war car in the hands of Mays.

Mays was a keen competitor and was particularly successful at the Shelsley Walsh hillclimb where, in R4D, he set the final pre-war hill record at 37.37 seconds in June 1939. Fifteen years later, Ken Wharton set a new Shelsley record of 35.80s in R4D.

It actually started life as a B-type in 1935 but was converted to a C-type chassis for 1937 and then, in 1938, was reworked into R4D with a D-type chassis. Through until 1949 it ran at both 1500cc and 2000cc, but has been a two-litre car ever since.

After post-war service with Mays, Flockhart and Wharton, R4D has passed through the hands of some key figures in historic racing, including Neil Corner, Nigel Moores, Anthony Bamford, Anthony Mayman, Vijay Mallya and Mac Hulbert. During Hulbert's tenure, his good friend Bronson won three times in a row at Monaco in R4D. It is now in the expert care of the Fidler family and used in competition by Ben Fidler.

"It's the most special of the special and it was a great thrill for me to be able to race and sprint R4D," says Hulbert. "The D-type ERA was probably the best-handling car that I've ever driven. I think it's better even than a Maserati 250F. At Shelsley Walsh, you feel as though the car knows its own way up the hill."

R5B 'Remus'

Chassis R5B was another car built for Prince Bira, this time ahead of the 1936 season. He raced it for two seasons and it was nicknamed 'Remus' as the brother of 'Romulus'.

It ran in the same colour scheme of light blue with yellow wheels but did not enjoy the same level of success as R2B, though Bira did win the Albi Grand Prix on the five-mile road course in southern France.

It was then sold during 1937 to future Le Mans winner Tony Rolt, who raced R5B until the outbreak of war in September 1939. It had several short-term post-war owners, including Rolt's Le Mans partner Duncan Hamilton! In 1949, when owned by Peter Bell, R5B was raced by future Autosport technical editor John Bolster, who was lucky to survive an accident in the British GP when the car hit a straw bale and rolled over the top of the driver.

As the car evolved into a historic racing car, it was the Lindsay family that owned and raced R5B regularly for over 50 years. First it was the irrepressible art consultant Patrick Lindsay who raced it with determination to many Vintage Sports-Car Club successes. He also famously let reigning world champion Jim Clark have a (very rapid) go in Remus at Rouen in 1964...

Lindsay senior had at least one major accident in R5B, and then it passed to his son Ludovic, who made it one of the fastest pre-war single-seaters in historic racing, later with a two-litre engine.

Over the past decade, it has been owned and raced by Charles McCabe and expatriate Irishman Paddins Dowling. 🏆



ALL PHOTOGRAPHY: MOTORSPORT IMAGES AND PAUL LAWRENCE

THE REMAINING 12



R6B

From new in 1936, R6B was owned and briefly driven by Dr Dudley Benjafield, and even competed in ice racing. Both Reg Parnell and Bob Gerard had R6B in the 1940s and 1950s, and Gerard modified it and fitted a two-litre engine. It has experienced various technical experiments and tweaks, and was later converted back to 1500cc and raced by Sid Day, Jeffrey Pattinson and most recently Charles McCabe.



R7B

Arthur Dobson owned and raced R7B, in distinctive white with chrome radiator surround, from 1936 until the outbreak of war, and then sold it in 1945 to Leslie Brooke. It received various upgrades in the late-1940s and Dudley Gahagan was custodian for nearly four decades before it passed to Michael Rudnik. Now owned by the Wilton family and raced by Julian Wilton.



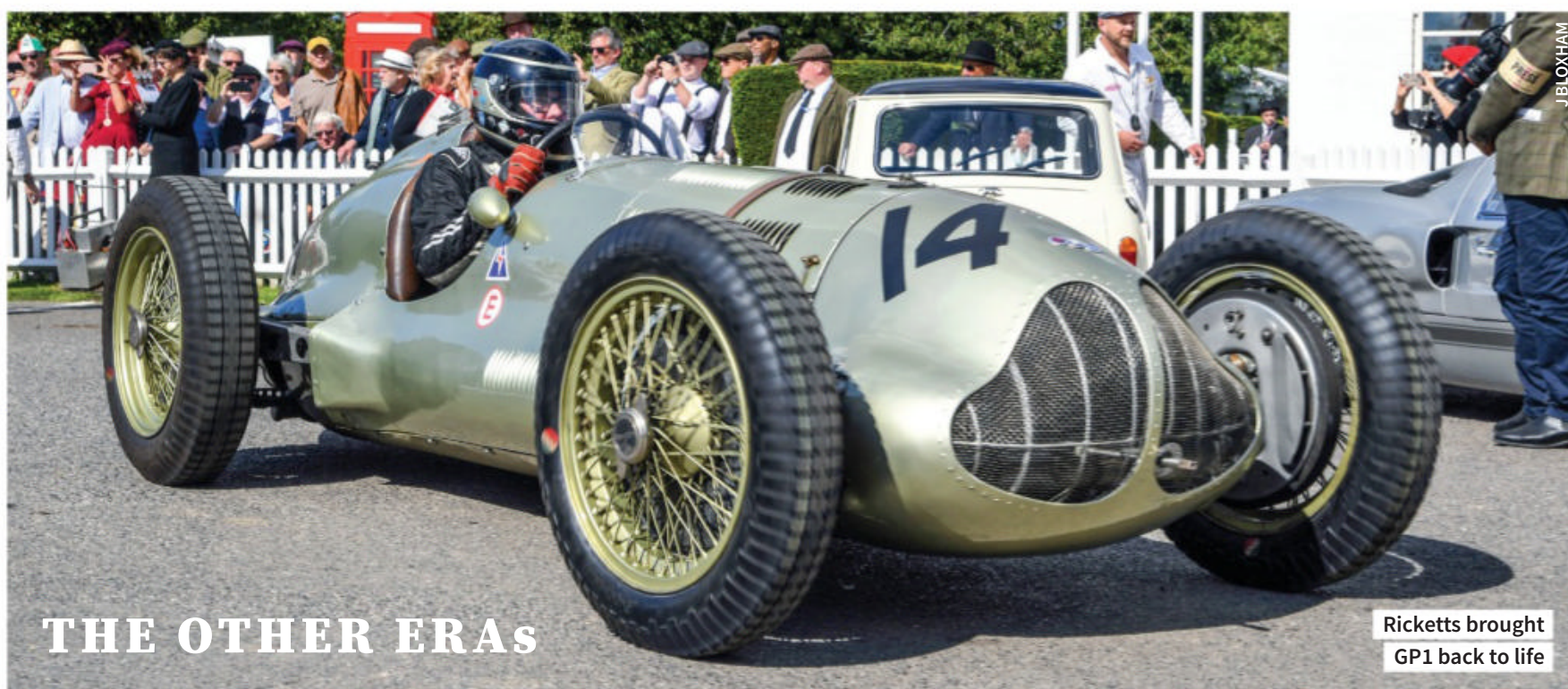
R8B/C

R8B was built in 1936 and raced by Earl Howe, including in the 1937 Donington GP. It was then rebuilt during the 1938 season into C-type specification around the chassis from R4C. The car was later briefly changed to a D-type chassis but was put back to C after a crash. Notable post-war pilots of R8B/C were Reg Parnell, Cuth Harrison and Graham Whitehead. The Spollon family have owned it since the late 1970s.



R9B

Dating from 1936 and always running in 1500cc trim, R9B was first raced by Birmingham stockbroker Dennis Scribbans. Post-Second World War, cousins Bob and Geoffrey Ansell from the brewing company raced the car with some success. The longest owner was Peter Mann, who had R9B for around 25 years in two instalments. Most recent owners are Rainer Ott and Heinz Bachmann.



THE OTHER ERAs

Ricketts brought GP1 back to life

In a bid to keep up with the ferocious pace of car development from Germany in the late 1930s, ERA unveiled E-type GP1. The sleek, low-line car was markedly different to the earlier generation of upright ERAs.

Raymond Mays gave GP1 its debut at Brooklands in 1938. Humphrey Cook continued the development of the E-type during 1939, though GP1 suffered reliability issues and an accident at Albi in France when being driven by Arthur Dobson. The outbreak of war in September 1939 brought the project a halt.

Post-war, Peter Walker had an accident on the Isle of Man in 1950 in GP1, and the car fell into disuse. Finally, in the 1990s, ERA enthusiast Duncan Ricketts acquired the car as a project and worked painstakingly



to take it back into historic competition, where it has looked and gone better than it ever did before.

Meanwhile, the second E-type chassis, tagged as GP2, was raced in the late 1940s by Leslie Johnson, but was soon abandoned as a race car and spent many years in the

Donington Grand Prix Collection. More recently it was bought by Jolyon Harrison, who entrusted it to James Baxter for a stunning restoration, and the car reappeared this summer in a range of speed events.

AJM1 was a 1.5-litre car based on B-type specification and built up from parts by Anthony Merrick. It has been raced extensively ever since, and now resides with the Fidler family.

Finally, there was an ill-fated G-type produced for Formula 2 in 1952 and raced occasionally by Stirling Moss. It failed to make much of an impression and was later sold to the Bristol Aircraft Company, where it was used to develop the Bristol 450 sports car, which went on to class success at Le Mans in 1954.



R10B

From new in 1936, R10B was owned and raced by Peter Whitehead, who won the 1938 Australian GP in it, and only in 1949 did it briefly pass to Peter Walker, who fitted a two-litre engine for hillclimbing. Later, Nick Mason owned and raced R10B for a quarter of a century and had it rebuilt to full 'B' specification before it went to Paddins Dowling and then most recently to American racer Brad Baker.



R11B 'Humphrey'

Owned from new in 1938 by Reggie Tongue, who named it 'Humphrey' after the ERA founder, R11B is now one of the longest-running and successful ERAs within the same family ownership. By 1951 R11B had been upgraded from a 1500cc engine to a two-litre unit and was bought by Martin Morris in 1961. Morris raced it regularly for decades until, in 2006, it passed to his son David.



R12B/C 'Hanuman'

There are two cars under the R12 tag, both raced by Bira and known as 'Hanuman' and 'Hanuman II'. R12B was a Raymond Mays car in 1936 and was rebuilt to 'C' spec for 1937. It was then sold to Prince Bira for 1938 as R12B/C and crashed at Reims in 1939. It was rebuilt on a 'B'-type chassis and reverted to R12B. Bill Morris, who owned R12B at the time, rebuilt the damaged Reims chassis in the 1980s into R12C.



R14B

From 1938 to 1955, R14B was raced regularly by Johnnie Wakefield, Reg Parnell and Bob Gerard, who took it to second at the 1949 British GP. It was the last car built to the original design concept that had served well since 1934. But R14B is perhaps best known as the car that the redoubtable Donald Day owned and raced for 57 years right up until 2015. It is now in the hands of American Chris MacAllister.



Dunne (left) and Slater both shone in Macau last year, in F3 and F4 respectively

MACAU GP



JEP

PREVIEW

GUNNING FOR MACAU GLORY

Freddie Slater and Alex Dunne find themselves as team-mates in the Far East this week. One has moved up for the event, the other has stepped down

STEPHEN LICKORISH

There are a surprising number of similarities between Freddie Slater and Alex Dunne, who will be Theodore Prema Racing team-mates for this weekend's Macau Grand Prix and are among two of the drivers to watch out for. Both have enjoyed dominant campaigns on British shores in the past; Slater rewrote the Ginetta Junior record books last season, while Dunne achieved what was then unprecedented success in British Formula 4 in 2022. Both proceeded to announce themselves on the international stage at Macau last year with starring performances, but each missed out on the ultimate glory. And now both are aiming to bounce back this time around with victory in a car neither has ever raced before.

For Slater, fresh from further record-breaking during an

impressive Italian F4 campaign, Macau this year represents his graduation to Formula Regional machinery, which has replaced FIA F3 as the category for the 2024 World Cup. Last year he was on the undercard in the F4 contest and was all set to challenge highly rated Red Bull Junior Arvid Lindblad for the win, despite it being just his seventh event in single-seaters, when intermittent electrical woes intervened and dumped him down the order.

Now, he wants to land that victory in the Macau showpiece. "Last year was a bit frustrating with what happened in the final race – that's how it goes sometimes – but this year it's my redemption year," declares Slater, a Silverstone Autosport BRDC Award finalist. "I'm going there to win, I'm not going there for anything else."

Fighting talk from a driver who, for the second year in a row, will be up against rivals with far more experience of the Tatuus car he is racing. But Slater heads to the event full of confidence, not just from his Italian F4 conquering but from his impressive Macau debut last year. "It's going to be a lot more tough as there's a lot of fast drivers," cautions Slater. "I've still got to go in open-minded but I know where I'm going now and I know where certain bumps are. It should be good fun and I'm super-excited for it."

He will also use it as an opportunity to get to grips with the car he will be racing next year, when he is due to tackle the Formula Regional European Championship with Prema. "Macau is so different to everywhere else we go and there's a different approach to the weekend, but it's still some practice of racecraft and how the car handles," Slater adds. "I'll get some good experience under my belt ready for next year. It should be good learning and will put a good focus on things I need to work on."

While Slater is progressing up the single-seater ladder for



Slater got his Macau eye in with F4 showing in 2023

MACAU GP



Dunne was a sensation on his F3 debut in this event in 2023 as GB3 runner-up...

“I was sitting at home on my sim and my dad called me and said, ‘You’re doing Macau with Prema’”

his Macau appearance, Dunne has opted to drop back a level for his. The Irishman has endured a “difficult” maiden FIA F3 season with MP Motorsport this year, where two sprint race podiums have been the sole bright points in a campaign that ended with him 14th in the standings. Those results are in contrast to his FIA F3 debut at Macau last year, where he turned heads by starting sixth and finishing second in the qualifying race for Hitech against rivals who had been driving the car all season.

“Going into the weekend, I said to my dad if I was starting in the top 10 for the qualifying race, I would be very happy,” recalls Dunne. “I outdid those expectations! I think I’ve become quite good at adapting quite quickly. When I first jumped in an F3 car [for a test], the pace was pretty good after one or two sessions. I was also in a very good team and a very good car and that makes your life as a driver a little bit easier.”

But any hopes of challenging for the GP win were extinguished on the first lap when he crashed out at Lisboa after slipping to third off the line. “It was just inexperience with warming the tyres and not understanding the car better in a race scenario,” says Dunne of his early exit.

Nevertheless, he still enjoyed his first experience of the event. “There’s nothing like a qualifying lap at Macau and being so close to the walls, especially as it’s high speed,” he smiles. “I really enjoyed it. I think naturally high-speed circuits always suited me a bit more.”

Dunne says his Macau performance “sealed the deal” when it came to him joining the McLaren Driver Development Programme, and now wants to pick up where he left off last year and put his 2024 struggles behind him. “There’s only one goal and that’s to try to win,” he states. “I’ve never driven the Regional car before but it’s



SUTTON/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

a weekend where I think knowing the track is more important than knowing the car.”

And Dunne is also relishing the prospect of being part of the successful Theodore Prema operation, having been pleasantly surprised to get the call-up. “I was sitting at home on my sim and my dad called me and said, ‘You’re doing Macau with Prema’, and I was a bit shocked,” he laughs. “Racing with Prema is a very good opportunity for me – it’s one of the most successful teams in the junior categories. Even if it’s only one weekend with the team, to learn off them will be very good.”

Slater and Dunne are just two of a talented 27-strong line-up for this year’s race, and one of their main threats could come from the final member of the Prema triumvirate: Dino Beganovic. The F3 race winner is another looking to avenge last year’s disappointment – he too crashed out at Lisboa when running third. Other F3 victors to take a step back include Oliver Goethe (MP) and Mari Boya (KCMG by Pinnacle), who finished fourth at Macau last year. While FRECA champion Rafael Camara is absent, James Wharton (ART) and Tuukka Taponen (R-ace GP), who finished second and third in the standings, will be ones to watch. In total, five F1 junior drivers are among the entry alongside a whole swathe of F4 champions, ensuring whoever prevails will have certainly earned it. ✎

P46 MACAU GT PREVIEW

CAN MERCEDES DEFEND ITS GT WORLD CUP?

Raffaele Marciello's victory in the 2023 FIA GT World Cup was his final act as a Mercedes driver before joining BMW. The only two-time winner of the single-driver GT3 event since it gained FIA status in 2015 will return this weekend for his maiden Macau appearance aboard an M4 and is among a star-studded 23-car entry list comprising eight regulars from the World Endurance Championship's Hypercar class.

But even without Marciello, Mercedes still has every chance of ending its year on a high by defending the title. In addition to 2011 Macau Grand Prix winner Dani Juncadella and Bathurst ace Jules Gounon, both entered by Craft-Bamboo Racing, the Affalterbach brand also has proven Macau expert Maro Engel, who is vying for a fourth victory at the Guia Circuit. The inaugural GT World Cup winner in 2015 also claimed Macau GT Cup glory in 2014 and 2022, before the World Cup's post-COVID resumption last year.

"Winning Macau again would be the icing on the cake" for Engel after a season in which he became GT World Challenge Sprint champion, led the line as Mercedes clinched the DTM manufacturers' title by finishing third and took a new Nordschleife lap record for good measure in the AMG One hypercar.

A regular in recent years with Kenny Chen's GruppeM team, which is entered under the Mercedes AMG Team GMR banner in Macau, Engel notes that it has not visited the street track since 2019 "so we do have a little bit of set-up work that we'll have to get through, but I have all the confidence in the guys that they'll give me a strong package".

That confidence is grounded in the inherent traits of the Mercedes-AMG GT3, a car that was last beaten in the headline GT event by Augusto Farfus's BMW M6 in 2018. The weapon of choice during the three 'COVID' editions of the Macau GT Cup also triumphed with Edoardo Mortara in 2017. Engel explains that it "really gives you a lot of confidence, a lot of good feedback, so it's a car you can really push hard in that very limited space where you'll hit the wall if you make a mistake".

Taking in Macau in 2022, where Engel triumphed after

"There's a lot of depth in the field for the other manufacturers as well, so it won't be an easy task"

Marciello visited the escape road, "was definitely a help" when the full international contingent returned last year. Remaining with Craft-Bamboo, Engel finished second to Marciello (Landgraf) in the qualifying race before transmission woes blunted his challenge in the main event. Having switched camps for this year, he says "I don't see a downside to the single-car entry we have" because data sharing arrangements that are standard between AMG performance teams at the biggest GT3 events means "we'll be feeding off each other" to continue the run of Mercedes success.

Confidence-inspiring Mercedes-AMG GT3 can be pushed hard in Macau's confines, says Engel...





Marciello (right, with Engel) is set for first Macau outing in a BMW

A fourth car will be entered for Ralf Aron by Toro Racing.

All teams will use the same Pirelli tyres as in DTM and GTWCE, removing one variable, but Engel is taking nothing for granted. The 39-year-old expects that Marciello (Toro Racing powered by MCG) will again be a force with BMW, after Farfus finished third last year, and singles out Mortara, four times a Macau GT winner, as another name to watch in VSR Theodore Racing's Lamborghini. It isn't lost on Engel that every previous winner from the previous six editions of the World Cup, including Farfus (Team KRC BMW) and Laurens Vanthoor (Absolute Racing Porsche) is on the grid this year.

"There's a lot of depth in the field for the other manufacturers as well, so it won't be an easy task," he concludes. "We want to see the best drivers, the best teams and the best manufacturers fight it out on what probably is the biggest challenge in our calendar, so it's a massive highlight of the year."

JAMES NEWBOLD



...as the Macau expert aims for win number four at the circuit



Huff got another podium in 2023

HUFF LOOKS TO GET BACK INTO TOP GUIA

"I hate the place; it scares the crap out of me!"

Surprising words from Rob Huff, the only man on four wheels to be in double figures for Macau victories, and who has ventured to the Far East once more for another crack at glory in the classic Guia tin-top clash.

These days, the Macau Guia doubles up as a round of the TCR World Tour. Huff, of course, left this series for 2024 in order to return to the British Touring Car Championship, but returned to the global contest for last month's Zhuzhou round and Macau with Spanish team Volcano Motorsport and the same model of Audi RS3 LMS that he raced in 2023.

As ever, the title battle for this, the final round of the TCR series, is finely poised. Norbert Michelisz, bidding for his third world crown with Hyundai, sits at the top of the tree, but Esteban Guerrieri (Honda), Thed Bjork and Yann Ehrlacher (Lynk & Co), and Michelisz's team-mate Mikel Azcona are all in the picture.

"Macau is one of those places..." Huff expands. "I love getting in the groove there, when my brain and the car are in harmony. And I have the outright front-wheel-drive record around there [from 2017 when he raced the Citroen C-Elysee from the potent TC1 regulations], and a TCR car's never going to get near it, that's for sure."

"We've had some luck around there. When I won in the Lada [in 2014], Tiago Monteiro was driving superbly in the lead but then we had a safety car and he lost his power steering. But I've also been unlucky. It's not just about you being in harmony; Macau chooses you as well. So many things can go right or wrong out there."

After a low-key Zhuzhou, the hope is that the Audi's balance of performance will be kinder in Macau. "It's not been touched for 12 months," points out Huff. "And the other teams have been developing. The outright pace in qualifying is lacking a bit, but it has good straightline speed for the race. The main thing is qualify in the top 10, get that reversed grid, and have a full send in race two."

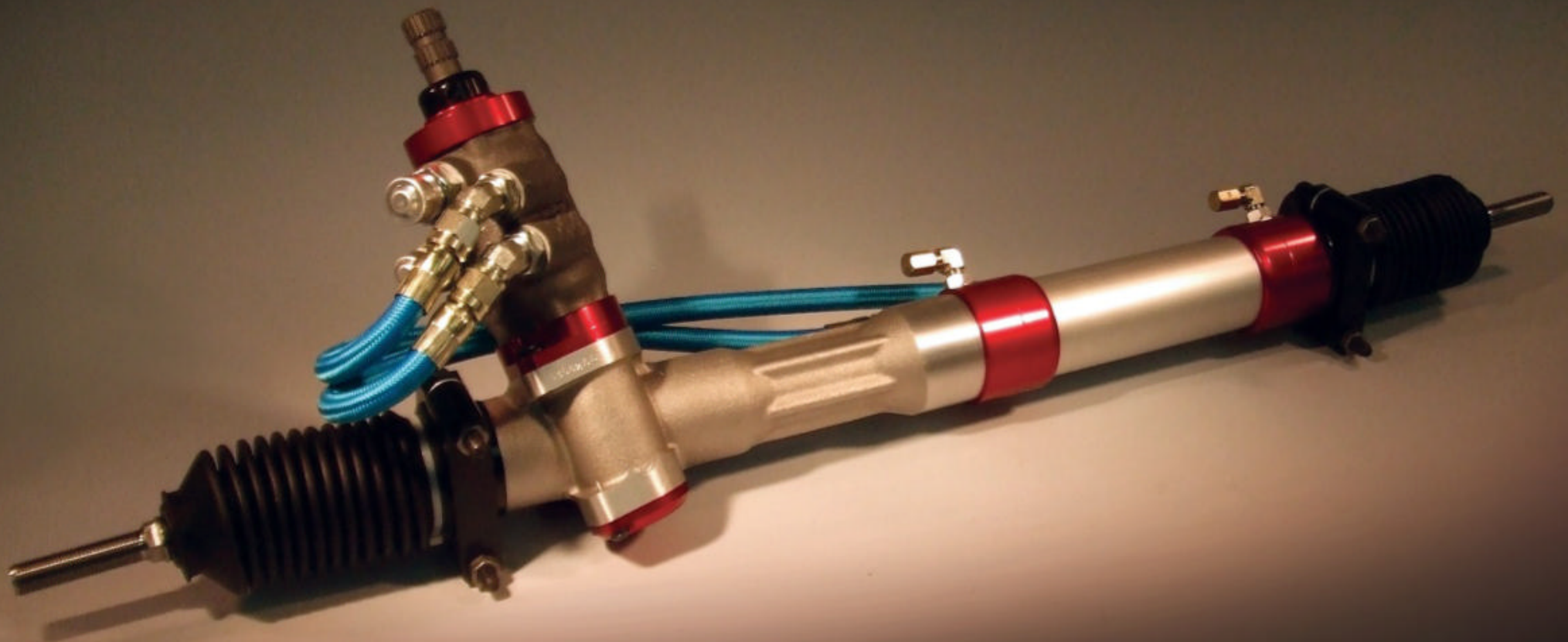
MARCUS SIMMONS



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Logano takes it from Blaney in all-Penske duel

NASCAR CUP
PHOENIX (USA)
10 NOVEMBER
ROUND 36/36

Joey Logano is a three-time NASCAR Cup Series champion, earning Team Penske its third consecutive title. Logano certainly had to fight for it. The final caution at Phoenix came just as William Byron had pitted for fresh tyres, which allowed him to jump into the race lead with two Hendrick Motorsports team-mates directly behind him.

But it didn't help much when Christopher Bell went on the attack in his Joe Gibbs Racing Toyota as the race went green with 54 laps remaining. Bell drew even with the Chevrolet of Byron in the battle for the lead, but this allowed Logano's Ford to rapidly close and take them three-wide through the dogleg. He cleared both cars and led every lap from that point to the chequered flag.

Yet the story was not yet over. Ryan Blaney eventually dealt with the Hendrick drivers and quickly began to



Logano celebrates his third title in suitably spirited style

NKP/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

carve tenths out of his Penske team-mate's two-plus-seconds advantage. Blaney, who was looking to become the first back-to-back champion in this knockout format, nearly reached the back bumper of Logano as the race came to a close. But the veteran driver of the #22 blocked masterfully with expert guidance from spotter Coleman Pressley, crossing the line just a few car lengths ahead of Blaney to join an exclusive club of 10 drivers with three or more titles.

Blaney ends the season as championship runner-up, Byron third in points, and Tyler Reddick fourth in the standings after spending most of the race a tick behind his

rivals. The finale also featured a bizarre moment that momentarily halted the race when the pace car driver tried to dive to pitroad a moment too late leading up to the Stage 2 restart. As a result, the car spun sideways and slid into the sand barrels at pit entry, causing a brief delay for clean-up.

The event also ended several eras, with Stewart-Haas Racing's final race as an organisation and Martin Truex Jr's last start as a full-time driver. Kyle Busch's record streak of 19 consecutive seasons with a win also came to an end.

NICK DEGROOT

Kristoffersson's seventh crown

WORLD RALLYCROSS
ISTANBUL PARK (TUR)
9-10 NOVEMBER
ROUND 5/5

The biggest surprise of the World Rallycross finale was certainly not that Johan Kristoffersson clinched his seventh title; it was that the Swede did not take victory on either day at Istanbul Park.

Kristoffersson sealed the deal thanks to an epic drive in the second heat on Saturday. His KMS Volkswagen Polo emerged from a scintillating battle



Veiby fends off Hansen Sr

@WORLD/REDBULL

for second with the electric PWR of Niclas Gronholm, then passed Timmy Hansen's electric Peugeot on the penultimate lap for victory. With the points he required in the bag, Kristoffersson then played the team game in his semi-final, blocking the pack behind as he chased KMS VW stablemate Ole Christian Veiby to propel the Norwegian onto the front row for the final.

Veiby then outdragged the Peugeot of Hansen's polesitting younger brother Kevin at the start of the final, and went on to claim his maiden WRX victory. Gronholm took second ahead of Kristoffersson, who was then demoted to sixth in the results for the rare blunder of forgetting to take his joker lap. Hansen Jr therefore moved up to third ahead of his brother and another Peugeot in the hands of Patrick O'Donovan.

There was another first-time winner in the wet on Sunday, and this one was a shock. Finn Juha Ryttonen had not contested a WRX round for over three years, but took advantage of Veiby stalling at the start of the final to sweep to the flag in his Hyundai ahead of Kristoffersson, Hansens Sr and Jr, and Gronholm.

WEEKEND WINNERS

NASCAR CUP
PHOENIX (USA)
Joey Logano (below)
Team Penske (Ford Mustang)

WORLD RALLYCROSS
ISTANBUL PARK (TUR)
Race 1 Ole Christian Veiby
KMS (Volkswagen Polo KMS 601 RX)
Race 2 Juha Ryttonen
PGRX (Hyundai i20)

SUPER FORMULA
SUZUKA (JPN)
Races 1 & 2 Kakunoshin Ohta
Dandelion Racing
(Dallara-Honda)



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GB3 F1 Academy champion to get prize drive with Rodin

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Audi TT comes out on top in Race of Remembrance



Pickups move from BARC to MSVR for 2025



Buckmore Park eyes major expansion



Silverstone back on **HSCC** calendar, Croft dropped

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Rodin claimed this year's
GB3 drivers' title with Louis
Sharp at Brands Hatch

F1 Academy champion to get prize drive with Rodin

GB3

This year's F1 Academy champion will receive a fully-funded drive in GB3 next season with Rodin Motorsport.

The all-female series previously had a similar prize in place with the Formula Regional European Championship with a Prema seat, although the inaugural 2023 champion Marta Garcia was eventually fielded by Iron Dames.

Now, this year's champion will receive a GB3 drive alongside 20 days of testing in a prize funded by F1 Academy and tyre supplier Pirelli.

It coincides with GB3 introducing a new car for 2025 that features DRS and improved aerodynamics, while it has also added Monza to its schedule so the calendar is now equally split between UK rounds and European events.

Alpine junior Abbi Pulling, who drives for Rodin, is currently dominating the F1 Academy season with two events to go and could seal the title and prize drive

next time out in Qatar.

She said: "It's very exciting to see what F1 Academy is offering to the champion. It's a car with a lot of downforce, a lot of horsepower, lightweight, some amazing tracks the championship goes to. I think it looks like an awesome package next year with the new car."

"That's what I've got my eyes set on, I'd love to get in bigger machinery and I've been saying it since I drove an FIA F3 car in 2022 – I'm jealous of anyone that gets to drive an F3 kind of spec car, so it would be an absolute dream to get to that level."

The Rodin squad has a proven track record in GB3 and its drivers have won the title in each of the past two years.

Jonathan Palmer, chief executive of MotorSport Vision, which operates GB3, added: "We are delighted that GB3 has been chosen as the next step for the 2024 F1 Academy champion."

"Over the past decade there has quite rightly been a big shift in motorsport to recognise and encourage the participation of women. F1 Academy has been instrumental in that process and Susie Wolff's determination to provide women with unprecedented opportunities to develop and shine is exciting."

The announcement coincides with GB3's feeder series, GB4, increasing its prize fund for the top female driver in the standings from €30,000 to €50,000 to help towards an F1 Academy seat, which this season went to Alisha Palmowski.

STEPHEN LICKORISH & STEFAN MACKLEY

OPINION



Fresh off the back of topping Formula E's all-female test in Spain last week, Abbi Pulling's star continues to rise as she sits on the cusp of the F1 Academy title and with it a drive in the GB3 Championship next season.

The 21-year-old Briton has dominated F1's all-female support series this season with seven wins from 10 races, the other three outings still yielding rostrums during her sophomore campaign.

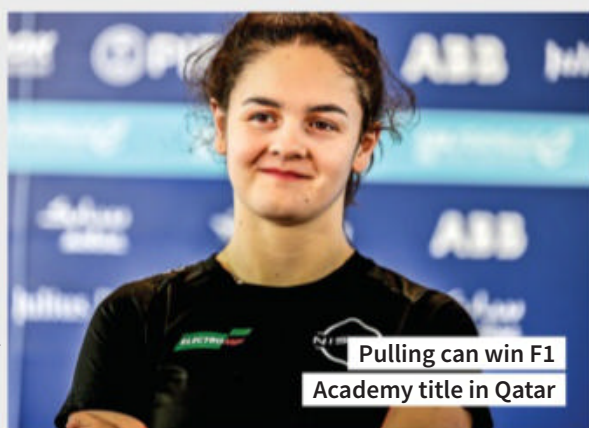
The new collaboration between F1 Academy and GB3 is welcome news, especially at a time when the UK's top single-seater category continues to flourish with an impressive new car for next season. The addition of Monza also takes the total number of current F1 venues to five, making it an ever-desirable destination for young drivers hoping to make it to the top of the sport.

Whether Pulling has got the talent and experience to mix it at the front in GB3 only time will tell. Her tenure in British F4 was solid if unspectacular – seventh in this year's standings after one win and a further two podiums – although she missed several rounds due to her F1 Academy duties.

Motorsport is a results business and failing to make the grade, regardless of gender, can cut short any career. Inaugural F1 Academy champion Marta Garcia, for example, recently announced on social media that she would likely be moving away from single-seaters having failed to score any points during her Formula Regional campaign this term.

Regardless of the outcome, though, there's no denying that Pulling has earned the opportunity to showcase her potential at the next level.

STEFAN MACKLEY



Pulling can win F1
Academy title in Qatar

HSCC back to Silverstone GP, but drops Croft

HSCC

The Historic Sports Car Club's 2025 calendar features a return to the Silverstone Grand Prix circuit, but the popular Croft Nostalgia event has been dropped.

The club will visit Silverstone on 31 May-1 June next year, and will once again embrace the Brands Hatch Super Prix (12-13 July) and Oulton Park Gold Cup (25-27 July). Croft's August date has been claimed instead by the British Touring Car Championship.

"It's very unfortunate," said Croft circuit manager Tracey Morley. "We've looked at other dates with the HSCC but we're only able to run two events a month from April to September. Nothing else fits, but hopefully it will be back stronger in 2026."

For the first time in 15 years, the club will run its own Mallory Park event, with plans afoot to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Formula Ford 2000 on Saturday, 6 September. The venue would be perfect for a reunion – the slicks-and-wings evolution from FF1600



made its bow there in March 1975.

As in recent seasons, the action kicks off at Snetterton over the 26-27 April weekend. Further visits to MotorSport Vision circuits are scheduled for Cadwell Park (Wolds Trophy, 24-25 May) and Donington Park over the 21-22 June mid-summer weekend.

The HSCC's championship season concludes on Silverstone's national circuit on 11-12 October. The club continues to organise the Silverstone Festival on 22-24 August and

the Walter Hayes Trophy FF1600 event.

HSCC CEO Andy Dee-Crowne said: "We have a great set of venues and a nicely spaced calendar with a sensible late April start and our normal mid-October finish for championship events. With Brands Hatch GP, Silverstone GP and Donington Park on the calendar, we can offer our members access to the finest tracks in the UK. We look forward to issuing a detailed calendar of dates."

MARCUS PYE

Corvette customer race team status for Steller



BRITISH GT

Corvette could return to the British GT Championship in 2025 after Steller Motorsport bought two Z06 GT3.Rs.

The American marque has not appeared in British GT3 since Speedworks contested the full 2012 season with a Z06.R.

This means Steller will

end its partnership with Audi, which started in 2019 and yielded the 2022 GT4 title before competing in the 2023 Le Mans Cup.

Steller boss Gary Blackham said: "The Z06 GT3.R is a stunning car, beautifully engineered and designed from the off as a true endurance racer. The team, and our customers that have seen the car

already, are truly excited by the prospect of racing with one of the most successful brands in sportscar racing."

British GT's entry process for 2025 opens on 2 December, with Steller "eyeing potential efforts in ELMS, Michelin Le Mans Cup, GT World Challenge and British GT".

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Pickup Truck Racing Championship moves from BARC to MSVR in 2025

PICKUPS

The Pickup Truck Racing Championship will join MotorSport Vision Racing's roster for the upcoming 2025 season after moving away from the British Automobile Racing Club.

The championship has existed in the UK since 1997 under the guidance of founder Sonny Howard and become a staple of the national calendar. It has worked with MSVR already as part of the popular annual American SpeedFest event at Brands Hatch.

"My wife, Barbara, and I have been working hard to find a way to future-proof the Pickup Truck Racing Championship," said Howard. "It is unique, whereby

everyone involved understands that we are a Motorsport UK championship, but are also aware that motorsport is designed to entertain.

"They are all show-orientated and even after 28 years the ethos of its racing – to put on a spectacle for spectators – is still instilled in everyone associated with the championship. MSVR and the team recognise this and have the infrastructure to not only continue with its concept, but to now take Pickup Truck Racing to a new level.

"The announcement to the drivers on Saturday evening saw 22 commit to the 2025 season and we know that the championship has an exciting future."

2025 BTRC CALENDAR

The British Truck Racing Championship has announced its 2025 calendar, which will consist of 34 races at seven different meetings. The season will begin on 19-20 April on the Brands Hatch Indy circuit, before outings at Pembrey, Thruxton, Donington Park, Snetterton, Le Mans and ending at Brands Hatch on 1-2 November. Truck Sport UK director Steve Thomas said: "The feedback we had from our trip to Le Mans was fantastic and it was a no-brainer for us to try and work with the British Automobile Racing Club and FIA European Truck Racing Championship to ensure we could go back there."

FINALS FOR BARRABLES

Reigning Legends Cars Elite Cup Masters champion Peter Barrable and his brother, multiple Legends Cars Championship race winner Robert, will compete in the Legends Cars World Finals this weekend. The Irish siblings will travel to Virginia International Raceway for the event, joining drivers including two-time and reigning Legends Cars champion Will Gibson and Elite Cup champion Jack Parker.

TCR UK TASTER DAY

A taster day for the TCR UK Championship will be held at Donington Park later this month. The event on 22 November will allow potential drivers to sample an Audi RS3 LMS TCR Gen 2, with current TCR drivers and championship staff on hand to offer guidance and knowledge. TCR UK Championship promoter Stewart Lines said: "This is the best way to find out how good a TCR car is at one of the best circuits in the UK."

Lola drivers star down under in Tasman Cup

F5000

The bark of stock-block V8 engines reverberated around period venues in Australia and New Zealand last weekend as historic racers celebrated the final throes of the Tasman Cup Series' Formula 5000 era.

At Sandown Park, Aussies Paul Zazryn and Bryan Sala prevailed. Piloting his Lola T332 HU32

(right), Zazryn won the bookend races, but a gearbox glitch in Saturday's second outing enabled the Sala (A50/51 002) to grab the middle gold.

Over the Tasman Sea at Manfeild Circuit Chris Amon, local ace Kevin Ingram – the 1983 national FF1600 champion – grabbed the early Tasman Cup Revival Series lead with a hat-trick in T332 HU48R over



promising 21-year-old Michael Hey (McRae GM1) and Tony Galbraith (T332 HU38).

The long-established New Zealand series continues with the second of six rounds, the

Historic GP at Taupo on 10-12 January, before moving to Hampton Downs for the Legends of Speed event celebrating David Oxtone on 24-26 January.

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Plans for major expansion at karting venue

BUCKMORE PARK

Karting venue Buckmore Park is set to submit plans for a major expansion at the venue that would include the construction of a 20,000-square-foot building.

Dubbed The Paddock, it would house 18 state-of-the-art karting simulators, a 100-seater conference room, a restaurant and bar area, as well as a viewing terrace at the circuit, a stomping ground for Formula 1 drivers Lewis Hamilton and Ollie Bearman during their childhood karting days.

The venue is owned by Leonora Martell-Surtees, daughter of 1964 F1 champion and multiple bike racing champion John Surtees, and her husband Richard, the family taking over the running of the circuit in 2017.

“On one side of the circuit the facilities are a bit lacking, so when we have race meetings they’re all based there and it wasn’t really the standard that we wanted to be able to offer,” said Richard Martell-Surtees. “That’s where we looked about a year ago – could we start



An illustration of what the inside of The Paddock could look like

to do something a bit better?

“The Paddock building encompasses many different things; it not only bolsters our existing business where we’ve got a lot of people coming down for leisure. We want it to be a bit more of a hybrid space where people are coming to use our sims for fun, they might be on a corporate event or a stag do, but also the main reason is we can offer it for driver development.”

A consultation into the plans will run until 5 December before the application is submitted to the local council. Martell-

Surtees is optimistic that once the plans are approved, the build will begin in 2026 and be complete by 2027.

“We’ve had over 500 comments on our social media, several thousand people liking a post – we even had the local MP and the leader of the council put out social posts in support, so I’m quite optimistic about it,” he added.

Anyone wishing to provide feedback on the plans or find out more information should visit buckmore.co.uk/paddock.

STEFAN MACKLEY

Igoe heads up Cadwell Park Stages entry list



CIRCUIT RALLY

The Circuit Rally Championship will hold its second round, the Cadwell Park Stages, this Sunday.

Reigning champions Michael Igoe/Wil Atkins (Citroen C3 Rally2) head the 75-car entry, with

former title winners John Griffiths/Emma Morrison (Skoda Fabia R5) next up.

Igoe was second at Oulton Park, but still took maximum points, while Griffiths retired mid-rally after debuting his Skoda.

The Darrian of Josh and Tamsyn Davey won its class at Oulton and was

fourth overall, and they start third, with the top six completed by Kiaran Hankin/James Swallow (Citroen C3 Rally2), John and Alex Stone (VW Polo R5 GTI) and Tony Robinson/Mark Jones (Skoda Fabia R5) for the eight-stage event.

PETER SCHERER



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Race of Remembrance victory went to the TT crew by a two-lap margin



RAF Motorsport Audi comes out on top at Anglesey

ANGLESEY
BRSCC RACE OF REMEMBRANCE
8-10 NOVEMBER

The diesel-powered Audi TT of Matt Isherwood, Oliver Waind, Alex Smith and Ryan Parkin was a dominant winner in the Race of Remembrance, which celebrated its 10th anniversary last weekend.

The quartet's final winning margin was two laps, having led from the 54th tour of the 362-lap race. Paul Cook's RAF Motorsport BMW E46 M3 set the pace from the start, but his 40-second lead was soon wiped out by the first safety car intervention after 26 laps.

The caution period ran to the completion of the first of 12 hours, with Cook leading Sam Heading in the Rob Boston Lotus Elise. But Heading was soon in the pits with a rear puncture, which moved Jason McNulty's ES Motorsport Elise into third, from Isherwood's Audi and Steve McCulley's LIOS Racing Caterham.

Completing the early top six were the Mazda MX-5s of Clapham North's Will Blackwell-Chambers and Stuart Humphrey.

Cook was an early stopper from the lead, as McNulty took over at the front and stayed out to the limits of his fuel supply. "They told me to keep going, as after another safety car spell the tyres had a new lease of life," said McNulty.

Once the Lotus stopped, Isherwood's Audi had a three-lap lead over Blackwell-Chambers, as Ben Brooks had taken over the Boston Elise and was back up to third, followed by David McNulty (ES Elise), Don Henshall (LIOS Caterham) and Timothy Steel in the Brake Dancer Caterham.

Only a couple of laps into the third hour Brooks was sidelined in spectacular fashion. "Oil had leaked onto the manifold; it was smoking, but the heat melted a fuel line, so I stopped and it burst into flames," he said. There was seven hours of racing before the overnight halt, which ended with the RAF Audi of Smith two laps up

on McCulley's Caterham. In third, Jason McNulty's ES Motorsport Elise had been penalised a lap after exceeding a driver maximum stint length by 34s.

In fourth, but seven laps off the front, was Wayne Lewis in the early leading BMW, followed by Paul Hearnden's Brake Dancing Caterham and Blackwell-Chambers' Mazda.

Overnight the lead car had to replace a wheel bearing, a leaking radiator and sort out sticking brakes before Smith could resume for the 90-minute part two on Sunday morning. It was compulsory for the drivers who finished part one to start the second phase, during which time Smith maintained his two-lap lead over McCulley.

Jason McNulty had taken over the Elise and retained third, with Blackwell-Chambers fourth and Allan Curtis fifth for the Brake Dancer Caterham team, and Humphrey in sixth. Out of the running, though, was the early leading RAF BMW after breaking a driveshaft.

With the cars parked up in the rain, the Remembrance service (left) took place before Mission Motorsport founder James Cameron issued the instruction to "let's go racing", signalling the start of the three-and-a-half-hour finale.

Curtis, Humphrey and Seb Fisher's seventh-placed TSW MX-5 all made early stops in the final part, but barring further drama the leaderboard was all but settled.

Isherwood took the final stint in the Audi TT and sealed the two-lap victory over McCulley/Henshall's Caterham, with the McNulty car completing the podium a further lap down.

After Rob Boston had a stint in the Clapham North Mazda, George Grant brought it home in fourth after demoting



ALL PHOTOGRAPHY: STEVE JONES

WEEKEND WINNERS

RACE OF REMEMBRANCE

(362 LAPS) 1 RAF Motorsport (Matt Isherwood/Oliver Waind/Alex Smith/Ryan Parkin – Audi TT); 2 LIOS Racing (Steve McCulley/Don Henshall – Caterham) –2 laps; 3 AbleCare/ES Motorsport (Jason McNulty/David McNulty – Lotus Elise); 4 Clapham North/Rob Boston Racing (Will Blackwell-Chambers/George Grant/Rob Boston – Mazda MX-5 Mk3); 5 Brake Dancer Racing (Daryl Cresswell/Paul Hearnden/Wes Payne/Harry Eyre/Timothy Steel/Allan Curtis – Caterham); 6 Stuart Humphrey Racing (Stuart Humphrey/Alex Kapadia/Martin Rich – Mazda MX-5 Mk3).

Class winners Clapham North/Rob Boston Racing; Brake Dancer Racing; Track Scotland 2 (Adam Morrison/Adam Kindness/Craig Dillon/Lowell Forsyth – Mini Cooper); Anthony Seddon Racing (Anthony Seddon/Samuel David Carrington Yates/Alan Corfield/Harry Ormerod/George Heller – BMW 116); Flatcap Motorsport/Minto Motorsport (Joel Moss/Haydn Payne/Alex Foden – Toyota Aygo); WRC Developments with CB Autoservices (James Macintyre-Ure/Robin Welsh/Liam Crilly/David Drinkwater/Finley Edwards/James Poulton – Citroen C1). **Fastest lap** RAF Motorsport with Lewis Property (Paul Cook – BMW E46 M3) 1m36.231s (78.56mph). **Pole** Rob Boston Racing. **Starters** 55.

CLUBSPORT TROPHY

Liam Crilly (BMW Z4 Coupe, below)



For full results visit: tsl-timing.com

the relay Caterham. But Wes Payne made sure the crew of six retained fifth, from the MX-5 of Humphrey, Martin Rich and Alex Kapadia.

The Track Scotland Mini of Adam Morrison, Adam Kindness, Craig Dillon and Lowell Forsyth topped Class B in seventh overall, and there were class wins too for the Clapham North Mazda, Anthony Seddon Racing's BMW 116, Flatcap Motorsport's Toyota Aygo and WRC Developments' Citroen C1.

Liam Crilly's BMW Z4 Coupe was a dominant winner in the 45-minute Clubsport Trophy race that was also held over the weekend. Lloyd and Neil Huggins' Lotus Exige had been second, but they were unable to restart after a fuel pump problem at the pitstop.

Adam Morrison's Mini Cooper had been under pressure from Paul Bancroft's Audi TT, but he pitted a lap later and got a telling gap to finish second. Morrison then received a penalty for a short pitstop, dropping him behind Andrew Dyer's Audi.

PETER SCHERER



PROBLEMS AROUND A double winner having raced in the event seven times, Peter Mansfield's Rob Boston-run Lotus Elise had a dramatic weekend at Anglesey. Sam Heading was running in second early on until he pitted with a rear puncture before Ben Brooks had to eject when the car caught fire later. "Some wiring had been melted and we cleaned it up, but we got it checked and were able to continue," said Boston. Having been given the all-clear, they rejoined on Sunday morning.



A STAPLE OF THE RACE The Mission Motorsport Mazda MX-5 Mk3 was driven by Toyota MR2 champion and F3 Cup racer James Cross and his former MR2 rival Roland Wilkinson, joined by Lee Ashton and Danny Graham. "It's the original Mission Motorsport car built by Jota that we used at the Silverstone 24 Hours, and it's not missed a Race of Remembrance," said Mission Motorsport's James Cameron. The quartet finished 19th overall and seventh in class.



WINNING ON SUSTAINABLE FUEL After gearbox dramas in testing, it proved a victorious weekend for Matt Isherwood, Oliver Waind, Alex Smith and Ryan Parkin in the RAF Motorsport Audi TT. "We have raced the car in Roadsports and Club Enduro and been a winner, but this was the first time we have run it on sustainable diesel fuel," said Parkin. "There are no significant changes in performance or pace and it's proving very competitive."

IS AN F3000 RETURN IN HISTORIC FORM FEASIBLE?



Racers from 1991-2000 are newly eligible for historic competition, but hurdles remain for F3000 cars

JAMES NEWBOLD

An adjustment to Appendix K of the FIA's International Sporting Code does not, on the face of it, sound like much to get excited about. But for fans of historic racing, the decision announced following last month's World Motor Sport Council meeting to issue Historic Technical Passports (HTPs) to machinery built between 1991 and 2000 from next year could have major ramifications.

"It would be correct for somebody who owns a 1992 car to question, 'Has my car fallen into the heritage or not? Is it part of the historic motorsport?'" says FIA historic championships and committee manager Mathias Doutreleau.

Among the tantalising possibilities that may result from the first significant change to Appendix K since 2014, the result of an FIA technical working group codenamed Project 2025, is the prospect of a return for Formula 3000 cars. In their pomp before going single-make for 1996, these provided performance to rival tail-end Formula 1 machinery.

When reflecting on his first F1 test for Lotus at Silverstone in 1994, Max Papis attests that the "mesmerising" level F3000 had

reached made motor racing's pinnacle slightly less impressive than he had imagined. The Italian, who went on to race for Footwork in 1995, recalls: "When I drove out of the pit the first time and I floored it, I was expecting to have that same feeling that I had when I drove the F3000 [for the first time], that it pushed me in the back of the seat and I was hanging on. It was not like that."

Papis says the feeling of driving an F3000, the category that in 1985 replaced European Formula 2 as the principal training ground for F1 drivers, "was like sitting on a rocket", and the reverence in which the cars are held today is widely shared. For historic preparation specialist Nick Edgington, their self-evident appeal is magnified by the mystique that surrounds them given "there's been no home for F3000 cars at all".

"They're just fantastic cars; they sound fantastic and proportionally they look right, as you'd want a racing car to be," enthuses Edgington, who has period F3000 experience as a mechanic on Yvan Muller's Omegaland Reynard that won the 1992 British F2 title. "Whenever we've been out with an F3000 car at Donington on a general test day, people just don't see them

Cars from F1's main feeder category of 1985-2004 currently have nowhere to race



GARY HAWKINS



Papis raves about the experience of driving an F3000 car in period

SUTTON/MOTORSPORT IMAGES



BRYAN TO/FIA.COM

Doutreleau says FIA will support owners of cars that are newly eligible in securing HTPs

“They’re just fantastic cars; they sound fantastic and proportionally they look right”

any more, and they just don’t really know what they are”.

Edgington has since 2017 worked with Colin Sowter, who describes himself as “the chairman, the founder and the exclusive member of the club of one” when it comes to F3000 zeal. To the owner of six F3000 cars, among them the title-winning ex-Roberto Moreno and Jean Alesi Reynards from 1988 and 1989 among his impressive collection, the Appendix K tweak offers hope that his cars will race again.

“If there was somewhere to race them, I would absolutely love to,” remarks Sowter, whose ex-Alesi 89D is due to be demonstrated by the Frenchman at next year’s Historic French Grand Prix. “It’s not for not wanting to race the cars, it’s been that there hasn’t been anywhere to race them.”

Doutreleau says the governing body plans to have a presence during Retromobile Paris next February to assist owners of newly eligible historic cars in applying for HTPs and answer any questions. But expanding the provision of HTPs is only part of the story for F3000. There has in theory been nothing stopping cars built between 1985 and 1990 from racing, after all. >>



Sowter (in car) and Edgington hope that a promoter will come forth

The problem is essentially twofold; in addition to there being nowhere for them to race, which Edgington attributes to cut-off dates and UK noise restrictions, steep costs can be offputting. As Sowter explains, “while the cost of entry in terms of your initial purchase of F3000 is less, the cost of running and maintaining one is the same as a Formula 1 car”. The investment involved may easily dissuade potential F3000 owners and push them towards owning an F1 car instead.

Although F3000 was devised as a means of finding new homes for Cosworth DFV engines that had become redundant in F1, with 9000rpm rev-limiters fitted as a cost-saving measure, limited availability and the high costs of sourcing engines is one of the major stumbling blocks to getting the cars running again. As Edgington explains, while “there’s quite a lot of rolling chassis around” – several went to Australia for Formula Holden or were used for hillclimbs – “it’s quite unusual to find them with engines, especially with the DFV.”



Difficulty in sourcing parts, including engines, has not stunted Sowter’s passion

“We hope a promoter or organiser will say, ‘Well, no one is celebrating Formula 3000, I’ll be the first one’”

The same applies for cars that used Mugen or Judd propulsion, including Sowter’s recently acquired ex-Alessandro Zanardi Il Barone Rampante Reynard 91D that was powered in period by Mugen. “There’s not a whole load of those around, they’re quite a rare beast as well,” Edgington adds. “To find one and then get it rebuilt takes time. That tends to be the problem, and the biggest cost, getting engines sorted out.”

The engine itself isn’t the only problem, points out Sowter. The injection and electronic systems used to manage them have to be sourced too, since many DFVs were converted back to their original mechanical spec for historic F1 racing. It all means “you’ve got to be very enthusiastic about them to want to spend the amount of money it takes”, shrugs Sowter.

If that all sounds like a lot of doom and gloom, Edgington doesn’t share it. Those with the means who would be willing to put their money on the table will not be disappointed, he believes. Your average gentleman historic racer “isn’t going to get any quicker in a Formula 1 car”, he says.

Operationally too, F3000 cars are less onerous than F1 machinery since, for all their impressive performance, they remained off-the-shelf racing cars. Although it wouldn’t be feasible for an owner to take one to the track on a trailer and do everything themselves, Edgington allows that “you could do it with a small team”.

That tallies with Mike Earle’s recollections of 1991, after returning to the category his Onyx team had won with Stefano Modena in 1987 following its subsequent brief stint in the grand prix paddock. “Coming back from F1 [with Ralts entered under the 3001 International banner], you realised how low-tech the F3000 cars were, they were still a lot less ambitious,” he says.



FORMULA 3000 IN BRITAIN

Should a Formula 3000 revival take root, it would be fitting if it did so in Britain, for the category always had a close link to these shores. Although F3000 racers were built elsewhere too, Ralt, March, Lola and Reynard hoovered up all 206 races of the main FIA championship between them, while tyres originating from Avon's Melksham workshop were on every winner from 1986 to F3000's climax in 2004.

The very first F3000 race was held at Silverstone in 1985, with Mike Thackwell's works Ralt taking victory in the International Trophy. Britain would host a round of the championship every year until its 2004 demise, and in 1987 held four of the 11 races between Silverstone, Donington, Brands Hatch and the Birmingham Superprix.

Such was the verve for F3000 that a spin-off national series was launched by the BRSCC in 1989, but it endured mixed fortunes over the next decade. From an initial motley collection of nine cars for the inaugural race at Brands, won by Andrew Gilbert-Scott in an Eddie Jordan Racing Reynard from Roland Ratzenberger's Spirit-run machine, numbers steadily grew and had reached 20 cars by the end of 1990.

A call to ban current machinery at the end of that season, claimed by Pedro Chaves in a Mansell Madgwick Reynard 90D, was arguably the right one and established the British series as a home for year-old machinery that attracted promising international talent. Future British Touring Car champions Alain Menu and Rickard Rydell were both race winners in 1990, while Swedish tin-top ace-to-be Fredrik Ekblom strung together a hat-trick in the closing stages of 1991.

Phil Andrews raced in the championship on and off between 1990 and 1994, and stresses "there was a lot of quality in depth" in 1991. That year Paul Warwick was crowned posthumously after the likes of Andrews, Richard Dean, Dave Coyne and Julian Westwood took points away from Ekblom. Another perk was "decent prize money, which was becoming unusual by then", says Andrews, who returned to the FIA series for 1992, when Yvan Muller won the British title.

But he's the first to admit that by 1993, it felt like a very different championship. Rebranding as British F2 couldn't disguise the fact that grids were back in single figures and the depth had disappeared, with the costs of racing in a national series deemed unattractive. It staggered along through 1994 before prudently taking a one-year hiatus. One last hurrah in 1996 gave hope, but a final race with three cars in 1997 was the embarrassing last straw.

Historic bouts would likely be shorter than period contests that typically exceeded an hour, since "your average amateur driver would struggle" with their physicality, Edgington notes. With shorter running times, engine mileage would stretch further too.

Sowter hopes that the HTP will "raise awareness" of the possibilities of racing F3000 cars, with "a much bigger pool of cars to pull on" in Europe, but knows this is just the first step. "It just needs somebody to bite the bullet and start allowing them in," he says. Edgington agrees: "It's going to take a bit of time."

Both suggest that a feasible workaround would be if an organiser agreed to run a combined grid with historic F1, F5000 or indeed ground-effect F2 machines. "If they get enough cars out on the back of the Formula 1 race, they could then look at having a standalone grid," reasons Sowter.

Masters Historic Racing will include a demo event for '90s F1 cars at Brands Hatch on 31 May-1 June, but plans to mix grids with F3000 cars aren't on the cards, a spokesperson told Autosport.

Doutreleau expresses optimism that a revival "will happen" in some form, though is at pains to stress "this is outside of our scope, because we're not organisers". "Formula 3000 definitely has its spot," he argues. "We hope that by putting together this regulation, it will spark the interest of a promoter or an organiser to say, 'Well, no one is celebrating Formula 3000, I'll be the first one.'"

Apathy around promotion dogged F3000 in period. It was remarked by Autosport that racing at Albacete in 1992 was merely "another way of keeping F3000 out of the limelight". It would truly be a pity if, with the 40th anniversary of the category set to be celebrated next year, they remained hidden from view. Now the waiting game begins. 🐾



FINISHING STRAIGHT

A rose by any other name...



BOOK REVIEW
FORMULA 1: CAR BY CAR 2000-09
Peter Higham
RRP £60

Formula 1: Car by Car 2000-09 offers perhaps the most in-depth look back

at a decade that featured some of the fastest machinery in motorsport history, and ended with the unforgettable Brawn GP fairytale of 2009. Across 304 pages, Peter Higham recounts every twist and turn of the decade for every team, in a format that quickly develops a familiar feel.

Higham introduces each season with a two-page overview, setting the scene for all the rule changes, political drama and intrigue, and telling the general tale of that campaign in a surprisingly detailed manner, given more than half of the spread is taken up by images. Beyond this, teams are generally given one or two pages for the story of their individual seasons to be told, with the 50:50 ratio of words and pictures continuing as a trend.

Throughout, Higham reflects on

important on-track battles that took place during the relevant season and major changes in team personnel. Bringing each chapter to a close is a double-page spread dedicated to statistics, showing the performance of individual drivers across qualifying and races, a full calendar, and tables for both the drivers' and

constructors' championships.

One thing that becomes very clear from an early stage is that this is not really a car-by-car run-through, but more a team-by-team recount. Aside from a handful of mentions of gearboxes, there are next to no technical specifications. Yes, the Brawn double diffuser saga is





Extraordinary saga
of Brawn GP caps a
decade steeped in
nostalgia

COATES/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

explained, but there is nothing that stands out as new in this regard, although this is natural in a book looking back at a long-since-closed topic.

But in this sense, Higham is following the pattern of his similar works looking at cars all the way back to 1950 and the inception of the Formula 1 World Championship, and it's a formula that works as Higham continues his journey through F1 history.

Given the quantity of images, it's remarkable that Higham has been able to squeeze so much detail into the pages. There was doubtless a lot that ended up on the cutting-room floor, especially for teams at the sharp end of things, but those in the midfield and towards the back rarely get the media attention of race winners, meaning there are plenty of untold tales. This may be less true now than it was back at the beginning of the millennium, but Higham is able to shine a new and interesting light on these teams.

While you may not necessarily agree that the book lives up to its title, it's certainly worthy of inclusion in any F1 fanatic's collection.

SAM HALL

FINISHING STRAIGHT



GALLOWAY/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

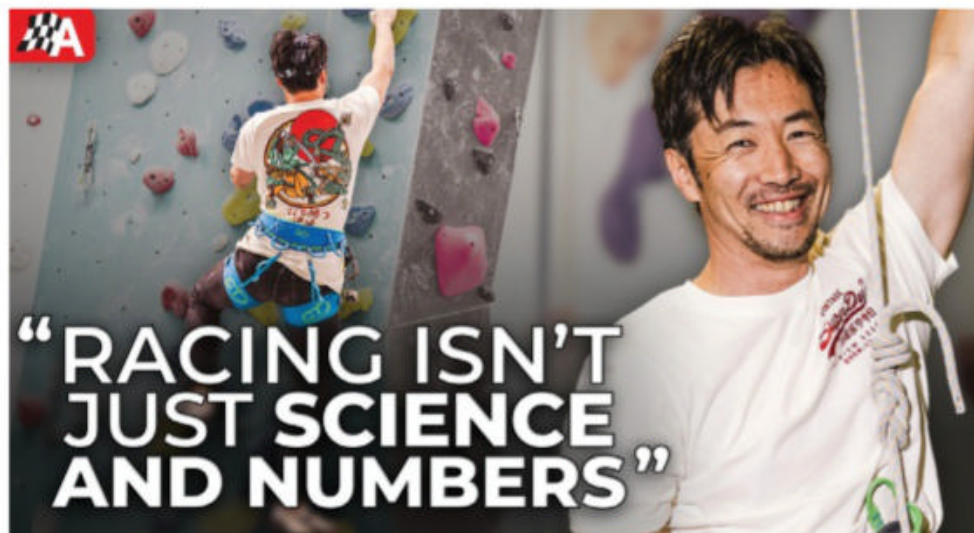
autosport.com/podcast

Interview: F3 champion Leonardo Fornaroli

2024 Formula 3 champion Leonardo Fornaroli speaks to Sam Hall, offering his thoughts on becoming the first winless champion, an insight into why he chose Invicta for his move to F2, and a detailed look into that astonishing final lap of the season that ultimately sealed the crown.



youtube.com/AUTOSPORTdotcom



Climbing up the grid with Ayao Komatsu, Haas F1 team principal

Ayao Komatsu comes from an engineering background, one that he believes gives him an important perspective while pushing Haas towards the front of the grid. Stuart Codling met up with him at his favourite rock climbing centre (yes, rock climbing) in Milton Keynes to talk about his career.



WHAT'S ON

INTERNATIONAL MOTORSPORT

Macau Grand Prix

Macau, China

16-17 November

FIA GT World Cup

Macau, China

16-17 November

TCR World Tour

Round 7/7

Macau, China

16-17 November

Livestream

Motorsport.tv will show all four days of Macau action

MotoGP

Round 21/21

Barcelona, Spain

16-17 November

Live TNT Sports 2,

Sat, 1330, Sun 1215

Highlights ITV4,
Mon 2000

Australian Supercars

Round 12/12

Adelaide, Australia

16-17 November

Live TNT Sports 1,
Sat 0400, Sun 0400

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WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN

RAY MALLOCK IN F1

Missed Brabham test opportunity helped steer successful new direction

MARCUS SIMMONS

ALL PICS: JEFF BLOXHAM



Mallock dominated 1981 Formula Atlantic championship in Ralt RT4

Been there, done that. Ray Mallock had won the Formula Atlantic championship in Britain in 1979 when the category was reintroduced to the country after a two-year hiatus. He'd then competed in the Aurora British Formula 1 Championship in 1980 at the wheel of Surtees and Wolf machinery. But for 1981, there was good reason to return to Atlantic to attempt to win a second crown.

"There was this thing that Bernie Ecclestone [then the owner of the Brabham F1 team and head of the FOCA teams group] was supporting," recalls Mallock. "The prize for that was an F1 test drive..."

Driving the Ralt RT4, the new ground-effect version of the all-conquering Formula 3 RT3, Mallock dominated the championship against variable opposition. Little wonder, because he'd already proved himself on the international stage – including a giantkilling second place in the 1977 Silverstone round of the European Formula 2 Championship behind Rene Arnoux.

"I HAD THAT AMBITION TO BE IN F1, BUT GROUP C ENDED UP BEING A GREAT PATH FOR ME"

"I won the championship and called Bernie at the end of the year," continues Mallock, "and he said, 'Yeah, we've got quite a few tests coming up, and we'll get you in the car.' I said, 'Well, next week I'm due to go off to do the Asia-Pacific championship – three rounds in Australia, Macau and Malaysia – but I can come back in between and test. And Bernie said, 'No, you don't need to come back, just get your races out of the way and give me a call as soon as you're back'."

As the British champion, Mallock had been invited out to those flyaway races. He claimed a brake-troubled seventh in the Australian GP at Calder, third in an attritional Macau GP, and retired from the Selangor GP with a blown engine. Then he got back on the blower to Bernie...

Mallock recalls: "And the answer was, 'Oh, it's a shame, there was a test at Paul Ricard last week which would have been perfect. Give me a call in a couple of weeks and this will work out'. So I did that, and there was nothing then going on. By the time it got to Christmas I called Bernie and he said, 'Well, you made your decision that you wanted to go and do your Formula Atlantic races, so you've lost your chance to do your F1 test drive'."

"It probably did me a favour, because that timescale coincided with the coming of Group C, and Aston Martin announced that they were coming in with the Nimrod. I knew a lot of people still at Astons, so I was able to get myself involved with the Nimrod



programme. Whereas I was always too tall for F1, I was driving pretty well I think, by my reckoning. I had that ambition to be in F1, but Group C ended up being a great path for me. I loved Le Mans, I loved those cars, and it really opened up the opportunity for RML."

His RML company went – and continues to go – from strength to strength, winning a world Group C2 title and multiple touring car crowns. But the episode's ironic twist? Second in that Australian GP, behind his pal Roberto Moreno, was Ecclestone's newly crowned world champion Nelson Piquet... ❧



FROM THE ARCHIVE

Jim Clark's #2 Aston Martin DB4 GT Zagato makes a lightning getaway in the 1962 RAC Tourist Trophy at Goodwood, aided by the fleet-of-foot Scot's "meteoric dash" (according

to Autosport's report) in the race's Le Mans-style start. But even the future two-time Formula 1 world champion couldn't make up the gap to the #15 Ferrari 250 GTO of Innes Ireland, or John Surtees's #6 Ferrari,

and later on the opening lap was demoted by Graham Hill's #10 GTO. After two laps the flying Surtees, "on irresistible form, driving the Ferrari like it was a GP single-seater", was in the lead, while Clark fell down

the order struggling with his Aston Martin's wayward handling. When Surtees came to lap him, Clark spun while attempting to move out of the way, taking out both cars and promoting Ireland to first place.





David Coulthard

Max Verstappen may be Red Bull's Dutch hero, but its first driver heralding from the Netherlands was Robert Doornbos. Upon stepping up from his third driver role to replace Christian Klien for the final three races of 2006, Doornbos was essentially keeping the seat warm for the incoming Mark Webber. With attention fully on the first new car of the Adrian Newey era and in an RB2 chassis that had long since ceased development, his chances of securing a longer-term seat before heading off to Champ Car for a race-winning campaign in 2007 always appeared slim.

Those outings alongside David Coulthard cemented an impression Doornbos had formed of the 13-time GP winner during a year in which he also made 15 Friday appearances. "Fun, fast and someone with experience," the Scot "ticks all the boxes" for Doornbos as his favourite team-mate pick.

"I was really able to learn from his experience in F1, how you present yourself to the sponsors until squeezing out the fast lap in qualifying, basically the whole package," reflects Doornbos.

A late starter in motorsport by modern standards, his interest only piqued by visiting the 1998 Belgian Grand Prix aged 16, Doornbos admits when he first started working with Coulthard "I had to



be cautious that I wasn't fan-boying". But it helped that the ex-McLaren ace "was very relaxed to be around straight away".

"He was very open and friendly," Doornbos explains. "He said to me straight away to the first test, 'You want to jump on the plane with me?' I thought, 'OK, I really made it now!'"

Doornbos modelled his approach to giving engineer feedback on Coulthard's example and was delighted to outqualify him immediately at a damp Chinese GP. The sole Q3 appearance for Red Bull of their stint as team-mates proved the high point of a run that Doornbos says otherwise "wasn't magical".

But of his fellow TV analyst, Doornbos has nothing but positive memories. "Just the best man you can have in the team," he adds. "It was very impressive what he did, total hats off to him."

JAMES NEWBOLD



IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE

Britain's new F1 star

GETTING TO KNOW OLLIE BEARMAN



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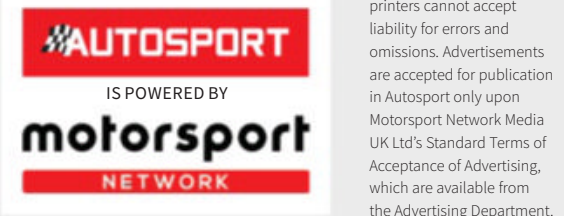
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