

RALLYCROSS EUROCHAMPS



British Rallycross drivers once again ventured into Europe, this time to Mantua, Italy to contest the 1986 European Championship. Bill Burkinshaw was there to see them race.

For those modellers interested in competitions and particularly international events, I have one simple message. You don't know what you are missing.

One hundred and twenty 1/8th Rallycross drivers from all over Europe met at Mantua in Northern Italy on the weekend of July 5th and 6th for the EFRA European Championships hosted by the Gruppo Aeromodellistica de Mantova. Note the 'Aeromodellistica', virtually all the hard work of putting on an R/C car event was performed by a model aircraft club few of

whom had any real interest in R/C car racing prior to the meeting.

In charge of preparing a circuit and a major sponsor of the event, Franco Poldi, boss of the largest Italian model distributors and manufacturers, *Mantua Models*, spared no effort to make us all welcome and ensure a weekend of friendly competition.

Although the men of *Mantua* provided the track and personnel, AMSCI, the Italian R/C Car Federation, provided the control of the racing aided by myself as International referee for the event.

Nine British drivers made what was to be for six of them the first of a dual trip encompassing both European and World Championships which were to take place on consecutive weekends.

The PB marques was supported by Keith Plested, Paul Pagdin, James Weedon and Stuart Wilcox at his first International event, whilst father and son team David and Tommy Chung favoured the *Serpent* 'Cobra'. A new car on the British scene, the French *Siccom* 'Magnum' was driven by both Richard Stitson and John Chamberlain, the former,

proprietor of *Windsor Models*, is to import this interesting new car into the UK.

The track prepared for the race was built on loose sandy ground and appeared to have an underlying layer of clay which gradually appeared as the power of racing motors wore through the top surface. By UK standards the track was once again rough, potholes and ridges soon appeared and in one spot a hole too deep and steep-sided for a two-wheel drive car to get out of appeared! Repair work on the track was restricted to evenings allowing the surface to steadily deteriorate during the days racing. Although generally rough it was evidently possible to drive very quickly and several drivers posted their fastest times in the last round of heats. The single consolation was that it was of course the same for everyone! A high rostrum with a large shady roof provided some cover for the drivers and also put them up into what little breeze there was, very welcome for it was very hot, hovering around the 100° F for the whole of the competition.

Practice and qualification

The startling sight of 20 plus drivers at one time crowding onto the rostrum underlines just how many R/C frequencies are available elsewhere in Europe. Frequency bands in use covered 27, 29, 35, 40, 41, 53 and 72MHz bands, many of the competitors being able to operate freely on a unique frequency.

The Italians and French always strong contenders in Rallycross racing were well to the fore with fast *Garbo*, *Yankee* and *Siccom* cars. Our own drivers took time to adjust to the conditions, but by the end of the free practice session, most were beginning to look competitive, although the *Serpent* duo of Dave and Tommy Chung were finding the track heavy going. All four of the PB 'Mustangs' were equipped with the latest damping system using the new longer stroke dampers plus a centre differential. The track did not lend itself to use of the two-speed transmission, none of the cars used it.

One of the few words of Italian that I managed to pick up during what was for me a

first visit was 'dome' — tomorrow and to be fair the high temperature and humidity did take away the sense of urgency that regularly prevails in cooler conditions. By the time the organised practice was underway the published time schedule was a good two hours adrift moving on into the early evening, but with little lowering in temperature.

As is almost universal for European meetings these days the AMB auto-count system was in use, the much discussed staggered start was not however used as the program appeared to contain minor 'bugs'. A series of heats was run as the evening drew in

using the timing equipment which enabled drivers to compare performances.

Qualifications

Saturday morning and it was hot! Technical inspection was due to start at 8.00, but gradually got underway at 9.00am, thoughts of the extra hour in bed that could have been passed through many minds. By 10.00am it looked as if the slow pace of the technical inspection was a deliberate ploy on the part of the Italian officials to delay the start of racing to a point where four rounds would not be possible. There had already

been a minor disagreement over the interpretation of the rule book regarding the number of rounds.

However, eventually things got underway for what was to develop into an absorbing days racing as drivers attempted to produce a time that would keep them in the top 80 and give them a chance at the finals day.

Gary Marsden was first out for the Brits and he turned in what was to be his best time of the qualifiers, making him 11th fastest overall straight into the semi-finals on the following day. Richard Stitson followed, starting what was to be for him a weekend of total frustration as engine problems robbed him of even the chance of qualifying for the second day.

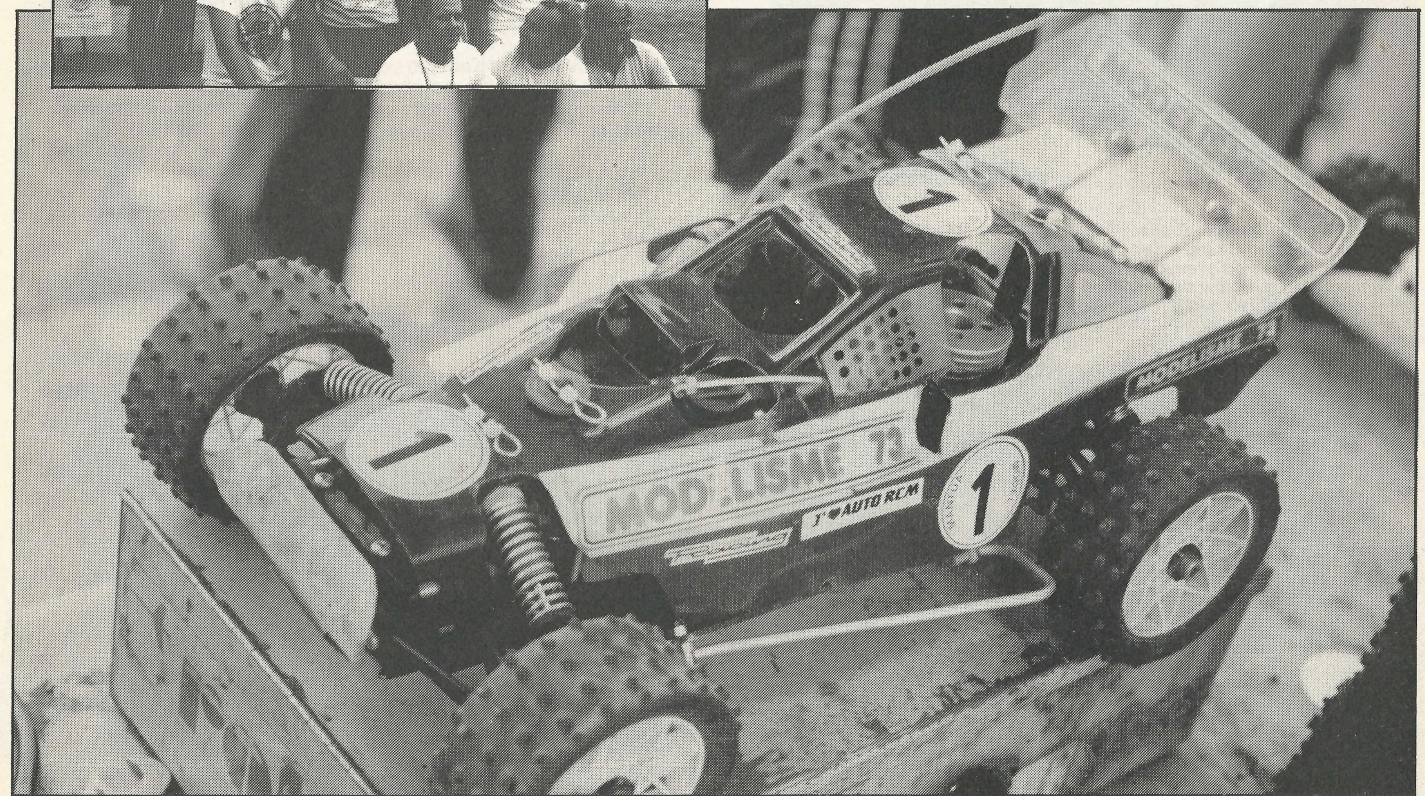
Engine problems were to dominate the Brits throughout the meeting, hotter climates and rougher racing posed problems that the normal UK race meeting cannot compare with. Although the *Rossi's* and *CMB's* used by many of them are undoubtedly good engines they were noticeably very thin on the ground in every other nationalities cars. One can only speculate that engines that are very good for track racing or very high traction

Rallycross racing such as we see here in the UK, are not best suited to the more weighty 1/8th car and potentially higher operating temperatures.

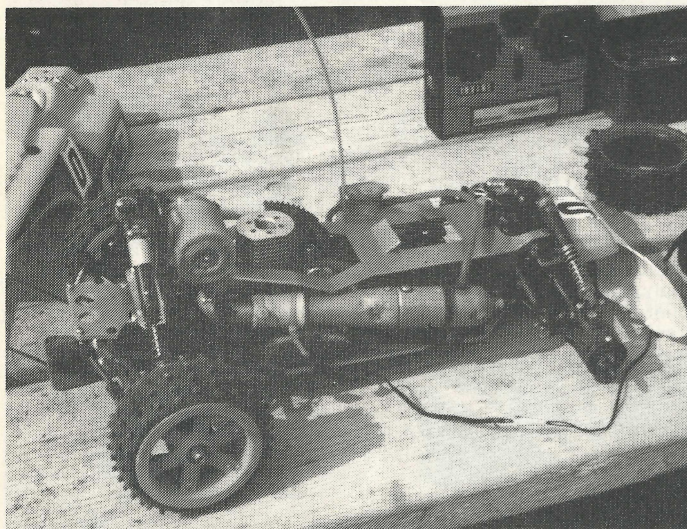
Tommy Chung struggled with his *Serpent* 'Cobra' in the second heat, never really being able to show what he is capable of doing on a smoother track, likewise father David Chung by now with the correct crystal in his transmitter driving for the first time on the track having spent the whole of the practice day working on Tommy's car.

Both Keith Plested and Paul Pagdin appeared to have competitive cars, but suffered the dreaded engine cuts, no reasons were apparent nor were the cuts predictable as to timing. At first there seemed to be a definite connection between the Buggy turning over and the engine cutting, but after some experimentation with fuel lines, etc. it became obvious that this was not altogether the case.

Of all the PB's that of James Weedon looked the most stable. James has matured enormously in his driving over the past 12 months and now regularly looks good enough to challenge the best, having



Top: race start action from the finals. Left: one of the all conquering *Yankee Cars* coping well with the harsh racing conditions. Centre right: the winners pose with their trophies. Right: the winning car driven by Veyssere for *Yankee*.



Top: UK Siccom importer, Richard Stitson of Windsor Models (left) with UK Siccom driver, John Chamberlain. Above: Richard's Siccom 'Magnum' in the pits. Below: Danniére's overlength and overfuelled Siccom 'Magnum' the victim of disqualification. Below right: another Yankee at speed. Opposite page top: Keith Plested's 'Mustang Xi2' specially modified for this event. Centre: Keith receives his tenth place trophy. Bottom: start of the 40 minute final.



now that deceptive appearance of travelling slowly, but in fact moving very fast. Preparation by father Ken is to a very high standard with little left to chance and little going wrong!

James managed to qualify along with third UK driver John Chamberlain straight into the semi-finals making three UK semi-final qualifiers in all with of course chances for more on the morrow. Last of the UK octet Stuart Wilcox at his first overseas meeting struggled a little finding both the track and the organisation a little hard to come to terms with, but nonetheless steadily settling down and improving.

Finals Day

The day started with consolation finals for all but the bottom few qualifiers, these were sparsely attended, neither having a full list of starters. First Brit to take the track was Tommy Chung in 1/32 Final B but an engine cut just before the start lost Tommy whatever chance he might otherwise have had of progressing up the ladder towards the main final. Stewart Wilcox in 1/32 A fared better putting up his best show of the weekend, even being in contention for one of the vital first three places for a period of the race. However it was not to be, an engine cut saw to that!

Next Brits to appear were Keith Plested and Paul Pagdin both in 1/8 Final B and with the confidence inspired by decent engine runs in their latest heats on the preceding day they immediately took up a 1-2 position at the head of the race. A fast Swede Jens Cristensson pushed the leaders hard, but for some time Paul looked unassailable in the lead until an engine cut finished it all leaving Keith to carry the flag which he did in convincing fashion ensuring progression into the next stage the 1/4 Final.

As the sole UK driver in this round of the Finals, Keith was facing some stiffening opposition, but the new found reliability of the Rossi motor seemed to be enabling him to drive in a more relaxed fashion. Almost as the first 1/4

Final started the French protest landed on the Race Directors lap, it appeared that the French drivers were still languishing beside the hotel swimming pool as a result of confusion between the EFRA timetable and the 'public' programme to which the organisers were running the race. As luck would have it as the protest landed our Keith was retiring hurt from the race, his 'Mustang' having suffered a mortal wound! The subsequent decision of the International Jury to uphold the French protest and re-run the 1/4 Finals at the correct EFRA time was the answer to a prayer for Keith who was able to repair his car and then race on to win the final for a place in the Semi-Finals alongside the other three UK drivers.

Four drivers from the team in one semi inevitably means that there will be strong competition between the drivers, one of them has got to go. How unfortunate for us that all four had to fail at this last stage before the Final. First Gary Marsden's engine cut at the start, then John Chamberlain holding a comfortable leading spot stripped a drive gear on the Siccom. The pace was hot, this was to prove the faster of the two semis by quite a margin and try as they might following engine cuts neither Keith nor James could reconnect with the leaders.

Final

Although the Final was devoid of British interest there was plenty to enthral. The new Siccom 'Magnum's' were there — could they take the Euro title first try? Yankee's in the hands of flying Frenchmen are always to be reckoned stiff competition and the 1985 Champion Monesi was in there with the Garbo.

After the preliminaries were over the cars lined up under a cloudy sky that threatened rain for the customary Le Mans style start and the flag was up. Right from the flag Danniére's Siccom took the lead with Gilles Di Lorenzo's Yankee hot on his heels, closely followed by Gueye and Veysseyre.

Early lap tangles put Veysseyre to the rear of the field, but allowed Monesi to show what he was made of and pull up into 3rd spot. For the first 15 enthralling minutes the order remained the same — Danniére, Gueye, Monesi, Veysseyre and Di Lorenzo with the leading group all on the same lap.

At around 20 minutes Veysseyre started what was to be his climb towards the leading position as he pulled past Monesi to take 3rd spot. Pascal Gueye also piled on the pressure threatening Dannières leading place, but in turn could not take the increased pressure from Barruchello. Gueye's mistakes in his efforts to stay in front of the fast Italian Yankee driver eventually enabled the Italian to pass whilst he was on his roof.

By now Veysseyre was close to Danniére who was just coming up to lap Pascal Gueye in 3rd place at the 30 minute mark. In between Danniére passing Gueye and the pursuing Veysseyre doing likewise Gueye's engine cut, putting him out of the running. Still towards the 40 minute mark the race could have gone to either Veysseyre or Danniére with Monesi poised to pick up the glory should either fail. Then at 39 minutes Veysseyre lost a wheel and although lightning work from the mechanics had him back on the track without losing a place, the lead was beyond his grasp and Danniére was first over the line some four minutes later.

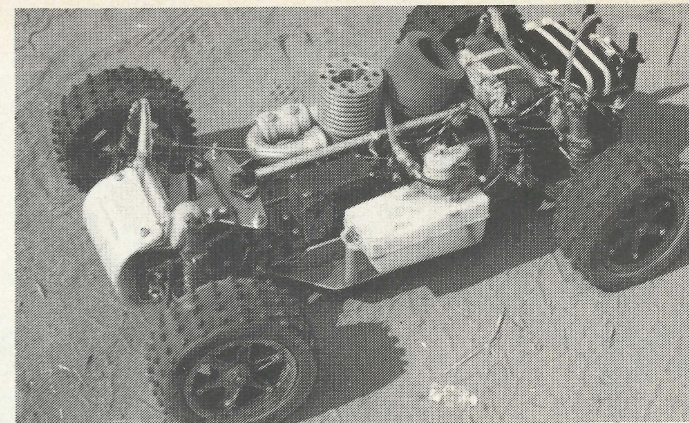
It is customary, indeed the race regulations demand it, that cars are impounded for technical inspection following the final for 30 minutes and in case of protests. This should be a formality, after all the cars have been checked once for compliance with the rules. On previous occasions

disqualification for an oversize fuel tank has been made, so this is an anxious few minutes for drivers.

I was horrified to be called to the scrutineering bay by the race director Emilio Giacce to confirm his view that Dannières car was too long. My first reaction was that a mistake must have been made for the car had been measured both at this meeting and at Grenoble where the official had said that it was close but legal.

As soon as I checked for myself I could only agree with the Italians, unless physical pressure was applied to the wheels and wishbones the car was too long. My view was that as the car could be made to conform with this pressure, Danniére's result should stand, and so it was agreed that as far as length was concerned, the car was OK. But worse was to come, when the *Serpent* fuel tank fitted to Danniére's car was checked it was found to be no less than 4cc over size — 129cc when the limit is 125. At this point the Race Director had no option but to disqualify Danniére, not a pleasant task, but unavoidable as strictly speaking the *Siccom* was outside the rules on two counts. This talented young driver took his disappointment extremely well and should take consolation from the fact that there will be many more championships to come.

So for the second time in its five year history the E.C. is won by a Frenchman, and for the third time by Yankee. Veysseyre drove a very good race, and it was only by losing a wheel that he was prevented from making a serious challenge for the front position during the closing minutes. In any event no-one should consider him anything less than a worthy champion.



Results

1. Frederic Veysseyre	Fr.	Yankee	Cippolla
2. Maurizio Monesi	It.	Garbo	Picco
3. Gilles Di Lorenzo	Fr.	Yankee	Cipolla
4. Pascal Gueye	Fr.	Siccom	O.P.S.
5. Didier Boulmier	Sw.	Yankee	Cipolla
6. Franco Poldi	It.	Mantua	Mantua
7. Gillis Graziani	Fr.	Yankee	Cipolla
8. Alan Lion	Fr.	Siccom	O.P.S.
9. G. P. Barrechello	It.	Yankee	O.P.S.
10. Keith Plested	G.B.	P.B.	Rossi
11. James Weedon	G.B.	P.B.	CMB
16. Gary Marsden	G.B.	Garbo	Rossi
20. John Chamberlain	G.B.	Siccom	Rossi
43. Paul Pagdin	G.B.	P.B.	Rossi
66. Tommy Chung	G.B.	Serpent	
70. Stewart Wilcox	G.B.	P.B.	Rossi
71. David Chung	G.B.	Serpent	
111. Richard Stitson	G.B.	Siccom	Rossi

