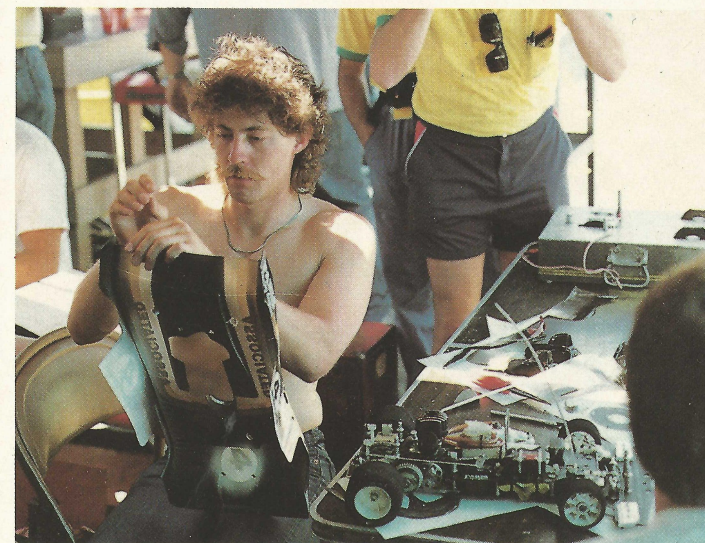
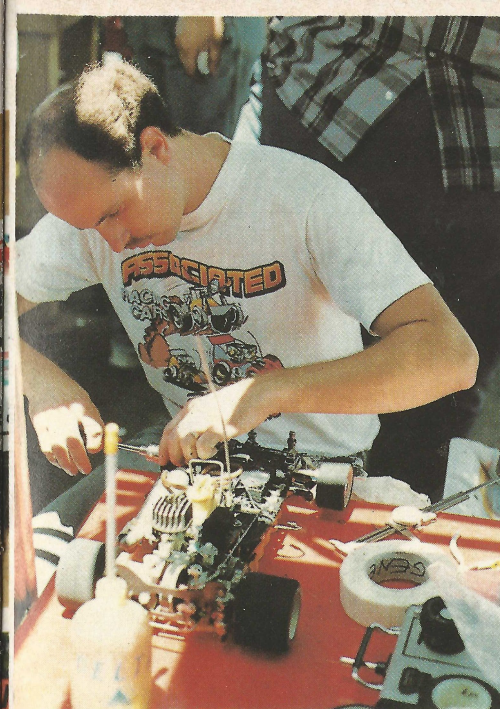
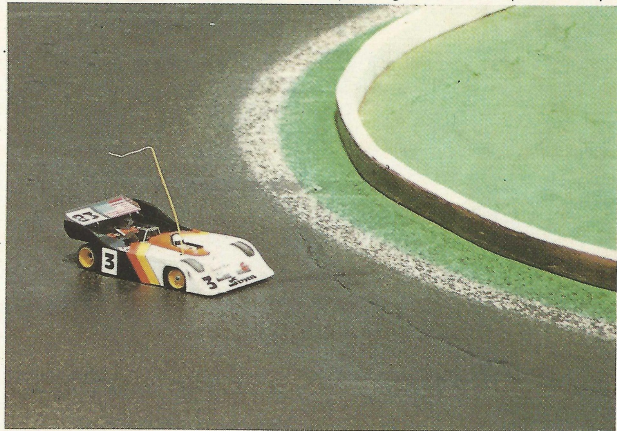


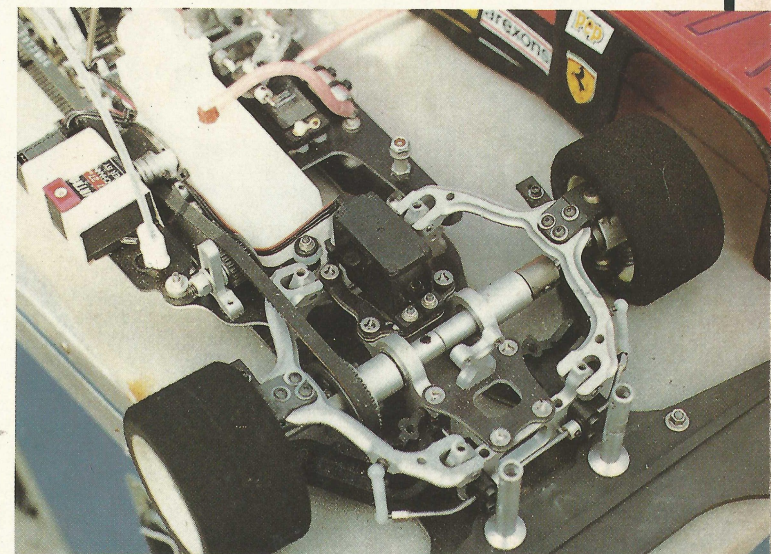
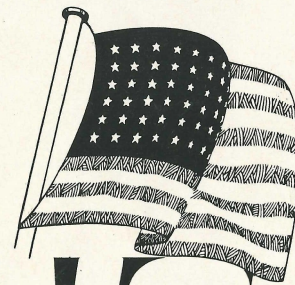


Left: Repete Fusco shows off his winning RC500 complete with his World Championship trophy. Below: lightweight cars were the order of the day. Bottom left: Rody Roem sporting Coca Cola sponsorship.

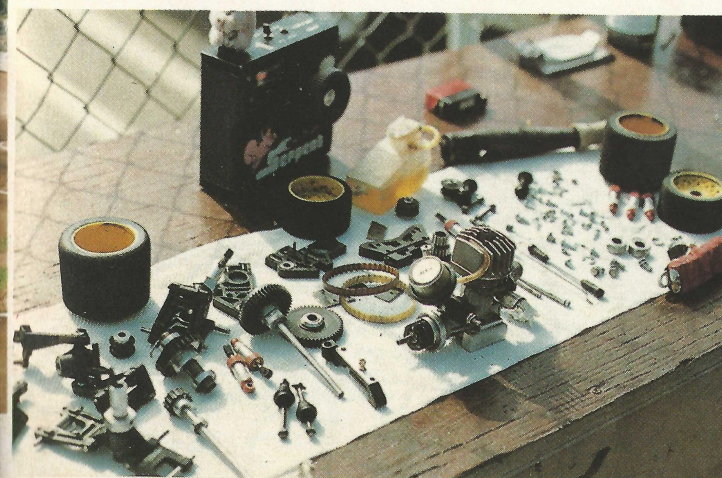
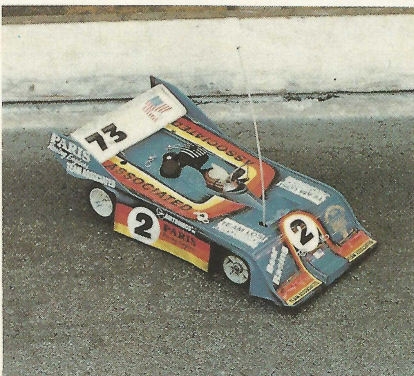
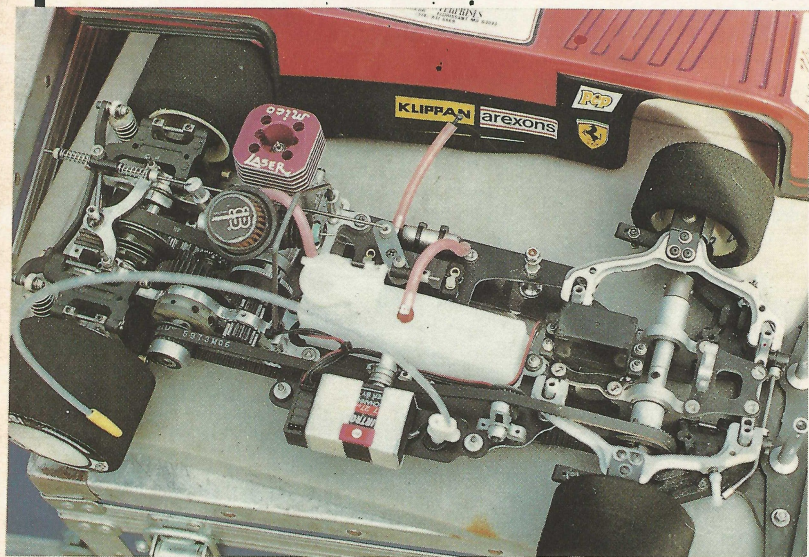


Left: Tony Neisinger at work before the start of the main final. Bottom left: routine stripdown before the final. Right: The finalists with their cars.

CALIFORNIA DREAMING



It's now the hottest day of the week, temperature is in the mid 90's and ten cars are lined up to face 60 minutes hard racing on the ultra tight *Ranch Pit Shop* circuit. Each lap giving a 2.5 second breather whilst the cars scream through the long loop and down the main 80 yard straight before maximum brakes and the tortuous infield which starts with a tricky 220 degree hairpin — where only an elite few drivers consistently drove a good line. On pole was local boy, Gil Losi Jr. —



CALIFORNIA DREAMING



Left: view of the stunning venue for the 1987 World Champs. Below: plug temperature of Butch Kloeber's car being checked by Ron Paris.

Above: lightweight Serpents were very popular. Right: Losi's Serpent being stripped before the final.

denying second qualifier Ralp Burch Jr. his third straight World Championship. T. Q. Losi was also fastest during the warm up (timed practice). In third place on the grid was reigning World Champion Rody Poem; the first time since the World Championships began, the reigning Champion has qualified for the following 'A' or main final.

Lining up were nine American drivers and one European (Rody), using four *Serpents* and six *Associated RC500's*. Ron Paris had reworked eight of the engines with McCoy and O'Donnell looking after the other two. The Paris drivers were running the same engines in the final as they had in qualifying.

Losi grabbed an immediate lead and quickly opened a small gap to Burch and Roem — he

was lapping around the 17.7 mark and looked even more stable and precise through the bends than usual and settled into what was going to be a long hard 200 lap enduro. Roem, who continued to tag Burch through to the first fuel stop, was driving very neatly and had planned to hold station and watch how the race developed. He knew he was capable of running with the leaders, having thrown away TQ during his fifth heat — he was leading Losi Jr. on what turned out to be the TQ run, by five-seconds, only to flip his car on the last bend of the last lap within two cars length of the timing line. He also knew that Burch is prone to driver error when under pressure, but this time it was the car, not the driver, which saw Rody through to second place. Leaving the pits after his first fuel stop,

Burch's *RC500* lost a rear wheel which was quickly retrieved, but by the time the turn marshal had returned the car and wheel to Ralph's dad to fix it to get going again, he had lost four laps.

So at six minutes, Butch Kloeber and Repete Fusco had moved into third and fourth places and were running round together — Kloeber with the faster car on the straight, enabling him to keep ahead of the inch perfect *RC500* of Fusco who closed right up through the infield only to drop back again on the straight. This entertaining battle lasting through to the second fuel stops. During this spell, a number of drivers hit trouble — Ron Rossetti literally. Twelfth World Champion Tony Neisinger was struggling with a sticking clutch and ineffective

brakes — having to stop his car in the pits by driving into the kerb. The result of which was to lose a rear wheel on the straight which was collected at full speed by Rossetti's *Serpent*. While Neisinger waited for his car to be carried back to the pits for Gene Hustings' attention, Rossetti lost control after hitting the wheel. He hit the barriers hard, badly damaging the front suspension and losing most of his steering. He was to spend the rest of the race in and out of the pits.

Burch meanwhile was struggling to find his rhythm, drifting wide out onto the straight, catching the left rear wheel on the barrier and breaking the quick release return. The wheel fell off as he turned into the hairpin at the end of the straight. In all, repairs and getting the engine to run

cleanly again, lost him nearly 20 minutes. Kloeber then disappeared from the lap charts with radio problems — finally traced to a faulty receiver and did not think it worthwhile trying to fix.

A look at the scoreboard showed Roem to be the fastest car on the track, although Losi was still circulating steadily. Losi though, had been in trouble almost from the start. We later found out his *RPS* modified *Serpent* was jammed in second gear — badly affecting acceleration and putting a severe load on the clutch on what was a stop and go circuit.

At second fuel stops, Losi still led from Roem on the same lap, but ten seconds down and Repete Fusco a further seven seconds behind, just staying on the same lap. Roem managing four laps more than Losi before refuelling. Back on the track Rody came up to pass fifth place qualifier Barry Grossenbacher who was struggling with a badly handling car — at the end of the straight, misjudged the manoeuvre and gave the barriers a solid smack. After struggling to the pits for a checkover — losing three laps in the process — he elected to carry on but it was clear he was in trouble and the car had been damaged. A further pit stop and examination, indicated the servo arm or gears had jumped, leaving more steering on the left than on the right. It took a little time to get used to the car thus tweaked and it says much for his character that not only did he carry on, but was soon lapping as fast as the leader.

Meanwhile, ninth qualifier Kevin Mercadante found himself in third place on the same lap as Losi. Kevin was the hero of the week — qualifying an unspectacular 40th with his new *Serpent 'S'* engine *Serpent* car and then winning his 1/8th and quarter finals, finally edging into the 'A' main, as did Ron Rossetti, by virtue of his fast semi-final time. He was destined to run through to second at the end. The only other car besides Fusco to have a trouble free race. At half distance, refuelling was the only thing to happen, although Fusco indulged in a quick spin having been startled by the speed of Burch who had returned to the track and was visibly the fastest car out there. Most cars were being fueled with fuel guns — resulting in a loss of time of only 6.7 seconds including stopping and accelerating back up to speed — (eat your heart out Nigel) and at this stage of the race, nobody was gambling on stretching stops. Indeed, Gary Kyes took the time to tip up Losi's car to read the calibrations on the

top of the tank. A flame out would cost more time than that of an extra fuel stop. Going into the second half of the race, Roem retook third when Mercadante's car died out on the track. Roem, Burch and Losi were still lapping in high 17 seconds and the leader Fusco in low 18's.

Grossenbacher gave up the unequal struggle with his car around the 45 minute mark. Losi provided the next drama — losing second spot to Roem as his crew tried to refuel him with an empty fuel gun. When he did finally get back out, his engine took a few laps to clear itself, although his speed on the straight was noticeably slower. Another stop for attention 'panic' second gear had given up so it was decided to jam the car in bottom gear and try and scream round to the finish.

At 48 minutes, Rody Roem's superb drive came to an end when the conrod let go — letting Mercadante back through to second — albeit six laps down. Neisinger was still circulating ten laps down in third place and Curtis Hustung was fourth. Curtis was another who spent the whole race fighting an ill handling car. His problem was thought to be rear tyres — like all the others in this race, he had planned to run without a tyre change, despite running very — I mean very — low profile tyres — until it was discovered he had a badly chunked front tyre which was flailing round.

As we entered the last two minutes it was all over — Fusco had driven magnificently to win, such was his cushion over

Mercadante, Neisinger was safe in third but Losi decided he was going to chase Hustings and fight him for fourth. Despite his lack of straight line speed Losi lunged inside Hustings through the infield — they touched three or four times — edged ahead onto the straight and was promptly passed again. He pushed past again and built a sufficient cushion going onto the straight to keep Hustings' ill-handling car from overtaking, finally taking fourth by two seconds.

There couldn't have been a more popular winner than Repete Fusco whilst most agreed that *Associated* deserved their win, having stayed with the sport and worked away during the ten years since their last win with Butch Kroells.

The cars

A detailed description of every make of car wouldn't be practical. By far the most popular cars were *Serpent* and *Associated* with about 40 per cent of the entry each. Every other make of car was represented, *PB*, *SG*, *Cook*, *Delta*, *Mantua*, *Kyosho* and even a couple of *hybrids*. Modifications were too numerous to mention individually, but included lightweight machined components — some were replaced with magnesium or titanium replicas — titanium screws and bolts, graphite chassis and shock mounts, various wheel combinations, magnesium cylinder heads. Weight reduction was

considered the most important area for improvement in performance, given the tight nature of the circuit and very high grip.

Those attending the annual Meloy race a few weeks earlier at the Ranch had sussed the car set-up. All of the front running *RC500's* ran without diffs, used very low profile tyres and were set to run loose, steering round the bends on the throttle. Very little front steering input was used, unlike some of the European cars which were suffering from severe power-on understeer and were seen 'pushing' out on the bevels with full lock applied. The most spectacular of the power steer drivers was Tony Neisinger — the 1/12 World Champion taking very consistent tight lines with the tail sliding out as the power went on hard — real Ronnie Peterson stuff.

The factory *Serpents* benefitted from their recent visit to the Meloy race and also ran without differentials although the attempts to reduce weight met with varying degrees of success. The new lightweight wheels were the most elegant of all — enhancing the car's looks as well as their performance. Peter Bervoerts — who has now virtually retired from driving — was using a very neatly made graphite chassis with bonded-in alloy engine/transmission plate in an attempt to dissipate the expected extra heat of Pomona. USA *Serpent* distributors *Team Losi*, running on home ground, had built their cars with virtually every go-faster mod they sell. "If it was flat change it for graphite," seemed to be their

The right hand end of the track with the tricky 220 degree hairpin.





The spoils of winning! First Repete Fusco, second Kevin Mercadante.

only three drivers to complete all six qualifying heats in the 30's with not a moment's problem with his car.

Finals

As the lower final ran through on Saturday, one or two stirring drives were noted. Jim Turner of the United States, driving the only 2WD car entered, pulled through two finals, stopping when well placed during his third. Argentina's Hernan Matticoli went even better, pulling through successive finals from fifth fastest in 1/32nd to fifth place in a semi — five finals in all. Albert Grob upheld Switzerland's honour, moving from pole in 1/8th to third place in a semi — leaving an 'A' final place to Mercadante on the fastest time rule. As already mentioned, Mercadante worked his way through three finals to ultimately finish second overall — he must surely be a driver to watch for the future.

One other item of interest in the semi's was the completion — at full racing speed — by I think Jurgen Baehr's *Serpent* — of 30 minutes racing without its *Mondial* engine's cylinder head heat stick. It's a tribute to modern engine design and manufacture that the engine did not appear to miss a beat during its tortuous run.

Not perhaps the greatest of finals — more an Endurance than a race — but a terrific week of racing, friendship and giant cokes. Gill Losi Snr. (Pop) and his staff and race officials made a thoroughly enjoyable event — I for one wish him well for the future and trust he is satisfied with his week's work.



motto. Gill Jnr. was using *Associated* 'RC10' shocks on his car — his set-up enabling him to drive his usual tight economic way with the minimum of apparent effort.

Local engine wizard Ron Paris was seen at trackside whenever one of his engines was running. His main concern was plug temperature — he used a digital thermometer with probe to check the mixture — aiming for an optimum of 220 degrees centigrade — adjusting the carb accordingly and sending the drivers out again and again until it was right. Contrast this with the Losi drivers — also using *Paris* engines — who listened at the side of the main straight to each other's cars to check the engine note — indicating to the mechanics which way to adjust the mixture. Out of interest, I spent some time during practice standing two thirds of the way along the straight listening to the cars screaming flat out past me. It was obvious that some teams were not getting the best out of their engines — some had not peaked as they went past me — others peaked almost at the beginning of the straight — one or two had only just changed up as they went past me and a surprisingly large number just didn't run clean at full chat. The most impressive part of this exercise was the manner in which the faster cars shut down cleanly when braking at the end of the straight and picked up revs immediately the throttle was snapped open again. Stirring stuff.

Qualifying

With an eight o'clock in the morning start to qualifying and temperatures expected to reach the nineties later in the day, the

first morning heats were expected to provide some fast times. The traditional qualifying schedule was being used of dividing the field into two groups, giving each group a morning and an afternoon session — with two runs in each — and on the third day, two full rounds.

At the end of the first day, Ralph Burch Jnr. to no one's surprise, held fastest time — shared with the reigning champion Rody Roem. They were the only drivers to top 35 laps, with just four other drivers scoring 34 laps. Only two drivers from the afternoon session made the top 20, one of whom was former Italian Ernes Tadiello, now racing for *Singapore*! He was using Rob Paris's spare *Associated RC500* which was very fast down the long straight, as you would expect.

On the second day, Burch went four seconds faster in the early afternoon of a much cooler day, while Gil Losi Jnr. finally put together a run to post second overall. Switzerland's Jacob Bueler drove a very neat and disciplined race to post a fast 34 laps and slot into sixth place. Britain's only representative, Gary Culver was struggling to balance his car to suit his tight driving style, finally conceding that the only way to go fast out there was to grab the car by the scruff of the neck and throw it round. He spent quite a lot of time on the track after the heats, adjusting his thumbs ready for the last chance heats of Friday. Mercadante at this time was an unsuspecting 64th, with Barry Grossbacher holding the last straight through time behind Burch, Losi and Roem.

Friday and the heat was on: Roem in his first race of the day had it in the bag, he was on his

35th lap with 15 seconds to go — five seconds ahead of Losi Jnr. who was chasing in vain — down the straight, smoothly round the hairpin, past the pits, overtaking two backmarkers just a left-right flick and TQ was his — until that dot flipped him. As the turn marshal waited for the track to clear, Losi ripped by to take TQ. Burch was unable to improve, Neisinger just made it across the line to score 35 laps which meant that all four straight through qualifiers were on 35 laps — covered by six seconds. Not much in a ten minute heat.

Gary Culver on his last run improved by more than a lap to slot into eleventh place — leaving him handily placed for the semi-finals. Two places behind Gary, West Germany's Jurgen Baehr was the first of

Name	Car	Engine	Radio	Fuel
R. Fusco	Ass. RC500	O'Donnell OPS	Airtronics	O'Donnell
K. Mercadante	Serpent	Serpent 'S'	Airtronics	Losi
A. Neisinger	RC500	Paris Mondial	Airtronics	Losi
G. Losi Jnr.	Serpent	Paris Mondial	Airtronics	Losi
C. Hastings	RC500	Paris Mondial	Airtronics	Losi
R. Roem	Serpent	Paris OPS	KO	Losi
R. Burch Jnr.	RC500	Paris Mondial	Airtronics	Losi
B. Grossbacher	RC500	McCoy Novarossi	Kraft	McCoy
R. Rossetti	Serpent	Serpent 'S'	Airtronics	Losi
B. Kloeber	RC500	Paris Mondial	Airtronics	Losi