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The best grand prix driver you've never heard of

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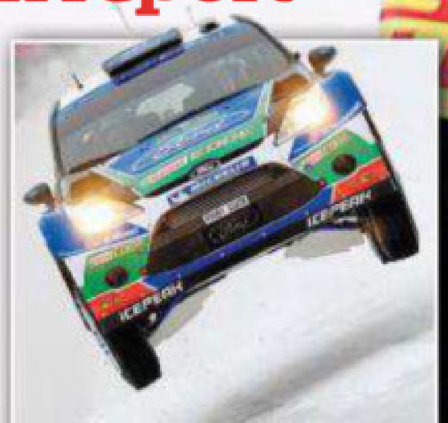

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"When your son dies like that, and a bunch of guys say, 'We want to tell the story', it takes guts to support them"

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POLE POSITION

Trying to read the clues from F1's Jerez testing

WE'RE A MONTH AWAY FROM THE opening grand prix weekend of the 2012 season and, while we can read into or dismiss what we like from last week's testing at Jerez, it did give us some clues on the season ahead.

Firstly, the comeback of Kimi Raikkonen is a case of so far, so good. There was a positive buzz around the 2007 world champion at Lotus, and he looked great on track (even if his car's nose did not). He sat down with Edd Straw and made all the right noises too, as you can read in his revealing interview (page 24).

Ferrari was the other big talking point, as it appeared to chase its own tail on set-up. Don't read too much into its headline-grabbing fastest time on the final day, nor should you write the team off for the upcoming season, but technical chief Pat Fry's admission that he "wasn't happy" is a warning sign that can't be ignored. If Ferrari can't calibrate windtunnel, simulator and real world, is it back to where it was last year?

The clock is ticking...

Charles Bradley, editor

BAMBER'S WEEK

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Hirvonen in a freeze-frame

As far as we know, Mikko Hirvonen is not related to Finnish 1980s ski-jumping legend Matti Nykanen, but he certainly got top marks for distance and style with this effort on last weekend's Rally Sweden. Hirvonen, on his second outing with Citroen, finished a close second. Full report on p56.

Pic: McKlein.de

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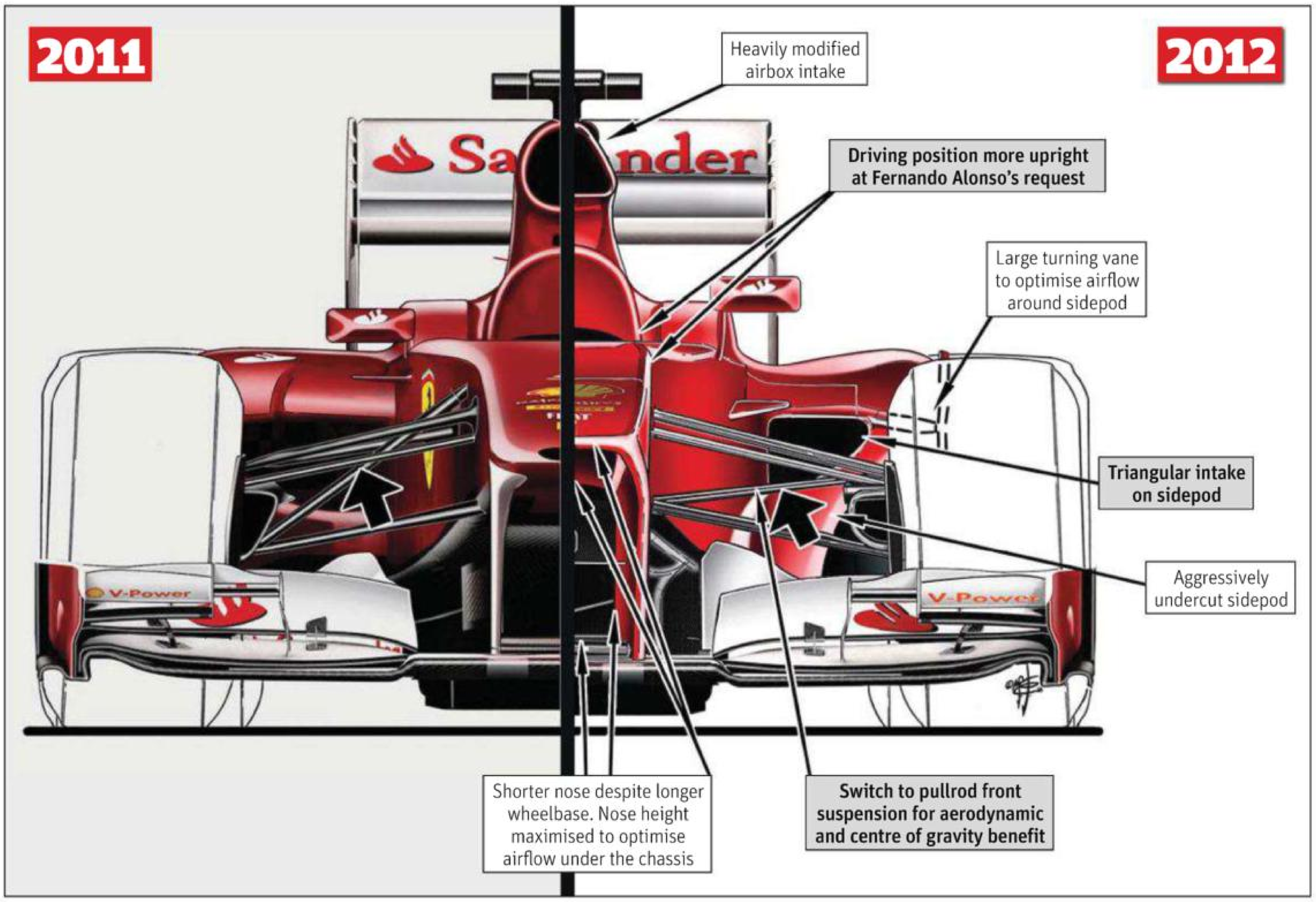

Has Ferrari gone too aggressive?

Troublesome first week of testing for Maranello as concerns grow over radical 2012 car. By EDD STRAW

Ferrari faces a battle to get on top of its new F2012 amid fears that it has gone too radical with its design.

Despite emerging from last week's Jerez test as the second fastest 2012 car, Ferrari struggled to understand the behaviour of its new machine. Fernando Alonso claims that Ferrari understands only "20 per cent of what we need to get the best out of the car", while technical boss Pat Fry admitted that he is "not happy with where we are at the moment". Although it's early days in testing, Ferrari was the only team to admit to struggling in such emphatic terms.

The F2012 is the product of a new-look technical department spearheaded by ex-McLaren man Fry. He has instilled a new philosophy of fearless innovation after last year's Ferrari was held back by a conservative approach.

Alonso says next test at Barcelona will be crucial

Comprehensive revisions have been made to the car, with a higher front chassis section, pullrod front and rear suspension and heavily revised sidepods.

"We did a lot of analysis about why we hadn't been performing as we liked in the last few years," said chief designer Nikolas Tombazis at Jerez. "We decided that the only way forward was to be a lot more aggressive in our design. One thing we cannot be accused of is being too tame with the car."

Nobody has levelled that accusation at Ferrari. In fact, several senior technical personnel from rival teams suggested that the car was designed to be radical for the sake of it, rather than for sound conceptual reasons. Its unique pullrod front suspension, last used in F1 by Minardi in 2001, is one example of this attitude as it requires a comprehensive revision of the geometry for negligible aerodynamic and centre of gravity gains.

More worryingly, the car did not behave on track as simulations had predicted. This meant that a large amount of track time at Jerez was dedicated to aerodynamic runs using pitot sensors and flow visualisation paint. After Ferrari's 2011 title tilt was ruined by windtunnel correlation problems that led it to bolt a key upgrade package onto the car at the final pre-season test that failed to work as hoped, there is a worrying possibility that it is still afflicted by such problems.

Ferrari also struggled to find a set-up that made the car well-balanced and at times it was visibly lacking the front-end grip needed to carry good speed into corners. The task at Maranello between now and the next test will be to digest the data and work out how the car should be best set-up to realise the promise that it is claimed to have.

"The car has potential because it's an innovative car in many respects," said Alonso. "What we have to do

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RELIABILITY BITES FERRARI CLOCKS FEWEST 2012 MILES

JEREZ TEST MILEAGE

1 Lotus	1111 miles
2 Williams	1020 miles
3 Caterham	985 miles
4 Toro Rosso	869 miles
5 McLaren	861 miles
6 Force India	847 miles
7 Sauber	817 miles
8 Red Bull	811 miles
9 Ferrari	743 miles

Ferrari's troubles were compounded by it completing fewer laps with its new car than any other team running 2012 machinery at last week's Jerez test.

Fernando Alonso bore the brunt of the restricted running on the third and fourth days of the test, managing only 106 laps. His progress was restricted by hydraulic problems and troubleshooting the power steering system.

While Red Bull also suffered its own trials, including electrical problems that hampered Sebastian Vettel's running, the lack of track time hurt Ferrari badly given the amount of work needed on understanding its radical car.

"We had a few problems of different types," said Alonso at the end of the test. "It wasn't one in particular so we lost a lot of time. But that's what happens with new cars."

Alonso also set his team a target of completing more than 100 laps on each of the four days of the Barcelona test, which kicks off on February 21.

Massa suffered fewer problems than Alonso

"The car has potential because it's so innovative. What we have to do is understand it better"
Fernando Alonso

is understand it better."

Alonso went on to point out that the Barcelona test, which kicks off on February 21, will be crucial in assessing Ferrari's progress. It could be that the first test was always going to be a challenge with the baseline set-up from 2011 of limited use on such a different car concept.

Its task at Jerez was made more difficult by a mooted promotional run, scheduled for Fiorano after the launch, being abandoned, costing Ferrari up to 100km of running.

"Compared to a relatively tame evolution, we have a lot more work to do," said Tombazis of the workload at the Jerez test.

If that work goes to plan, then we can expect Ferrari to hit the ground running when it gets to Barcelona. If that test starts badly, it faces a real fight to get on terms with the likely frontrunners Red Bull, McLaren and fast-out-of-the-box Lotus at the start of the season.

But for all of these concerns, there are positives that prevent the first test from being regarded as a disaster. For several years, Ferrari has struggled with tyre warm-up that has held it back both in qualifying and on the harder tyre compounds in races. This was one of the prime objectives to address and if Ferrari has come up with a car that works the tyres better, it is a major boost.

"The strong point of the car from what I have seen so far is the tyre warm-up," said Alonso. "It seems we can extract the maximum on the opening lap, something we couldn't do last year. The things we need to improve are the aerodynamics and reliability."

Fry has admitted that the run-up to the next test is critical. Next week at Barcelona will likely give a clear indication of whether the radical Ferrari that is loaded onto the plane for Australia will be a potential winner.

Fry (l) admitted to early trouble

AUTOSPORT SAYS...

EDD STRAW
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It was so very predictable. Just before a quarter to 11 on the final morning of the Jerez test, Fernando Alonso banged in a lap of 1m18.9s to jump to the top of the timesheets. It spoke volumes.

Alonso's lap was 1.5s faster than anything else Ferrari managed during the week, save for a few laps turned during the 80 minutes of work he did on Friday morning in the build-up to and immediate aftermath of his headline time.

Hint of Alonso glory run

It was posted on the first flier of an eight-lap run, but it's reasonable to conclude that he was carrying far less fuel than Ferrari did for much of the rest of the week. The bottom line is that this was in response to the building pressure at Maranello. The Prancing Horse is expected to gallop, not merely canter this year. A cheap glory run shouldn't figure in that plan.

It takes time for teams to get on top of a car when it's so different from its predecessor. But what is concerning is that a team convinced that it was merely working through the processes to unlock championship-winning potential should be secure enough not to feel obliged to chase positive headlines.

The Ferrari will surely be, at worst, a decent grand prix car. Maybe it's just a case of unlocking the potential of a very raw Red Bull-beater – and if it is, we will see that at Barcelona. But the combination of glory runs and questionable windtunnel/CFD to track correlation is a worrying one.

REMEMBER WHEN...

...the Ferrari 640 won on its debut? The 1989 Ferrari was not expected even to finish its first grand prix at Rio after suffering disastrous reliability in testing. But Nigel Mansell took it to a shock debut victory.

How to adapt to this year's new rules

Teams and drivers offer an insight into how they are getting used to the challenges presented by the 2012 cars

New regulations designed to make exhaust-blown diffusers impossible have led to a big reduction in front-wing downforce levels, according to Red Bull chief technical officer Adrian Newey.

Because the cars with the most powerful exhaust-blown diffusers last year had so much rear downforce, it was necessary to ramp up the amount generated at the front to prevent chronic understeer. Although teams have worked hard to claw back some of the downforce lost, the cars no longer generate so much at the rear. This also means there is a big shift in how the downforce is distributed around the car.

"Last year, we were able to generate quite a lot of rear downforce, which then meant that we had to work the front wing quite hard," Newey told AUTOSPORT. "The front wing is easier this year because you're running almost Spa levels of front wing at high-downforce circuits."

Newey expected "small complaints" from drivers

> "We have people who are good at predicting the starting set-up"
> Lotus's James Allison

This has significant implications for car set-up, although Newey confirmed that at last week's Jerez test the modified Red Bull performed broadly as anticipated.

"The car seems to be behaving roughly as we expected," he said. "There are some small complaints on the handling compared to last year from the drivers, which was to be expected."

Crucially, the majority of teams had already zeroed in on a likely baseline set-up using simulation technologies before even turning a wheel on track last week. This was one area where Ferrari struggled, with its machine not performing as predicted. But Lotus, which looked strong at Jerez with a car that Romain Grosjean hailed as significantly better than last year's in terms of handling, had no such problems, as technical director James Allison explained.

"It hasn't been too big a deal because you've got a lot of aero data from the windtunnel and mechanical data from various rig tests," Allison told AUTOSPORT. "We have people who are good at making predictions of where the starting set-up should be given the characteristics of the car.

"It seems to have come in relatively benign from the start so we have just been mucking around locally with that starting set-up rather than starting off with a new can and meandering our way to where we are now. You start with simulations on the new car, not based on the old one."

While the drivers have had

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Newey says Red Bull ran Spa-spec front wing

Reduced rear downforce has shifted car balance

to make changes to their styles to adapt to the post-exhaust-blown diffuser era, specifically in terms of how much mid-corner downforce is available, Force India driver Paul di Resta agrees that the bulk of the work is done by the teams.

"There is a driving style difference, but the biggest difference is the way that the aerodynamics work for the team," di Resta said.

"They have various simulation tools and give you a car that's best-balanced. When you get back in the car it's very small details you change, but they can make a big difference so you do have to change your approach."

JEREZ F1 TEST, FEBRUARY 7-10 — *2011 CAR

POS	DRIVER	CAR	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
1	Nico Rosberg (D)	Mercedes MGP W02*	1m20.291s	-	**1m17.613s**	-
2	Romain Grosjean (F)	Lotus-Renault E20	-	-	**1m18.419s**	1m19.729s
3	Michael Schumacher (D)	Mercedes MGP W02*	1m20.794s	**1m18.561s**	-	-
4	Fernando Alonso (E)	Ferrari F2012	-	-	1m20.412s	**1m18.877s**
5	Mark Webber (AUS)	Red Bull-Renault RB8	1m20.496s	**1m19.184s**	-	-
6	Sebastian Vettel (D)	Red Bull-Renault RB8	-	-	**1m19.297s**	1m19.606s
7	Lewis Hamilton (GB)	McLaren-Mercedes MP4-27	-	-	**1m19.464s**	1m19.640s
8	Daniel Ricciardo (AUS)	Toro Rosso-Ferrari STR7	1m20.694s	**1m19.587s**	-	-
9	Jean-Eric Vergne (F)	Toro Rosso-Ferrari STR7	-	-	1m19.734s	**1m19.597s**
10	Kimi Raikkonen (FIN)	Lotus-Renault E20	**1m19.670s**	1m20.239s	-	-
11	Sergio Perez (MEX)	Sauber-Ferrari C31	-	1m20.711s	**1m19.770s**	-
12	Paul di Resta (GB)	Force India-Mercedes VJM05	**1m19.772s**	1m20.272s	-	-
13	Kamui Kobayashi (J)	Sauber-Ferrari C31	1m21.353s	-	-	**1m19.834s**
14	Nico Hulkenberg (D)	Force India-Mercedes VJM05	-	-	-	**1m19.977s**
15	Bruno Senna (BR)	Williams-Renault FW34	-	-	1m21.293s	**1m20.132s**
16	Jules Bianchi (F)	Force India-Mercedes VJM05	-	**1m20.221s**	no time set	-
17	Felipe Massa (BR)	Ferrari F2012	1m22.815s	**1m20.454s**	-	-
18	Jenson Button (GB)	McLaren-Mercedes MP4-27	1m21.530s	**1m20.688s**	-	-
19	Pastor Maldonado (YV)	Williams-Renault FW34	1m23.371s	**1m21.197s**	-	-
20	Heikki Kovalainen (FIN)	Caterham-Renault CT01	1m23.178s	**1m21.518s**	-	-
21	Pedro de la Rosa (E)	HRT-Cosworth F111*	1m23.676s	**1m22.128s**	-	-
22	Jarno Trulli (I)	Caterham-Renault CT01	-	-	-	**1m22.198s**
23	Giedo van der Garde (NL)	Caterham-Renault CT01	-	-	**1m23.324s**	-

Trackside view

Some of the more revealing traits shown by the nine 2012 cars that were in action at Jerez last week

RED BULL Despite some reliability glitches, the Red Bull looked assured at Jerez. It visibly had more rear traction than its rivals and could put down the power decisively without the back end misbehaving. Looked like a reasonably well sorted package straight out of the box.

McLAREN It's clear that the MP4-27 retains its predecessor's requirement for a stiff set-up to allow the aero to work. While McLaren kept a low profile during the test, the car looked untroubled and well behaved, although that stiffness did mean that the car lacked Red Bull's poise over the kerbs.

FERRARI The F2012 spent a large amount of time completing aero runs and parts evaluations, but it did look a little unwieldy. At times it appeared to lack front-end grip at turn-in and didn't put the power down as well as some. Overall, didn't look particularly well balanced.

LOTUS From early on in the test, Kimi Raikkonen could lean on the car. While it didn't quite have the rear-end poise of the Red Bull, it looked driveable, forgiving and pretty quick, with the slight instability under braking usable to rotate the rear of the car at turn-in.

FORCE INDIA By far the team's most well refined design, the Force India looked impressively stable under braking and on turn-in. It wasn't quite as strong putting the power down, perhaps as a result of struggling to adapt to losing its potent exhaust-blown diffuser.

SAUBER While the Sauber didn't look as quick as the likes of Lotus, the car appeared superbly balanced. This suggests that the plan to maintain the good tyre degradation characteristics of the 2011 car has been successful. As you'd expect from Sauber, it looks like a solid package.

TORO ROSSO It shares Red Bull DNA, albeit from a few generations back, so it was no surprise that the Toro Rosso looked like brisk midfield fodder. Strong at turn-in, it did look a little oversteery, although some of that might be down to its rookie driver line-up.

WILLIAMS In the slow sections, the Williams looked unwieldy – when the driver fed in the power, the rear seemed keen to step out. This made the chicane particularly painful. The car looked a little better in the fast corners, although race simulation suggests that the team still has some work to do.

CATERHAM On track, the car looked well balanced, although its minimum corner speed suggests that its overall downforce level still needs to be improved. Despite that, looks every bit the midfield runner.

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F1 2012 car secrets revealed

With nine new Formula 1 cars hitting the track for the first time last week, AUTOSPORT's technical correspondent GARY ANDERSON explains the key design trends on show at Jerez

RED BULL NOSE DUCT

The letterbox in the Red Bull nose where it slopes up to the chassis immediately caught the eye when the RB8 was launched. Adrian Newey claims that the duct is for cooling, but when you consider that the driver's feet aren't far behind it, in a race that turns into wet conditions you'd get so much water in there that the driver would need Wellington boots.

There are dampers and things such as inerters in that area that could be cooled using this, and you want a consistent temperature for these types of components.

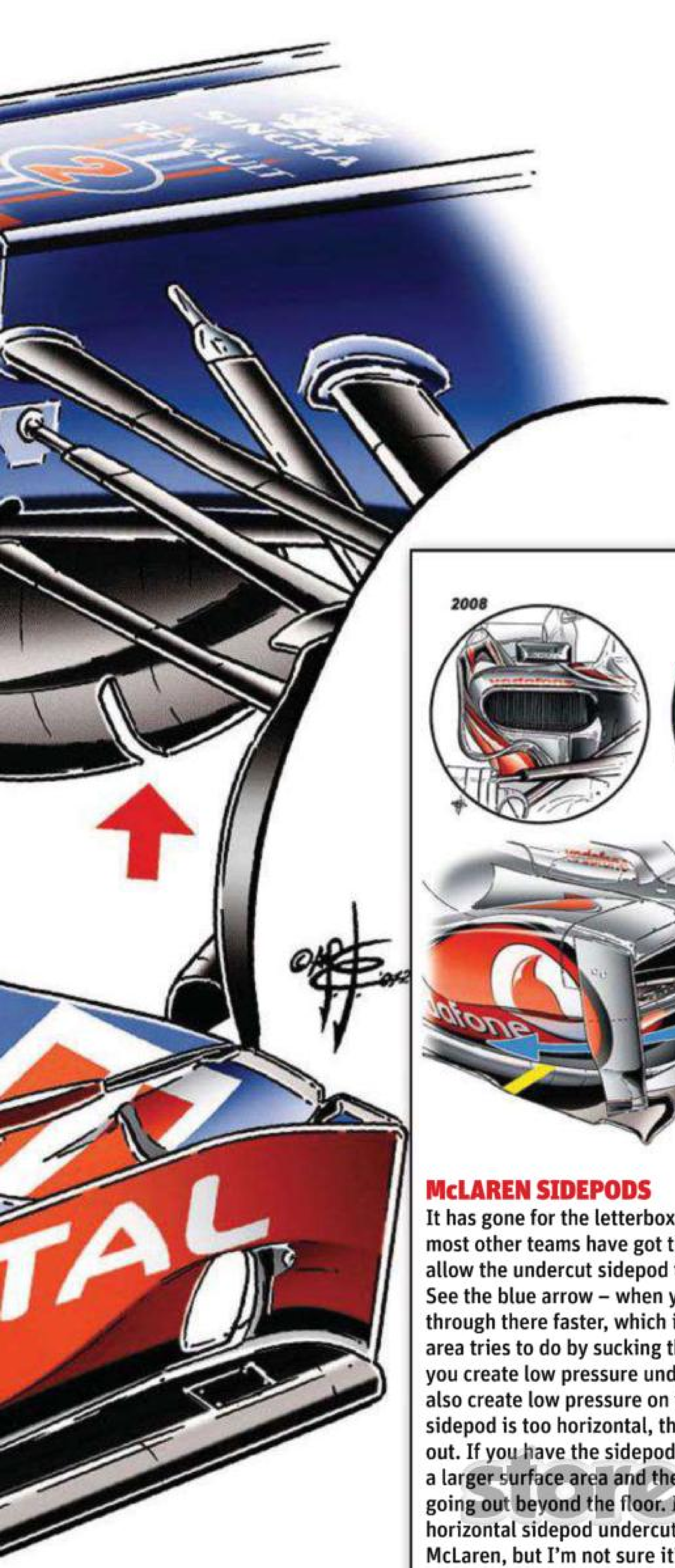
It can work to reduce the lift generated by that style of surface by reducing the airflow that is accelerating over the top of the chassis, but I think that Red Bull might have something up its sleeve that will appear in the future relating to this. It could be possible to connect it to the front wing via the nose pillars to create an f-duct style effect.

TORO ROSSO TWIN FLOOR

It has continued with its twin-floor concept. There is a much bigger undercut, so the Coke bottle works with the leading edge of the sidepod much better. I'm not sure what the duct is with the red arrow, but it can't be the exhaust and it's probably for cooling. The only compromise with this design is to centre of gravity with the radiators sitting higher. That can have an effect over longer runs on tyre degradation and perhaps teams opted against following Toro Rosso's design because it's a lot of work for relatively little gain. Still, it's very neatly packaged for sound aerodynamic reasons.

EXHAUST CONCEPTS

The Ferrari, Sauber and McLaren exhaust concepts are similar in what they are trying to achieve in terms of harnessing the gas flow. They have often been using temperature-sensitive stickers because of worries about composite parts overheating. Last year, it was advantageous to direct the exhaust flow low down inside the wheels to seal off the diffuser, and that idea is still being used. Once you learn something you don't forget it, and teams are still trying to seal that area.

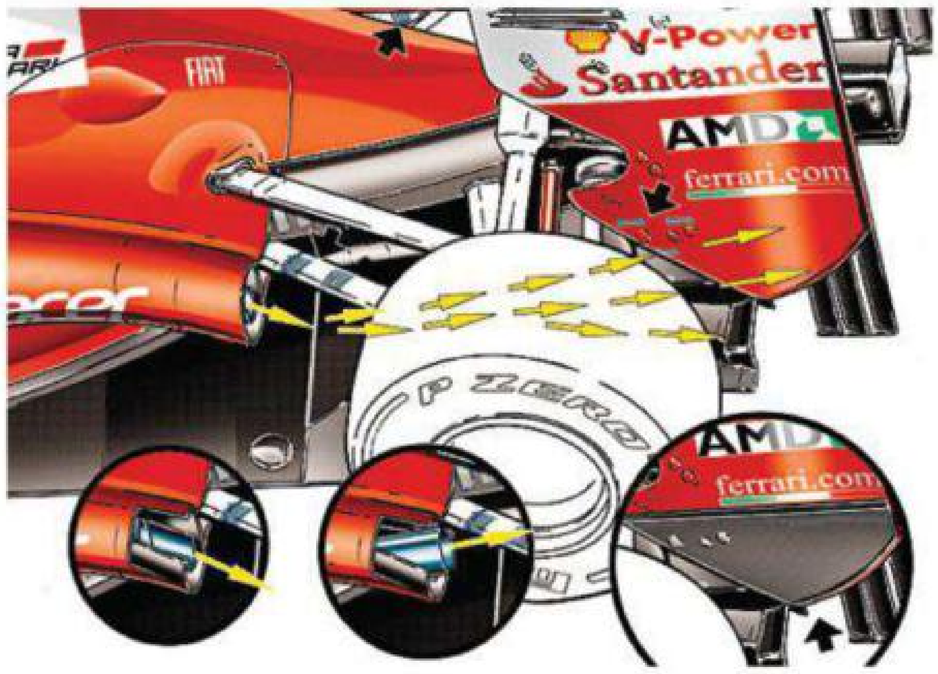


McLAREN SIDEPODS

It has gone for the letterbox inlet in 2012, whereas most other teams have got the triangular one to allow the undercut sidepod to be at 40-45 degrees. See the blue arrow – when you get the air to travel through there faster, which is what the Coke bottle area tries to do by sucking the air towards the rear, you create low pressure under the sidepod. But you also create low pressure on the top of the floor. If the sidepod is too horizontal, those cancel each other out. If you have the sidepod at a bigger angle, there's a larger surface area and the low pressure area is going out beyond the floor. I don't agree with the horizontal sidepod undercut. I'm not criticising McLaren, but I'm not sure it's as good as it could be.

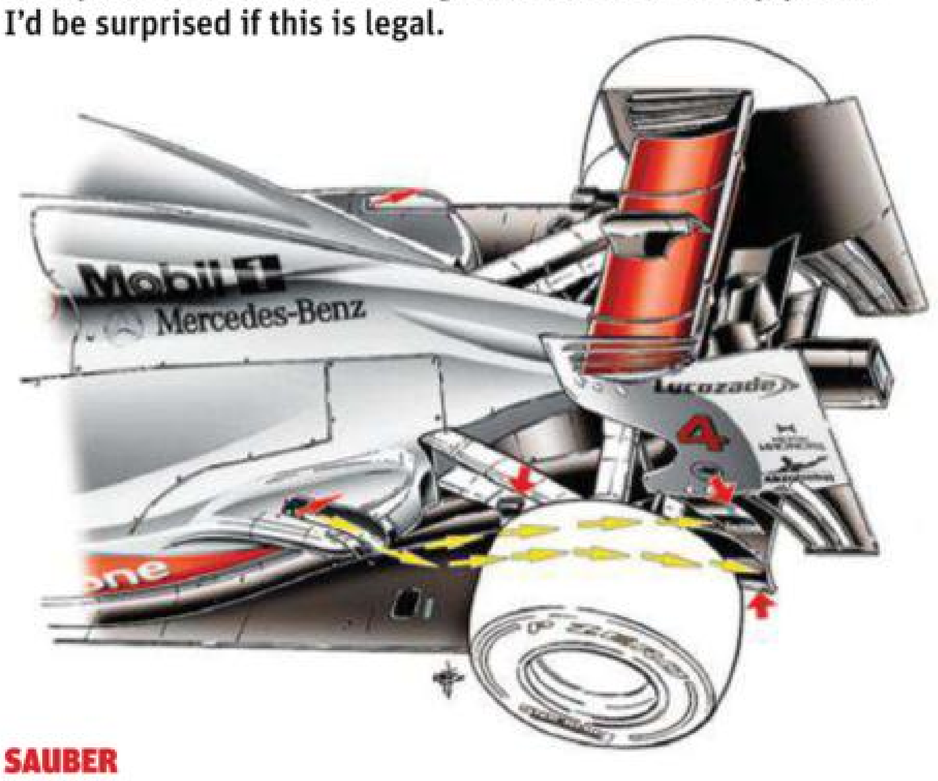
FERRARI

It tried a few exhaust ideas. On the bottom-left inset, I'm not sure how it meets the regulations as the last 100mm isn't round and you have that U-shaped section. But it might have been a temporary solution as they were having problems with overheating bodywork. The middle inset one points upward as the rules require and directs the airflow between the rear wing endplate and the inside of the tyre. The third (main image) shows where the bottom stream of yellow arrows heads to. There are a few turning vanes on the diffuser detail and rear wing endplate design to make that airflow work hard, but I don't think they will have a major affect as the exhaust gases are so far away from this area.



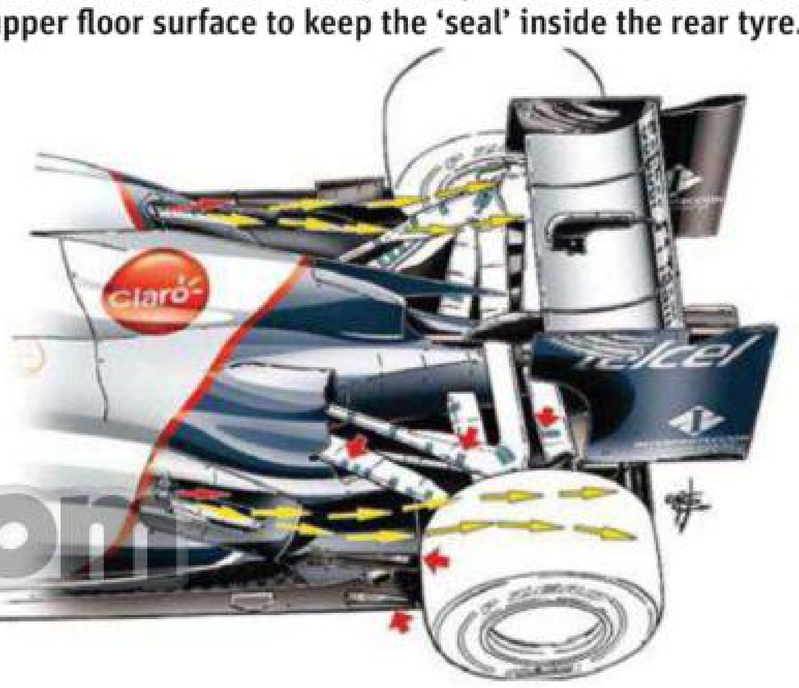
McLAREN

This design is odd. The pipe points up, as shown by the first red arrow, but you then have a trough. This is designed to channel the exhaust flow downwards towards the floor and I'm not quite sure how that fits in with the FIA's technical directives. Really, there should be nothing at the end of the tailpipe and I'd be surprised if this is legal.



SAUBER

This attempt to replicate the exhaust-blown diffuser characteristics involves adding a couple of turning vanes on the upper floor surface to keep the 'seal' inside the rear tyre.



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THIS WEEK IN F1

VAN DER GARDE MAKES CATERHAM BOW

Van der Garde had tough Caterham baptism

GP2 race winner Giedo van der Garde returned to Formula 1 test action at Jerez last week for the first time since November 2008. The Caterham reserve completed 74 laps, which included this trip to the gravel, and set a best time 1.8 seconds slower than the team's fastest driver, Heikki Kovalainen. Van der Garde is a contender to race for the team this year as he has the budget to displace veteran Jarno Trulli from his seat. As AUTOSPORT closed for press, Trulli was set to remain in the car for the first four races at least. Ex-Renault driver Vitaly Petrov also continues to chase the finance required to replace Trulli.

Didier's been a good friend of mine for many years and he's got great experience of my team and the F1 paddock. I thought it would be good to have him just there when I need him. That's generally what he's there for

Lewis Hamilton on Didier Coton, who has joined his management team.

2932

Number of laps completed by 2012-spec cars at last week's Jerez test

PIRELLI TEST CAR PLAN

F1 control-tyre supplier Pirelli has confirmed that it is pushing ahead with plans to acquire a 2010-specification test car for development work. As the teams have failed to come up with an acceptable car, Pirelli is working on its own test deal, which could involve a tie-up with an existing squad.

HRT FAILS TESTS

The new HRT will not make its track debut until the final pre-season test at Barcelona on March 1 at the earliest after failing two of the mandatory FIA crash tests. It failed the rollhoop and lateral nose tests, although it passed 14 others. The nose-test failure means that the car has also yet to pass the front-impact test.

Clos with his 'local' team

CLOS LANDS HRT RESERVE DRIVE

Spaniard Dani Clos has been selected as HRT's reserve driver for 2012. The GP2 race winner is expected to drive in Friday practice sessions for at least half of the grand prix weekends. Clos, 23, tried out with HRT during the Abu Dhabi young-driver test last November.

BIANCHI'S BAD START

New Force India reserve driver Jules Bianchi was apologetic after ruining the team's third day of pre-season testing at Jerez. The Frenchman went off on cold tyres at the Pons left-hander and hit the barrier with his right-rear. "I'm sorry because my mistake has cost the team a lot of time and effort," said Bianchi. Force India was forced to miss the rest of the day waiting for replacement parts to arrive.

Sacre bleu! Bianchi crashed

WILLIAMS GRABS TECH MAN

Ex-Force India chief race engineer Dominic Harlow has joined Williams as senior operations engineer. He had worked for Force India since joining it in its Jordan guise in 2005.

SUTIL APPEALS VERDICT

Former Force India driver Adrian Sutil has appealed against the court verdict that gave him an 18-month suspended sentence and a €200,000 fine for causing bodily harm to Lotus Formula 1 team co-owner Eric Lux in a Shanghai nightclub. German state prosecutors have also appealed the verdict, claiming that the punishment was too lenient.

PICS: GILHAM, THOMPSON/GETTY, STALEY/LAT

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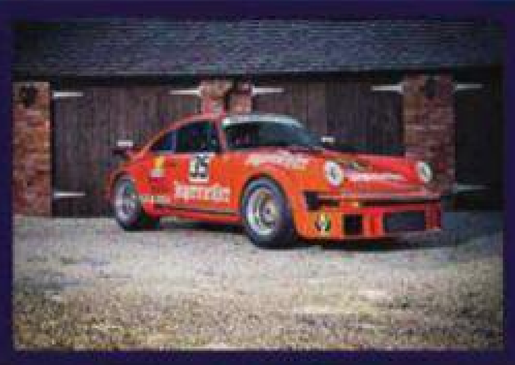

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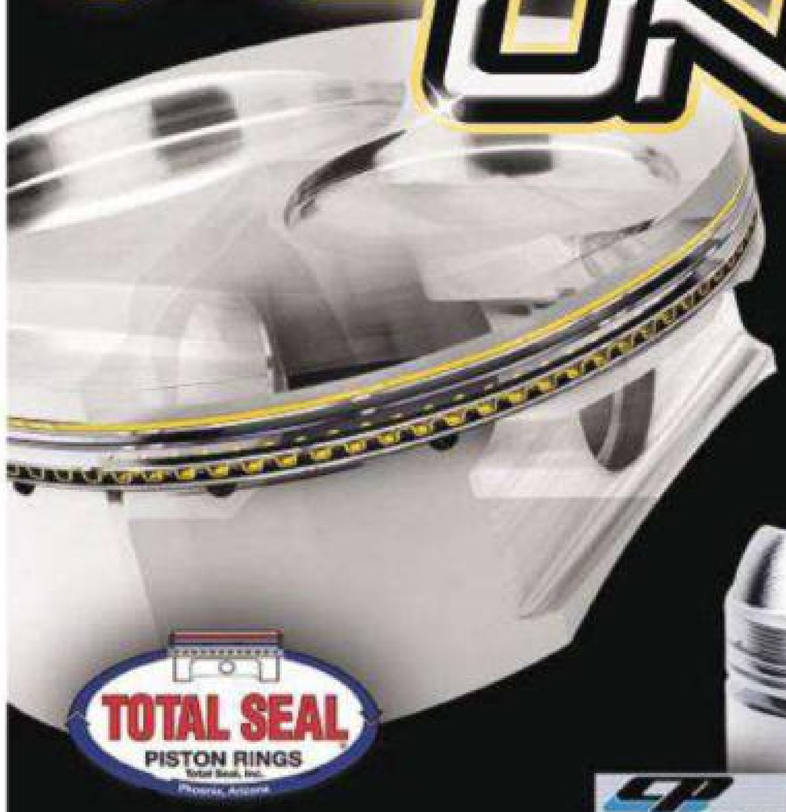

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MPH
Mark Hughes

AUTOSPORT grand prix editor

Romain Grosjean didn't stand a chance in his first stint in Formula 1. That tough baptism could have destroyed his career, but all the signs for his return with Lotus look promising

One of the feel-good stories to have come out of Jerez testing last week was the performance of Romain Grosjean, the smiley, happy, relaxed driver that cuts such a sharp contrast to the preoccupied, under-pressure stand-in of late 2009.

While the definitive competitive picture between the teams is as yet unclear, it would appear that the Lotus E20 is at the very least a nicely balanced car that both Grosjean and Kimi Raikkonen have no qualms about leaning on hard – and that's invariably a good sign.

Grosjean's F1 baptism was tough. At what was then the Renault team, he was thrown in as the sacked Nelson Piquet Jr's replacement for the last seven races of '09 with no testing in a mediocre car and with Fernando Alonso on the other side of the garage. Not only was Grosjean being compared with one of the fastest, most combative drivers of all time, but he was doing it with one hand tied behind his back, coming in cold. Besides, it was only a few races before the team became embroiled in the fallout from 'Singapore-gate', the team principal and director of engineering both falling on their swords with four races still to go, the team in disarray amid the scandal of what had happened around Marina Bay one year earlier. Unsurprisingly, the struggles of a stand-in driver were not top of anyone's priority list.

Grosjean's response was full-on attack. This might have been the only F1 opportunity he was going to get, after all. His natural way with a car was an aggressive one anyway, as even the most casual observation of his GP2 races of the time revealed. In that category he many times made the ballsy overtaking move work for him, even if occasionally it got him into trouble. Translating that approach to his difficult F1 environment, there were predictably quite a few incidents – and so he was simply dismissed by the F1 paddock, a notoriously prejudicial analyst of drivers. But what was being missed, particularly as it was happening way down in the midfield because of the mediocrity of the Renault R29, was that Grosjean was often within a couple of tenths of Alonso. Under the circumstances that was actually very impressive.

I happened to be standing trackside Singapore '09 at the very corner that Piquet had deliberately crashed one year earlier. It was Friday morning practice and my brain couldn't quite believe what my eyes were telling it – that the second Renault had crashed there again. It was like watching a recording of a past incident, but in real time, as if transplanted to an earlier event as an observer. But it wasn't quite the same; Grosjean had the accident that Piquet had been trying to have, hitting the exit barrier with his right-rear tyre whereas Piquet had missed it, spun 180 degrees and hit the opposite barrier side-on. Grosjean got out and was pondering on what the return route to the paddock was. I motioned for him to follow me. We chatted as we walked and he fully understood the irony of where he'd gone off – and also of how it wasn't about to do his cause much good.

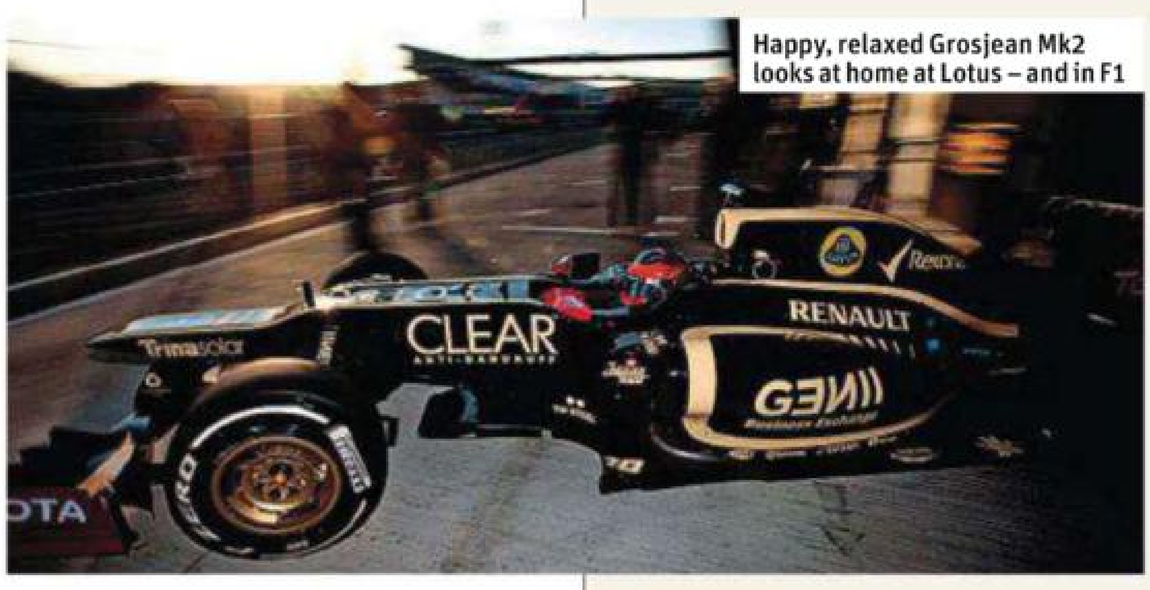
The team wasn't impressed that in the midst of all it was dealing with, Grosjean was repeatedly glazing the brakes, rendering them useless. It was a horrible mismatch of a team with too much on its plate and a driver with too much to prove and not enough time.

But there was hope. His management, Gravity, were the same people who'd subsequently take over the running of the team and ultimately they were to provide him with a more permanent return to the F1 paddock than the one I'd been able to show him.

In not bringing him straight back to F1, but leaving him to ponder on what he may have lost and how his approach could be improved, Eric Boullier played a blinder. A confidence-boosting second attempt at GP2 yielded the '11 title, all the previous speed now welded to a less impulsive attitude. In his extrovert celebrations, as well as his new easy-going manner around the paddock, Grosjean was clearly so much more at ease with himself.

Sometimes second opportunities do come around – and you'd reckon this time he'll be ready.

PIC: FERRARO/LAT



Happy, relaxed Grosjean Mk2 looks at home at Lotus – and in F1

"Grosjean's speed is welded to a less impulsive attitude"

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NASCAR

Schedule was barrier to Raikkonen switch

Finn admits that intensity of NASCAR schedule put him off, but options open for the future

Raikkonen raced Nationwide car

P24 RAIKKONEN INTERVIEW

Formula 1 comeback man Kimi Raikkonen has revealed that he would have switched to NASCAR if the American racing schedule was not so busy.

Raikkonen, the 2007 world champion, made his racing return at Charlotte last May in NASCAR's third-tier Truck Series, in between appearances in his World Rally Championship programme.

After one Truck race the Finn stepped up a level to contest a NASCAR Nationwide Series round. He was offered a multi-million dollar deal to make a full-time switch to US racing for 2012 (AUTOSPORT, April 21 2011) but turned it down because he was not prepared to commit to a full schedule of nearly 40 races per season.

"I had a really good time there," Raikkonen said of his NASCAR exploits. "But the biggest thing is that if you want to do it all the time, you have to move to the US. If there were less races, and you could stay in Europe [between them], then I would probably have done it."

The new Lotus F1 recruit admitted that he would still consider racing regularly in the US in the future, as the level of professionalism in NASCAR impressed him.

"It's a completely different way of doing things," he said. "The teams are very professional and I enjoyed it. It was something that probably in the future would be nice to do again.

"The racing was nice. You don't really think about the fact that you are just doing ovals because you have so many cars to race against. It looks very simple to drive around and be fast, but it's the same as in F1; it's the small details that make a difference. It's so close time-wise that with one tenth [lost] you are 20 places back, so it's still hard to be at the front."

Kimi: travelling to 40 races a bit much

Nissan revealed V8 plans last week

V8 SUPERCARS

Chrysler could follow Nissan to V8s

CHRYSLER HAS ADMITTED THAT it is considering an entry into Australia's V8 Supercars series, just a week after it was announced that Nissan will join the field in 2013.

The championship, which has long been the sole domain of traditional rivals Ford and Holden, has been openly courting new manufacturers to embrace its new Car of the Future regulations, which come into force next year. The new rules emphasise lower costs and a higher proportion of standard equipment.

Chrysler Group Australia managing director Clyde Campbell told *V8X* magazine that the rules made a V8 entry appealing.

"SRT [Chrysler's tuning arm] stands for Street and Race Technology, the 'Race' part of that needs to be borne out, and it needs to be borne out in a category that fits the brands that we are trying to retail," he said.

"The Car of the Future concept looks like it would suit in that regard. We haven't closed the door; it's something we are looking at."

Chrysler's interest is thought to be further piqued by the inclusion of the series' maiden visit to the US on the provisional calendar for 2013 – at the Houston Formula 1 venue.

Nissan confirmed last week that it would enter four works cars in 2013, meaning that Ford and Holden will have an additional rival for the first time in two decades. Current Holden team Kelly Racing will run the cars.

Team owners Rick and Todd Kelly will lead the driver line-up along with Greg Murphy and Karl Reindler.

BTCC

Onslow-Cole relishes WSR return

BRITISH TOURING CAR RACER

Tom Onslow-Cole believes he can challenge for the title this season after rejoining West Surrey Racing to drive a turbocharged BMW.

Onslow-Cole, 24, began his BTCC career with a WSR BMW in 2007, when he notched up the first of his seven victories to date.

He now returns to the squad to join WSR regulars Rob Collard and Nick Foster.

"There are a few new faces, but I know the core of the team and it's fantastic to be back," said Onslow-Cole, who hopes to test before next month's BTCC media day.

"It's the same car I drove in 2007 and, although there have been a lot of upgrades and developments, I'm confident I can do a great job."

The cars will be fitted with new two-litre turbocharged BMW engines prepared by Neil Brown Engineering, the firm behind the 2011 title-winning Honda Civic turbo unit.

Onslow-Cole believes the new engine, combined with a proven chassis, should help the team compete with the array of new NGTC machines.

"We're looking at the championship," he said. "The key will be getting a good start because there will be a lot of new cars at the start of the season. We certainly have the car to be at the front of the grid."

Team boss Dick Bennetts added: "I believe we have a very strong driver line-up for this year. Together, Rob, Nick and Tom make a fantastic team."

Last year Onslow-Cole raced AmD Milltek's VW Golf and an Arena Motorsport-run Ford Focus.

Collard, TO-C and Foster with BMW

AUTOSPORT SAYS...

GLENN FREEMAN
NEWS EDITOR

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Kimi Raikkonen's admission that he seriously considered racing in NASCAR full-time for 2012 is fascinating. Remember, his dalliance with US oval racing came before there was any serious chance of a return to Formula 1, and it was only after reflecting on how much he enjoyed going wheel-to-wheel with other cars that he decided to pursue a return to the pinnacle of the sport.

So it would seem that, had he not been so averse to moving to the US (or competing in a 36-round championship), he could have been vying with Danica Patrick as the biggest story heading into this year's Daytona 500.

The timing of the Finn's admission is bizarre, given that he has spent much of this winter trying to disprove theories that he lacks motivation. But it's amusing because the fact that there were too many races fits the 'lazy-Raikkonen' stereotype so well.

One man who can never have his desire called into question is Rubens Barrichello, and over the next page you'll read that his IndyCar deal has come back from the brink after hitting a few snags. Was it really ever in doubt, or just a clever ploy to get a few more *reais* out of Brazilian sponsors?

Barrichello: got any money?

IN BRIEF

BMW's Post haste

MEIRA QUITS INDYCAR

Brazilian IndyCar regular Vitor Meira will return home to race in V8 Stock Cars with the Pro GP Team this season.

JUNCADELLA STAYS PUT

Macau Grand Prix winner Daniel Juncadella will remain with Prema Powerteam for a third year in the Formula 3 Euro Series. He will be joined by American Michael Lewis and Sven Muller, who move up from Italian F3 and ADAC Formel Masters. Another Formel Masters racer, Lucas Wolf, will drive with URD Rennsport.

MORE DTM WARPAINT

BMW has revealed another of its liveries for its DTM return. The yellow paint scheme of Deutsche Post will be run by all three of the series' manufacturers.

BIANCHI'S FR3.5 SWITCH

Force India Formula 1 test driver Jules Bianchi will switch from GP2 to Formula Renault 3.5 for 2012. The Ferrari protege will race for Tech 1 Racing alongside Estonian ace Kevin Korjus.

MILWAUKEE RETURNS

Milwaukee has been reinstated to the IndyCar Series calendar after initially being dropped for 2012. A marketing company headed by team owner Michael Andretti will promote the event, which will be held on June 16.

Premat in a Holden

GP2

Merhi has been linked to DTM ride

Merhi turns down GP2 seat

FORMULA 3 EURO SERIES CHAMPION

Roberto Merhi is unlikely to graduate to GP2 this year after turning down an offer to join leading squad Racing Engineering.

Merhi, 20, was offered a cut-price deal to partner Fabio Leimer, who was signed last week after winning the non-championship GP2 Final event with the Spanish team in 2011. But the Spaniard told AUTOSPORT that budgetary issues have prevented him taking up the drive.

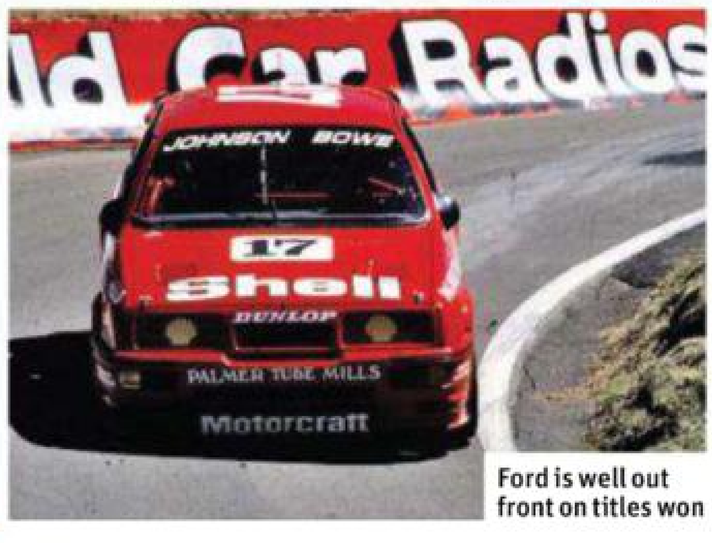
"The offer was very good," he said. "But even then I still have to find a million euros."

Merhi has been linked to a race drive with Mercedes in the DTM this year, and would most likely line up alongside Susie Wolff (nee Stoddart) at Persson Motorsport.

ROLL OF HONOUR

For the first time in two decades, Ford and Holden will have a rival in V8 Supercars next year. But in the pre-V8 era, other manufacturers were commonplace. Here are the ATCC title-winners since 1960:

Ford (23) • Holden (16) • Jaguar (4) • Nissan (3) • Chevrolet (2) • BMW (2) • Mazda (1) • Volvo (1)



Ford is well out front on titles won

Stanraman.com

PICS: LESLEY ANN MILLER, LEVITT, FERRARO, GIBSON/LAT, CIANFLONE/GETTY

autosport.com

ALMS

NEW HPD LMP1 BREAKS COVER

The HPD ARX-03a LMP1 car made its debut in the hands of the Muscle Milk squad in last week's American Le Mans Series test at Sebring. Lucas Luhr, who will share the car with Klaus Graf and Simon Pagenaud in the Sebring 12 Hours, topped the times on a 1m48.192s.

INDYCAR

Rubens inches closer to KV deal

F1 veteran to get second IndyCar test at Sears Point as team boss pulls out stops to get things finalised

Formula 1 refugee Rubens Barrichello and KV Racing are closing in on a deal to secure his switch to IndyCar this year.

The veteran of 19 seasons in Formula 1, who was overlooked by Williams for 2012 in favour of Bruno Senna, has admitted his interest in switching to IndyCar this year after spending three days testing with KV at Sebring a fortnight ago. Barrichello is scheduled to spend a further two days in the car at Sears Point on February 25-26, and KV Racing general manager Mark Johnson told speed.com that the team was inching closer to getting things finalised.

Barrichello with old pal Kanaan

"I think we're just a whisker away from making it happen," he said. "It's not there yet, [but] we can see the finish line and now we just need a few final things to take place."

Johnson's optimism comes just days after Barrichello reported that his deal was dependant upon the team finding additional funding.

"The car was available for someone who arrived with the cash to race," said Barrichello. "Fortunately, the situation is different with me – everybody is in a hurry to try to find the money. There are still minor details that need to be resolved."

Barrichello also appears to have softened his stance on oval racing. Initially, concerns about the safety of ovals – particularly from his family – had led him to insist that he'd only compete on the road and street courses, and possibly the Indy 500. But the 39-year-old now admits that he's tempted by the thought of contesting the entire season.

"The possibility [of doing only road and street courses] still exists," he said. "But I don't think I would feel good to be back in Brazil watching these [oval] races from TV. I would feel better being there, taking the risk and having fun."

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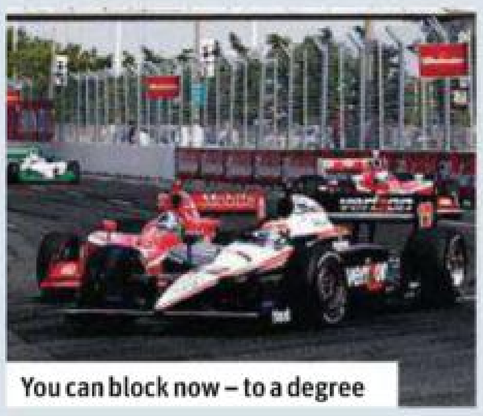
MIS MOTORSPORT

INDYCAR

IndyCar relaxes rules on blocking


You can block now – to a degree

NEW INDYCAR RACE DIRECTOR
Beaux Barfield has pledged to introduce a new interpretation of the controversial blocking rule for the 2012 season, although the actual wording of the regulation will stay the same.

Barfield's predecessor Brian Barnhart was frequently criticised for a 'heavy-handed' interpretation that led to drivers being penalised for merely defending their line.

Barfield, who was charged with reviewing the entire rulebook during the winter, said that he was satisfied with the rule itself, but recognised that it needs to be applied differently.

"A basis for the strong stance on blocking was that our cars have become notorious for being difficult to pass, so a little bit of defensive manoeuvring leads to processional races," he said.

"My opinion is that it is dealt with better technologically, not in how a driver intuitively tends to drive or behave on the track.

"That doesn't mean I'm going to allow dangerous weaving. I'll deal with that, but the defensive moves people are more accustomed to are being restored."

INDYCAR

Herta rage over lack of dollars

INDY 500 WINNING-TEAM OWNER
Bryan Herta has declared himself shocked not to have been allocated one of the two Leaders' Circle franchises for the 2012 season.

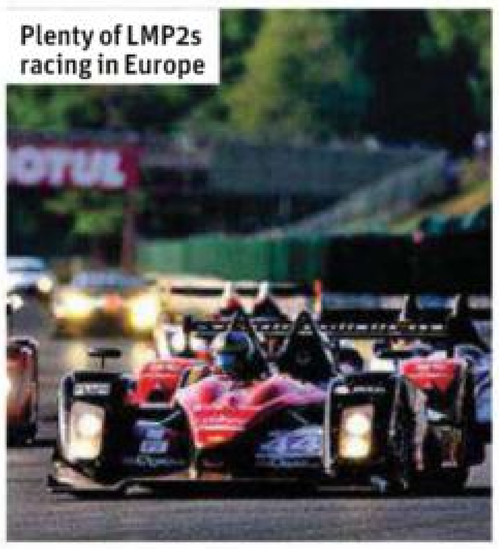
The series pays just over $1.1m for each car that finishes in the top 20 of the previous season's IndyCar points, and the closure of Newman/Haas Racing meant that two additional contracts were available.

Ed Carpenter Racing and Dragon Racing were selected from the seven bidders last week, and Herta – whose team was charged with the initial development work on the DW12 chassis – said that he was stunned at having been overlooked.

"It's a travesty," he told speed.com. "I'm always told the Indy 500 is the most important race in the world."

ELMS

Strong prototype entry in ELMS


Plenty of LMP2s racing in Europe

EUROPEAN LE MANS SERIES BOSS
Patrick Peter says he is satisfied with the 13-car entry in the premier LMP2 division in 2012.

The ELMS, formerly known as the Le Mans Series, has ditched LMP1 machinery in the wake of the creation of the World Endurance Championship. It has exceeded Peter's pre-season target of 12 P2 entries for its relaunch season.

"Together with the LMPC cars, we expect to have 20 prototypes, perhaps more," he said. "That is a good result. We have good teams with good drivers."

Reigning LMP2 champion team Greaves Motorsport heads the entry with a Zytek-Nissan Z11SN. GP3 team Status GP has firmed up its expansion into sportscars with an entry for its Lola-Judd/BMW.

Peter is expecting the seven-car entry across the GTE classes to be bolstered by a minimum of five race-by-race cars per round.

IN BRIEF

LYNN TO EURO F3 OPEN
Reigning Formula Renault UK champion Alex Lynn will contest the European F3 Open Winter Series, with races at Algarve and Paul Ricard. Lynn, who will race with British squad Team West-Tec, is gearing up for his rookie British F3 season with Fortec Motorsports.

SARRAZIN JOINS STARWORKS
Former Peugeot LMP1 driver Stephane Sarrazin has been picked up by the US Starworks squad for this year's FIA World Endurance Championship. The Frenchman will share the team's LMP2 HPD ARX-03b with Scot Ryan Dalziel and Venezuelan Enzo Potolicchio.

PESCAROLO OK FOR SEBRING
The Pescarolo team has been given clearance to run its 2011-spec Judd V10-powered Pescarolo 01 in the opening round of the WEC at Sebring next month. The team's new Pescarolo 03, based on the Aston Martin AMR-One monocoque, will not be ready until Spa in May.

LOTUS GERMAN F3 TIE-IN
Motopark Academy's German F3 squad will run under the Team Lotus banner this year after tying up a deal with the legendary constructor. The four Dallara-Volkswagens will be used to 'training a young driver squad'.

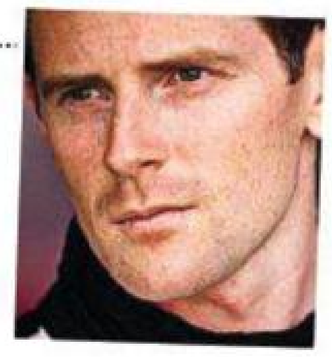
HEXIS TESTS McLAREN
The Hexis Racing team put the first of the McLaren MP4-12C GT3s it will race in this year's FIA GT1 World Championship through its paces at its home circuit at Ledenon last week. Frederic Makowiecki and Stef Dusseldorp drove.

McLaren on track at Ledenon

60 SECONDS WITH

ANTHONY DAVIDSON

Toyota driver



Anthony Davidson talks about his deal to race for Toyota in this year's Le Mans 24 Hours, which was revealed by AUTOSPORT last week.

How soon were you contacted by Toyota after Peugeot's withdrawal?
Quite soon. I have a relationship with Toyota Motorsport GmbH technical director Pascal Vasselon from my testing days at BAR and Honda [when Vasselon was at Michelin]. We gelled together back then, so when the Peugeot news broke it was nice to talk again.

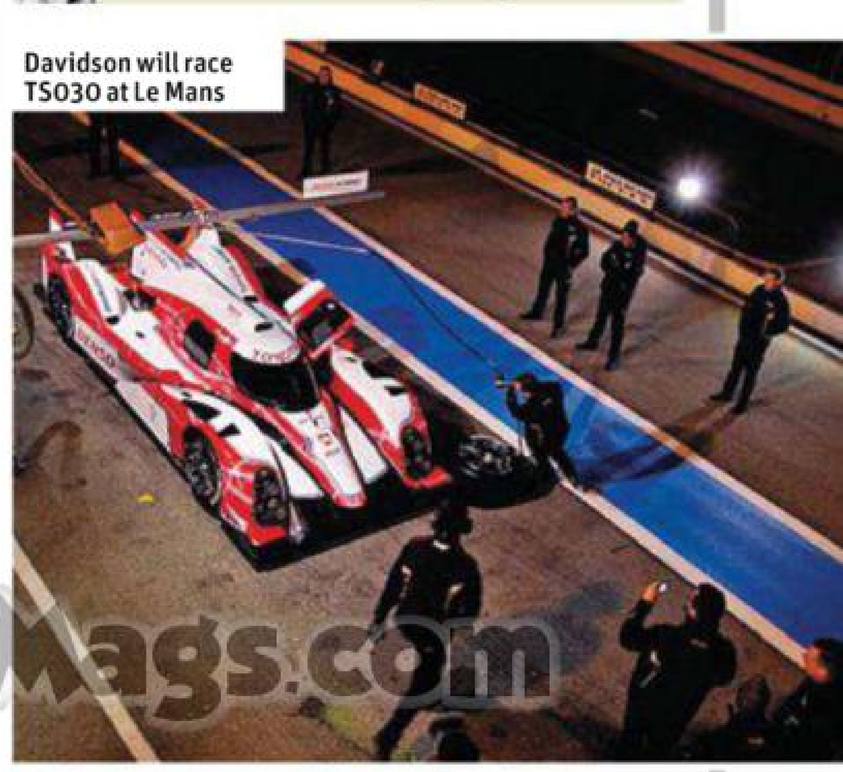
What does it mean to land this opportunity?
This year has been an emotional rollercoaster, and I haven't even turned a wheel yet. I may have been given only one race, but at least it's the race that I have dedicated the rest of my racing career to winning. I believe that being with a manufacturer as strong as Toyota gives me the best possible chance.

Do you think you can achieve that in 2012?
Having looked at the TS030 HYBRID, the technology is right up there with anything I've seen on any racing car. I don't see any reason why we can't be fast enough, but it's still early days for Toyota.

Will you be racing a Toyota full-time in 2013?
Even though it's just one race for now, you never know where it will lead. There's a beautiful saying that goes, 'take care of the present and the future will take care of itself'.

Do you expect to race anything else this year?
I don't know because the Toyota news is so recent. I'd like to do as much racing as possible because it's important for a driver to stay sharp, to keep match fit if you like. I guess we will talk about it as it comes up.

Anthony Davidson was talking to AUTOSPORT's International editor-at-large **Gary Watkins**


Davidson will race TS030 at Le Mans

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WRC

One month to rescue the WRC

Commission president says next few weeks are sport's 'most important month – in history'. By DAVID EVANS

The coming month is the most important in the history of the World Rally Championship and will shape the future of the series, according to WRC Commission president Jarmo Mahonen.

Speaking exclusively to AUTOSPORT and breaking his legally-enforced silence since the loss of WRC promoter North One Sport, Mahonen said he had the utmost confidence in the future of the championship, which has been beleagured by problems since the end of last year.

Mahonen: wants a new start

In the wake of the failed negotiations for TV network Eurosport to promote the championship, the FIA has called for expressions of interest from other parties to step into the breach.

It is this process, which concludes with the selection of one or more candidates on March 30, that Mahonen says offers a major opportunity in the sport.

"There has never been a more important month for this championship, not in all its history," said Mahonen. "The whole situation today, I see as a chance to create something new. I see it as a way to wake the sleeping giant.

"The senior management of the FIA sees this as an opportunity for the championship and for the FIA. This gives us the chance to produce something new and sustainable.

"We are not going to make hasty decisions. We want to be doctors, not nurses: we want to cure the disease. Now is the time to look at this from a clean sheet of paper."

That extends to every aspect of North One Sport's former involvement, including existing contracts for all 13 rounds of the championship. "There is nothing," said Mahonen. "Nobody has the contract."

The Finn intends to use the WRC's fresh start to produce a "10 to 13-round" 2013 calendar in time for May's WRC Commission meeting, and then a proposal to the FIA World Council the following month.

In keeping with FIA president Jean Todt's desire to reinstate some of the WRC's former global appeal, one or both of this year's candidate events in South Africa and Russia could appear on the calendar. But they would be provisional until the 2012 'trial-run' rallies have been held.

Todt is known to have met with officials from the Qatari investment bank that came close to agreeing a deal to buy NOS late last year.

On that subject, Mahonen said: "I think we have to keep talking with all the interested parties. Let's see what happens – all the doors are open and the windows as well.

"We have to do the best for the sport, while remembering that this sport cannot be bought. If somebody comes with a lot of money to buy the rights, they have to show the right plan for the promotion. Otherwise we could make a huge mistake."

RALLY GB

Gravel rally rule ruins Great Orme asphalt fun

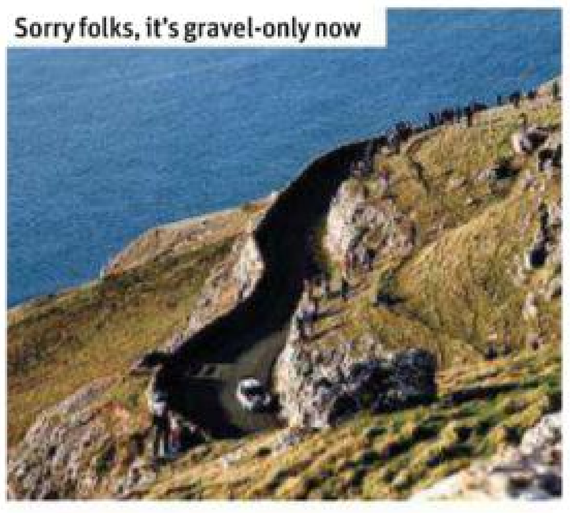
THE POPULAR GREAT ORME STAGE WILL not be included in the route for this year's Rally GB following regulation changes to the World Rally Championship.

Gravel rallies can no longer include stand-alone asphalt tests, which precludes the well-known headland test that opened Britain's WRC round last year. The September event will retain the Conwy Castle ceremonial start, but there will be no competitive action in North Wales.

Another major change to the route is the loss of service in Builth Wells, with the Royal Welsh Showground being used for a sheep sale on the same weekend. Newtown is believed to be a potential remote service venue for the two mid-Welsh days of the event, while main service will return south.

This will not necessarily be Cardiff, and a variety of venues close to the M4 are being examined. Manufacturers described the Millennium Centre, used in 2010, as the perfect location, but there are concerns the whole service park cannot be included.

Sorry folks, it's gravel-only now



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WRC

Qualifying system to be reviewed

THE FUTURE OF THE WORLD RALLY Championship qualifying stage will remain under review amid fears for competition in the series.

The qualifying stage was used for the first time on last week's Rally Sweden and will remain in use on all loose-surface rounds this year. But WRC Commission president Jarmo Mahonen remains unconvinced of the merits of the system.

After becoming the inaugural winner of a qualifying stage, Ford driver Jari-Matti Latvala was allowed to select his preferred position in the running order on the opening day of the event.

The extension of this new-for-2012 regulation is that the classification of the top drivers is reversed for days two and three, so that the slowest World Rally Cars 'sweep' the stages for the fastest.

Mahonen said: "When the cars are in the reverse order, so the gaps can get bigger and bigger and this is not in the interest of the championship.

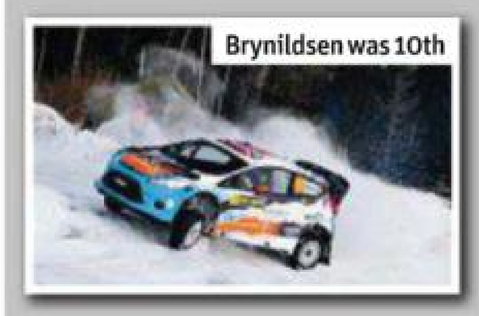
"Yes, it's fair from a sporting point of view, but I am still a little confused about why we always give the best places to the best drivers. Absolutely, this will be under review this year."

Ford driver Petter Solberg said: "I think it's great for the media. It was something that got everybody – all the fans – excited and got everybody talking about the event before the start. I think it's a very good idea."

Ford director of motorsport Gerard Quinn added: "Qualifying added an intriguing tactical element to the mix. It made for plenty of excitement on Thursday night, and in situations like that it gives scope to try a variety of different strategies."

Latvala claimed WRC's first 'pole'

IN BRIEF



Brynildsen was 10th

BRYNILDSEN WANTS MORE

Norwegian Eyvind Brynildsen is hoping to contest further rounds of the World Rally Championship with the Adapta World Rally Team. Brynildsen used compatriot Mads Ostberg's 2011 Ford Fiesta RS WRC to finish 10th on last week's Rally Sweden. Adapta team principal Morten Ostberg said: "We're looking at an asphalt rally and Rally Finland. We're really pleased with the way he's driven here and we are looking forward to working with him again."

KETOMAA TO ARGENTINA

DMACK-backed Jari Ketomaa will swap the Acropolis Rally for Rally Argentina as part of the Chinese tyre firm's development programme. The Finn has never competed on the South American event in the past, but hopes the data gathered will help with the development of a new construction for his home rally.

McRAE DITCHES IT

Reigning Asia-Pacific Rally champion Alister McRae's first WRC outing in five years ended with seventh place in SWRC on Rally Sweden. The Scot put his Proton Satria-Neo S2000 in a ditch on Friday and Saturday. "It was good to be back," he said, "but I don't think that was my rally!" McRae will now focus on the defence of his Asia-Pacific title, starting with the Rally of Whangarei in New Zealand next month.

PADDON FINDS IT TOUGH

PWRC champion Hayden Paddon admitted Rally Sweden was the toughest of his career, adapting to his new Skoda Fabia S2000 while driving on snow for the first time. Paddon, fourth in Sweden, will have a two-day gravel test in Spain before his next rally in Portugal.

ITALY'S ISLAND SWAP?

This year's Rally d'Italia (October 18-21) is expected to return to Sardinia instead of going to Sicily. A formal announcement is planned in the next couple of weeks.

CRONIN IN A TWINGO

Two-time British Rally champion Keith Cronin will return to the series in a Renault Twingo R1. The Irish driver, champion in 2009 and '10, will be co-driven by Seb Marshall.

HUNT BLOODS HIS FIESTA

Londoner Harry Hunt made his competitive debut in a Ford Fiesta S2000 on last Saturday's Wyedean Rally, but his former Monte Carlo-winning car suffered alternator failure at final service. Charlie Payne won in a Ford Focus RS WRC.

WRC

VW Polo hits test stage with Ogier

VOLKSWAGEN'S POLO R WRC HAD ITS first proper runout on Monday in Norway, driven by ex-Citroen star Sebastien Ogier and chief test driver Dieter Depping.

The Polo, VW's first World Rally Car contender, turned a wheel for the first time at the firm's private test track in Germany last month – but this week was its first time driven in anger in snow.

Ogier, who drove the car briefly last month, said: "This is a very exciting week – it's what we have been waiting for. The rollout was nothing really, just driving, but this test is going to tell us something. And we have to work quickly: we have a lot to do; we will be competing in just one year."

VW will not be testing on any of the stages used on Rally Sweden, but it will take its Skoda Fabia S2000 for comparison. VW ran Reiger suspension on its Skodas in Sweden, providing data to test against the Sachs units that will be fitted to the Polo.

Ogier rallied Skoda in Sweden

AUTOSPORT SAYS...

DAVID EVANS
RALLIES EDITOR
david.evans
@haymarket.com

We've turned a corner. In fact, we've turned plenty of corners.

The hope of a Eurosport deal to save the World Rally Championship on the opening round in Monte Carlo turned to despair a week or so later, but in Sweden there was a genuine feeling of optimism. And normality.

Computers were switched on and split times delivered. And then we knew when, why and for how long people had stopped in stages. No longer were the crews risking their necks in a GSM void caused by too many spectators facetweetbooking. Stage 1 Technology was back, the repeater plane was flying and big brother was sitting firmly on the shoulder of every car again. The sport owes a big thank you to S1T's Simon de Banke, a man who has kept the best intentions of the WRC at the forefront of his mind.

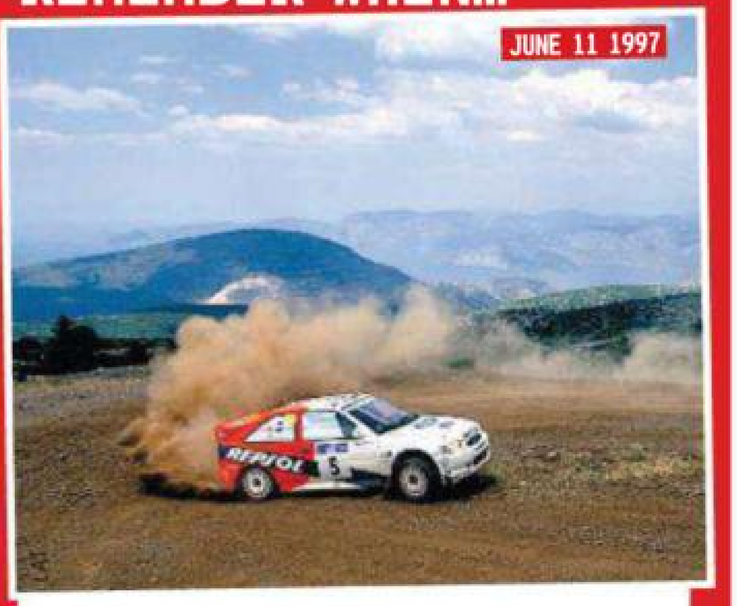
Unlike a few others we could mention.

Without reproach is Jarmo Mahonen. The WRC president's mind has been crammed with the championship and its madness for far too long now and it was very good – and reassuring – to see him in Sweden.

As detailed in the main story (far left), Mahonen's the man for putting the WRC back on track. And amid the politics, the sport delivered another brilliant rally in Sweden.

S1T's modern timing is back

REMEMBER WHEN...



JUNE 11 1997

...M-Sport's first Ford WRC victory?

Forty-nine wins before Jari-Matti Latvala's Swedish success last week, Carlos Sainz took the maiden win for the M-Sport/Ford partnership on the 1997 Acropolis Rally.

PICS: McKLEIN.DE

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Jerez, 10.56am, first day in Lotus E20: Raikkonen is on it

PICS: FERRARO/LAT, THOMPSON/GETTY

"PEOPLE WHO WRITE ME OFF DON'T EVEN KNOW ME"

Kimi Raikkonen's F1 return has caused fierce debate. *EDD STRAW* talks to him to find out just why he's back and what he thinks he can achieve

What brings Kimi Raikkonen back to Formula 1? At the most fundamental level, sure, we can accept his assertion that after a couple of years in rallying he realised that he missed the thrill of wheel-to-wheel racing. From there, it's hardly a giant conceptual leap to conclude that he would want to get back into grand prix racing.

But it's unlikely to be as simple as that. After all, this is a guy who turned his back on the sport at the end of 2009 and who, for whatever reason, failed to close a McLaren deal for '10 that would have allowed him to continue to win races. This is also someone for whom opportunities in rallying rapidly dried up – last year he had to sink a substantial sum of his own money into a World Rally Championship campaign that showed him to be sporadically quick, but ultimately not as good on the stage as he is on the racetrack.

Any number of forces could be at play in his decision. Only two years out of F1, it's clear that his residual value as the 2007 world champion had faded to the point where it couldn't sustain his WRC adventure. From there, it's a straightforward conclusion that perhaps money was one of the driving forces for his switch, even though his Lotus retainer of a few million is paltry compared to the days when he was earning a reputed £20 million, even once you factor in the healthy results-based bonuses on offer.

His statement of missing the thrill of racing an F1 car is a worthier ▶

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reason to return, and the fact that he seriously contemplated a switch to Williams, a team that could neither offer him the pay packet nor the machinery he was once accustomed to, means that this claim also holds a good deal of water. This is doubly convincing when you bear in mind that it only took a couple of weeks for his deal to join Lotus to come together once the Williams discussions had fallen apart.

Of course, regardless of the initial motivation, such is the myth in which Raikkonen is shrouded that there are all sorts of questions about whether his desire to do the job will wane once the novelty of being back in F1 has worn off. But the Finn, who at 32 still has plenty of life left in him as an F1 driver, insists that he doesn't need to be in F1 for the cash. What's more, he torpedoed the suggestion that there is, or might ever have been, a question mark over his motivation.

"Probably you do want to get a certain amount of money out of it, but I don't need to do it [for that]," he says. "The racing is the main thing.

"There has always been talk about the motivation, but the people who write it don't even know me. There's always shit going on and I don't mind if people want to write it. What can I do? I would have stopped if I felt that I didn't have the motivation. The problem is not motivation if the car is shit – you just drive your best and don't get good results. It's not always the driver's fault, but it's easier to blame the guy who is in the car. My feeling was that I drove one of my best years [in 2009 with Ferrari] so I was very happy with that.

"Whatever happened, I don't mind. That's F1. But I never had any issues with motivation."

> "My feeling was that I drove one of my best years in 2009, so I was very happy with that"

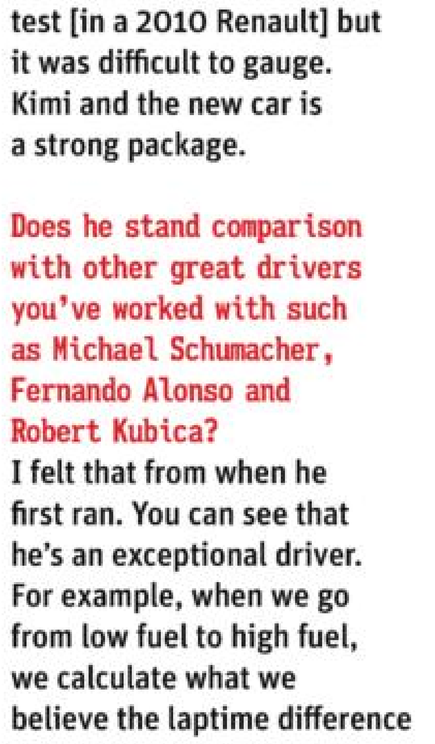
That's as may be, but coming from the same person who told AUTOSPORT last year that his reasoning for not going to Rally Australia was "it's that far away and I don't like to travel so much now", and who frustrated his co-driver by not spending an intensive week or two to nail the all-important pacenote systems, it's not completely convincing. Yet none of that means that he isn't fully committed to his F1 comeback. In fact, perhaps the question isn't so much of motivation, as his desire to focus only on the areas of the job that he believes are completely necessary. It was this that caused some of the problems that he had at Ferrari.

It's a case of so far so good, as he was immediately quick when strapped into a 2010-specification Renault at Valencia last month. Last week he was on the attack from the off at the Jerez test in a new Lotus E20 that looks very promising, and impressed the team with his method.

Lotus has taken a pragmatic approach to getting the best out of him. With only 12 days of pre-season testing to share between its drivers, plus three days at Mugello in May, there is little running outside of grand prix weekends. Just as McLaren recognised, in a way that Ferrari never did, to get the best out of Raikkonen you need to give him space. Outside of grand prix weekends and tests, his time will largely be his own. Lotus doesn't need 365 days of intensity from Raikkonen – it needs fewer than 100. ▶

Q&A

ALAN PERMANE
LOTUS TRACKSIDE OPERATIONS DIRECTOR



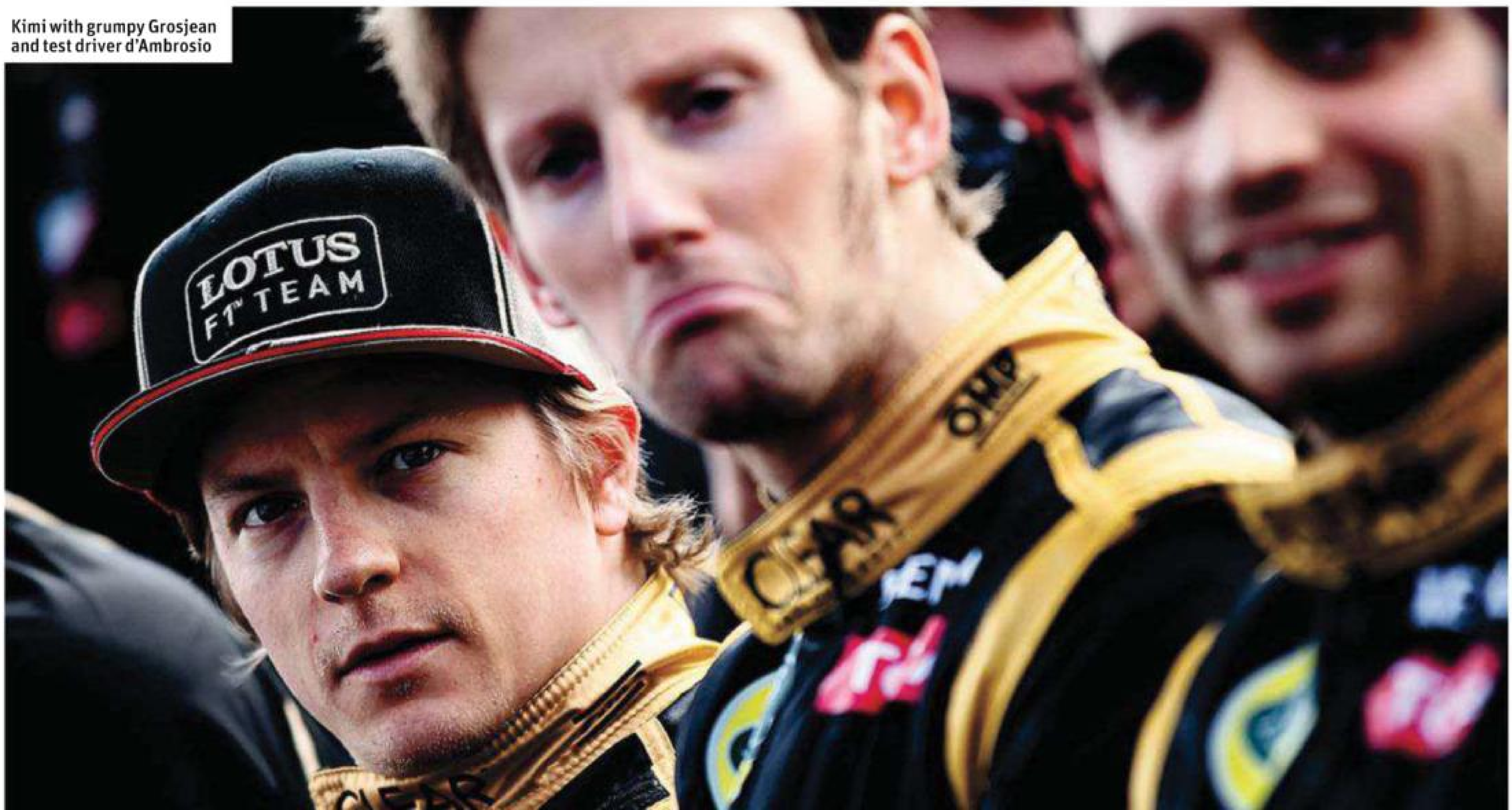
Has Kimi filled the gap left by Robert Kubica at the team?
It's early days. What we can say is that he has fitted in extremely well. One area where he is incredibly strong is his consistency on long runs. You can tell from that how good the driver is going to be, not just from outright pace but how he holds that pace. Often you see drivers do a fast lap, a slow lap and make mistakes on long runs, but not Kimi.

So you need leadership from Kimi?
Drivers don't lead the team. He doesn't need to stand on a pedestal and tell us how to do our jobs. The sense of confidence is where the leadership comes from and he will get that respect and trust because we can see that he knows what he's doing.

He doesn't have a great reputation technically, but it seems that you've not seen any weakness in that area...
His feedback is excellent. His knowledge of different engine maps and differential maps is excellent. I see no reason to say that he isn't a good development driver.

So you are completely confident that the speed is there?
I was reasonably comfortable with that after the Valencia test [in a 2010 Renault] but it was difficult to gauge. Kimi and the new car is a strong package.

Does he stand comparison with other great drivers you've worked with such as Michael Schumacher, Fernando Alonso and Robert Kubica?
I felt that from when he first ran. You can see that he's an exceptional driver. For example, when we go from low fuel to high fuel, we calculate what we believe the laptime difference should be and every time he hits it on his first lap. A lesser driver takes time to feel that.



Kimi with grumpy Grosjean and test driver d'Ambrosio

PICS: THOMPSON/GETTY, FERRARO/LAT

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Raikkonen's final GP to date: Abu Dhabi 2009

◄ It would be wrong to say that F1 has changed beyond all recognition since Raikkonen was last here; after all, the in-season test ban was first introduced in 2009. But perhaps his tolerance for goings-on when not in the cockpit will have been reconstituted by a couple of years away.

"I don't think F1 has changed a lot at all," he says. "I like to race and that's why I came to F1. All the rest is something that is part of F1 but it's not the main thing. There is not much testing now, but when you do many days in a row at some places it's not always the most fun thing.

"It's nice to do different things [outside F1 over the past two years], but I don't think it's going to change anything. It was nice to be out for all of that time and probably you can take the bullshit more again!"

If keeping Raikkonen insulated from as much bullshit as possible is what it takes to harness his ability at Lotus, then that is what will happen. So far, those in the team have been impressed with his attitude and seen none of the signs of a driver who doesn't have the spirit for the fight or who lacks any of the focus needed to deliver. Team principal Eric Boullier admits that there was an element of risk inherent in signing him, but underlines that this was based upon him being out of F1 for two years rather than any fears over his dedication.

"Of course," says Boullier when asked if it was a gamble. "He was out of F1 for two years. When any sportsman stops training, he loses a bit of his natural level and it takes time to recover. But Kimi has shown that he hasn't lost much and maybe hasn't lost any at all. Now it's just a question of how he handles the whole race weekend."

Most impressive about his testing exploits was not his outright speed – this is, after all, someone who was very fast when he first stepped into an F1 car fresh out of racing in Formula Renault. What really caught the eye was his consistency and the ability to turn the right lap times for the relevant fuel load. This, more than any single-lap pace, was inevitably what impressed the team most. He certainly did not appear to be a driver far away from race fitness, as technical director James Allison explains.

"Kimi was doing the business pretty much from lap one and he put a lot of laps in," says Allison. "We did much more than a grand prix distance on both days and he looked as fresh as a daisy. Particularly on the longer runs, he doesn't miss a beat.

> "It was nice to be out for all of that time and probably I can take the bullshit more again!"

Inevitably, the sterner tests are to come, and at the moment the Raikkonen/Lotus relationship is in the honeymoon phase. He has shown his world championship pedigree already, but there are question marks about how he will respond when the inevitable bad times come. The car looked good at last week's Jerez test, but it's unlikely to be a championship contender and it's likely that he will spend much of the season fighting for points, possibly podiums and, if things go remarkably well, the odd win.

But Raikkonen has a decent response to this. He argues, with some justification, that his Ferrari campaign in 2009 proved that he has the fighting spirit to get the results even when the

PICS: GILHAM, THOMPSON/GETTY

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car isn't good enough. While it is perhaps stretching a point to claim that it was his best season, he certainly turned in enough very strong drives in a difficult car, particularly in the second half of the season, to show that he can get what he needs out of fighting for fifth.

"The last Ferrari I drove wasn't always at the front and I had some pretty good races," he says. "I won't give up if I'm, say, eighth. As long as I know that I am giving 100 per cent, I am happy with my driving. If it's not enough [to win], it doesn't matter.

"Of course, you want to win the championship, but it doesn't really change my life. It's more that it changes the way people look at you or think about you. I'm happy just to achieve something. If I can win more races in the future that's a good thing, but it's not something in my head that I have to do. If it doesn't happen, it doesn't happen."

It remains to be seen exactly how the Raikkonen/Lotus relationship turns out. Whatever happens, the Finn's first objective will be to prove that the searing speed and capacity for incredible performances can still be accessed, and on a consistent basis. If he can do that, it will be good news for his team, even if the car isn't quite up to winning races.

And it could be a win-win situation for Raikkonen. Even if Lotus does not give him good enough machinery to keep him next year (and sources indicate that his 2013 contract is dependent on him finishing in the top eight of the drivers' championship), if he excels in a mediocre car then any number of teams would be interested in his services.

Comebacks rarely work in F1. But Raikkonen is young enough, and good enough, to make a success of this. Few doubt that he still has grand prix wins in him and a second championship is far from impossible. He may not acknowledge any flaws in his previous approach, but some close to him say he understands exactly why the question marks over his focus and attitude came up last time around and has adjusted the way he works accordingly. If so, his 'first' F1 career might just have been the prelude to his greatest successes.

If that's the case, it's very good news both for Raikkonen and for the whole of Formula 1.

Mark Hughes

GRAND PRIX EDITOR ON KIMI'S 'FIRST' F1 CAREER

There were three Kimi Raikkonens. First there was the young kid bursting with talent and in-car effervescence that just drove the wheels off the Sauber in 2001 and early into his McLaren career. That Kimi would jump kerbs, flick and catch the car and be visibly full-attack everywhere.

Then there was the mid-to-late McLaren Raikkonen, when he started getting a fuller understanding of the many facets behind race-winning performances, where his sublime talent was less in your face, but still very much there. He became laser-target precise without giving up anything in corner-entry attack. He would commit to using every last millimetre of track and was able to do so because of his wonderfully natural feel for a racecar. He was never a thrusting guy behind the scenes, never one to work too hard, but at McLaren there was a system in place that could use Kimi, squeeze out what was needed from him and then let him do his stuff.

When Ferrari employed him we got the third Raikkonen.

"At McLaren there was a system to use Kimi, squeeze out what was needed"

This was the guy who could still be devastatingly fast, but not every time, who failed to ignite a team waiting to be led, who could not establish clear leadership over Felipe Massa. He liked the easier-going surface of the team, but the team in turn was waiting for direction. The 2009 car was evolving ever further away from his driving preferences – strong front end, quick and precise direction change – and more towards Massa's. He told them – but only once.

Then Felipe had his accident and Kimi – the driver Ferrari was paying off a year early – became the sole focus for the last few races. "What do you need from the car?" they implored. He told them, and it worked and for those last few races he was consistently superb. "Why didn't you tell us before?" they asked. "I did," he shrugged.

Early 'effervescent' Kimi, Suzuka 2003

The greatest driver you've probably never heard of

In just a handful of outings, Frenchman Georges Boillot stunned the grand prix world with inferior Peugeot equipment. *MARK HUGHES* charts the history of an extraordinary and short-lived talent cut down by the First World War

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Boillot's GP Peugeot on parade for '14 Lyon GP

Georges Boillot's career encompassed only six big-time races between 1912 and 1914, but in that time he lit up the sport like no other had ever done, inspiring all of sporting France with his audacious, attacking style and bewitching the sport itself.

Every time he climbed aboard his GP Peugeot he added lustre to his legend, shooting for the moon and defying the odds with a skill matched only by his total self-belief. He loved to play to the gallery, but he was much more than just a super-fast natural showman – he was also one of the prime-movers in the creation of the revolutionary line of cars in which he carved his legend.

How good was he? He won his very first grand prix – and his second. He shattered the lap record on his first visit to the Indy 500 and only lost the race to tyre failure when running where he always ran, out front where the air was clean with the rest trailing in his wake. Of the six major races he contested, he won three of them, retired after dominating the others. Bear in mind that at the time there were only two or three major races each year and that winning 'The Grand Prix', as the pre-eminent French GP was then known, was akin to winning the world championship today.

Yes, the GP Peugeots he'd helped create, with their double-overhead cams and four valves per cylinder were often the best cars. But in his first and his final grand prix he faced cars – the Fiat and Mercedes respectively – that were probably faster and he delivered performances beyond the machinery's capability. He also had alongside him in the other Peugeot his friend Jules Goux – an Indy 500 and future multiple GP winner. Terrific driver though Goux evidently was, he invariably failed to get within sniffing distance of the great Boillot who was simply extraordinary.

> "Boillot's 1910 Targa Florio victory would be the only time a voiturette would achieve this feat"

Don't think there was no depth of competition in those days, either. The 1914 French Grand Prix, for example, mustered an entry that would make Bernie Ecclestone salivate – major factory teams from virtually the whole European car industry, three or four cars per team. Opposing Peugeot were Mercedes, Fiat, Sunbeam, Delage, Opel and Vauxhall, not to mention a half-dozen smaller manufacturers. This was the white-hot crucible where new automotive technology was forged, where money was no object and where the top drivers were put to dangerous work carving out manufacturers' reputations. Boillot prevailed against a very great depth of talent.

He'd started out a mechanic, but a bright and ambitious one. Working for Lion-Peugeot (a splinter from the main company following a Peugeot family row) he worked on the company's voiturette (small car) racers. Before long he was behind the wheel himself, joining the established Goux and Giosue Guippone. His first recorded appearance was at the 1908 Madonie circuit in Sicily where he crashed out, but his speed earned him a full-time place on the team and his breakthrough victory came at Caen the following year. He opened 1910 with outright victory in the Targa Florio, the only time a voiturette would ever achieve this feat, albeit against a weak field of bigger cars (he beat often-quoted winner Tullio Cariolato's bigger Franco by an hour). At Boulogne later that year, during practice for the big voiturette race of the season, his team-mate Guippone rolled his car and was killed. With a heavy heart Boillot climbed aboard and fought out the race's destiny before being delayed by water leaks. The race was won by the beautifully-engineered Hispano-Suiza of Paul Zuccarelli.

Zuccarelli – just like Boillot and Goux – was itching to make the break into big-time grand prix racing, which was rumoured to be coming back for 1911 after a two-year absence. The three drivers got together and saw a route to making that dream a reality. Goux was close to the management having been a sometime-chauffeur to president Robert Peugeot. Lion-Peugeot and Peugeot were reunited, the family differences resolved, and Goux convinced the president to recruit the engineering-savvy Zuccarelli as a replacement for the late Guippone, not only for his driving talents, but also for his knowledge of the new technology at Hispano-Suiza – including a twin-cam, four-valve-per-cylinder sportscar.

Zuccarelli, Boillot and Goux hatched an audacious plan to create a grand prix Peugeot along such lines and presented it to Robert Peugeot. ▶

PICS: LAT ARCHIVE

Just as he had done with two groups of designers at Lion-Peugeot, the boss pitted this new group against the established Peugeot engineers who were sneeringly dismissive of the engineering pretensions of this group, labelling them 'Les Charlatans'.

Without the full engineering resources of the factory, the 'charlatans' recruited Zuccarelli's former colleague at Hispano, Ernest Henry, to turn their ideas into engineering drawings.

"Zuccarelli and I supplied the main idea for the car; Henry was responsible for the drawings," said Boillot. With the charming Goux as the vital link with management, this tight-knit little team got its way. The 1911 Grand Prix was cancelled, but for 1912 there were the three 'charlatans' in 7.6-litre, twin-cam, four-valve-per-cylinder Peugeots.

They were up against the crack race-hardened Fiat team, used to winning major events and with a driver line-up that included superstars David Bruce-Brown, Louis Wagner and Ralph de Palma. The Fiat S74 was the ultimate iteration of the racing monster, 14.1-litres and 190 bhp beneath its towering bonnet.

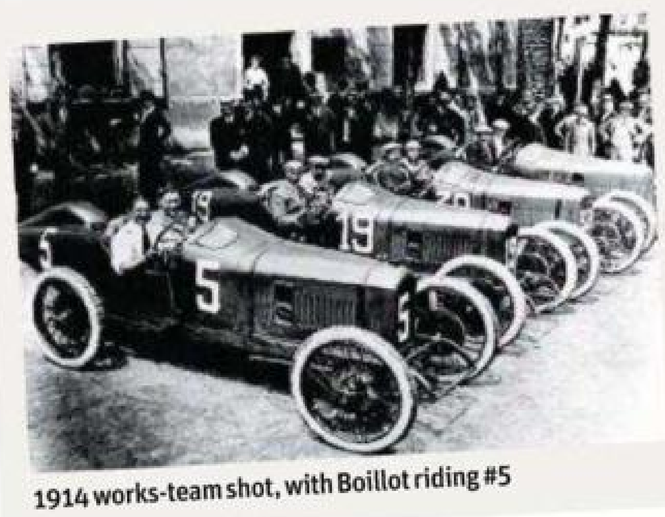
The Peugeot L76 was the cutting edge of the new technology, an engine

Despite appearances, Boillot was a super-talent

> "'Les Charlatans' were up against a crack, race-hardened Fiat team used to winning"

little more than half the size yet still mustering 130bhp, partly on account of that trick new valve gear. It gave its peak power at a heady 2800rpm, 1200rpm higher than the antediluvian Fiat that nonetheless mustered a lot more torque on account of those cubic inches. The 48-mile Dieppe course, around which old school and new would fight out the future, played to the Fiat's brute power, consisting essentially of a triangle of long straights, with just a few curves in which the Peugeot's agility would show.

It came down to a straight fight between the two greatest drivers of the day: Bruce-Brown and Boillot. They lay first and second respectively at the end of the first lap and remained locked in battle for the rest of the opening day. The race was held over two days, 10 laps on each. At the end of the first day Bruce-Brown led Boillot by 2m after seven hours of racing, each of them having outpaced their team-mates. With rain falling on the second day, Boillot sniffed an opportunity, but was promptly delayed nine minutes as the Peugeot initially refused to start. The car had been housed in a leaky shed overnight and rain water had found its way into the plugs. Eventually, Boillot began eating into the big Fiat's lead. He was catching, but whether it would have been enough wasn't certain. Fate intervened; Bruce-Brown hit a dog, damaging a fuel line, with the resulting leak leaving him with an empty tank.



1914 works-team shot, with Boillot riding #5

Finding fuel and re-filling earned him disqualification, leaving Boillot out front. There was an element of luck in this debut victory certainly, but Boillot alone had carried the fight to the faster car. He became a national hero from that day onward, a status he evidently enjoyed immensely.

A water leak forced him to retire from a dominant lead in the lesser-status GP de France (as opposed to the big event, the GP de l'ACF) at Le Mans two months later. In 1913 he won the ACF Grand Prix again, this time at Amiens, but only after a late scare. A water pump connection had burst with three laps to go. He stopped, had the leak wrapped and taped and set off again, now just 6s ahead of Goux in the sister car. But in those remaining laps he pulled out two and a half minutes, the victor once again.

Boillot then stepped back to voiturette racing for the major small-car event of the year, the Coupe de l'Auto, in a scaled-down twin-cam GP Peugeot. He won that, too. Goux had won the Indy 500 that year but Boillot didn't venture there until 1914, in company with Goux in adaptations of the previous year's GP car. With this, Boillot stunned the regulars by shattering the lap record, just shy of 100mph. He led before suffering tyre troubles that blighted both Peugeots. In a spellbinding display he fought his way back from 15th to retake the lead and was pulling away from the Delage of eventual winner Rene Thomas when another burst tyre wrapped itself around a brake lever, snapping the

PICS: LAT ARCHIVE

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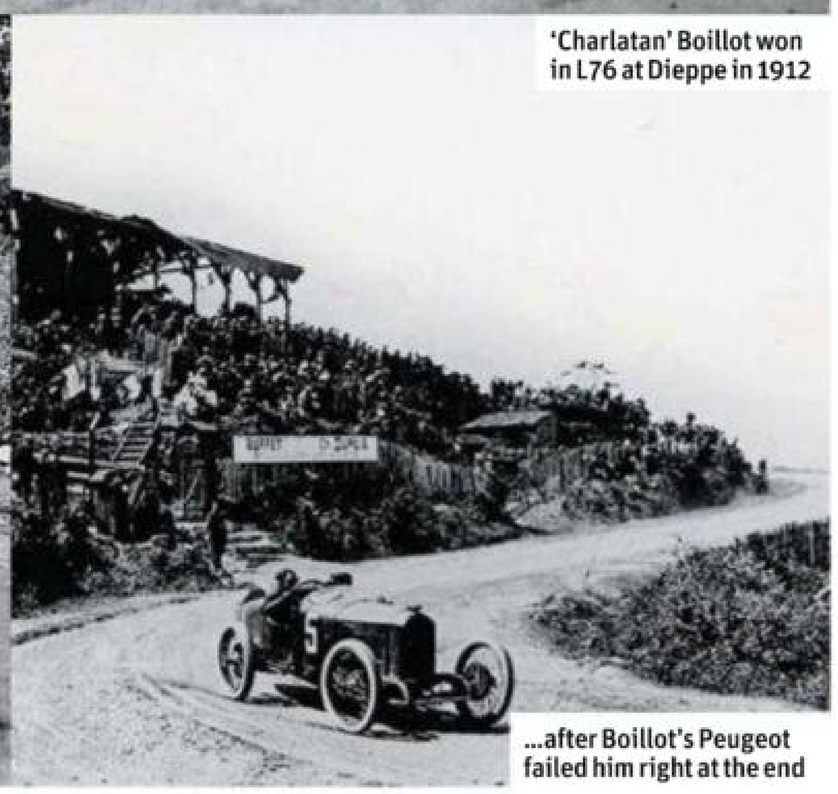
'Charlatan' Boillot won in L76 at Dieppe in 1912

Lautenschlager Mercedes won at Lyon in 1914...



...after Boillot's Peugeot failed him right at the end

"Boillot's had been a defiantly magnificent rearguard performance against all the odds"

frame and sending him into the wall.

Though he wasn't to know it, Boillot had just one race left in his career – but what a race that was. For the 1914 Grand Prix at Lyons, Mercedes, absent since winning the 1908 race, had re-entered the fray. An internal memo during preparation for the event read: "For reasons of publicity, we have decided to win the Grand Prix." They had created a formidable new car that matched the Peugeot's four-valve-per-cylinder unit and its horsepower, designed by the company's aero engine department. With Teutonic efficiency they took preparations to new heights, pounding around the course for months before, constantly fine-tuning.

Peugeot had countered with new-fangled front-wheel brakes and an attempt at streamlining that involved standing up vertically the previously horizontal spare wheels on the back.

The early laps revealed that the Mercedes was decisively faster – and that Boillot was the only Peugeot driver able to mix it with them. Goux afterwards said that the resiting of the spare wheels had horribly unbalanced the handling. Boillot was thus fighting an armada of Mercs single-handed. In this endurance race, he would be stretched by first one Mercedes, then another, the strain shared out between them as Georges fought alone.

Boillot led by half-distance but by the 15th of the 20 laps his car was giving out. The front-wheel brakes were no longer working, the steering was faulty, the engine was losing power – and still the Mercs came, like metronomes. It was cruel. He lost the lead to Christian Lautenschlager's Mercedes with two laps to go, the Peugeot now down one cylinder. On the very last lap Boillot's engine expired. After seven hours of brilliant but fruitless toil, he pulled silently over to the side of the road, stopped, slumped over the steering wheel – and wept. The Mercs finished 1-2-3 – on French soil, with the war on its way.

Boillot's had been a defiantly magnificent rearguard performance against all the odds, ultimately unrewarded but signifying a spirit that was more important than the result. Yet it signified more than even than that. Journalist Sammy Davis wrote: "There was something more than motor racing in the atmosphere as the crowds made their way dustily from the course. Never before had there been that curious, indefinable feeling and everyone was extraordinarily quiet.

"Though we knew nothing of it, there had come faintly on the winds the echoing thud of guns. The brooding shadow was death; the end had come to a generation. Never again would the Grand Prix be the same... The roads we had known were to see not racing cars but millions upon millions of men to bear armoured fighting machines and countless numbers of guns. When next we saw the Mercedes Grand Prix engine it was in a fighting aeroplane... Men had reached their journey's end. Perhaps it was as well we did not know."

Postscript: *New York Times*, May 22 1916 – 'Boillot is killed in aircraft fight'.

One small detail is missing from the piece, in which we learn Boillot died from a bullet through his heart. The Mercedes engine that was the instrument of Boillot's defeat in his final race was a prototype for the aero engines that would power those very planes that took his life.

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Peugeot: The world was not enough

Peugeot's recent withdrawal from endurance racing shocked the sportscar fraternity. *GARY WATKINS* reflects on five years of the 908 and asks those involved if it was a success or a failure

If Peugeot had just pulled out of any other branch of our sport, there would surely be ticker-tape celebrations to mark the end of an ultra-successful programme. Just look at the stats: 35 starts, 25 wins and four titles over five seasons. Yet because the French manufacturer was competing at the pinnacle of endurance racing, there's been no fanfare. A more telling statistic provides the reason: in five assaults on the Le Mans 24 Hours, Peugeot triumphed just once.

When a major manufacturer builds a prototype for the top class of sportscar racing, Le Mans is everything. Or, at least, it was prior to the return of a proper FIA-sanctioned global series in the form of the new-for-2012 World Endurance Championship. The focus on success at Le Mans may eventually change for the car makers slugging it out in LMP1, but during Peugeot's adventure with its 908 turbodiesels, the term jewel in the crown barely did justice to the 24 Hours.

It doesn't matter that for every race arch-rival Audi won, the Peugeot Sport team notched up two victories. Or that the success ratio was the same in terms of the three championships they fought out during the lifespan of the two iterations of the 908 from 2007 to 2011. Peugeot's failures at Le Mans already overshadow its triumphs elsewhere, a perception that will only be exaggerated as its successes away from La Sarthe fade from the memory.

Yet it could have been very different. Peugeot is probably unlucky not to have more than its 2009 triumph at Le Mans with the first-generation 908 coupe to shout about. It *should* have won in 2008 and 2010 with the original car and *could* have won in 2011 with all-new, second-generation 908.

The 2008-specification Peugeot 908 HDi had a significant performance advantage over the three-year-old Audi R10 TDI. There were new snowplough-style aerodynamics specifically designed for the ultra-fast Circuit de la Sarthe, and a switch from aluminium to steel pistons enabled Peugeot to run its 5.5-litre diesel V12 at full power for 24 hours, something that had not been possible in 2007.

The latest Peugeot was significantly faster than its open-top rival from Audi, yet its in-house team failed to make it count. There was a series of reasons why, but the catalyst for all of them was the rain that fell for much of the second half of the race.

Not only was the 908 no match for the Audi R10, or at the least the car mercurially driven by Allan McNish, Tom Kristensen and Rinaldo Capello, on a damp or wet track, but its performance was blunted by a mixture of water, spent rubber and cement dust clogging its cooling system. This 'goo', famously described by Peugeot Sport team manager Serge Saulnier as "a paté", left Peugeot no choice but to reduce engine power.

The cooling issues can, at a push, be brushed away as a freak misfortune, but not the 908's lack of pace in the wet. Nearly four years on Saulnier, who left the team early in 2010, describes Peugeot's failure to win Le Mans in 2008 as inexcusable.

"I have to say that it was the mistake of the team," he says. "We concentrated too much on dry conditions." ▶

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Le Mans '10: lead car of Franck Montagny failed

FACTORY HEAD TO HEAD

	PUG v AUDI
Le Mans wins	1 4
Total wins	15* 7
Poles	20 3**
Fastest laps	19*** 3
Titles	2 1

* Does not include ORECA's 2011 Sebring win
** Includes pole awarded on practice times at Sebring 2008
*** Does not include two fastest laps for ORECA

That applies to Peugeot's development in the build-up to Le Mans and decisions affecting the set-up of its three cars for the race. It was way behind in development of traction control and it chose an optimised dry set-up for the 24 Hours, whereas Audi opted for a compromise in anticipation of rain.

"We were three seconds a lap quicker [in the dry], but we were not quick in the wet; that was a mistake of the team," continues Saulnier. "We did not have the right compromise for the wet and the dry. We needed more work on the traction control and more work on the tyres."

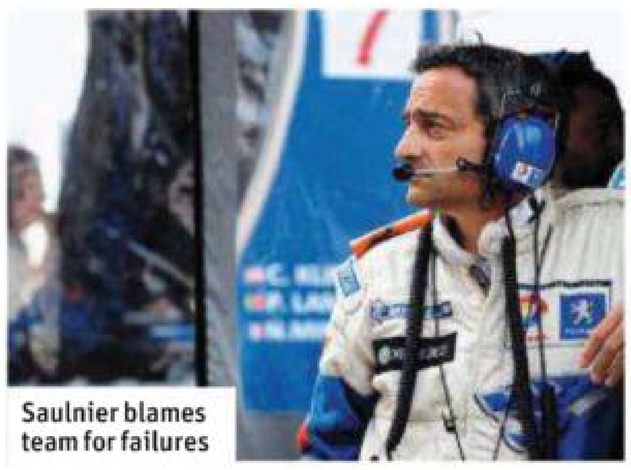
That begs the question: why didn't experienced racing man Saulnier guide the team in the right direction?

"I knew that; I am not completely stupid," he says. "It was a matter of the experience of the technical team to give the right solutions."

Nicolas Minassian, who finished second in '08 together with Marc Gene and Jacques Villeneuve, remembers the Peugeot's traction control offering little benefit. But he also points out that the 908 never liked the rain.

"It was such a good car and always quick straight out of the truck," he says. "But it was never particularly good in the wet and always grained the tyres, and I don't know why. We were continually fiddling with the traction control settings in 2008, but it didn't seem to make much difference."

Peugeot's tactical failure in 2008 was opting for a full dry set-up. It has been suggested that Audi knocked its French opponent for six in terms of strategy over the course of the race. In fact, it just looked that way courtesy of the 908's appetite for its wet-weather Michelin tyres.



Saulnier blames team for failures

> "We were three seconds quicker in the dry, but we were not quick in the wet; it was the team's mistake"
> **Serge Saulnier**

The Audi film *Truth in 24* about the 2008 race has only added to that myth. It contends that the German marque won the race with a spot-on tyre choice when the rain came back in the closing stages. That's wrong.

The decision to put Kristensen onto intermediates was correct, but Peugeot's choice of slicks, then wets and then slicks again was also the right one for a chasing car.

"We had nothing to lose," says Minassian, "because we were the team behind. It changed nothing."

Bruno Famin, technical director throughout the life of the 908, denies that Peugeot got it wrong in 2008 by focussing too heavily on a dry set-up.

"In 2008 we didn't have really wet conditions; it was not heavy rain at all," he says. "The really big problem was with the wet tyres; sometimes we did less than one stint with the tyre. We had so much downforce and so much power that the tyres were not strong enough."

Famin concedes that the traction control was an issue, though he denies it was the cause of the tyre issues. He puts it down to inexperience.

"In 2008 we had some functions that were not working well and traction control was one of them," he says, "but as a team we had less than one and a half years' experience. We gave a false image because the car was so quick, but we still had so much to learn."

Famin has a point. Peugeot arrived back in sportscar racing in 2007 after a very short gestation period for a major manufacturer. Its return may have been announced in June 2005, but the project didn't begin in earnest until the following January, and the car was running inside a year.

Famin reveals today that the original plan for the 908 was a debut in 2008. "When we proposed the programme to [Peugeot boss] Frederic Saint-Geours, the first race was meant to be 2008," explains Famin. "He said, 'I like your project, but you are going to start one year earlier.' That's why in 2007 we were so green. Even in 2008, everything was very new for us."

Another year's worth of experience changed all that. Peugeot Sport looked like a team capable of winning the Le Mans 24 Hours in 2009, and that's what it did. The French manufacturer finally exploited the performance advantage of the 908 to notch up its first Le Mans victory since 1993 – Gene, Alex Wurz and David Brabham leading home a Peugeot one-two.

"The team was stronger in 2009 in terms of pitstops and I would say in terms of serenity," says Saulnier.

PICS: FLAMAND/VARGIOLU/DPPI

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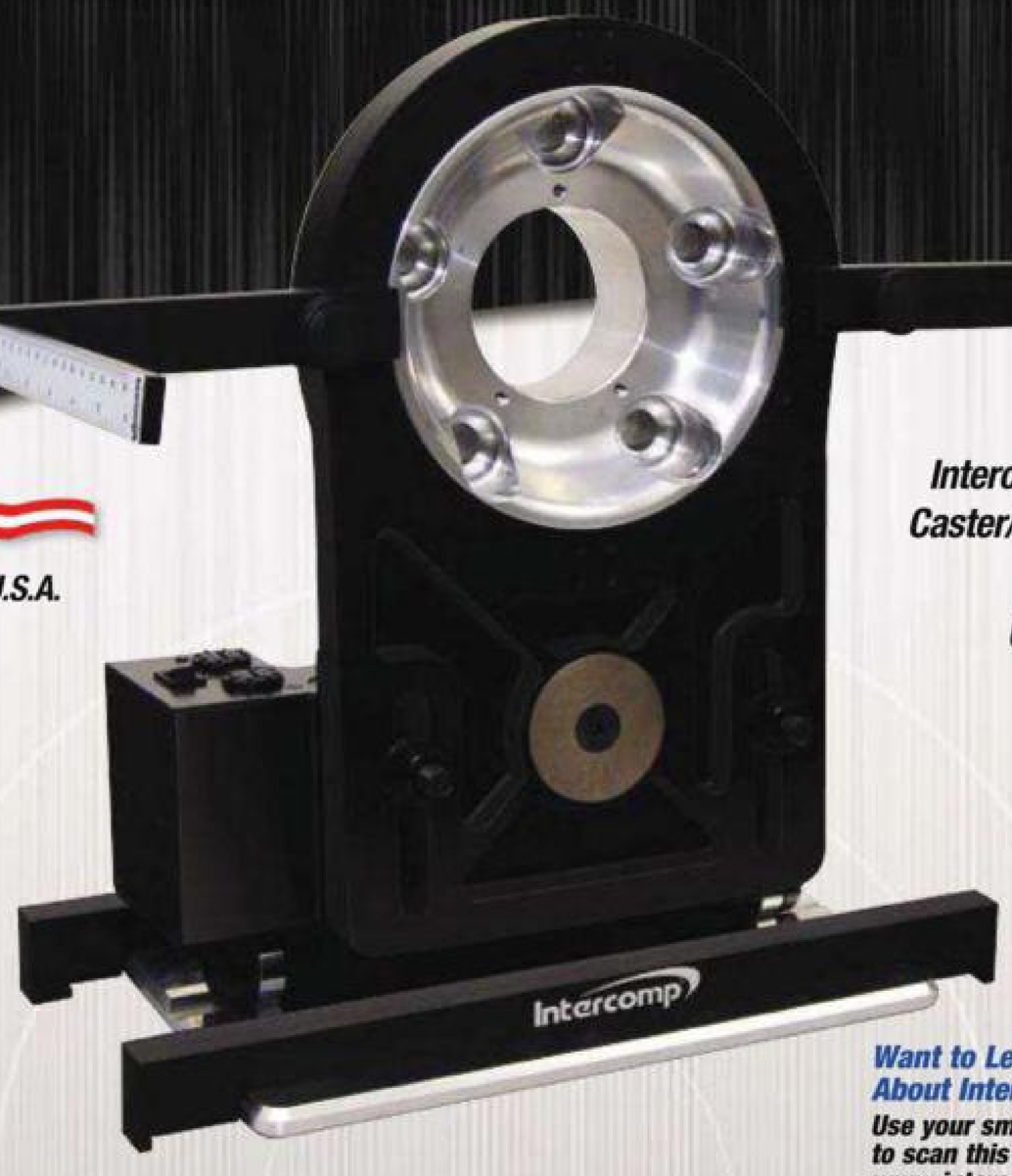

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PEUGEOT 908: FAST & FRAGILE

HIGHS

April 2007
Car wins on debut at Monza 1000Km despite failing to complete a race distance in testing.

June 2007
908 takes pole position on Le Mans debut and only car to finish claims distant second to rival Audi.

Le Mans debut in 2007 netted pole

June 2009
First Le Mans victory for Peugeot since 1993 with Gene, Wurz and Brabham leading home a 908 one-two.

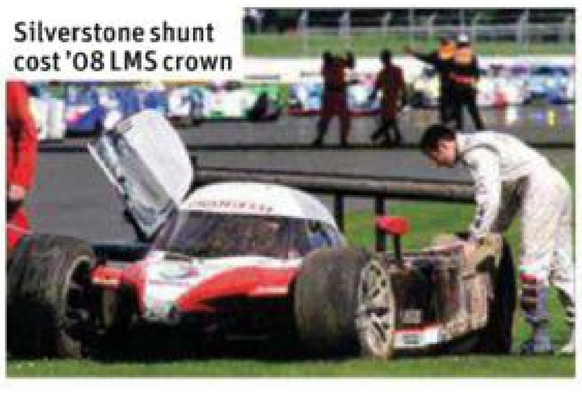
'09 Le Mans winner rests under podium

November 2011
Peugeot completes a clean sweep of Intercontinental Le Mans Cup titles after winning six of the seven races.

LOWS

June 2008
Massive dry performance advantage at Le Mans disappears in the wet and Audi pinches victory.

September 2008
Loses Le Mans Series titles through accidents at Silverstone, despite winning four out of five races.


Silverstone shunt cost '08 LMS crown

June 2010
Certain Le Mans win lost to engine failure. Three of four 908s out with conrod failure.

June 2011
Cool daytime temperatures leave Peugeot unable to exploit pace of new 908 at Le Mans. Audi wins again.

PICS: GIBSON/EBREY/LAT, MEUR/LE FLOC H/DPPI

◀ "We changed a bit the management of the team in the last three months before the race because in 2008 we pushed the mechanics too hard."

In 2009, Peugeot beat Audi fair and square, though the best of the new R15 TDIs had been keeping the French manufacturer honest when rain precipitated a cooling problem akin to that encountered by its rival the year before. But in 2010, Peugeot was in the process of trouncing its German rival.

The final iteration of the 908 was streets ahead of the heavily revised R15+. In Minassian's words, Peugeot "never stopped improving the car". But that continuous development ultimately went a step too far.

Peugeot introduced a new version of its V12 turbodiesel for 2010, one with titanium rather than steel connecting rods. It was this component that put three of the cars out of the race, including the leading car driven by Minassian, Stephane Sarrazin and Franck Montagny when it had a lead approaching two laps.

Peugeot already knew it had a power advantage over Audi, but it chose to push development further with the new engine. The powerplant came through its endurance simulations, but the higher demands placed on it by flat-out running at Le Mans ultimately took their toll.

Famin dismisses the argument that Peugeot pushed the envelope too far. "The problem we had every year was to know what Audi's level of performance would be," he says. "We were convinced the R15+ would be very fast, but it was not. Imagine what people would say if you did not put everything you could on the car and you fell short?"

Famin also insists that Peugeot had originally planned a split strategy between the three factory cars and the solo ORECA-run machine.

"We wanted to mix the configuration of the engines and have two with steel conrods and two with titanium," he explains. "We had an issue with a supplier and had a major problem on the dyno, so we couldn't mix the specs as we wanted. Unfortunately the remaining spec was the wrong one."

> "To be faster than Audi means the programme was a real success"
> **Bruno Famin**

Last season was the first time that the Peugeot 908 failed to take pole position at Le Mans. This time it was Audi, with its new R18 TDI coupe, that had the edge on performance, yet Peugeot still only finished 13s behind at the end of the 24 Hours.

Last year's race is perhaps an indication of how far the Peugeot Sport team had come in five years. Rather than squandering a performance deficit, it got the maximum out of the car to come within an ace of victory.

Famin argues that the three or four years it took Audi to catch up in terms of performance is the ultimate accolade for Peugeot.

And he doesn't regard the 908 adventure as a failure for reasons that go beyond its win ratio against Audi.

"More than the figures, to have been able to take the pole at Le Mans against Audi, the reference brand in endurance racing since 2000, in the first year and, since that time, to have always have been faster than them means the programme was a real success," he says.

"No-one would have bet £1 on that when we started the programme."

Famin's emphasis on the speed of its cars is interesting. Peugeot always set great store on claiming pole positions and Saulnier insists that it was all too keen to show the ultimate performance of its machines. There's little doubt that this focus on outright pace cost Peugeot at Le Mans in 2008 and '10.

The marque will always be judged on its failure to win those two races through a combination of inexperience and pride. Had Peugeot ended up with a three-two record against Audi at the 24 Hours, the 908 adventure would be judged entirely differently. History would recall it as a runaway success.

The Peugeot/Audi battle ended in '11

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Masters of the ART

Most money plus best drivers equals domination, right? Er, well, for this French superteam there's a bit more to it, as *GLENN FREEMAN* **finds out**

Team has own engineering creed

Hamilton dominated Euro F3 in 2005

Sebastian Vettel, Lewis Hamilton, Nico Rosberg, Paul di Resta, Romain Grosjean, Nico Hulkenberg, Kamui Kobayashi... All are on the 2012 Formula 1 grid, and all have passed through one of motorsport's best finishing schools: junior single-seater powerhouse ART Grand Prix.

Those seven drivers are just the tip of the iceberg. Plenty more have gone on to race in F1 or star elsewhere after passing through ART's doors. Of course, to some the French team's success is the result of a simple equation: invest lots of money to develop the best cars, then sign the best drivers because you have the best kit. But there's far more to it than that. Since ART left Formula 3 and focused only on one-make racing, there has been less scope to make big gains in car development. And it's often overlooked just what lengths the squad goes to in making sure it develops its drivers to become the best in their series.

Today, the reputation of the team run by Frederic Vasseur and Nicolas Todt precedes it in single-seater circles. But none of the Formula 1 stars we namechecked, even those who are now world champions, arrived at ART (or, in its former guise, ASM) as the finished article. Turning rough diamonds into world beaters is not the work of a moment, and ART's success rate on that front owes very little to coincidence. It's part of a long-standing philosophy in the team.

"Driver development is one of our strengths," says Todt, who has Ferrari's Felipe Massa and Force India tester Jules Bianchi on his management books. "To do well you have to have the best package, and the best package includes the car, the engineers, the mechanics, and of course the drivers. So it's logical to try to improve their driving."

When speaking to ART drivers past and present, one theme comes up every time: when a driver's feedback suggests that his car has a certain handling trait, the engineers' first response is not to change the set-up, but to look into the data and see if there is something in his driving style that is creating the problem.

Sam Bird, who was a race winner in GP2 with the team back in 2010, thinks it's a refreshing approach: "Their mentality is great. They make sure you're driving to the absolute maximum of the car's potential, then they will help you. They won't change the car until you're delivering your best."

Jamie Green started a run of six consecutive F3 Euro Series titles for the French squad with his 2004 success (when it was ASM), and he feels that ART's level of analysis surpasses that of any other junior squad.

"When you look at data, most people look at their best lap compared to their team-mates," says the Mercedes DTM star. "But ASM would go through it all in so much more detail. They would look at every corner from every lap, and find trends that might not show up on your fastest lap. But those trends could explain why you're losing time in particular places. There was lots of details they went into like g-loadings in corners, from which they could tell exactly what you were doing wrong. If you're good enough and smart enough to understand it all, you can really get a benefit from it."

Green's use of 'if' is telling. Not every driver that goes to ART fits the mould, and some promising talents over the years have suffered. Bird, who flourished in 2010, thinks he has the explanation.

"Some people don't succeed at ART because they don't look inwards," he says. "You've got to be prepared to do that – it's one of the key things they work with you on, and it makes you a better driver."

Vasseur explains that the importance of analysis is instilled in new engineers from day one. When they join the fold, it's two years before they start directly working on a car.

"When we bring in a new engineer, he works only on the data for the first two seasons," says the team founder. "So then he understands the philosophy of the team, and the way of developing the car and the drivers, before he works on one car."

GP3 runner-up James Calado (more on him over the page) so nearly got caught out by this approach when he first tested for ART last winter.

"When I arrived last year it was a different atmosphere to anywhere else," says the current GP2 racer. "They told me that until they were happy with my driving using their set-up, they weren't going to change anything on the car. It took me ages – at first I really couldn't get the hang of it."

Those who have failed at ART often point towards a lack of flexibility from the engineers to tailor to a driver's needs. But if all that data analysis, not to mention the 13 championships listed to the left, isn't enough to convince a young driver that this team knows best, then that wannabe is unlikely to join the list at the beginning of this article in years to come.

ROLL OF HONOUR

Charting ART/ASM's championship glories in the junior categories

1998 French F3
(David Saelens)
2002 French F3
(Tristan Gommendy)
2004 F3 Euro Series
(Jamie Green)
2005 F3 Euro Series
(Lewis Hamilton)
2005 GP2
(Nico Rosberg)
2006 F3 Euro Series
(Paul di Resta)
2006 GP2
(Lewis Hamilton)
2007 F3 Euro Series
(Romain Grosjean)
2008 F3 Euro Series
(Nico Hulkenberg)
2009 F3 Euro Series
(Jules Bianchi)
2009 GP2
(Nico Hulkenberg)
2010 GP3
(Esteban Gutierrez)
2011 GP3
(Valtteri Bottas)

Vasseur: no vacillation

ART GRAND PRIX PRIDES ITSELF ON BEING IN ALL THE right places to offer good drivers a path all the way to F1. Recent additions to the ladder include a karting team and a tie-up with Formula Renault Eurocup squad R-Ace, filling in a couple of key gaps beneath its GP3 team. And there was nearly an expansion to Formula Renault 3.5 for 2012.

In the end, ART decided against expanding further, while GP2 rivals DAMS and Arden have added the Renault-backed series to their workloads for 2012.

"I had a look at it, because that is my business," says team co-owner Frederic Vasseur. "But I think we are already involved in series that are working well, and I don't want to be involved in too many categories. It would be too much time and energy, so in the end I decided to forget it."

One change for 2012 though: the team is renamed 'Lotus GP'.

Vasseur: 'non' to FRenault 3.5

PICS: STALEY/GP2, GIBSON/GP3

stoemmas

Calado kicks up a gear

As runner-up to Jean-Eric Vergne in British F3 in 2010, James Calado needed a strong year on an international stage in 2011. He spoke to *GLENN FREEMAN* about how he succeeded, and what happens next...

Calado has the GP2 title in his sights for 2012...

James Calado arrived on the international scene a year ago as a promising talent with rough edges, hoping to find his feet and forge his way to Formula 1. Now, after a GP3 campaign that so nearly yielded the title, and a victory in the non-championship GP2 event in Abu Dhabi last November, he heads into the 2012 GP2 season as one of the most exciting prospects on the Formula 1 support bill.

If the aim of racing on the continent was to put himself on the map, it was resoundingly achieved in 2011.

"My reputation has gone up a lot," says the 22-year-old. "What was good about racing abroad and on the F1 weekends was that it meant I could get talking to a lot of people and try to make a name for myself. The whole idea of going to ART was to try to be successful enough to get into their GP2 team, which is what I've done."

But it all could have been so different, for two reasons. First up, the racing driver's natural desire to always want to drive something faster. Had Calado not been under the rule of the Racing Steps Foundation, he could have easily tried to bite off more than he could chew following his final year in the UK.

"As a driver you want to get into a bigger and faster car straight away," he says. "We had some discussions, but I think RSF did the right thing putting me in GP3. To start racing abroad – in GP2 – would have been too much. Instead, I had a year of experience in F3 [in 2010] where I learned everything I needed to, and I was able to take all that understanding into GP3."

Potential pitfall number one avoided, but number two was lurking. Rule changes in GP3 (new tyres and reduced downforce levels) had caught reigning champion team ART off guard, leaving title hopefuls Calado and Valtteri Bottas floundering in the midfield instead of fighting it out at the front in the early races. The international bubble was bursting already.

"It was impossible," admits the Briton. "We couldn't get to grips with the changes, and I can remember Valtteri and I were always complaining. We struggled a lot, and we just couldn't understand it."

It was a big test for the team and its two lead drivers, but by living in France and close to the ART factory Calado was able to play a major role in solving the problems. When it all came good mid-season, he and Bottas propelled themselves into what would become an exclusive title fight.

In the end it was Bottas who took the glory, but even in defeat there were two key signs that Calado would have been just as worthy of the crown. In the early races he made better use of the difficult car, outscoring the Finn 21 points to 12 over those first four troublesome weekends. And even in the two most costly races of his season, which came at the Nurburgring and the Hungaroring, he put in two of the drives of the year to charge from the back of the field into the points.

"We were both giving positive input when the car was bad, but maybe Valtteri had had enough," says Calado of his Finnish team-mate. The Williams test driver was in his third year with the French team, after two seasons that had failed to yield a title in the F3 Euro Series. Last season was make-or-break for Bottas, and by the summer it didn't look good.

"Maybe Valtteri let it get to him

JAMES CALADO CV

2011
GP3 runner-up with ART (1 win)
2010
British F3 runner-up with Carlin (5 wins)
2009
Formula Renault UK runner-up with Fortec (8 wins)
2008
Seventh in Formula Renault UK with Fortec (1 win)

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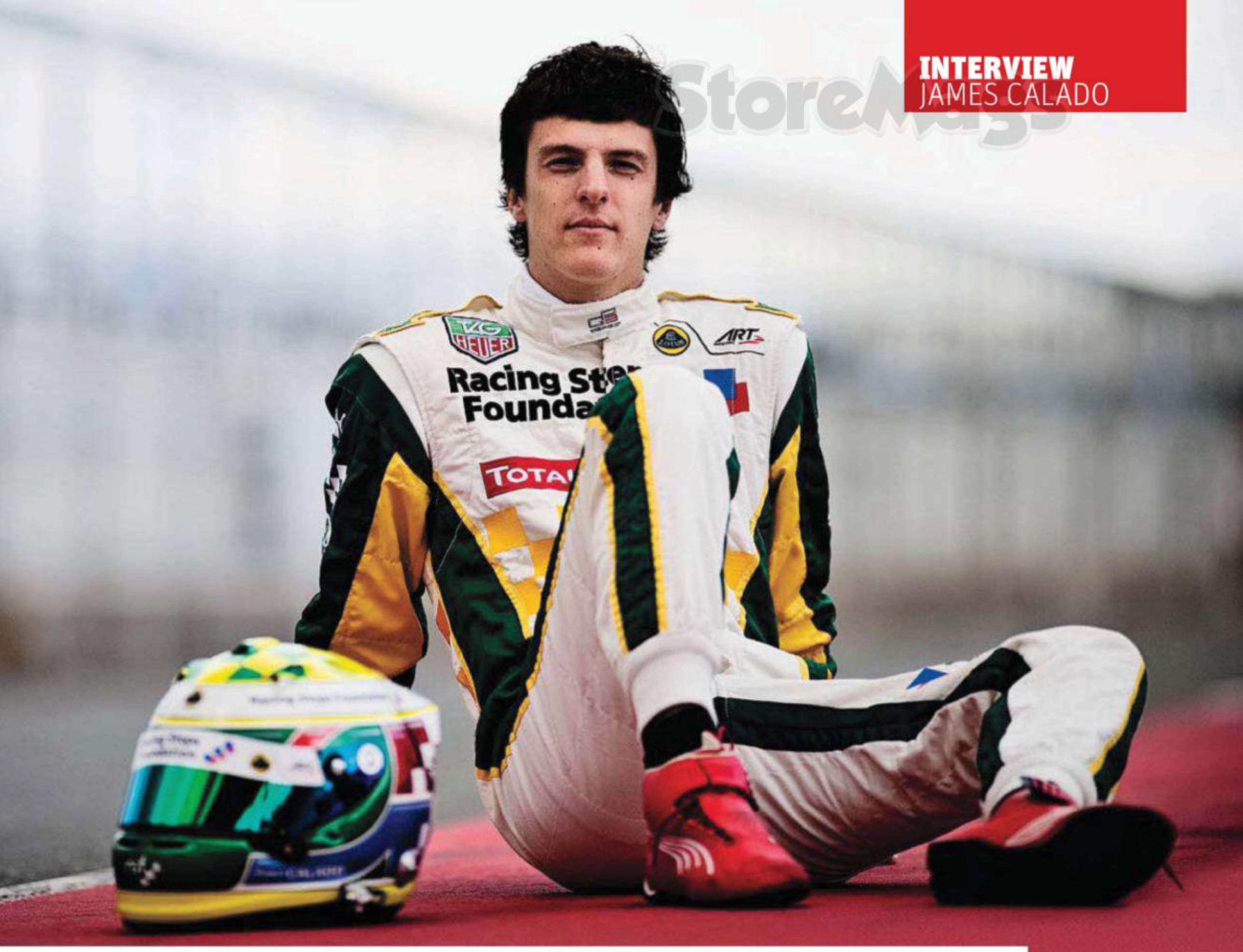


a bit," Calado adds. "Whereas I was thinking that we needed to do something about it because I had to show I could work with the team to make the car fast. If I had a bad result I just shrugged my shoulders, forgot about it and didn't let it get to me."

Unfortunately for Calado, when the car did come good and he had to battle back from collisions that weren't his fault, Bottas was up front and cashing in on ART's new-found speed.

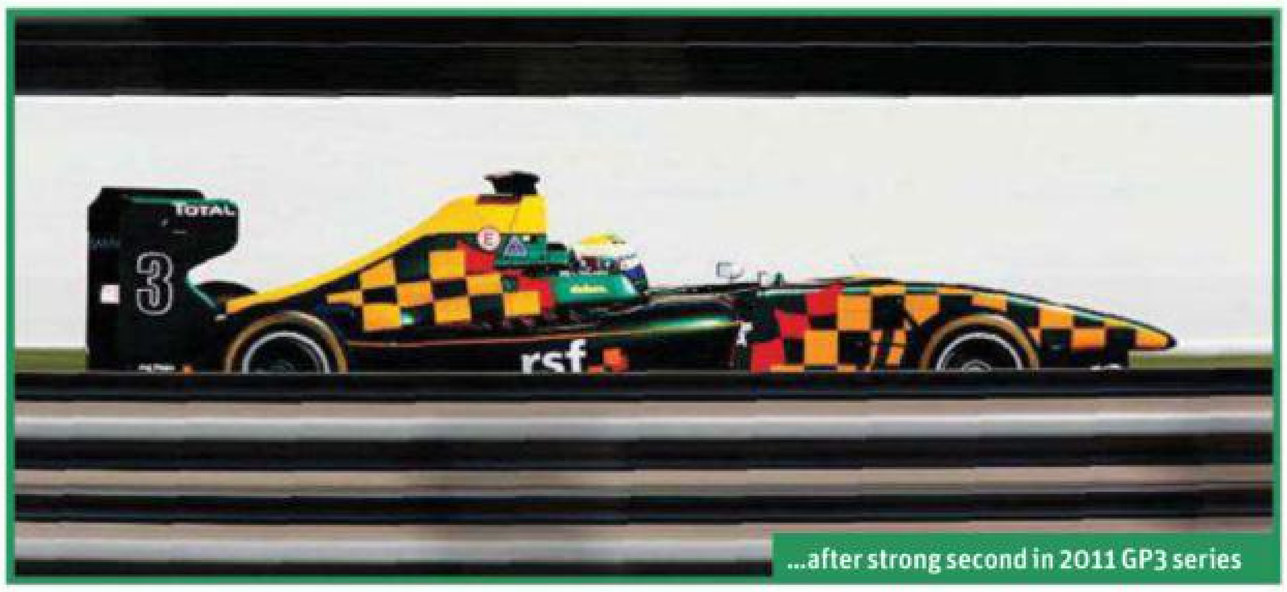
It was enough to give the Finn the title, but Calado's efforts paid off. He achieved his aim of proving to ART that he was worthy of stepping up to its GP2 team, which has propelled Nico Rosberg, Lewis Hamilton and Nico Hulkenberg to championship success in the past. And his swashbuckling drives through the field caught the eye of many in the F1 paddock.

As if all of that wasn't enough, Calado and ART returned to the F1 support bill in November for their GP2 bow together. A points finish in race one was followed up with a victory from the front row in the reversed-grid event, with a drive more befitting of a veteran, not a debutant. Of course he says there's more to come, but it's the detail that he goes into when backing up that claim that suggests there's a little more to it than fighting talk.

"Even with that race win, I was probably only 80 per cent ready for GP2 in Abu Dhabi," he explains. "Towards the end of the race I was already thinking about where I could have gone quicker, and what I could have done differently. That last 20 per cent still wasn't there, but we've analysed everything and we know what we have to work on."

That sort of measured answer shows how much Calado grew as a man as well as a driver in 2011. By the end of last year he was no longer a boy trying to find his way. He knew he belonged there, and that's why he's almost disappointed that so many of last year's GP2 frontrunners have moved on from the category.

"I'd have liked them all to stay on so I could prove I could race with them, if not beat them," he says. "It would have been nice, but there will still be a lot of competition. I'll go into the championship hoping I can win it. I know it's tough, but it's possible."



...after strong second in 2011 GP3 series

PICS: GIBSON/GP2, GP3

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Wilson show

Britain's Justin Wilson is over his bizarrely-incurred spinal injury and ready to roll for the 2012 IndyCar Series. He tells *SIMON STRANG* that the time is right to step out of the shadows

Just how good is Justin Wilson? Ask four-time IndyCar Series champion Dario Franchitti how he rates him as a rival, and the Scot replies: "I would love to see Justin in a good car." He pauses, then adds: "Once I've retired!"

Franchitti, the standard bearer for his generation in the US – describes Wilson as "clearly very good", in an elite band of individuals he pays close attention to. A group that includes Indy 500 winners and series champions such as Scott Dixon, Helio Castroneves and Tony Kanaan. And, of course, Will Power.

So it remains a fundamental mystery to most observers why Wilson perennially gets overlooked by the 'big three' – Chip Ganassi Racing, Team Penske and Andretti Autosport. After all, he remains one of only three men to have beaten them in a straight fight since 2008.

There are plenty of theories. For one thing, Justin's a big lad, now 'only' six-foot-three (more of which later) – and broad. That's not good for weight distribution given IndyCar's current regulations. There are also drivers more gifted at holding court with sponsors, and in corporate America there are some funds that depend on that. It's rumoured that Andretti Autosport's GoDaddy drive, which became available after Danica Patrick's original replacement Dan Wheldon died at Las Vegas, hinged on the 'right' blend of chat-show charm and speed.

And then, of course, there's Wilson's famous fortune – or lack thereof. His availability has rarely coincided with an opening in the grandee teams, and when it did with Newman-Haas in Champ Car, the series promptly folded. Of course it was Justin who broke his back last year merely by running wide at Mid-Ohio's Turn 1 and clattering over an access road.

"How many times do you run wide and think, 'Oh shit, that's ruined that lap' and move on?" asks Wilson. "It should have been two wheels dropped over the kerb, onto the grass and then that be the end of it. But because of the way the grass was shaped, the

> "You're not sure what's going to happen. Will it heal? There's a lot going around in your head"

whole car slid wide instead. I just hit that lip on the access road and it sent the car airborne."

Wilson's car didn't hit anything else; it came to a halt apparently undamaged with its driver assuming he was just winded. But it was much worse than that. "The car went about four feet in the air," he says, "and when it took off it loaded a vertical 70g. When it landed there was another 70g hit, then it had another bounce, which was 50g.

"I compressed my T5 vertebrae. So now one of the vertebrae in my back is basically half the size it used to be. It doesn't grow back so I'm no longer six-foot-three-and-a-half, I'm just six-foot-three! Which makes my brother [Stefan, who races Indy Lights] now taller than me!"

That injury wrecked Wilson's season and prematurely ended his winless relationship with Dreyer & Reinbold Racing, the team he'd been with since the beginning of 2010. He was forced onto the sidelines, his confidence and race sharpness sapping away as he waited to heal, clamped in a back brace for four months. He was unable even to lift up his little daughters as he tried to get fit for the Las Vegas finale. He never made that ill-fated date and went through the winter without a deal secured, and still wondering about his fitness. That's why his Daytona 24 Hours victory, with Michael Shank Racing last month, was such a big deal.

"To say that I'm winning races again is huge because over the past two years I've not won anything," explains Wilson. "After a while, and when you've sat out for six months, you start to doubt yourself and you feel like you're falling out of the limelight.

"You're not sure what's going to happen. Are you going to heal completely? Will you still be able to perform as you could before? Is everything going to be OK? There's a lot that goes around in your head that you just don't have the answers for.

"So to put myself back on the map and remind people; that was pretty big."

Victory in the 24 hours came around the same time as confirmation he would rejoin Dale Coyne Racing for 2012 – the same small squad with which he conquered giants in '09 to score an unlikely, if emphatic, victory at Watkins Glen. There were other offers on the table, but Wilson is utterly convinced he's chosen correctly. ▶

Testing the Dale Coyne Dallara at Sebring

PICS: LAHAM/GETTY, LEVITT/LAT SOUTH

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Daytona win came in Shank's Riley-Ford

SHAKING OFF THE DEMONS

In this game, conjecture can become fact in a paddock full of gossip. So even though Justin Wilson doesn't feel guilt over losing a chance of victory in the 2010 Daytona 24 Hours by pitting his Chip Ganassi Racing car from the lead to investigate a noise, he was still relieved to be able to shake it off for good with his win with Michael Shank Racing on the last weekend of January.

"I know I wasn't dreaming it [in 2010]," he says. "They did find a few things wrong, but it wasn't enough to hamper the car, and the protocol was always to bring it to the pitlane in those situations.

"It's always haunted me, but I always felt like if it happened again I'd do the same thing. I have no regrets. But to actually be able to put that behind me now and to say we've won it is great."

There was a point in the 2012 race when it looked like it might all go wrong again, as team-mate AJ Allmendinger banged wheels with rival Allan McNish while racing for the lead in the final stint.

"I thought it was funny," says Wilson.

"We all know how hard Allan drives and normally everyone backs down – but not AJ. But they're both pretty good guys and they know where the limit is. It was more a case of, 'That's cool, bring it on. Let's go.' AJ enjoyed it. He got to go wheel-to-wheel with sportscar legend Allan McNish and beat him, so he was pretty happy."

Shorter Wilson still towers over co-drivers

> "Dan Wheldon told me at Vegas, 'You're lucky you're not doing this – it's going to be crazy'"

"I have lived my career by having no regrets," he says. "I had a chance to move to Champ Car before going to F1 [in 2003] but I said at the time if I did it that way around I would have regretted not taking the F1 opportunity. If I'd stayed with D&R and it had worked out, great, but if it hadn't worked out I would have regretted not going back to Coyne."

Coyne has secured Honda engines, what Wilson calls a "safe bet" in the new open-manufacturer era, and will rekindle his relationship with chief engineer and ex-KV Racing man Bill Pappas, the same man with whom he clicked so well three years ago.

"Bill and I just connect," he says. "A big part of any decision is knowing you'll race with people you want to work with. Yeah, we've all got different engines, but we've got the same chassis and you have to work out how to use the car better than everyone else."

Another part of IndyCar's new era is Dallara's DW12. While Wilson has yet to get a proper run in it, he's confident his proven ability to be quick in new cars can help him get a headstart early in a calendar that features 10 road courses, his recognised strength.

"I'm hopeful that we'll get a quick start on things and I'll be able to push it hard, but you can't just rely on that because at this level everybody is good. Franchitti, Dixon, Power, Kanaan, Castroneves, Ryan Briscoe... all these guys are not leaving anything on the table.

This year is an important rebuilding one for Wilson, and he thinks he'll be able to "recover momentum quickly", but as one of IndyCar's more established drivers he's in a position to emphasise the need for the sport to recover too. Politics, dwindling crowds and that catastrophic end to last season have left the series vulnerable at a time when it was beginning to gain ground.

"It's important to show that we have learned from that and are improving," he says. "The key is to show it to more people. This year is critical."

Wilson cares passionately about the future of IndyCars. "I know that this is good racing and this is where I fit," he says. "It's a good atmosphere, it's a good feeling and you get to enjoy it while you're doing it, not like in F1 where you enjoy it more when you're looking back on it. In some ways it's like karting again, but in cars that are going fast and at a serious level."

Unlike many drivers, Wilson does believe in luck. He says it's arrogant for those who make it big not to recognise the misfortune of talented drivers who don't. But he doesn't count himself as unlucky – especially after that Daytona win. And anyway, there are two sides to every coin: "Dan [Wheldon] said to me the night before Vegas, 'You're lucky you're not doing this – it's going to be crazy out there.'

"I kind of have a bit of reputation for having bad luck, but I think I'm pretty lucky compared to a lot of people: one, that I'm here racing; and two, things can always be a lot worse."

ROLL OF HONOUR
2012 Daytona 24 Hours winner
Two-time IndyCar Series race winner
Four-time Champ Car race winner
16 grand prix starts with Minardi & Jaguar
2001 FIA F3000 champion
Two-time race winner in World Series by Nissan
1998 Formula Palmer Audi champion

BUILD-UP FOR OVAL ATTACK

As two-time Indianapolis 500 winner Dario Franchitti observes, Justin Wilson still has some "stuff to learn on ovals", but the Englishman believes he was about to turn the corner when he was injured.

"It's always been down to a lack of confidence in setting the car up," explains Wilson. "I just couldn't get there fast enough, especially with the oval weekend schedule including just an hour's practice.

"Also, it's just building that understanding of them and that takes time. I felt I was making progress last time I worked with Bill [Pappas] in understanding what I was looking for. That understanding wasn't quite the same the last couple of years. We were getting there again towards the end of last year and then the accident happened."

Wilson reckons that the team Dale Coyne is building around him under Pappas is only going to increase that understanding.

"Bill [at KV] had cars on the pace on road courses and ovals last year, so I'm hoping that we can keep that same kind of performance," he says. "Obviously there's a new car and there's new stuff to learn, but it's going to be closer."

Running the Indy 500 with Dreyer & Reinbold

PICS: WILLIAMS/LAT SOUTH, LABERGE/GETTY

INDYCAR'S BRIGHT YOUNG THINGS

The names at the top of the IndyCar tree have been the same for a while, but there's a new generation knocking at the door. *MARK GLENDENNING* **speaks to four drivers hoping for big results in 2012**

Getting tired of Red Bull's dominance in Formula 1? How's this: not since 2007 has anyone other than a Ganassi driver won the IndyCar title, and the same amount of time since a team other than Penske provided the main opposition. And while Red Bull has Adrian Newey in the design office, Ganassi and Penske's supremacy has been achieved using the same kit as everyone else.

There's no mystery to any of this – these two teams are the best-resourced, best-run and have the best drivers. But their technical advantage will be diminished (at least in the short term) with the arrival of the new DW12 chassis and two new engine manufacturers, and even the best drivers start to lose their edge eventually.

Fortunately, the IndyCar field has taken a leap in quality over the last couple of years, and the next generation of Dario Franchitti, Scott Dixon and Will Power-beaters might already be on the grid. The tricky part is figuring out how to bridge the gaps between the middle of the pack and the frontrunners, and then find a way to stay there weekend after weekend.

James Hinchcliffe, who picked up rookie of the year honours with Newman/Haas last season, is one driver who will be under the microscope in

Rahal already has four years in IndyCar on CV

PICS: BOYD, WEBB, LEVITT/LAT

autosport.com

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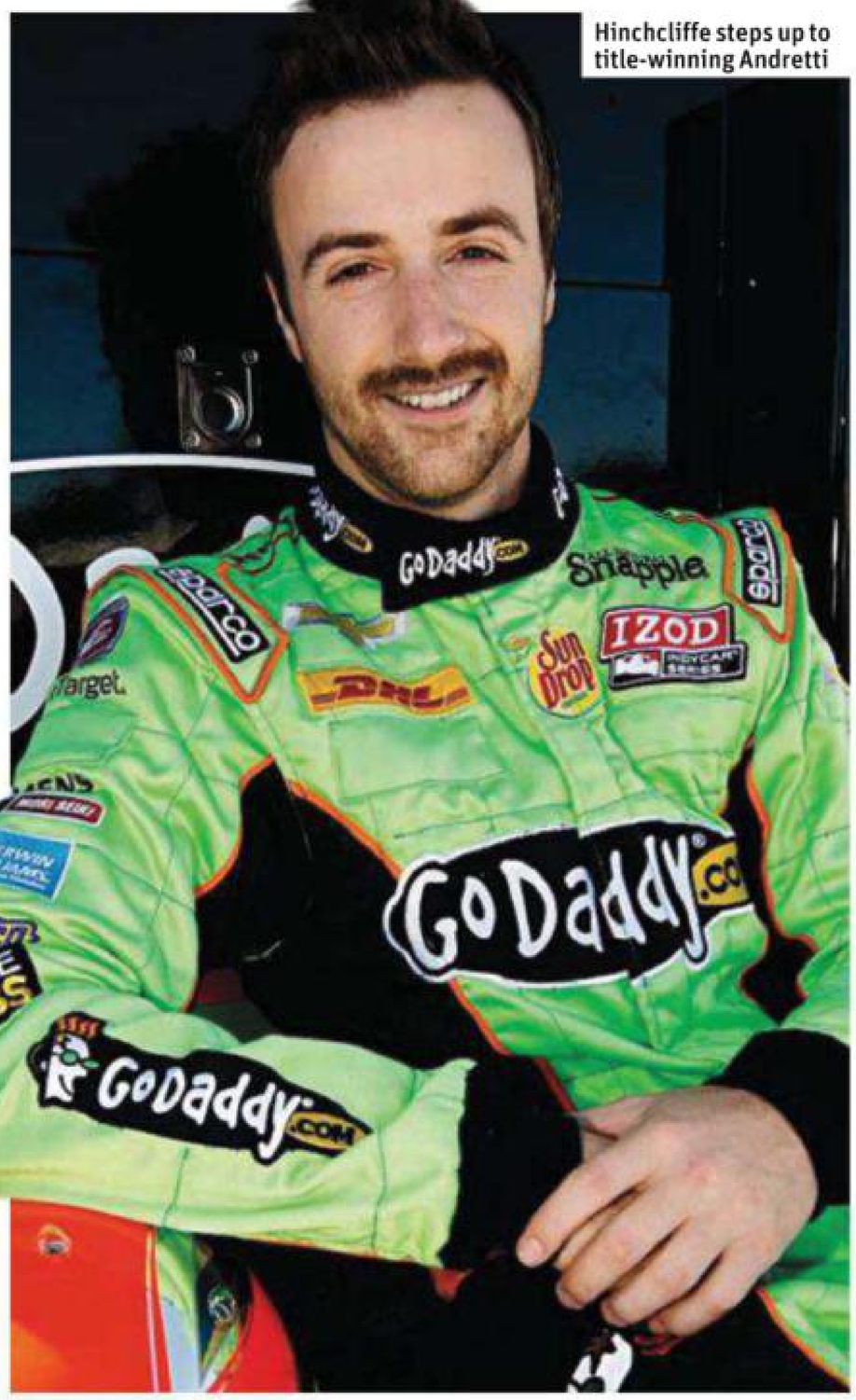
2012. For one thing, he has moved across to Andretti Autosport – the only team other than Ganassi and Penske to have won titles since 2003, albeit when it was still in its Andretti Green guise. On top of that, he's taken on the luminescent green GoDaddy colours that were used for years by Danica Patrick, and were then earmarked for the late Dan Wheldon.

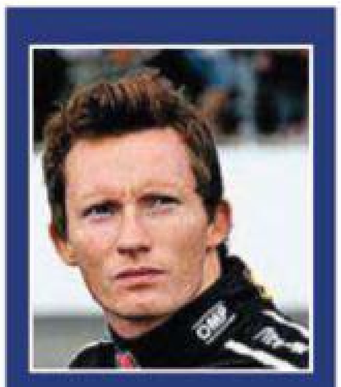
Replacing one marquee name is hard enough; trying to replace two at once adds another few thousand watts to the spotlight. The Canadian admits that the step up is "not an easy task", but feels that the lessons learned in the first part of his rookie season will help.

"IndyCar was a pretty big step up because you're going into such a competitive environment," he says. "You come through the junior formulas and realistically in any given series there are two or three guys who are really fighting for race wins or the championship. When you get to IndyCar, you realise that those two or three guys from the last 10 years have now all moved up and are all in the same place. The level of competition is just incredible, and you really have to maximise everything to get any kind of result. It's as much a mental test as anything."

Before a driver can 'maximise everything', they need to reach a ▶

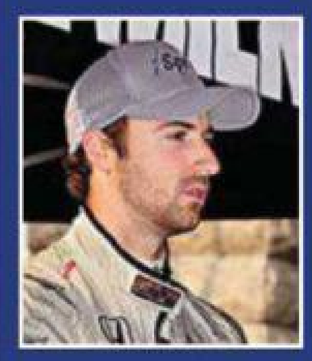


Hinchcliffe steps up to title-winning Andretti



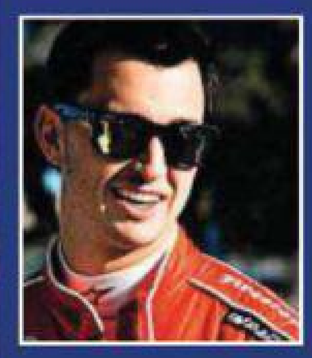
MIKE CONWAY
AJ Foyt Racing

AGE	28
STARTS	39
WINS	1
POLES	0
CAREER POINTS	631
2011 POSITION	17th



JAMES HINCHCLIFFE
Andretti Autosport

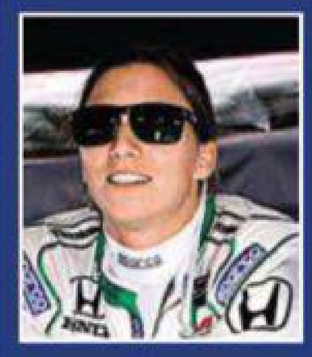
AGE	25
STARTS	16
WINS	0
POLES	0
CAREER POINTS	302
2011 POSITION	12th



GRAHAM RAHAL
Ganassi Racing

AGE	23
STARTS	61*
WINS	1
POLES	2
CAREER POINTS	1228
2011 POSITION	9th

*Excluding Champ Car



SIMONA DE SILVESTRO
Lotus HVM Racing

AGE	23
STARTS	32
WINS	0
POLES	0
CAREER POINTS	467
2011 POSITION	20th

De Silvestro earned respect in 2011...

...but has work cut out in one-car team

Rahal reckons he's now strong on all kinds of track

◀ point where they can trust their own feedback. Hinchcliffe deferred to experienced team-mate Oriol Servia in the early part of the season, but said that when his own impressions began to be validated, it provided an enormous lift.

"For the most part, Oriol and I were quite close [in set-up] on the ovals," he says. "Obviously, early on a lot of the set-up work was being done by him, but New Hampshire was a bit of a turning point, because after practice we'd gone in different directions, and in qualifying he ended up throwing my set-up onto his car. It was cool to reach that level and know that I could really contribute to the set-up side of things."

The 2011 season was also a confidence-booster for Ganassi's Graham Rahal. Four years of IndyCar experience (plus one in Champ Car), a win and two poles belies the fact that he's only 23 and, according to him, just starting to hit his stride.

"Last season was the first one where we were competitive on all sorts of tracks, and that does make you feel good," he says. "We know that we can compete on the big ovals, like Indy. We know we can compete on the short ovals. We know we can compete on the street courses and road courses.

"In Europe it might be a little bit hard for people to understand, but those aspects of it, the Indianapolis Motor Speedway versus a Milwaukee one-mile flat track... they're two completely different animals. Not even *close* to the same. And the same could be said for going from Milwaukee to Iowa, which is a short 7/8-mile track, but with really high banking. So they're all different. Dario has won at all of those kinds of circuits, so you have to be able to do that, and I think last year we really closed up on that."

Rahal proved his point in the final four races of 2011, qualifying second at Baltimore (a street course), third at Motegi (a road course), second at Kentucky (an oval) and eighth at Las Vegas (an oval).

"That felt pretty good for us as a team, and it feels particularly good for me as we move forward into this year," he says. "Now we know we've got the talent, we've got the team around us, and we've just got to build upon it."

From a purely numbers point of view, if you stack Rahal's 2011 stats alongside those of HVM's Simona de Silvestro, it doesn't look good for the Swiss. Yet her final championship position of 20th belies a genuine sense of respect within the paddock for her ability. During a conversation last year, one veteran driver used the 23-year-old to illustrate a point he was trying to make about the shortcomings of the considerably higher-profile Patrick.

"I know how this sounds, but Danica drives... like a girl," he said. "You can tell when you watch her that she doesn't quite have the upper body strength to handle the car." [Indycars do not have power steering]. "But when you're following Simona, she's really committed under braking and into the corners. She can muscle the car around and drive it properly."

She's also tough. A massive accident in practice for the Indy 500 left her with second-degree burns on her hands, but she was back in the car the following day. Less than a month later she suffered concussion and a laceration to her knee in an equally big crash at Milwaukee.

"If I think about it now, qualifying the car at Indy with burned hands really doesn't make a lot of sense," she says. "But I proved a lot to myself. That was the biggest thing. I just showed myself that I can do it."

Ironically, the two lowest points of her 2011 season are also the moments that she plans to draw the most from in her efforts to step up this time around.

"I think [those crashes] changed me a little bit, in terms of my perspective," she says. "It was difficult, but it was also a good thing. It changes you a little bit when you have to go through something like that. I'm more focused now than I've ever been, and that had

"There's no secret in this game. It's the guys that work the hardest that are going to come out on top"

James Hinchcliffe knows what it takes

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Rookie of the year Hinchcliffe leads on a restart at Ohio

a big part in it. It really opened my eyes about the things I can do better."

De Silvestro did get an early chance to demonstrate her fundamental pace when she hustled around behind Tony Kanaan for fourth at the St Petersburg season-opener, but her performance was overshadowed by that of Mike Conway at Long Beach, who broke a three-year drought of first-time winners. But reality soon bit, and hard, when he failed to qualify for the Indy 500 – a catastrophic result for a team like Andretti. Despite odd flashes here and there, the Brit admits that his season never really got going again.

"It was a very strange year," says Conway. "Strong start, picked up a win, and then Indy was obviously terrible. But from there it was a little bit difficult, with some mechanical failures and some other issues...

"Although we had some good things to take out of it, I definitely want to have a better, more consistent year. I don't just want to have a couple of good results, I want to have a good, strong season. That's the focus for me, and with everything being new, there is a window there."

The IndyCar talent pool is clearly there – if still a bit raw. Harnessing that ability and turning it into consistent, Dario-spooking pace is another matter altogether, but as part of the Ganassi set-up (albeit in a satellite team), Rahal, for one, has had the opportunity to see how the best operate at close quarters.

"Being in a team with Dario and Scott, I learned a lot about the effort that it takes and how hard they push all the time, trying to find that next little bit of speed," he said. "Where you push beyond what you thought was possible... that's what Will and Scott and Dario and all those guys are able to do all the time, and that is what has separated them so much over the last few years. You learn so much when you are around guys like that. How do I reach that level myself? I just have to pull it all together."

Hinchcliffe will also have plenty of experience to draw upon this year with two proven race-winners in Marco Andretti and Ryan Hunter-Reay as team-mates, but he has his own ideas about how to join their ranks.

"The only thing you can do to add yourself to that list is work hard," he says. "There's no secret in this game. Everybody knows what it takes to be successful, and ultimately it's the guys that work the hardest that are going to come out on top. From my perspective, I have to work well with my team-mates. I think it's one of the biggest things in racing, that when you get these intra-team rivalries going, it really just brings the whole effort down.

"I think we have a good rapport among the three drivers. The three of us can all push each other to make the team better, and if you can you are going to add yourself to that list of guys who are winning races and will hopefully be up there at the end of the season contending for the championship."

That's all well and good for those two, but Conway, who moved to AJ Foyt Racing for this season, and de Silvestro are both with single-car teams, so neither driver has the 'experienced team-mate' card in their hand. The one thing in de Silvestro's favour is that as far as IndyCar goes, she's never known any different.

"Guys like Dario are never up and down, they're quick every weekend, they're always in the hunt"
Mike Conway aims high

"This year, demanding more from the people around me every race weekend is going to be a big thing, and demanding more from myself too," she says.

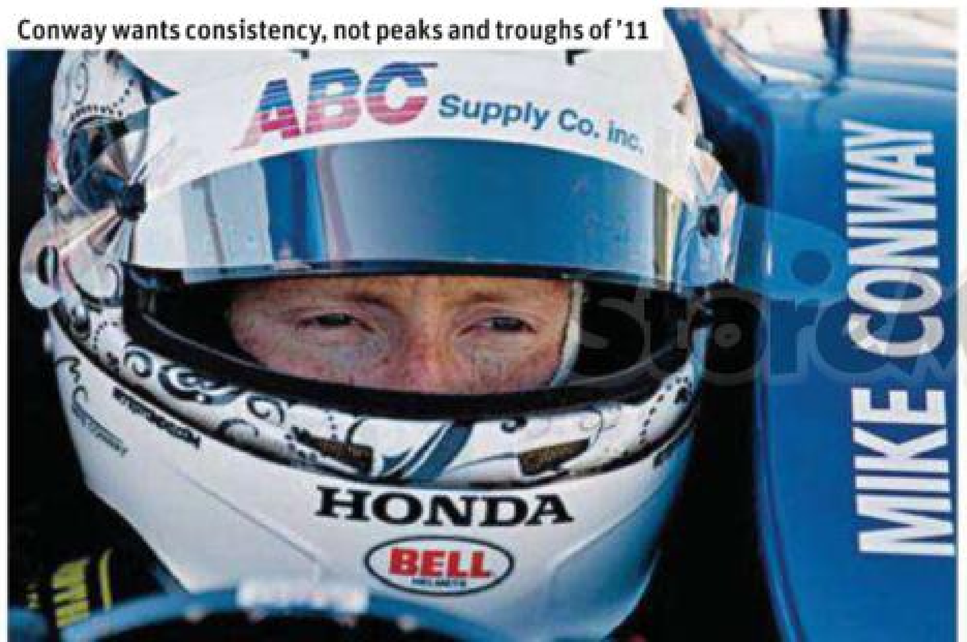
"That's what I'm looking for this season; just try to get better every weekend and not fall into a slump. I have to prove myself, and the team has to prove itself too, that we can be up front. Penske or Ganassi have an advantage, because the budget they run on is so much bigger than the budget that we run on. But I've been able to show at some races that I could battle with them. I just have to be more consistent and show that I can do it every weekend. And I think we can achieve that."

If Conway is concerned by the prospect of trying to up his game while going it alone this year, he's not letting on.

"I think you kind of rely on yourself a bit anyway," he says. "It's always helpful when you have team-mates to spread the workload a bit more, and you learn more over the course of a weekend. But it's quite exciting, having just the one car and the focus being on making one car quick.

"Guys like Dario, Scott, Will and all those boys are never up and down, they're quick every weekend, and they're always in the hunt. The fact that they are in a good team is just a bonus for them. Getting that first win was good, but I want to keep getting the results, not just have one of them."

Conway wants consistency, not peaks and troughs of '11



PICS: LEVITT, BOYD, ABBOTT, WEBB/LAT

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CHINA: HOLY GRAIL OR POISONED CHALICE?

Many have tried to break into China's high-powered economy, but motorsport has found things tough. *MARK GLENDENNING* asks why

A1GP: tried hard with national pride

Superleague 'fans' in Beijing

Franky Cheng, A1GP hero of China

A1GP opening ceremony at Chengdu

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Anyone who ever saw an episode of *The Jetsons* knows how it feels when visions of the future fall short of reality. People were meant to be getting around in flying cars or with jetpacks by now, and communicating via video phones. (OK, we had video phones, but decided we didn't like them).

That sense of anti-climax is familiar to many international series that have tried their luck in China. IndyCar will become the latest to attempt to wake the sleeping dragon and tap into the world's second-largest economy when it rolls into Qingdao for a street race later this year, but many have gone before it.

Formula 1, Global/FIA GT, the DTM, V8 Supercars, World Touring Cars, A1GP, Superleague Formula and the Intercontinental Le Mans Cup have all dipped their toes in. Some succeeded, sort of; others very quickly decided to direct their energies elsewhere. So what will IndyCar do to avoid joining the ranks of those who failed to learn from history?

And more to the point, why does everyone want to race in China anyway?

IT'S ALL IN THE NUMBERS

First, some basics. In 2009, China became the biggest car market in the world – just five years earlier, it had been fifth. Projections suggest that by 2021 one in every three cars built in the world will be sold there. Some manufacturers, such as Peugeot, are already on the brink of having China become their most important region.

Other Chinese markets are expanding at a similar rate, and the main urban centres are packed with hundreds of millions of people potentially looking for things to spend money on. It doesn't take a huge leap to put the pieces together.

"China has become a top priority for American corporations, but when you look at our paddock I think the same is true as well," says IndyCar business chief Sarah Davis. "When we did a poll – informal as it might be – of our teams and sponsors, saying, 'Where should we race outside of the United States?', China topped the list, given the explosive economy over there and the opportunities for their sponsors to connect with the Chinese economy."

In IndyCar's case, the support for the event is certainly true for some of the series' sponsors – IZOD plans to open 500 stores across China over the next five years. But whether it's a fit for the teams is less clear.

"The fact that we go off-shore doesn't do anything for many of our sponsors," says Roger Penske. It's a view shared by Penske's main rival Chip Ganassi.

"As long as we stay in US time zones, it works," says Ganassi. "My sponsors don't have any interest in going too far east. By the time the race has aired on TV, people are going to know the outcome already. If you miss it, you might look up one little YouTube clip of a pass or something that happens in the pits, but you're not going to watch a two or three-hour race on delay. It's just not going to happen."

THE FIRST HURDLE

Taking 'Series X' into China and tapping into all of this potential needs several boxes to be ticked in order to make it work, but many attempts that have been made so far have stumbled at the first stage: by and large, people in China don't know or care about motorsport.

Jennifer Wu, a journalist with *China Autosport* magazine, explains: "When we are talking about China, it is not only about a giant market – it's more about a new market. People only started buying private cars in the 1990s, and sales started to boom in the 2000s. You need to sow before you can reap, and that's what motorsport has to do."

A lot of people want to buy a lot of cars

Stephane Ratel, who was central to the groundbreaking Global GT race in 1994 (see p55) is still not convinced that the Chinese appetite for motorsport has fully matured yet.

"Twenty years down the line [from the 1994 Zhuhai race], we have the second generation, the children of the people making the money back then," he says. "They have a huge enthusiasm for fast cars, but there is a difference between their fascination with road cars and their understanding of racing.

"I think the key is to bring the racing to them in the way we tried to do at ▶

PICS: DUNBAR, TEE, FERRARO/LAT

China's GP circuit, near Shanghai

Plenty of empty seats at 2011 GP

◀ the Olympic Park [a demonstration event for World GT1 last year in Beijing]. We really did see a big crowd because we were bringing motor racing to their doorstep. We had more and more people coming, because people were ringing their friends. The culture is not there yet, and I think that's true of all sports. They need heroes. If you don't go with a well-known Chinese driver, forget it. They're not interested in foreigners."

This is where IndyCar believes that its race will succeed. The 'take-it-to-the-people' model has already served the series well with street races in Long Beach, Baltimore, Sao Paulo and Toronto, and it will use the same approach later this year in the port city of Qingdao.

"One of the chief things we have going in our favour is the venue itself," says Davis. "We are in Qingdao, which is very European in nature, and the fact that we are taking our product to the streets

Aussie V8s didn't last

DTM finale in 2010 – far from Hockenheim

gives us a benefit. Like many of our street events in Canada and the US, we are really able to bring our products to the people: 'You may not know a lot about IndyCar, but there's a really cool event going on and you should come and check it out'.

"Also, this year we will be racing during the international beer festival. Tsingtao is made in Qingdao, and we will be racing during that festival. So we're just adding to the party."

LESSONS FROM THE PAST

If IndyCar gets it right, it will have succeeded where many others have not. V8 Supercars signed a five-year deal to race at the Shanghai circuit starting in 2004, with an additional bonus of a six-year deal for free-to-air TV coverage.

Despite promises from the local promoter to "make it a sports event for ordinary fans" and host "activities to promote the understanding of the sport", crowds for the inaugural race in 2005 were small. By that point, the series had already terminated its deal with an earlier promoter, and then encountered a fight with FASC (Federation of Automobile Sports of China) over the date for the following year. The deal was finally cancelled.

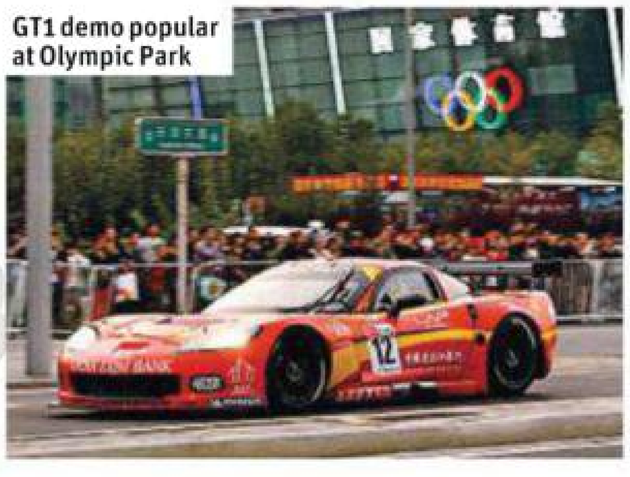
"The lessons going forward are... engaging in a promoter that controls the venue and has demonstrated motorsport experience," says then-series CEO Wayne Cattach.

> "If you don't go with a well-known Chinese driver, forget it. They're not interested in foreigners"
>
> **Sportscar boss Stephane Ratel**

V8s weren't alone in getting stung. The DTM had a try with a Shanghai street race in 2004 (which was marred by loose drain covers destroying cars; a phenomenon also evident when the V8s visited the Shanghai F1 circuit).

The series returned with another street race as its season finale in 2010 to satisfy Audi's and Mercedes's urge to gain a foothold in China, but found themselves on a circuit with virtually no grandstands (most spectators were simply guests of sponsors), a track that the drivers disliked, and facing a backlash from fans back home who resented having to set their alarm clocks to watch a three-way title battle being decided.

Even F1 has had its fingers burned.



GT1 demo popular at Olympic Park

Dreams that a race in China would kick the door open to new sponsors and untold riches proved hopelessly naive, although Jordan did make some money out of its deal with state TV company CCTV in 2004, Williams was able to strike a similar deal a year later, and other logos such as Lenovo and Aigo have found their way onto bodywork since then.

But if China has proven to be a landmine in the short-term, there are signs that the efforts have not necessarily been in vain.

"The series that didn't do well either suffered from bad timing or bad promotion," says Wu. "But when F1 came to China, it definitely attracted more attention from both the specialised and mass media, and also among the general population. They were able to widen their knowledge about motorsport and got a good sense of the professionally organised race teams and the high-technology cars in China.

"More and more investors and government officials also now regard motorsport as an option. There are seven circuits in China now, and more are under construction, which are inevitably supported by local governments. And that means there are more drivers, teams, local races – and fans."

Additional reporting by Gary Watkins, Glenn Freeman, Charles Bradley and Edd Straw

PICS: DUNBAR, HORSBURGH, ABBOTT/LAT

stormgas

DRAGON'S DEN
BREAKING INTO CHINA

IndyCar will try to crack the market

Ratel takes GT competition to China

CASE STUDY: PLAYING HARDBALL

SUPERLEAGUE FORMULA HELD two rounds in China in 2010. The first was at the Ordos road course – which prompted one mechanic to say, "They've managed to build a brand-new circuit and make the facilities look like they're 25 years old already" – and was a full points-paying round.

The second track, a street circuit in Beijing around the Olympic rowing venue, was too narrow to receive the requisite FIA track licence. The event was run for prize money only, but the teams and drivers had to threaten a strike before the promoters paid the sanctioning fee.

"The whole organisation, the teams included, had to threaten that we wouldn't drive in practice, just to make sure the Chinese paid the money they'd promised," says Yelmer Buurman, who drove the AC Milan car.

"Organising anything there wasn't easy. Everyone was so keen to race there, but it was difficult to go there because the locals were so new to it, they didn't understand the motorsport world. Even getting the buses from the circuit to the hotel, they promised they would run every half an hour but the guys from our team had to wait for hours! It didn't make life easy."

Beijing: and it's a win for Spurs

CASE STUDY: BREAKING THE MOULD

CHINA'S FIRST INTERNATIONAL motorsport event was in 1994, when the BPR Global GT Series ended its season with a three-hour street race at Zhuhai. BPR co-chief Stephane Ratel recalls: "We were in Zhuhai, a special economic zone on the doorstep of Hong Kong. When they opened to the west and free markets, they realised that motorsport was something they should have. So the moment they opened up, they organised a race.

"During the first year, we were seen as very strange people – they hadn't seen a racing driver before. We showed up with all these cars, and it was a bit of a sensation."

The series raced on the Zhuhai streets again the following year before the city's permanent circuit was completed for 1996. GT racing has continued on and off at the venue ever since.

SUCCESS IN MACAU

THE ANOMALY OF MOTORSPORT IN China is the Macau Grand Prix. Run annually around the streets of this former Portuguese enclave since 1954, the event attracted worldwide interest when it adopted Formula 3 rules in '83 – the year Ayrton Senna won there – and has gone on to become arguably the most important junior-formula race on the planet.

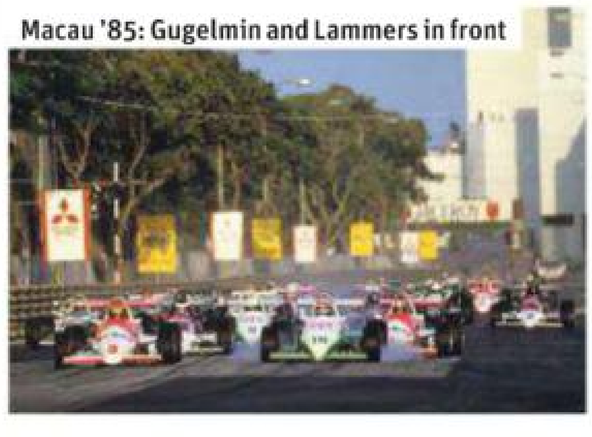
"The event was started by a couple of enthusiasts in Hong Kong who weren't able to race there due to legal requirements," says Barry Bland, the Macau GP coordinator. "They came to race in Macau and it developed from there.

"It didn't create much interest outside Macau until the F3 era, but now we receive an enormous amount of press from around the world."

Macau became part of China in 1999 and, like near neighbour Hong Kong, is a 'special administrative region' – governed locally but defended by the mainland's army. China will not assume full control until at least 2049.

Macau's status as a Mecca for gamblers has served to increase its reputation as a 'Monaco of the Far East', with Las Vegas-style casinos bringing added wealth in recent years. The key to the event's past and future is strong government support.

"It has always been supported by the government, and since 1983 benefited from the direct interest of the tourism department," adds Bland. "This has spread the word, and given Macau a huge amount of exposure that justifies the budget put into it."



Macau '85: Gugelmin and Lammers in front

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Latvala pips Hirvonen in Swedish gripper

Actually, 'grip' is the word in question as the Ford star beats his former team-mate in battle of the Finns

SWEDISH RALLY
Karlstad, February 9-12

ROUND 2/13

WINNER
Jari-Matti Latvala/
Miikka Anttila
3h18m28.3s

RALLY RATING
★★★★★
Latvala edges former team-mate with mature drive

DRIVERS' STANDINGS

Loeb	39pts
Hirvonen	32pts
P Solberg	29pts

POWERSTAGE WINNER
Sebastien Loeb

MILESTONES
- 50th win for Ford/ M-Sport partnership
- Hirvonen's first Citroen podium

DAVID EVANS reports

FOUR YEARS AFTER HIS maiden World Rally Championship victory, Jari-Matti Latvala truly came of age on Rally Sweden last week. At just the point when the Ford mechanics might have been expecting to pick up pieces of his Fiesta, they were left to wash the champagne off the bonnet. A final-day puncture made this event look closer than it was, but in reality this was a masterclass from the most mature Latvala we've seen. It also meant six straight Swedish wins for Ford.

LEG ONE (89.89 miles)

OVERCAST - AMBIENT TEMPERATURE RANGE ON STAGES: -16 TO -4 CELSIUS

After a horrible week of politics, bad business and impenetrable press releases, Dani Sordo gave Mini fans across the world something to smile about in Karlstad last Thursday evening: he was fastest on the first stage of Rally Sweden. In one minute and 34 seconds, the Spaniard reminded Prodrive's hard-working staff what life was really all about. Unfortunately, he then plonked his John Cooper Works WRC in an eighth-stage snowbank, overheated the motor and went home.

Third on the loosener, Ott Tanak went off the road early doors for the second event in succession. This time he dropped his Ford after a late call from his co-driver.

Following an entertaining opener in the French Alps last month, the Swedish snow was where the first real fight was going to come between former team-mates Mikko Hirvonen and Jari-Matti Latvala. The Finns were the stand-out favourites for the event, and the tension built with the WRC's inaugural qualifying stage: Latvala fastest with Citroen-mounted Hirvonen half a second behind him.

J-ML's historic success meant he would be the first driver to select his start position on a WRC round. Hirvonen wasted not a moment in winding him up.

"I sent him an SMS," said Hirvonen. "I told him whatever position he started in, I would be right behind him – providing he promised to pull over when I caught him. He hasn't replied yet."

Latvala wouldn't have replied. He was way too focused for that.

After his troubled time on this event last year and an early bath on the Monte, Latvala wouldn't have needed anyone to tell him of the importance of a big points haul in Karlstad.

Determined to turn this into a three-way Nordic needle, Mads Ostberg led the event as it arrived in his Norwegian homeland. The Mitandersfors stage started in Sweden and ended, from Ostberg's perspective, on the right side of the border. Last year's runner-up was ready to make the most of a day at home, and he started well. Quickest on the event's first significant stage, Ostberg took a 1.9s lead from SS2.

Ostberg wasn't the only local boy looking to make good – in fact, this really

Spaniard leads on snow! Sordo was quick early on

storemags

Latvala stayed just ahead of Hirvonen

Solberg congratulates his winning team-mate

was Petter Solberg's back yard. The stage went right past the 2003 world champion's farmhouse and it's fair to say he wasn't short on support.

The twistier sections of the ensuing Opaker and Kirkener stages spoiled Ostberg's chances of a lunchtime lead. He felt his Fiesta was understeering too much and a collection of missed apexes would leave him third, 10s off the lead.

Hirvonen had struggled for confidence aboard his Citroen on Friday morning's opener, but the longer he was in Norway the more comfortable he felt. He led at lunchtime.

"I wouldn't say I feel completely comfortable now," he said, "so it's nice to be leading, knowing that I can go quicker. I feel better than I did first thing this morning with the car, but there are still times when I turn in and wonder what's going to happen. Maybe this is just me still getting used to the car."

Hirvonen was 2.9s up on Latvala, who had led after SS4 but was not happy with his driving.

"I have made maybe five or six small mistakes this morning," said the Fiesta man. "They're just small things, but you know when you touch the rear of the car against the snowbank the speed just stops. I need to be cleaner, but I need to work with the car a little bit as well – it's snapping out quite a lot."

One man who didn't need time to get used to a Citroen was Hirvonen's team-mate Sebastien Loeb. The Frenchman was fourth at the day's mid-point. His day started badly when a late call to run with two spare tyres necessitated a set-up change to his DS3; this took longer than expected and cost him a 10s penalty. The highlight of his morning was fastest time through Opaker. Loeb arrived at remote service in Kongsvinger fourth, but still well in touch.

He worked his Opaker magic again in the afternoon, quickest on the stage in the hills above Grinder to move past Ostberg for third place. Unfortunately for the eight-time champion, that was as close as he would get to repeating his 2004 win. He spun at the start of Kirkener, wedging the DS3 into a snowbank at a cost of two minutes – and eight places on the leaderboard.

After fiddling with the suspension on his Ford, Latvala was happier and faster in the afternoon. He closed the gap to Hirvonen to just four tenths after stage six, only for the leader to take seven tenths back on the next one.

It was neck and neck between the two of them. Every time they came out of a stage, they each clamoured to know just one time.

As the afternoon progressed, there was increasing concern at the emergence of gravel through what had been snowy stages. And, having been frozen hard at overnight temperatures of around minus 20 celsius, the gravel wasn't for moving; there would be only one winner in the contest between the studs in Michelin's tyres and the permafrost-locked stones that greeted them. Soon enough, the leaders were coming through with considerably fewer than the 380 studs per tyre with which they had started the afternoon.

Hirvonen lost the lead in Finnskogen, with Latvala consistently quicker than him through the final Norwegian stage of the rally. But that was nothing compared with what was coming in Torsby, the day's final significant stage.

Again Latvala started to take time progressively, before hauling chunks out of him in the final two splits. Fifteen seconds went south to Hirvonen's former team-mate as Latvala built a 16.8s end-of-leg lead.

Worse was to come for Hirvonen, as Solberg, the man who replaced him at Ford, was even faster than his predecessor at the Cumbrian-based squad. What had happened?

Before Hirvonen would answer questions, he had one of his own at the end of SS9: "What was his [Solberg's] time?"

Taking time to compose himself on the back of the news that he was now 17.2s down, he eventually added: "Tyres are finished."

Solberg's studs were anything but finished – the 2005 Sweden winner demonstrated his exceptional ability to read a rally and make the right choices. Solberg had saved his two spares as late as possible and then deployed them at just the right moment to move himself back into a podium position, just a couple of seconds behind Hirvonen.

"I got the feeling back again in the last stage," said Solberg. "It was the same feeling we finished with in Monte Carlo. I did a little bit with the clicks on the suspension and some on the ride-height and it really helped. It's a little bit frustrating that we had a spin in one stage this morning – without that we'd have been right there. Don't worry, there is much more to come for the next two days."

Solberg's last revelation wasn't the best of news for Ostberg, the man he'd deposed from third place. Ostberg was, however, ready with his own fighting talk.

"Tomorrow I will give it everything I've got," he said. "We tried to raise the rear to get rid of the ▶

PICS: WWW.MCKLEIN.DE

Evgeny Novikov took another strong finish

STAGE TIMES

SS1 SUPERSPECIAL KARLSTAD 1 (1.18 MILES)
Fastest: Sordo 1m34.2s
Leader: Sordo

SS2 MITANDERSFORS (16.82 MILES)
Fastest: Ostberg 14m13.0s
Leader: Ostberg

SS3 OPAKER 1 (12.53 MILES)
Fastest: Loeb 10m45.8s
Leader: Latvala

SS4 KIRKENER 1 (4.41 MILES)
Fastest: Hirvonen 5m41.0s
Leader: Latvala

SS5 FINNSKOGEN 1 (13.03 MILES)
Fastest: Hirvonen 11m57.2s
Leader: Hirvonen

SS6 OPAKER 2 (12.53 MILES)
Fastest: Loeb 10m30.1s
Leader: Hirvonen

SS7 KIRKENER 2 (4.41 MILES)
Fastest: Hirvonen 5m34.9s
Leader: Hirvonen

SS8 FINNSKOGEN 2 (13.03 MILES)
Fastest: Latvala 11m48.3s
Leader: Latvala

SS9 TORSBY (11.93 MILES)
Fastest: P Solberg 9m51.5s
Leader: Latvala

SS10 SUPERSPECIAL KARLSTAD 2 (1.18 MILES)
Fastest: P Solberg 1m32.6s
Leader: Latvala

SS11 VARGASEN 1 (15.30 MILES)
Fastest: Latvala 13m23.7s
Leader: Latvala

SS12 SAGEN 1 (8.84 MILES)
Fastest: Latvala 7m32.4s
Leader: Latvala

SS13 FREDRIKSBERG 1 (11.27 MILES)
Fastest: Hirvonen 10m26.4s
Leader: Latvala

SS14 HAGFORS SPRINT 1 (1.16 MILES)
Fastest: Tanak 1m52.3s
Leader: Latvala

SS15 VARGASEN 2 (15.30 MILES)
Fastest: Latvala 13m02.6s
Leader: Latvala

SS16 SAGEN 2 (8.84 MILES)
Fastest: Latvala 7m22.8s
Leader: Latvala

SS17 FREDRIKSBERG 2 (11.27 MILES)
Fastest: Hirvonen 10m26.7s
Leader: Latvala

SS18 HAGFORS SPRINT 2 (1.16 MILES)
Fastest: Tanak 1m58.0s
Leader: Latvala

SS19 LESJOFORS 1 (9.32 MILES)
Fastest: Latvala 9m10.3s
Leader: Latvala

SS20 RAMMEN 1 (7.31 MILES)
Fastest: Latvala 11m47.1s
Leader: Latvala

SS21 HAGFORS 1 (2.89 MILES)
Fastest: Ostberg 3m05.2s
Leader: Latvala

SS22 LESJOFORS 2 (9.32 MILES)
Fastest: Ostberg 9m00.8s
Leader: Latvala

SS23 RAMMEN 2 (7.31 MILES)
Fastest: Latvala 11m40.7s
Leader: Latvala

SS24 HAGFORS 2 (2.89 MILES)
Fastest: Loeb 2m58.7s
Leader: Latvala

◄ understeer, but it didn't really work. I wasn't so happy this afternoon."

For the second event in succession, Evgeny Novikov was turning in a mature drive. His hopes of staying in touch were spoiled by the choice of just one spare tyre through the afternoon, which meant he ended the day with fewer studs than anybody. Henning Solberg was sixth overnight, as Loeb recovered to seventh.

POSITIONS AFTER DAY ONE

1 LATVALA/ANTTILA	1h23m50.8s
2 HIRVONEN/LEHTINEN	+16.8s
3 P SOLBERG/PATTERSON	+18.6s
4 OSTBERG/ANDERSSON	+32.3s
5 NOVIKOV/GIRAUDET	+1m12.1s
6 H SOLBERG/MINOR	+1m48.5s

LEG TWO (73.17 miles)

SUNNY - AMBIENT TEMPERATURE RANGE ON STAGES: -4 TO -1 CELSIUS

Saturday was the Jari-and-Mikko show. Even Loeb admitted he was fascinated by the all-Finnish tussle at the front. But was it really much of a fight?

Possibly not. Latvala controlled the day perfectly and drove a magnificently-controlled leg. The Ford man added 1.8s to his lead through the morning, and a further 4.4s in the afternoon. No wonder he was smiling.

Day two began with Vargasen. Hirvonen was quickest through the twistier first half of the stage. But when the road widened, Latvala got the hammer down: fastest.

"I was a bit stressed when I saw his split and he was up," said Latvala at the finish.

It was the same story on the next stage: Latvala quickest again. Hirvonen admitted he thought he'd done enough through the Sagen stage. He was impressed.

"He is driving well," said Hirvonen with a smile. "Very well."

The Citroen man finally pulled some time back in Fredriksberg, taking 1.9s away from his rival.

"I love it!" said Hirvonen at the end. "It's so close, it's fantastic."

Latvala hadn't been so happy, unable to find as much grip as he wanted on the morning's final long stage. And now he was having to deal with another problem: Hirvonen the entertainer.

Having grown up with Mikko, few drivers know what makes France's new Finn tick like Latvala does. But that wasn't going to stop Hirvonen. Between the stages, the chatter got more and more animated.

"I'm trying to stitch him up," said Hirvonen. "I'm winding him up, asking him all sorts. I want to get his mind off the rally – before the last stage I asked him when he got laid last!"

It wasn't working.

"He's not telling me about his set-up any more," said Latvala, "but I know what Mikko's like. I'm not going to respond, but he is very funny."

With temperatures rising considerably and with less snow and ice on the roads, the afternoon was about keeping as much metal as possible in the tyres. The considered opinion was that Fredriksberg would be the worst stage for gravel. Latvala nodded sagely when this was put to him, and then suckered his rival completely by blitzing the preceding Sagen test to add five seconds to his lead.

"We need studs for the next stage," said Latvala, "but they don't have to be sharp..."

He was right. With just about enough of a covering of snow and ice through Sagen, Latvala kept most of the 1520 studs underneath his car. They were blunted, but still there, allowing him to limit the time loss to Hirvonen to 2.6s on the rockiest road of them all.

Evidence of just how hard the pair had been pushing through the afternoon came on the second run of the Hagfors sprint stage, a spectator-pleaser through the centre of town, which had been watered and frozen rock-solid via a bowser and near-Arctic temperatures. If studs were necessary for forward progress, it was along this 1.16 miles: Latvala was 12th fastest, Hirvonen 17th...

The Ford driver would start the final day 23 seconds ahead.

Solberg's hopes of pressurising the duo ahead were spoiled when he stalled on the line of the second stage. Instead of engaging in the lead fight, the former champion found himself becoming embroiled in his defence of third from Ostberg. The younger Norwegian beat Solberg through five of the day's eight stages, but only

PICS: WWW.MCKLEIN.DE

Jumping contest: podium man Mads Ostberg...

...and top Mini finisher Sandell

managed to narrow the gap by 2.6s. His efforts were slowed on the penultimate test when an electrical glitch sent his car into launch mode.

"I ripped the wires off the back of the [steering] wheel," said Ostberg. "That seemed to sort it. We were still faster than Petter, but we'd saved our tyres for that stage and I think we could have been even quicker."

Eyeing the timesheet, Solberg admitted his approach to the final day wouldn't be easy. "I need to be quick, not crazy," he said.

Novikov remained fifth and determined not to relinquish that place to Loeb, who ended the day 44.4s behind him in sixth.

POSITIONS AFTER DAY TWO

1 LATVALA/ANTTILA	2h30m08.0s
2 HIRVONEN/LEHTINEN	+23.0s
3 P SOLBERG/PATTERSON	+51.4s
4 OSTBERG/ANDERSSON	+1m02.5s
5 NOVIKOV/GIRAUDET	+2m13.1s
6 LOEB/ELENA	+2m57.5s

LEG THREE (52.71 miles)

OVERCAST - AMBIENT TEMPERATURE RANGE ON STAGES: -8 TO 0 CELSIUS

Sunday turned out to be all about one rock in Lesjofors. Second time through the stage and with more than half a minute in his pocket, Latvala was cruising. Unfortunately for the Ford team he cruised straight over a rock on the apex of a right-hander. And then Solberg did exactly the same thing.

Tough as it was for Solberg to miss his chance of a second successive podium with Ford, all anxious eyes were on the leader: his 35.6s advantage was slashed to 8.4s with just two stages to go.

"He'll be all right," said team boss Malcolm Wilson, biting his lip nervously.

Having been here before and seen Latvala bounce cars into the trees, nobody was sure. Except Latvala. He kept his cool and caned Hirvonen in Rammen before taking third on the powerstage.

"I'm so happy," said Latvala at the finish. "I feel like a weight's been lifted from me."

He wasn't the only one. Ostberg was delighted with third, saying: "I reckon I would have had it without Petter's problem."

Fourth for Solberg kept him third in the standings, while Novikov held onto fifth place ahead of Loeb.

In three weeks, Latvala's gone from zero on the Monte to hero on the Swedish. And with Hirvonen settling into a French way of life, this is just the start of a fascinating fight.

SWRC

Proton becomes a stable elementary particle

Three weeks ago Proton almost made the perfect start to its maiden Super 2000 World Rally Championship campaign on the Monte Carlo Rally – and last Sunday in Sweden P-G Andersson finished the job.

Andersson's SWRC debut with the car came to a premature halt in the French Alps when his Satria-Neo S2000 caught fire and cost him a massive class lead. With another advantage measured in minutes, the Swede scored the dream result in Sweden.

Andersson didn't have it all his own way at home, though. Certainly for the opening day's stages, he enjoyed the close attentions of emerging Norwegian star Pontus Tidemand and his Skoda Fabia S2000.

Revelling in Friday's Norwegian stages, Tidemand was rarely more than a handful of seconds away from Andersson, but a puncture on the eighth stage ended that.

"We had to stop and change," said the disconsolate stepson of Henning Solberg. "It's very disappointing – everything was going so well."

Some consolation – although not much – would be a third-place finish.

With Tidemand out of the lead battle, Andersson was left with a two-minute lead. And he would need that lead – on Saturday morning the dampers on the Proton were sticking, which left the car awkward to drive and hungry for rear tyres. A complete change at lunchtime cured the problem and allowed Andersson to bring the car home.

"This is a fantastic result," he said of Proton's maiden SWRC win. "Once we'd changed the suspension, we had the perfect car again and we were able to push hard. I'm really pleased for the whole team. It's a round later than we would have liked, but the win is here."

As in Monte Carlo, Irishman Craig Breen was ready to pick up the pieces had Andersson faltered for a second time. Breen drove a great rally in Sweden, playing himself into the conditions on the opening day before pressing on. Unfortunately for the WRC Academy champion, his Fiesta suffered a shattered brake disc on the penultimate stage of significance on Saturday.

"I thought it was the front differential," said Breen. "It went with a bang. Fortunately it didn't put us off the road."

Breen and co-driver Gareth Roberts worked on the car after the stage, stripping the hub of disc and caliper before a nervy, three-braked run through the 11-mile Fredriksberg test.

"It was hell in there," said Breen, "but we made it through. Apart from that, this has been a good event for us."

Reigning PWRC champion Hayden Paddon was a distant fourth, the Kiwi having to get to grips with his Skoda and snow on the same rally.

Andersson had time in hand to take victory

SWRC – Round 2 of 8

POS	DRIVER/NAVIGATOR	CAR	TIME
1	P-G Andersson/Emil Axelsson	Proton Satria S2000	3h30m16.8s
2	Craig Breen/Gareth Roberts	Ford Fiesta S2000	+1m35.8s
3	Pontus Tidemand/Goran Bergsten	Skoda Fabia S2000	+2m49.6s

RESULTS

Swedish Rally, February 9-12, round 2 of 13

24 SPECIAL STAGES, 216.958 MILES

POS	NO	DRIVER/NAVIGATOR	CAR	TIME
1	3	Jari-Matti Latvala/Miikka Anttila	Ford Fiesta RS WRC	3h18m28.3s
2	2	Mikko Hirvonen/Jarmo Lehtinen	Citroen DS3 WRC	+16.6s
3	15	Mads Ostberg/Jonas Andersson	Ford Fiesta RS WRC	+38.8s
4	4	Petter Solberg/Chris Patterson	Ford Fiesta RS WRC	+1m14.3s
5	6	Evgeny Novikov/Denis Giraudet	Ford Fiesta RS WRC	+2m41.4s
6	1	Sebastien Loeb/Daniel Elena	Citroen DS3 WRC	+2m55.1s
7	10	Henning Solberg/Ilka Minor	Ford Fiesta RS WRC	+3m49.5s
8	52	Patrik Sandell/Staffan Parmander	Mini John Cooper WRC	+5m08.9s
9	21	Martin Prokop/Zdenek Hruza	Ford Fiesta RS WRC	+5m30.0s
10	64	Eyvind Brynildsen/Cato Menkerud	Ford Fiesta RS WRC	+6m27.2s
OTHERS				
11	60	Sebastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia	Skoda Fabia S2000	+7m35.0s
12	18	Thierry Neuville/Nicolas Gilsoul	Citroen DS3 WRC	+10m03.7s
13	62	Andreas Mikkelsen/Ola Floene	Skoda Fabia S2000	+10m18.5s
15	12	Armindo Araujo/Miguel Ramalho	Mini John Cooper WRC	+13m00.9s
R	5	Ott Tanak/Kuldar Sikk	Ford Fiesta WRC	SS22-elec'al
R	37	Dani Sordo/Carlos del Barrio	Mini John Cooper WRC	SS8-accident

Starters/finishers: 50/42. Leaders: SS1 Sordo; SS2 Ostberg; SS3-4 Latvala; SS5-7 Hirvonen; SS8-24 Latvala.

CHAMPIONSHIP TABLE

POS	DRIVER	PTS
1	Sebastien Loeb	39
2	Mikko Hirvonen	32
3	Petter Solberg	29
4	Jari-Matti Latvala	26
5	Evgeny Novikov	21
6	Dani Sordo	18
7	Mads Ostberg	15
8	Francois Delecour	8
9	Henning Solberg	6
10	Pierre Campana	6

MANUFACTURERS' POINTS

1	Citroen Total WRT	65
2	Ford WRT	55
3	M-Sport Ford WRT	28

RALLY SUMMARY The biggest change to this year's route was the inclusion of a full day's competition in Norway. After competing close to Kongsvinger on Friday the crews returned to Sweden for a weekend on the more regular roads around Hagfors, north of Karlstad.

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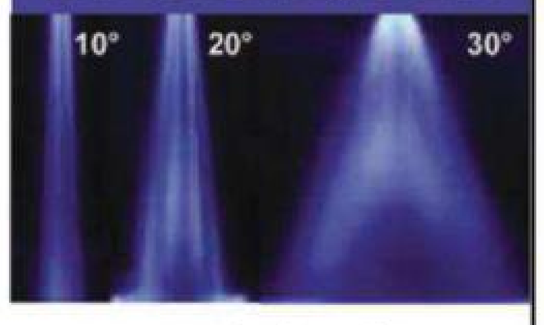

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INTERNATIONAL RACES & RESULTS
TOYOTA RACING SERIES
Manfeild (NZ), Rd 5/5

QUICK RESULTS
→ Race 1 **Mitch Evans**
→ Race 2 **Felix Serralles**
→ Race 3 **Nick Cassidy**
→ Champion **Cassidy**

RACE RATING ★★★☆☆
Title achieved in less-than-dramatic style - but that didn't apply to GP

TOYOTA RACING SERIES MANFEILD (NZ), FEBRUARY 11-12, RD 5/5

Cassidy lands the title and NZ GP victory

Evans (1) defeated Cassidy in race one

NICK CASSIDY HAD A DREAM weekend at Manfeild as he scooped the Toyota Racing Series title and won the New Zealand Grand Prix.

The 17-year-old Kiwi ended the 15-race season with five wins and a 100 per cent finishing record with Giles Motorsport to wind up 176 points ahead of Hannes van Asseldonk.

But Cassidy was not the fastest driver at Manfeild, that honour instead going to his team-mate Mitch Evans who took pole, scored a win and a second place and was then on course for a victory in the Grand Prix before his engine failed with a quarter of the race left.

An upset Evans said he had smelt something wrong before his powerplant began to misfire.

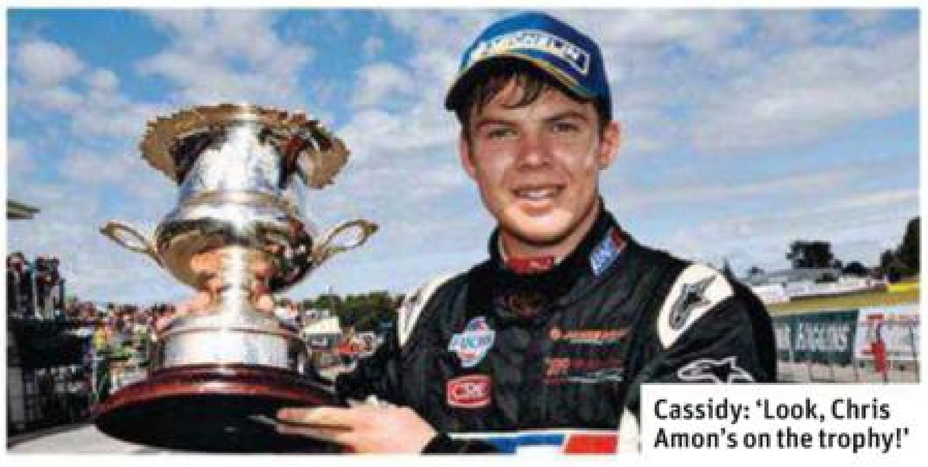
With Evans out of the way, Cassidy came under pressure from van Asseldonk (another Giles-run driver) during the middle stages of the race, but the Dutchman dropped back and Cassidy bagged victory. "Before the race I looked at the trophy and it has names like Jackie Stewart and Chris Amon on it," he said. "It's great to get my name on that; I'm pretty emotional."

Josh Hill, whose grandad won the NZ GP in 1965 and '66, posted a fifth and a third in the first two races and was running fourth in the GP until retiring with a holed radiator.

The failure cost the Formula Renault UK racer third in the Toyota series. That accolade went instead to Damon Leitch, despite a horror weekend that included beaching his car in the gravel.

Third in the GP went to JK Asia (Formula BMW) champ Lucas Auer from South American F3 B-class champ Bruno Bonifacio. Puerto Rican Felix Serralles, who will compete in British F3 this year, won the reversed-grid race. Brit Jordan King suffered a disappointing round that included a DNF in the GP.

● Bernard Carpinter



Cassidy: 'Look, Chris Amon's on the trophy!'

RESULTS

Race 1 **1 Mitch Evans**, 20 laps in 21m29.128s; 2 Hannes van Asseldonk, +5.932s; 3 Nick Cassidy; 4 Lucas Auer; 5 Josh Hill; 6 Felix Serralles. **Race 2** **1 Serralles**, 12 laps in 13m00.706s; 2 Evans, +0.257s; 3 Hill; 4 Auer; 5 Cassidy; 6 Nathanael Berthon. **Race 3** **1 Cassidy**, 35 laps in 40m18.328s; 2 van Asseldonk, +0.509s; 3 Auer; 4 Bruno Bonifacio; 5 Berthon; 6 Jono Lester. **Points** 1 Cassidy, 914; 2 van Asseldonk, 738; 3 Damon Leitch, 633; 4 Hill, 629; 5 Jordan King, 591; 6 Auer, 589.

IN BRIEF

Pigot won winter title

US F2000 WINTERFEST

Spencer Pigot took the title with a treble win at Palm Beach in his Cape Motorsport Van Diemen. He also won twice at Sebring earlier in the week, after Matthew Brabham took the first race.

NEW ZEALAND V8

Tim Edgell dominated at Manfeild, with pole, two wins and a second place. Angus Fogg won race two, but saw fellow Ford man Jason Bargwanna reduce his points lead with a round remaining.

PICS: EUAN CAMERON

Castrol EDGE Rankings

CURRENT STANDINGS

1	Sebastian Vettel	◇	31,442
2	Mark Webber	◇	21,777
3	Jenson Button	◇	19,745
4	Lewis Hamilton	◇	19,305
5	Fernando Alonso	◇	18,663

Ranking the world's best drivers

WHAT HAPPENED THIS WEEK

Jari-Matti Latvala reaches an all-time high of 13th after his victory on the Swedish Rally. Sebastien Loeb (9) moves the other way and falls two spots to match his lowest after he finished sixth. His drop allows NASCAR's Carl Edwards (7) to climb a spot to his all-time high.

To see the full list, visit castroldriverrankings.com

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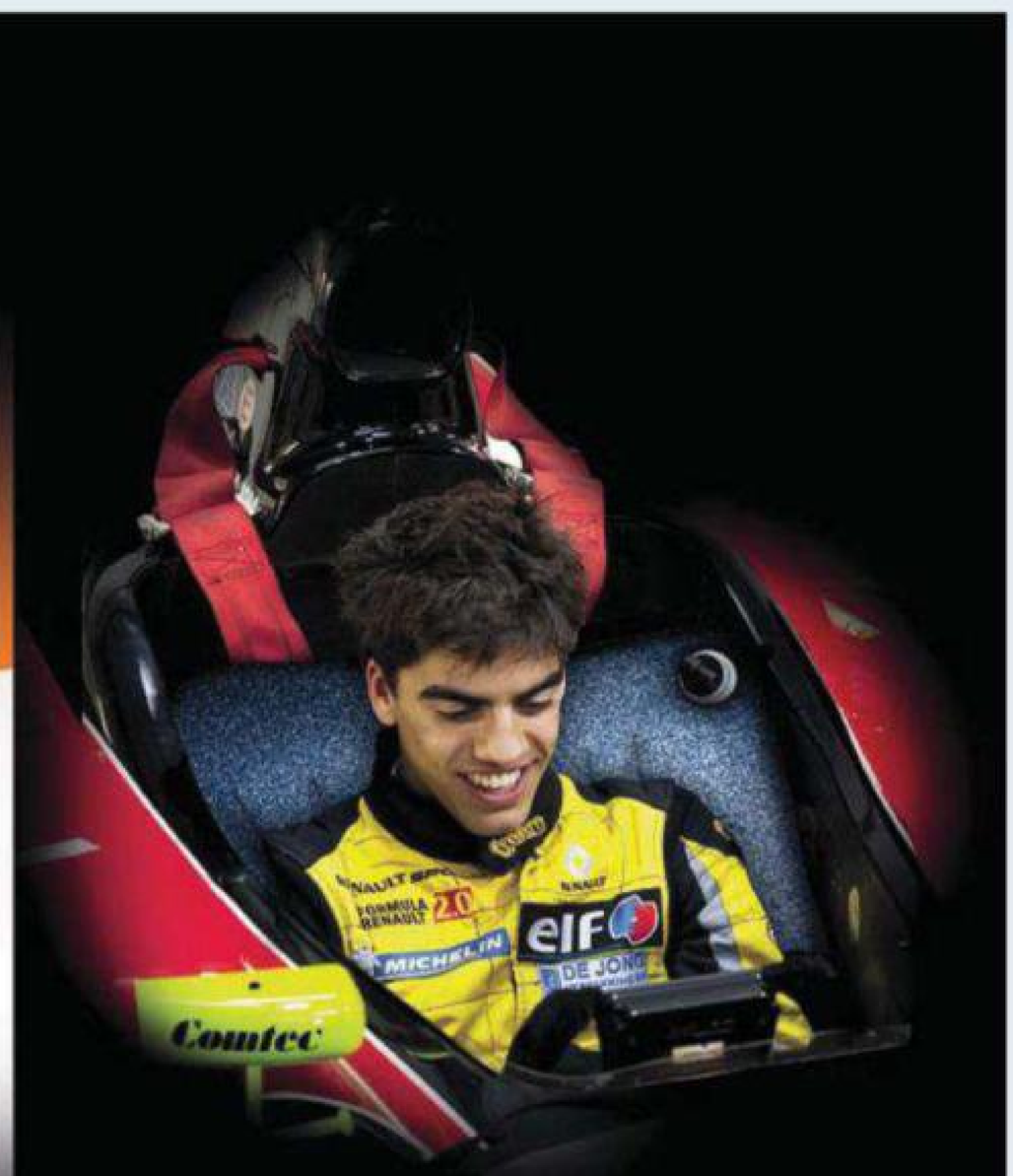

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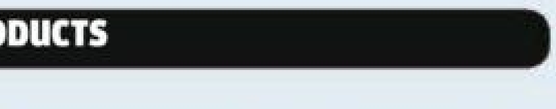

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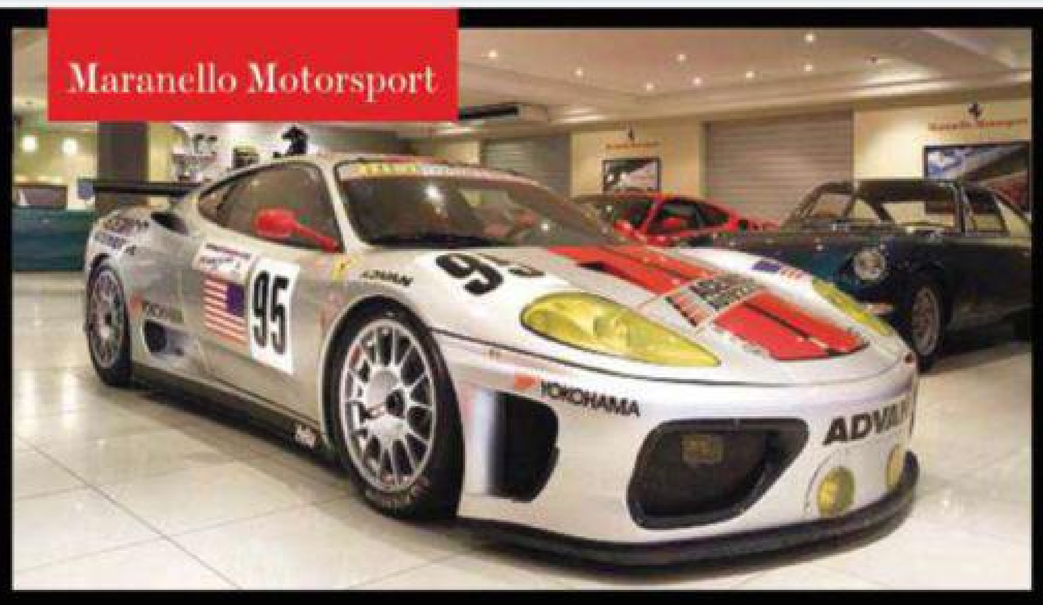

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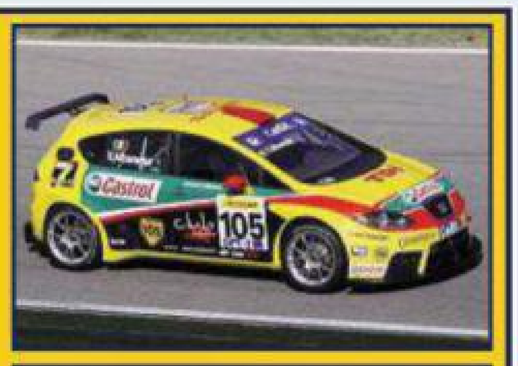

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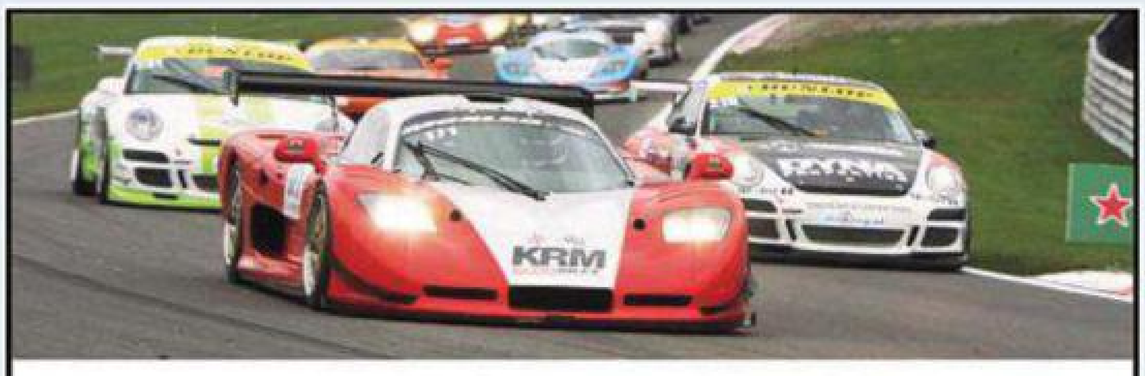

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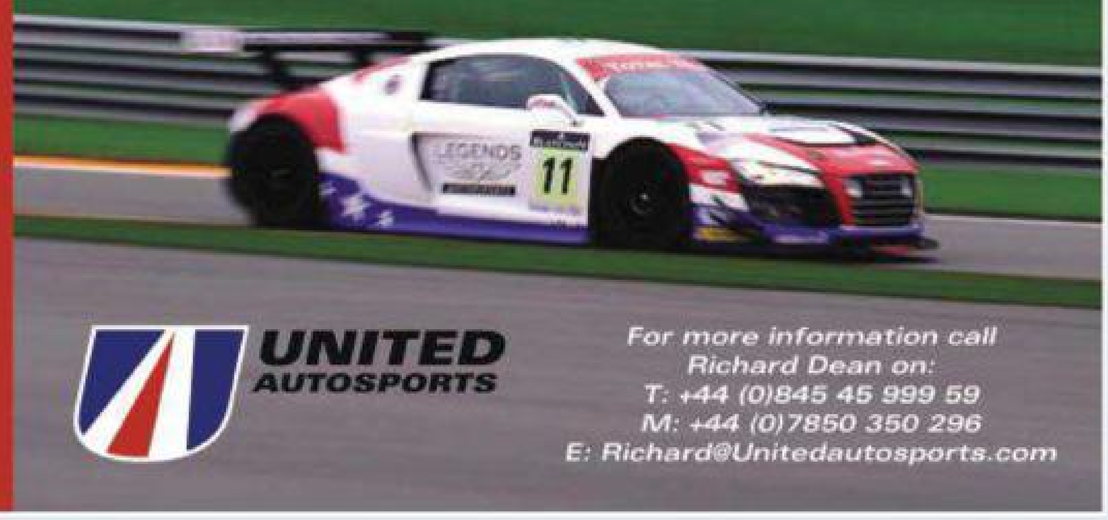

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Hadfield "would love" to join anniversary grid

Celebration races for Elans

Classic Sports Car Club to run 50th anniversary events for iconic Lotus design

TWO RACES WILL CELEBRATE the 50th anniversary of the Lotus Elan this year, run by the Classic Sports Car Club.

Standard, 26R and +2 versions of the successful British sportscar will be eligible for the single-driver races, which will take place at Brands Hatch's Lotus Festival on August 18-19 and Donington Park on September 15-16.

CSCC competitions director Hugo Holder said: "We have quite a few Elans racing with us, there are a few elsewhere, and there are some on the continent. We have people that race with us at Spa and we'll be talking to them.

"It's for FIA cars or other versions with the original silhouette. You can't have wide arches – there will be no Modsports versions allowed."

Cars will run on 1a or 1b tyres and each race will be 30 minutes long.

Holder feels there are enough cars to make the events strong. "It's not like Jaguar E-types or Minis in terms of numbers, but there are definitely enough out there and it's another iconic car," he said. "The first race is on the Brands Grand Prix circuit, it's near Dover for the continental guys, and it's the Lotus Festival, so it should attract people.

"We'd like to get as many of them as possible, 35-40 would be a good grid."

Holder believes continuing the initiative beyond the celebration year, as happened with the Historic Sports Car Club's E-type Challenge, is unlikely. "If we got 55 cars and it's a roaring success we'd do it again, but I don't think that's likely," he added.

The Elan proved to be a successful club racer against more exotic machinery in the mid-1960s and was still a frontrunner in Modsports events in the '80s.

Preparation expert and ace historic racer Simon Hadfield, who started his career in an Elan and won the Masters Gentlemen Drivers title with Michael Schryver last year in a 26R, welcomed the move. "It's a good thing and I'd love to do it," he said. "In 1964 or 1965 you had to have an Elan. John Miles became an F1 driver substantially through what he did with his. I love the cars and they mean a lot to me."

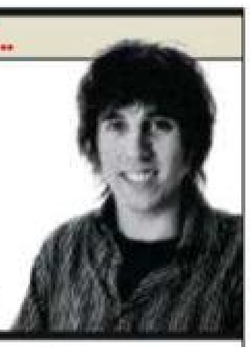
AUTOSPORT understands the HSCC is also considering running standalone races for the 1600cc machine, but has yet to confirm any events.

Club executive director Grahame White said: "We haven't really got space – our programmes are full and timetables are bursting. Having said that, we may look at it later in the year."

CSCC is targeting a grid of 35-40 cars

PICS: MICK WALKER, CHARLIE WOODING

AUTOSPORT SAYS...



BEN ANDERSON
NATIONAL EDITOR

ben.anderson@haymarket.com

JONATHAN PALMER HAS become a key figure in UK racing over the past decade or so.

After his Formula 1 commentating career ended in the late-'90s, the 1981 British Formula 3 and 1983 European F2 champion started the Formula Palmer Audi championship that helped launch the careers of IndyCar ace Justin Wilson and sportscar star Darren Turner.

That came to an end in 2010, but in the meantime Palmer launched his own trackday business at Bedford Autodrome, bought four of Britain's race circuits, took control of British Superbikes, revived Formula 2, and founded his own racing club – MotorSport Vision Racing.

That club, started in 2006, has grown into one of Britain's biggest race-organising bodies over the past half-decade. As more and more categories have sought shelter under the MSVR umbrella, so many of the established race organisers have become concerned about this upstart stealing their thunder – or, more accurately, their series.

The MSVR approach to promotion, backed up by a strong organisational team and the wealth generated by Palmer's wide range of business interests, has certainly shaken up the established order – and given the bill-paying competitors more choice when it comes to how they go racing.

Given Palmer's growing influence on this country's motorsport scene, AUTOSPORT decided it was time to catch up with the MSVR boss to find out some of the secrets behind his club's success. Turn to page 80 to read JP's thoughts on the state of UK club racing, what else he has planned for his beloved circuits, and how to reinvigorate spectator interest in grassroots competition.

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kevin.turner@haymarket.com

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Formula Renault UK

Webster lands Renault UK seat

Formula Renault BARC runner-up joins Mark Burdett for 2012 main series title attack

Webster was third in 2011 Finals Series

FORMULA RENAULT BARC runner-up Josh Webster will graduate to the UK series in 2012 with Mark Burdett Motorsport.

The Racing Steps Foundation MSA Young Driver of the Year won three races in 2011, but lost out to McLaren AUTOSPORT BRDC Award finalist Dino Zamparelli in a final-round shootout for the FR BARC title.

He went on to finish third in the FR UK Finals Series with Burdett at the end of last year and will now graduate to the main series with the squad.

Webster said: "We've been working so hard to put together a deal to race in Formula Renault UK this year so I'm happy we've been able to agree something with Mark Burdett.

"The team did a great job for me in the Finals Series last year and together we showed we've got what it takes to run at the front.

"This is going to be such an important year for my career, particularly as I'll be representing Team UK and the MSA, so I'll be giving it everything."

Team boss Mark Burdett added: "We were very impressed with Josh in the Finals Series last year – he did a very good job and the top priority for us this season was to try and sort out a deal with him. We've got a great working relationship and the aim is to fight for the championship."

Josh Hill, son of 1996 F1 world champion Damon, plus reigning InterSteps champion Jake Dennis will both race for Webster's former team Fortec Motorsport in Formula Renault UK this year.

Hill, who finished seventh in FR UK with Manor Competition last year before taking fifth in the Finals Series with Fortec, and RSF-backed Dennis join Dan de Zille and Indian Shahaan Engineer in Fortec's line-up.

Renault Clio Cup

Hale targets race return in Clios

EX-FORMULA RENAULT BARC racer Mitchell Hale is hoping to return to racing in 2012 in the Renault Clio Cup.

Hale, 18, narrowly lost out to Alice Powell in the race for the 2010 FR BARC title and sat out last season due to budget constraints.

He tested for Clio Cup squad Scuderia Vittoria at Brands Hatch last week and was due to drive again at Snetterton this week.

Team boss Danny Buxton said: "He tested with us last year at Donington and went under the Clio lap record on old tyres. He was blindingly fast at Brands too, in terribly icy conditions. He's trying to raise the budget, so hopefully we can do a deal."

Buxton said Vittoria, which has already confirmed Scottish Mini graduates Vic Covey Jr, Finlay Crocker and Ronnie Klos, hopes to sign FR BARC racer Tom Walker. He is backed by carbon trading company AGT and also tested at Brands.

Hale was "blindingly fast" in SV Clio test

Sports 2000

Sports 2000s to Martini Trophy

SPORTS 2000 CARS WILL BE ABLE to join the Martini Trophy field at the Silverstone International meeting in May and could become a permanent feature on the grid.

The Historic Sports Car Club launched the Martini Trophy, for cars from the European two-litre sportscar championship of the 1970s, last season. It has already linked up with the Supersports series (see AUTOSPORT, January 5) and will now include Ford Pinto-engined Sports 2000s.

HSCC executive director Grahame White said: "We've got a big grid to fill at Silverstone and we've been approached by several people wanting to run Sports 2000s. It's an ideal place for them to come where they won't get in the way of the faster cars.

Historic Sports 2000s are being sought by HSCC

"We'll see what support we get and there is the possibility they could be invited back for other meetings."

White confirmed the S2000 class was likely to be for pre-1983 or pre-1984 machines, but that certain cars with all-enveloping bodywork (those with wheelspats) would not be allowed.

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Renault BARC boss was worried about new class

Formula Renault

Formula Renault Junior row ends as promoters agree compromise

PROMOTERS OF FORMULA Renault UK and Formula Renault BARC have reached an agreement on how to re-admit older Tatuus chassis into a new class for the top-level championship.

FR UK promoter SRO had been pushing for FR BARC promoter Grovewood to change a long-standing rule that forbids FR BARC drivers from racing in FR UK, which it felt would limit potential for a new 'Formula Renault Junior' class in FR UK to boost grids.

Grovewood expressed concern that Formula Renault Junior may damage FR BARC, and held a meeting with teams and organising club the BARC last week. They laid out a proposal to replace Formula Renault Junior with a 'Renault GP Cup' mini-series supporting the final three rounds of Formula Renault UK in 2012.

The series will run within the main FR UK championship at the Silverstone GP, Rockingham and Brands Hatch GP rounds, and will only be open to drivers already registered for FR BARC. SRO was unhappy that this restriction would prevent drivers from other series taking part, but has accepted the proposal.

The move has received widespread approval from FR BARC teams. MGR Motorsport team boss Mark Godwin said: "It got to the point where not enough people wanted the Junior class in Formula Renault UK. For the drivers who don't have the money to race in Formula Renault UK, this is a very good compromise."

British Endurance Championship

Virgo to Britcar with Ginetta G55

TWO-TIME LE MANS SERIES GT2 champion team Virgo Motorsport will contest Class 3 of the British Endurance Championship this season with a Ginetta G55.

The team will run the car under the Redgate/Virgo Motorsport banner for former 750 Motor Club Roadsports racer Peter Smith and his son Matt, who have raced a Ginetta G50 sporadically in Britcar over the past two seasons.

The duo's 2011 season was interrupted by the need for Smith Sr to have a second kidney transplant. The father-and-son pairing also plan to contest the Britcar 24 Hours and may enter the GTC class of British GT.

Virgo team founder Chris Warne said: "We're delighted to be back in endurance racing and we look forward to our partnership with Peter, Matt, Redgate and to a new association with Ginetta."

Virgo ran Ferrari 430 in LMS

Le Mans

Hamilton in GT Aston for Le Mans

ARCHIE HAMILTON, GRANDSON OF Le Mans winner Duncan, will return to the French circuit this year in the Aston Martin support race to the 24 Hours.

Hamilton, who finished fifth in Formula Renault BARC last season, raced at the Circuit de la Sarthe in the Porsche support race in 2010. He will now drive a Gulf Racing GT2 Vantage in the 45-minute Aston Martin Racing Festival preceding the 24 Hours.

"I'm very excited to be back," said the 20-year-old, who will race alongside team boss Roald Goethe's GT1 DBR9. "I'm very grateful to Roald for the opportunity to take part in such a great event in a fantastic car.

"My goal is to race in the main event in 2013, which will be the 60th anniversary of my grandfather's win, and this race is the best preparation."

Hamilton will race GT2 Aston Martin at La Sarthe

MARCUS PYE

HUMBLE PYE

The voice of club motor racing

Salazar raced 'impotent' Ralt RT3 prototype in '79

It seems incredible that 26 years have passed since I co-founded the Classic Formula 3 Association with former Monoposto champion Tony Broster (soon to return to these shores from the Far East), Jackie Stewart's esteemed F1 world championship-winning crew chief Roy Topp and several like-minded souls at a house beside Broster's Timsbury Garage, near Romsey in Hampshire.

Taking the germ of an idea – to bring back to the tracks the charismatic multi-marque two-litre cars of 1974-'80, instantly obsolete once Ron Tauranac's radical Ralt RT3 'wing-car' concept was understood – we toiled countless nights after work to get it off the ground. Several metamorphoses later, our successors probably have to pedal just as furiously.

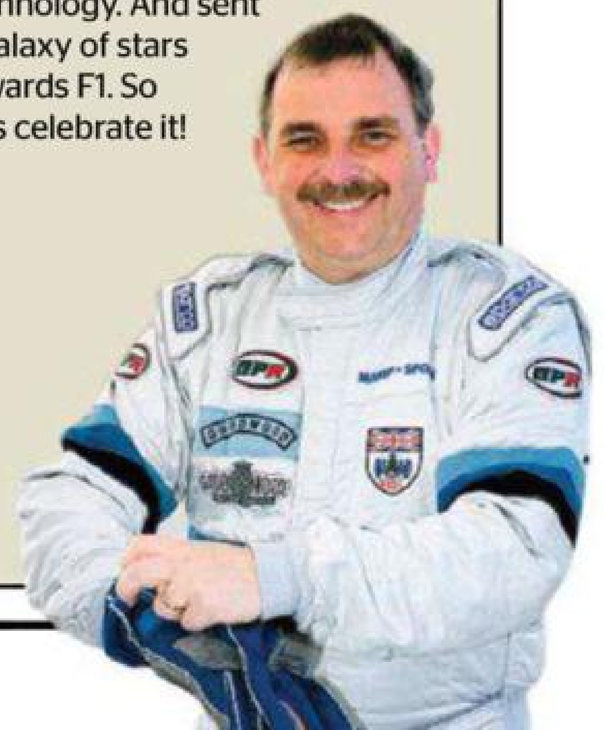
While competitor support in Britain's domestic championship has fluctuated in recent years (for various reasons, not least the economy), France's F3 Classic equivalent is flying. There are also races for the air-restricted 160bhp engined cars – immortalising brands such as Argo, Chevron, GRD, Lola, March, Martini, Modus, Oliroy and Ralt – in Italy and Scandinavia. Indeed, since the movement made its long-overdue Monaco GP Historique debut in 2010, interest is booming anew.

With many RT3s lurking across continental Europe, where they had been hillclimbed for years, the French quickly espoused the most brilliant and influential F3 car since the Cooper 500 entered series production three decades earlier. But, gauging from the 1979 prototype's impotence in Eliseo Salazar's hands, nobody would have guessed that 160 RT3 evolutions would be made before the class rules changed.

This year, again under the HSCC's wing at Silverstone, CF3 has widened its parameters to accept the very cars to which it owed its existence, in the biggest rule-change to date. To maintain the status quo, the Ralts and their contemporaries have been shorn of 'ground-effect' properties by the simple expedient of fitting flat floors – as was done from '85 anyway – per the proven French model. At least six post-'80 cars are being prepared here already!

While Brits have long enjoyed taking their cars to France, and our neighbours have returned the compliment, now we have the basis of a pukka European Historic F3 series. Spanning the 1600cc machines of 1971-73 to the mid-'80s, it's an era that wrought unprecedented change in chassis technology. And sent a galaxy of stars towards F1. So let's celebrate it!

> "Now we have the basis of a pukka European Historic F3 series spanning 1971 to the mid-'80s"



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IN BRIEF

New tyre for Brit GT

BRITISH GT TYRE SUPPLIER AVON will introduce a new evolution of its rubber into the series this season. Avon Motorsport technical manager Mike Lynch believes the new tyre will be more durable and around a second quicker than its predecessor at most circuits.

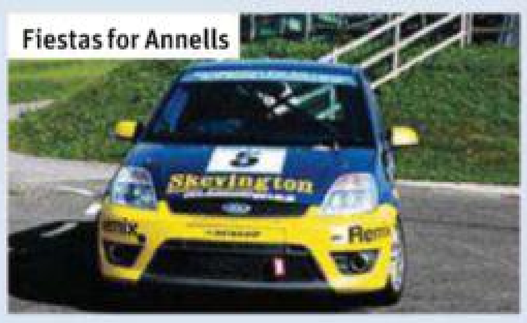
FORMULA FORD DEBUTANT RYAN Cullen will contest the championship's Rookie Cup this season in a new EcoBoost Mygale run by David Ellesley's Race Car Consultants team. The squad has recruited experienced data engineer Rob Elmer and also hopes to enter a second car in the Duratec class.

FORMER RADICAL UK CUP AND Masters champion Ross Kaiser will dovetail his Radical racing with a full season of Fun Cup this year with 360 Racing. He will share a car in the TDI class of the championship, which has introduced sequential gearboxes for the first time, with fellow Radical racer Ray Woolhead and team boss Mark Owen.

BRITISH GT RACER FREDDIE Nordstrom recently tested a Euro Racecar NASCAR Touring Series V8 racer at Ferte Gaucher in France as he evaluates his options for 2012. Nordstrom finished third in GT4 last season sharing a Lotus Evora with former Sport Maxx Cup champion Leyton Clarke.

SOMETIME JAGUAR XK RACER AND renowned classic Jaguar restoration expert Tim Waddingham has died following an accident. The 53-year-old drowned in an icy pond near his West Sussex farmhouse. It is believed he had gone in to rescue his pet dog.

SAXMAX RACER JORDAN ANNELLS will graduate to the Ford Fiesta ST championship this year with Daniels Motorsport. The 17-year-old, who finished sixth in Saxmax last year, has signed a two-year management deal with Scuderia Vittoria with a view to graduating to the squad's Clio Cup team in 2013.


Fiestas for Annells

PICS: EBREY/LAT, LAT ARCHIVE

'Black Jack' made history in BT3 in '62

HGPCA

Brabham is back

Prototype F1 car to race again after 40-year break

THE PROTOTYPE BRABHAM Formula 1 car will return to the tracks this season, after a layoff of more than four decades.

The unique Ron Tauranac-designed BT3 made history when 1959 and '60 world champion Jack Brabham finished fourth in the US Grand Prix at Watkins Glen in October 1962. He was the first driver to score championship points in a car bearing his own name.

Brabham and team-mate Denny Hulme shared the now green and gold Coventry-Climax V8-engined BT3 in '63. 'Black Jack' won the non-championship F1 grands prix at Solitude (Germany) and Zeltweg (Austria), then finished fifth in the Italian GP.

The development chassis was subsequently sold to British privateer Ian Raby. The Sussex motor trader painted his motto 'Puddle Jumper' on the side and installed a BRM V8 engine for a minor-league programme in '64.

Later owners were Yorkshiremen Tony Dean and David Hepworth (who installed an American V8 power unit for hillclimbing), John Scott-Davies, Tim Stock, and American Fred Opert, the force behind Keke Rosberg's Formula 2 rise in the late '70s.

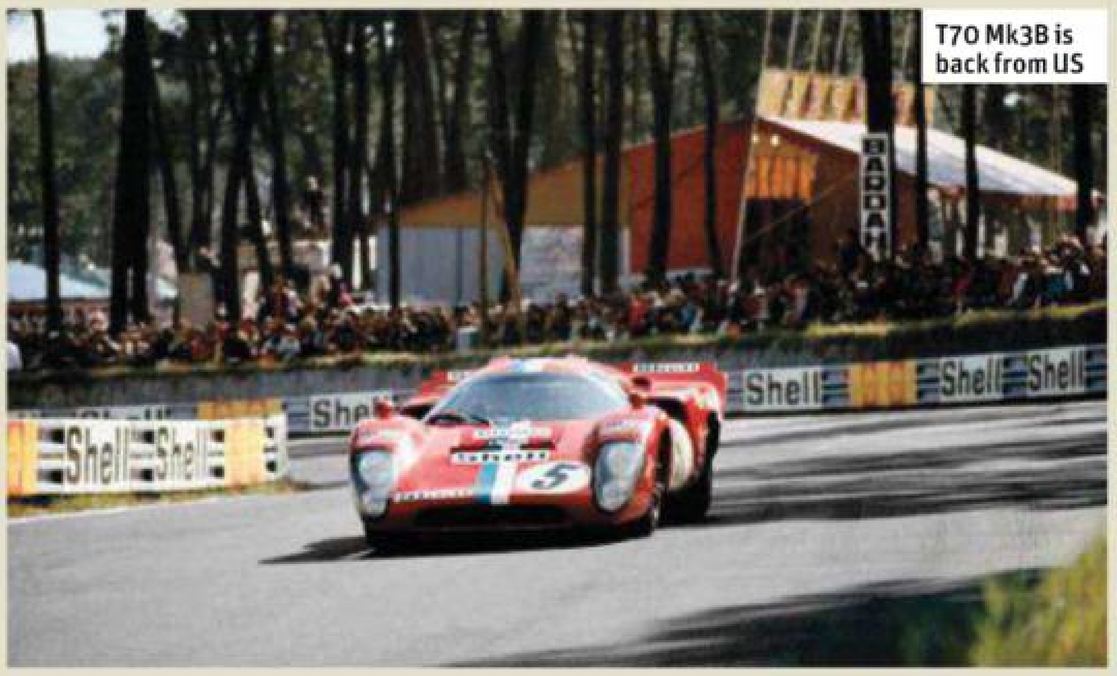
Rick Hall, whose Hall and Hall concern has long been involved with the car, is rebuilding it for ex-Formula Junior racer Marco Rollinger.

Hall said: "Tom Wheatcroft brought the BT3 back from the States at the end of the '60s and it was restored for the opening of his Donington Collection museum in '73.

"Marco's been invited to the Goodwood Festival of Speed and plans to race it regularly once he's got some test miles under his belt. It will be great to see such an historic car out again."

Le Mans Classic

Bellm in frame for Lola T70 seat


T70 Mk3B is back from US

DOUBLE GROUP C C2 SPORTSCAR world champion Ray Bellm could contest July's Le Mans Classic event in the Lola T70 Mk3B recently acquired by fellow Monaco resident Grant Tromans.

Bellm, veteran of nine 24-hour races at La Sarthe, scored his best finish in 1995, when the McLaren F1-GTR he shared with Mark Blundell and Brazilian Maurizio Sandro Sala finished fourth.

Tromans' T70, chassis SL76/146, was not as successful at the venue. Raced by Richard Attwood for first owner John Woolfe in 1969, it competed at Le Mans under Count Rudi Van der Straten's Team VdS banner in '70 and '71. Belgian drivers Teddy Pilette and Gustave 'Taf' Gosselin retired both times.

The five-litre Chevrolet V8-engined coupe that won sprint races at Villa Real and Montlhery in period has been re-imported from the US and is now back with Raceworks Motorsport in Hertfordshire for recommissioning.

Group C/GTP

European bow for Veskanda

THE UNIQUE VESKANDA, ONE OF only two Australian Group C cars, is to race in Europe for the first time in 2012 in the Group C/GTP Racing series.

Sometime Britcar racer Paul Stubber has bought the Chevrolet-engined Group C1 car that raced in the 1988 World Sports-Prototype event at Sandown. The Australian plans to contest the full series with the car, which will be run by Xtec Engineering.

Xtec boss Paul Knapton said: "The car has already been restored, so we'll give it a run at Donington Park ahead of the first race there."

The Veskanda was unbeaten in the Australian Sportscar Championship in 1985-87 in the hands of future Aussie V8 driver John Bowe. The car returned for its one-off WSPC appearance in the hands of Bowe and Dick Johnson.

Veskanda will race again

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Palmer's club

MSVR continues to extend its reach across UK racing. *BEN ANDERSON* talks to club founder and circuit boss Jonathan Palmer

Like it or not, it's impossible to argue against the success of Jonathan Palmer's MotorSport Vision Racing. At a time when many clubs are amalgamating grids and looking to run fewer race meetings, Britain's youngest organiser of modern motorsport has boldly stated that it's set for its busiest season yet in 2012.

The rise of MSVR over the past half-decade has led to plenty of muttering among rivals about circuit-owner power and championship poaching, but Palmer (who also owns and operates Brands Hatch, Cadwell Park, Oulton Park and Snetterton) is quick to emphasise the passive nature of MSVR's growth.

"MSVR has been very successful, but successful while deliberately not having an aggressive, acquisitive approach," says Palmer, who has seen his club expand from running a handful of standalone meetings for open sports and saloons on his own circuits in 2006 into one set to host 34 race meetings

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vision

and run 20 series in 2012. "We don't want to just pinch other people's championships; it's always been the championships that come to us and say, 'What can you offer?'

"They should have a choice. Until MSVR came on the scene, I don't think there was much to differentiate between the clubs, so people stayed where they were. It's important for us to have our own club because it helps us understand the business of club and national racing."

As MSVR has expanded, so more and more categories have come under its umbrella, leading some to wonder if MSVR gets favouritism for race dates at choice MSV circuits such as Brands Hatch GP. But Palmer says his circuit organisation tries to be fair to everyone.

"It's not easy, because of the 24-raceday limit [at Brands], but we allocate days to everybody – including MSVR – carefully and with consideration," says Palmer. "We certainly value the other clubs as our customers and I have no intention of growing MSVR as a dominant force."

It's impossible to ignore Palmer's presence in British motorsport. He is one of life's doers, with a keen eye for detail that has been instrumental in transforming his circuits from rundown, ramshackle venues into attractive modern facilities. He also possesses genuine enthusiasm for the sport. After all, it's easy to forget that Palmer started his own career racing in club events with a Frogeye Sprite and a Marcos 3000 in the mid-1970s.

"I had six years racing at club level; it was a massive part of my life and made a big impression," explains Palmer, who went on to take British Formula 3 and European F2 titles and race in F1 and world sportscars. "It all comes down to the people who race, whether it's in old F3 cars, Formula Vees, BMW saloons or Modsports. I'm fortunate because I'm running a business that is my passion – I love wandering around club racing paddocks as much as DTM paddocks. I'm interested in what people

> "I had six years racing at club level; it was a massive part of my life"
>
> **Early days inspired Palmer**

are racing, what they're spending and their frustrations.

"I have a huge amount of respect for these people spending a lot of money on their hobby. It's easy for people who haven't been there and competed to think that people at club level aren't serious and it doesn't matter to them, but it really does. We've got a world-beating culture of national motorsport and club racing in this country and it's ▶

PICS: GARY HAWKINS

WHERE ARE THE CROWDS?

Club events get poor crowds...

SPECTATOR ATTENDANCES AT CLUB races are nearly always small and plenty of promoters have tried different ways to change the record, without much success.

Former British GT racer and current BTCC team boss Mike Jordan once said national motorsport was "beyond help" in this regard, but Jonathan Palmer believes there is potential to do better.

"You won't get people coming out six to 10 times a year following motorsport – there are other things for them to do – but I think there's some opportunity," he says. "We get 500-1000 spectators on average at club events and I've always wanted to get people to interact more with the competitors."

One of Palmer's plans is to erect a giant screen in front of the Paddock Hill grandstand at Brands Hatch, so that spectators can be better informed about what's happening at club races.

"We can give a much greater level of exposure to our competitors at that level and I think we can help people understand it a bit more," he adds. "If we can do this, then hopefully people can go away from club races thinking, 'That was really interesting – that bloke in that saloon race was a real character!'"

Palmer believes it's possible to "double club racing gates over a five-year period", but says the tight margins involved in operating a circuit mean there is "no mileage" in making circuit admissions free to the public and recouping revenue using captive sales of food, drink and merchandise.

"The key thing is it's got to be an interesting experience [for the spectator] – you won't do it [just] by advertising," Palmer adds. "The important thing is that when spectators come to an event, they want to come to the next one because they enjoyed it."

...but Superbike following is huge

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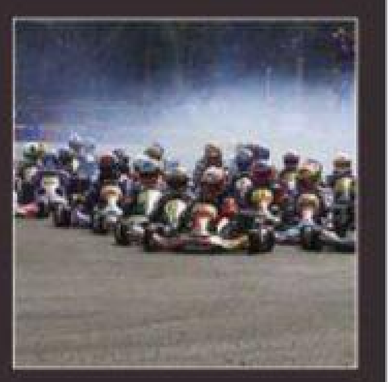

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Radicals defected from BARC in 2011

MSVR ran first meeting in 2006

Strong team is backbone of MSVR

◄ something to really cherish."

Palmer's passion for club racing helps him understand what competitors and spectators want from their race meetings. It's this broad knowledge of motorsport – from the perspective

> **"The strength of MSVR is that it's very focused on understanding what the club racer wants"**
>
> **Palmer explains key to success**

of circuit owner, track day organiser, corporate hospitality operator, race series boss, as well as race meeting organiser – that underpins MSVR's rise to prominence.

"The whole point of business is giving your customer a better deal – more of what they want at a good price," Palmer adds. "By running MSVR we can put our approach into practice and see how successful it is. We want to grow the whole business of club and national motor racing – not just at our circuits."

By working hard to construct "good calendars with a good spread of circuits" and paying attention to small details – from rotating when certain series use garages, to publishing fair timetables, via making sure people don't feel as though they're "standing in a dole queue" at signing on – Palmer feels MSVR has had a positive impact on the UK racing landscape.

"By MSVR being successful, I think it's helped the whole industry because other clubs can see what we have done," Palmer argues. "Some clubs have different strengths: the BRSCC has had a real resurgence and is running more events, and Grahame White has done an outstanding job at the HSCC – he's got a great manner, gets on with everyone, and really understands what his competitors want.

"I think the strength of MSVR is that it's very focused on understanding what the customer – the club racer – wants, and giving it to them; listening to them and not just delivering what we feel they should be taking. People have had little influence on when and where they race and that kind of thing – that matters and competitors care about it. I think that's a bit of a change to how things have been in the past."

Jonathan Palmer has undoubtedly left an indelible mark on UK motorsport and he shows no sign of slowing down just yet. MSVR may be modern British racing's youngest club but has expanded into one of its biggest. Like it or not, it's here to stay.

TOP FIVE UK CLUBS
(by number of series)

BARC (excludes BTRA)	36
BRSCC	24
MSVR (excludes BSB & F2)	20
750MC	15
HSCC	12

CHANGING TRACKS

BRANDS HATCH, CADWELL PARK, Oulton Park and Snetterton have all come a long way since MSV took them under its wing in the middle of the last decade, but the process is still ongoing.

There have been mixed reactions among competitors to the major pre-2011 redevelopment of Snetterton, but Palmer is proud of a personal project that he feels has been "a big success", producing "record crowds for BTCC and British Superbikes".

So what's next? Well, Palmer recently had extra asphalt run-off laid at Druids and new kerbs installed at Clearways at Brands Hatch, and he's also plotting a major revision of Graham Hill Bend.

"There is pressure from the DTM to create overtaking opportunities at the circuit and I think that's a legitimate concern because they want their show to be good," explains Palmer, who has mooted the idea of extending the track and introducing a hairpin in place of Graham Hill.

"It will unfortunately take a slower corner to produce that opportunity, and Graham Hill is the one bend on the track that is bland and has been changed poorly in the past. It won't be change for change's sake, but I'll be disappointed if we don't come up with something decent enough to take the plunge."

Palmer would also like to alter the Britten's and Knickerbrook chicanes at Oulton Park. "I don't like the impromptu chicanes that get dumped in to deal with safety issues," he says. "I'd like to find a more elegant

Palmer doesn't like Oulton chicanes

solution. Circuits should be a thing of beauty – it's a great track but I think it could be better still."

The topography of Cadwell Park prevents wholesale changes, so Palmer plans to focus on preserving one of Britain's most interesting circuits: "I think the right thing to do is not to make it into something it isn't and just make it nicer still for what it's good at, which is bike racing, historics and club races."

PICS: MICK WALKER, RICHARD STYLES, GARY HAWKINS

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YOUR SAY

What you think of the motorsport news of the past week

Rally coverage praised, but will it continue?

At last, a WRC good news story...

Thanks to Motors TV for putting on superbly professional coverage of the Swedish Rally. Their commentary was first class, keeping up with the action, as were their chats with the drivers and teams.

We have too many so-called commentators chatting about inconsequential stuff that they miss what's going on. I hope Motors can continue to show the rest of the season in such style.

Patrick Wickham, by email

EDITORIAL CONTACT **mail@autosport.com**

Can't believe that all the talk in last week's AUTOSPORT was about the F1 car launches, and the biggest problem was... er, many people don't like the shape of the nosecones! What? If that's your biggest problem you are lucky!

Fans of the WRC like me are worried our beloved sport is disappearing over the edge of a precipice, despite multiple promises from those in power that they have a long-term 'strategic plan', but there appears to be much talk but very little action.

Andy Maclean
Churchill, Oxon

The more I read about the WRC and its problems, the more I think it's time for it to go back to the drawing board.

What we have at the moment are the wrong cars on the wrong rallies. No promoter is the least of its problems.

Jamie Deadman
By email

Last week I returned from a month in Australia having been AUTOSPORT-less all that time. When I saw the Ferrari on the cover I had to check to make sure it wasn't April 1.

And while Mark Hughes' splendid comparison with the 1910 regulations is comical, I am not entirely convinced his briefing about the technical reasons for the current ugliness is entirely accurate.

The height of the Lion-Peugeot's engine does, however, give a whole new slant to the comment once made by my old Silverstone neighbour, one Edmund O'Jordan, after being driven on the road by one of my alleged race drivers... that the pistons were coming through the bonnet.

Richard Owen
Silverstone, Northants

This obsession with F1 has to end. WRC is dying, GTs are a mess, prototypes are nothing except for Le Mans.

I love – adore – motorsport. For me, the only bright spots for 2012 are the rejuvenated DTM, and the prospect of IndyCar being mixed up by the new engines and chassis.

Long may AUTOSPORT share that passion and hope for innovation and competition.

Mark Dunlop
By email

AUTOSPORT.com

TOP FIVE ON OUR WEBSITE

1. RED BULL REVEALS ITS 2012 CHALLENGER
2. FERRARI 'NOT HAPPY' WITH EARLY PROGRESS
3. McLAREN HAS FAITH IN NOSE DESIGN
4. LOTUS REVEALS THE E20
5. RAIKKONEN QUICKEST IN FIRST TEST OF 2012

AUTOSPORT.com PLUS

TOP STORY ONLINE

INSIDE TESTING: JEREZ DAILY BLOG

To read this exclusive feature and many others like it, log on to autosport.com/plus and choose which package you'd like. A month will cost £5.50, a year £46. Includes access to Forix – the ultimate stats website.

WIN!

ROAD ANGEL VANTAGE

This week's star letter will receive a Road Angel Vantage – a dedicated safety camera and blackspot locator that displays the legal speed limit of every road you drive, automatically and wirelessly updating its database every few minutes as you drive. For more details on Road Angel visit www.roadangelgroup.com Please ensure that your full address is included on all correspondence.

CORRECTIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS

● The Grand Prix Racewear advert on the bottom right-hand corner of page 81 in the February 9 issue is out of date and should not have appeared in the magazine.

It is the policy of AUTOSPORT to correct significant errors as soon as possible. Please note the issue date and page number when contacting us on autosport.editorial@haynet.com

PIC: McKLEIN.DE

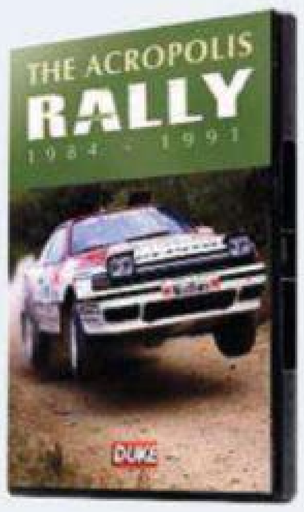
THE LATEST GEAR

The most desirable new releases for motor racing fans: books, DVDs, models, art and gifts

AGV VALENTINO ROSSI HELMET
$599 (agvrossi.com)

For serious bikers and/or memorabilia collectors, AGV's Valentino Rossi-inspired GP Tech Five Continents helmet has all the proper kit: carbon-kevlar shell, double-D strap, removable lining and quick-release polycarbonate visor.

Check out the website for a whole range of Rossi clobber, including plenty of other helmet designs sported over the past decade by the nine-time world champion.



ACROPOLIS RALLY DVD
£16.99 (230 mins)
dukevideo.com

A single-disc, four-hour compilation of seven years' worth of highlights from the car-bashing stages of the Acropolis Rally.

The years 1984-1991 brought Group B monsters and their star drivers to Greece and heralded the arrival of the WRC's lower-fat, but no less spectacular, Group A machines.

VW TOUAREG 1:18 MODEL
£47.99
autosport.com/shop

Norev's 1:18-scale replica of Giniel de Villiers' 2009 Dakar Rally-winning Volkswagen Race Touareg features opening doors and bootlid, while the front bodywork is removable.

With added detail such as four spare wheels and a fire extinguisher in the back, this is a high-spec model at a sensible price.

McLAREN SCRAPBOOK
£30 (978 1 8695 089 44)
autosport.com/shop

Co-compiled by Bruce McLaren's younger sister Jan, this 256-page hardback is packed with unique memorabilia from the family archives of the Kiwi driver, engineer, team founder and visionary.

Many of the captivating images of the F1 winner and Can-Am champ have never before been shared.

HOT ON THE WEB THIS WEEK

YOUTUBE: TAKING ON THE NORDSCHLEIFE IN THE SNOW!

SEARCH FOR: NURBURGRING Formula Race Car. ICE and SNOW (6:49)
The chief instructor of the Nurburgring Driving Academy, Andy Gulden, takes a Formula BMW for a spin around the German venue's Grand Prix circuit and then heads out on to the infamous Nordschleife – in the snow!

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WHAT'S ON...

Your guide to the best events taking place in the UK and around the world this week – plus TV and online

BUDWEISER SHOOTOUT

NASCAR Sprint Cup: non-championship
Daytona, Florida, USA
February 19
nascar.com

For the 34th consecutive year the NASCAR Sprint Cup season starts with the non-championship Budweiser shootout (formerly Busch Clash) at Daytona International Speedway.

NASCAR's 2012 curtain-raiser is all-star special

NEW ZEALAND V8 SUPERTOURERS

Hampton Downs, New Zealand
Rd 1/7
February 18-19
v8st.co.nz

It's the inaugural round of the newly-created New Zealand V8 SuperTourers, run by former Touring Car World Cup winner Paul Radisich. Among the drivers are ex-Bathurst 1000 winners Greg Murphy and Steven Richards, as well as A1GP race winner Jonny Reid.

EUROPEAN F3 OPEN WINTER SERIES

Algarve, Portugal
Rd 1/2
February 17
gtsport.es

The European season creeps into action with what will be the first race outing for the new Dallara F312. Formula Renault UK champ Alex Lynn will take on those who intend to be series regulars (although he'll be in an older F308).

ACCESS ALL AREAS

Our guide on how to keep the motorsport flame burning through the cold winter months

HEATH PHOTO EXHIBITION

The look of the 2012 Formula 1 cars, with their platypus noses and awkward lines, has brought a common debate back to life: "what were the best-looking F1 cars?"

Even before the Jodie Marsh-inspired proboscis of the latest batch, the cars of the modern era, with their asymmetric front and rear wings, narrow track and multifarious aerodynamic appendages, were unlikely to win any beauty contests.

But that doesn't mean they don't posses an intrinsic aesthetic that comes hand in hand with being the fastest racing cars on the planet, although it can take a skilled photographer to unlock these hidden charms.

Over the past 20 years Darren Heath has established a reputation as one of Formula 1's top snappers. His obsessive attention to detail, coupled with his desire to capture previously unseen angles and images, have marked him out.

While his work can often be seen in the pages of magazines and newspapers, the size and reproduction quality means that some of the finer points can get lost in translation.

Fortunately, an exhibition of his finest work from 2011 is currently taking place at the offices of Collyer Bristow, which are situated on Bedford Row in the Holborn area of London.

There is a fantastic mix of action pics and detail shots that force you to stare deep into the image to work out exactly what's being shown. Personal favourites include a beautifully composed picture of Fernando Alonso's red Ferrari winding its way through the multi-coloured background of Abu Dhabi's Yas Marina circuit, while the image of two young Swedish air hostesses sunning themselves on a Monaco balcony will appeal to F1's core audience.

Viewing is by appointment only, and the show closes on February 16. Call 020 7242 7363 for more details.

Heath knows a cracking shot when he sees one!

PICS: DARREN HEATH, McKLEIN, LAT SOUTH, WILLIAMS, FERRARO/LAT

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Television

THURSDAY FEBRUARY 16

1445-1650 Motors TV
Andros Trophy: Season Review
1700-1800 Sky Sports 3
Racemax

FRIDAY FEBRUARY 17

1700-1730 ESPN Classic
Grand Prix Classics: British GP 1969
1730-1800 ESPN Classic
Grand Prix Classics: Japanese GP 1976
2300-0000 ESPN Classic
The Quest of Le Mans

SATURDAY FEBRUARY 18

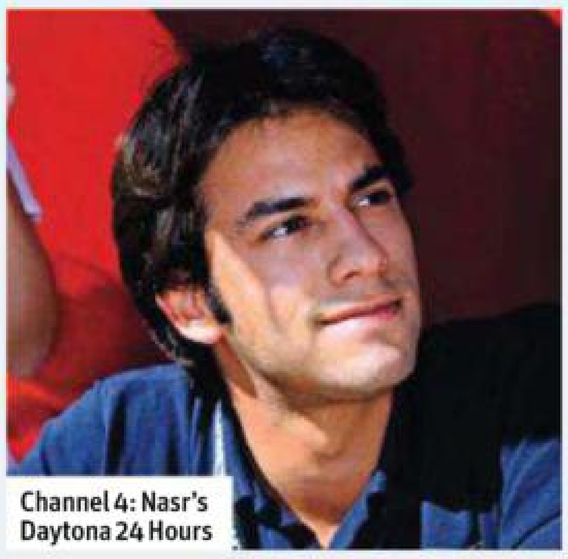
0100-0130, 0700-0730 ESPN Classic
Grand Prix Classics: British GP 1969
0130-0200, 0730-0800 ESPN Classic
Grand Prix Classics: Japanese GP 1976
0400-0425 Channel 5
Motorsport Mundial
0500-0600, 1100-1200 ESPN Classic
The Quest of Le Mans
0600-0700, 0900-1000 Sky Sports 4
Max Power
0725-0755 Channel 4
Daytona 24 Hours: Felipe Nasr profile
2100-2305 Motors TV
Andros Trophy: Season Review

SUNDAY FEBRUARY 19

0100-0300 Premier Sports LIVE
NASCAR Sprint Cup: Budweiser Shootout
Live coverage from NASCAR Sprint Cup's season opener, a non-championship shootout at Daytona.
0230-0330 Sky Sports 3
Max Power
0700-0800, 2100-2200 ESPN Classic
The Quest of Le Mans
0900-0930, 2300-2330 ESPN Classic
Grand Prix Classics: British GP 1969
0930-1000, 2330-2400 ESPN Classic
Grand Prix Classics: Japanese GP 1976
1445-1650 Motors TV
Andros Trophy: Season Review
1600-1700 Sky Sports 4
Racemax
2235-2340 Motors TV
WRC Rally Sweden: Highlights

MONDAY FEBRUARY 20

1600-1700 Sky Sports 4
Max Power
2030-2130 Motors TV
WRC Rally Sweden: Highlights
2235-2305 BBC 1
A Question of Sport
Three-time grand prix winner Johnny Herbert is among the guests for this week's episode of the long-running sports quiz.
2330-0000 ESPN Classic
Grand Prix Classics: British GP 1969


Channel 4: Nasr's Daytona 24 Hours

Online

AUTOSPORT.com

Coming up on the web this week

FORMULA 1 TESTING

Formula 1 testing resumes at Barcelona on Tuesday after little over a week off for the teams, and with in-depth news and features, expert technical analysis and live text commentary, you won't miss anything on AUTOSPORT.com. Plus, find out who takes pole for NASCAR's showpiece event, the Daytona 500, on Sunday, and read what resident office Aussie Mark Glendenning makes of Nissan's decision to join V8 Supercars.

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For more info, visit www.autosport.com/app

REVVED UP OVER WHAT'S ON THE BOX

We cast a critical eye over the best and worst of this week's TV coverage

No nightly TV updates in 1986, but it did have this

IF A RALLY HAPPENS IN the forest, and no-one is paid to film it properly, does it make a TV show? In Rally Sweden's case, rumours of the World Rally Championship's demise appear to have been greatly exaggerated. Or were they?

A last-ditch decision on the eve of the start by the event's promoters paid for the filming and production by the regular Finnish camera crews, and as a result Motors TV and ESPN got the familiar graphics, cracking onboards and exterior shots, including those wondrous helicams of snow-packed stages. It barely missed a trick, especially when Sebastien Loeb dropped it – not once but twice. Sacre bleu!

The in-car shots and end-of-stage interviewer grabbed all the drama on offer as first Petter Solberg and then leader Jari-Matti Latvala smacked a rock to give them both punctures, and throw the podium positions right into doubt in the closing stages.

In contrast, had you tuned into host broadcaster SVT's self-produced live coverage of the opening day's superspecial, you'd have been bewildered by the lack of graphics and randomly-operational timing. OK, so you could watch it unfold live, but filming with two cameras just wasn't good enough.

Even 1986 brought us better production values, with *BBC Grandstand*'s reports. Sure it was broadcast a week late, but frankly you didn't care when Group B cars were slewing sideways across a frozen lake one minute and Scandinavian-flicking through the trees the next.

Proving that everything was better back then, mechanical failures decimated the field. Even Malcolm Wilson was on course for a podium until his Metro 6R4 croaked. A Group A car finished fourth, and even the Citroen BX 4TC – possibly the worst rally car ever – managed to slither home in sixth.

Still, it doesn't get better than sadly-not-long-for-this-world Henri Toivonen's epigrammatic riposte to his exit from the event: "I'm off to join Salonen in the bar."
Revved Up

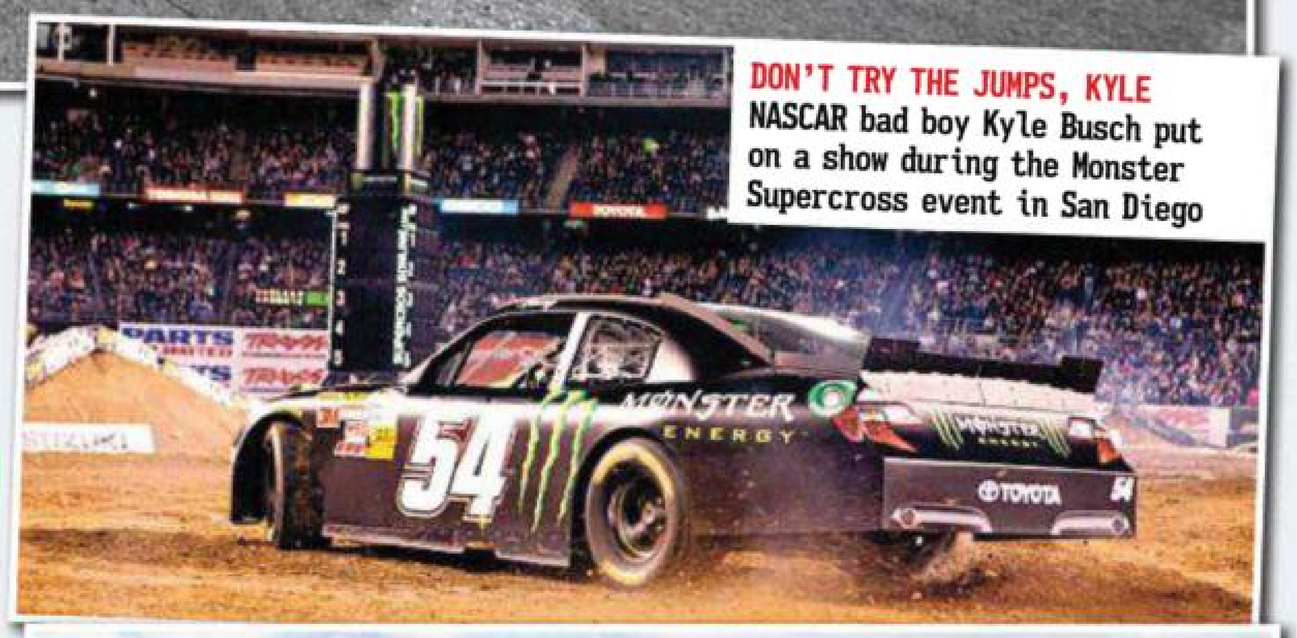
"In 1986 rallying was broadcast a week late, but you didn't care when Group B cars were sliding across a frozen lake"

THE WEEK IN PICTURES

Our lensmen pounding the beat from Jerez to Sebring via San Diego

PORSCHE ALL SET FOR SEBRING 12 HOURS
A trio of brand-new Porsche 911 GT3 RSRs hit the track for (l-r) Paul Miller Racing, Flying Lizard and Falken Tire Racing last week

EVEN SEVEN-TIME CHAMPS CAN GET IT WRONG
Michael Schumacher abuses his new-spec Pirellis in Jerez testing



DON'T TRY THE JUMPS, KYLE
NASCAR bad boy Kyle Busch put on a show during the Monster Supercross event in San Diego

OZ TIN-TOP SUPERSTARS GET THEIR WINGS DOWN UNDER
V8 Supercar stars (l-r) Will Davison, Mark Winterbottom, Garth Tander and James Courtney strut their stuff with new partners Virgin Australia

PICS: GRAHAM THOMPSON/GETTY, HORSBURGH

Storenvy.com

FROM THE ARCHIVE

Peugeot Sport's first victory, August 30 1984

"Vatanen stretched his lead further, AUTOSPORT reporting 'there wasn't the drama with which he is often associated'"

A future MEP of Finland at work

THE OFFICIAL PEUGEOT SPORT TEAM ENTERED just one car, a brand new 205 T16, in the 1984 World Rally Championship's visit to Finland. It would prove sufficient. Three years after the squad's formation, and nine rallies into its debut season, Peugeot Sport would earn its maiden victory in commanding fashion on the 1000 Lakes Rally.

Peugeot Sport came into existence in 1981 when Jean Todt, a co-driver for Guy Frequelin, was asked to create a sporting department for the PSA Peugeot Citroen group. Within three years the squad was ready to make its WRC debut and, with Ari Vatanen and Terry Harryman at the controls, it fared increasingly well.

The pair led its first event in Corsica, before crashing badly, and then led the Acropolis before mechanical issues intervened. In Finland, supported by Todt's impressive technical back-up, they made the breakthrough. It would prove to be the first of many victories for Peugeot Sport over the next 27 years before announcing its withdrawal from sportscar racing earlier this year.

Although the 205 entered the winner's enclosure in impressive fashion – the margin of victory stood at exactly two minutes – the event was not always straightforward, and the crew struggled with the Peugeot's suspension settings on the Finnish jumps.

By Saturday morning the set-up had been sufficiently tweaked and Vatanen edged ahead of Lancia's Markku Alen and into the lead for the first time. By the end of the 19th stage the advantage had been extended further, after Alen lost around 20s when a stone fouled his gearchange.

As the course headed south towards Helsinki Vatanen managed to stretch his lead further, with AUTOSPORT reporting that his control was so complete it was 'almost odd, because there wasn't the drama with which he is so often associated'.

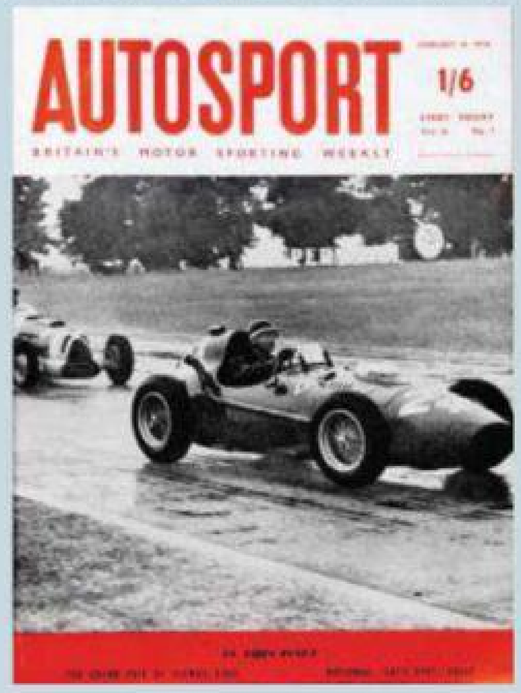
Alen refused to accept defeat, but could not challenge the nimble superiority of the Peugeot, which had benefited from an increase in power and a reduction of weight heading into the rally. Henri Toivonen, in the second Lancia 037, was third.

As has been the case in its recent sportscar exploits, Peugeot's victory was also significant because of the humbling impact it had on Audi.

The Germans had held the advantage of four-wheel drive for some years, and were still able to end the year with the manufacturers' and drivers' crowns – the latter coming at the hands of Stig Blomqvist. But the balance of power had shifted and Peugeot became the dominant force, winning back-to-back constructors' titles in 1985 and '86.

PIC: WWW.MCKLEIN.DE

THIS WEEK IN...



FEBRUARY 14 1958

JUAN MANUEL FANGIO ANNEXED victory in the Grand Prix of Buenos Aires, although his path to victory was aided somewhat by retirements for Stirling Moss and Mike Hawthorn.

As was customary the race was decided on an aggregate of two 30-lap heats. Ferrari star Hawthorn jumped polesitter Fangio's Maserati at the start of the first heat and edged away in slippery conditions, extending his advantage to 31s. Moss's Cooper was hit by Jesus Iglesias at the start, the damage putting an end to his weekend.

Fangio faced a heavy deficit at the start of race two, but the few fans who braved the rain were denied a spectacle of seeing him charge when Hawthorn's Ferrari broke an axleshaft at the start. That left Fangio to cruise to victory, with Luigi Musso (Ferrari) and Carlos Menditeguy (Maserati) next.

Storemags.com

TAKUMA SATO

■ Japanese Grand Prix ■ Jordan-Honda EJ12 ■ Suzuka ■ October 13, 2002 ■ Hometown glory

Only one man mattered to this Suzuka marshal

SUZUKA WAS THE FIRST place I ever saw racing cars on a circuit, when I was a 10-year-old boy at the 1987 Japanese Grand Prix. When I first saw a Formula 1 car go past me it was like an electric shock, and from that point I had only one dream.

I started my racing career at the Suzuka Racing School when I was 20, but coming back for the grand prix was a totally different world. Every grand prix is special, but my home race was beyond that. At Monza you get the *tifosi*, but here there were 160,000 fans focused on me and cheering me.

I've never forgotten the first practice session, just going out of the pit box – there were camera flashes, people waving flags and jumping up and down. It was amazing – and it was only the installation lap!

This was my first year in F1 with Jordan. It had started positively but then the team had some financial problems and stopped testing after May. Each grand prix there would be new aero, new compounds and constructions of tyres, and circuits I had never seen, and the EJ12 was a very physical car to drive – initially difficult handling.

Then, before Suzuka, we got two days at Silverstone. There were no essential components for the car, so I went tyre testing – for the first time in my F1 career. It gave me great experience, and for the first time I would go to a grand prix familiar with the tyres and car.

"I got back into the car and went for my attack, and it got me seventh on the grid. I made it flat through 130R - sideways - and I was second on the speed trap!"

Qualifying was a drama – Allan McNish had his huge crash at 130R and there was over one hour before they resumed the session. I jumped out of the car, looked at the data on the PC and then fell asleep! I was so tired mentally and my body needed a rest before 'the big lap'. I got back in and went for my attack, and it got me seventh on the grid. I made it flat through 130R – the car was sideways but my foot was flat on the throttle and I was second on the speed trap!

In the race, the Renaults got ahead of me at the first pitstop. In the first stint I could go no faster and was speaking with my engineer James Key about the front wing and tyre pressures. For the second stint we had low fuel, wound up the front wing and I went for qualifying laps. It worked.

Even before James told me I had passed the Renaults, I knew I had when I saw all the flags and people jumping. James was telling me to short-shift because the engine was losing oil pressure. His voice got louder and louder every lap, but we finished fifth and it was magic. Everyone went crazy.

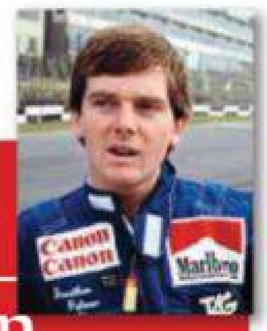
People told me later that Michael Schumacher said in the press conference that there were two winners: him and me. He didn't have to do that. I just felt I was a lucky man to be there that day.

Takuma Sato was talking to Marcus Simmons

IN PROFILE

AFTER A DOMINANT BRITISH F3 season in 2001, Takuma Sato got his F1 break with Jordan. The team's financial problems left him out of a drive for 2003, but he joined BAR and in '04 got his only F1 podium finish, at Indianapolis. Super Aguri was set up for Sato in '06, but when the team ran out of funds during '08 he was left on the sidelines. In 2010 he moved to IndyCar with KV Racing, scoring two poles in '11, and he has now joined Bobby Rahal's squad for his third season in the US.

NEXT WEEK
Jonathan PALMER



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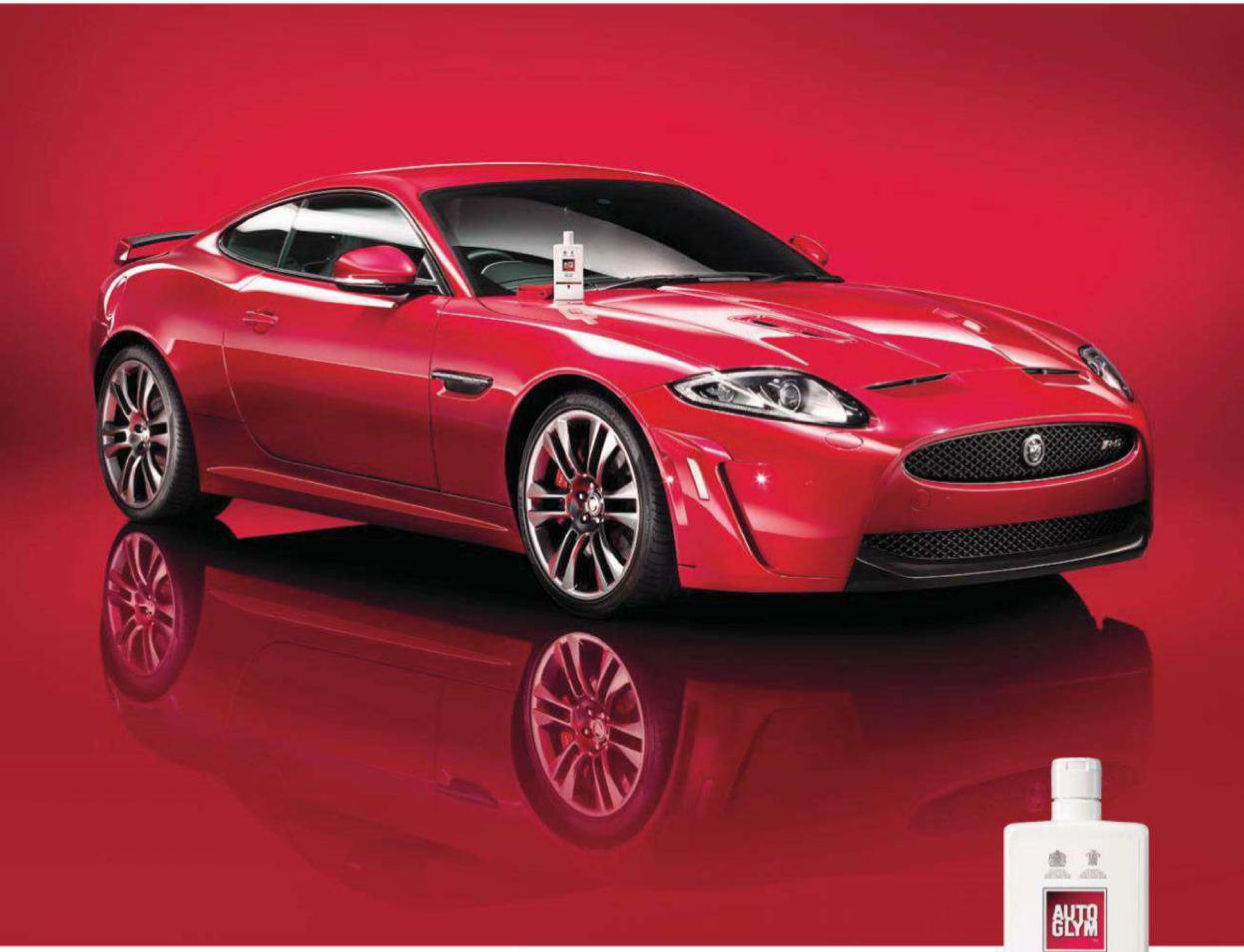

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