

COLIN LEAKE

TOP SCALE



The track at Groningen.

European Championships - Groningen

Not as detailed report as last year I'm afraid because I was not able to be present in person, therefore I am having to rely on the results sheets and information gathered from those who were there.

If I'd been a bookmaker taking bets on the results of this meeting I'd have fled the country by now, especially if I'd taken any on all ten cars in the final being FG's!

In practice it quickly became apparent that the German FG cars were going to set the pace and be difficult to beat, as they flashed round the circuit leaving many of the top drivers of other makes and indeed foreign FG drivers struggling even to stay on the circuit.

At the end of qualifying the top four cars were all FG, if you count the Harm as being modified FG.

Markus Feildman managed fifth

place with his very much modified SVM and Philippe Lachat, having finally got his tyres right qualified seventh with his Laro.

All of the remaining top twelve cars were FG's.

Many of the Brits had a torrid time with all sorts of problems, some of which I must say were caused by a naive belief that when the organisers stated that anyone caught using an illegal fuel would be banned for ten years they actually meant it!

The final qualifying places for the Brits were as follows:

Geoff Symonds	Laro	22nd
Ian Oddie	SVM	23rd
John Young	FG	46th
Tony Rees	Dynamic	48th
John Skidmore	Laro	59th
Kevin Murby	SVM	71st
Steve Leake	Laro	81st
Neal Douglas	SVM	84th
Kevin Blears	Dynamic	87th
Chris Wright	Laro	100th
Paul Dudley	DNS	Car damaged in practice

THE FINALS

The result of the main final was as follows:

Position	Name	Country	Car	Laps
1st	Oliver Bald	Germany	FG	85
2nd	Mario Hassig	Switzerland	FG	85
3rd	Rolland Iff	Switzerland	FG	85
4th	Achim Bald	Germany	FG	84
5th	Matthias Fritton	Germany	FG	82
6th	Rudolf Mock	Germany	FG	81
7th	Ulli Notzel	Germany	FG	81
8th	Horst Single	Germany	Harm	76
9th	Ernst-Peter Utz	Germany	FG	73
10th	Michael Mielka	Germany	FG	21

The fate of the Brits was as follows:

Name	Position	Final
Chris Wright	DNS	1/128
Kevin Blears	4th	1/64
Neil Douglas	7th	1/64
Steve Leake	1st	1/64
	1st	1/32
	9th	1/16 (Radio problem)
Kevin Murby	10th	1/32 (Retired)
John Skidmore	1st	1/16
	5th	1/8
Tony Rees	10th	1/16 (Blown engine)
John Young	6th	1/8 (Retired)
Ian Oddie	8th	1/4 (Engine electrics)
Geoff Symonds	6th	1/4 (Bad cell in battery pack)

All the drivers who had problems were obviously unlucky but Geoff Symonds was probably the most unlucky of all. He incurred a ten second stop go penalty for creeping at the start which cost him 20 seconds, but then clawed his way back through the field to second place before the battery pack gave up the ghost. An analysis of his lap times suggests that he may well have been in the running for a place in the final if that had not happened.

How Did They Do That?

To say that the result was unexpected to most people and ran contrary to the form book would be an understatement. Had this been a horse race there would have been a jockey club inquiry! So just how did the Germans pull off the shock of the year with their FG cars?

Well firstly the new car is very much improved over the old one. Many of the parts that needed to be made stiffer have been, the car is much lighter than the old car, especially with the carbon-fibre chassis fitted, and finally it is now very adjustable so that it can be set to suit each individual circuit. The reason we've not seen it show up well in the UK probably owes much to the fact that FG don't have a UK driver with the experience to be able to set a car up and take advantage of that adjustability.

Not so in Holland, where the Germans had crossed over the border to the circuit as a team and taken

time to set the cars up. This is something that can't be done in the normal practice days before the event due to a lack of available track time.

Secondly they had some lightly treaded wet tyres, branded FG but made for them by PMT, that worked much better than any other tyre. The fact that these tyres were not made available to FG drivers from other countries let alone rival teams made them few friends, but they were legal.

Thirdly the Harm car that set F.T.D. was in reality a very heavily modified FG, but by no means all the cars were. Some were even using the standard metal chassis.

Also the engines they were using were fast and reliable, shrugging off the effects of the heat. No one could see inside them but they were said to have titanium rods, carbon fibre crank webs and cost over £1,000! Whatever the facts were they were certainly effective.

The cars were much wider than the existing FG cars. This is achieved by a simple widening kit along with a modified Mercedes body. Brakes on these cars were a revelation given the previous poor reputation of FG brakes. Almost everyone I've talked to commented on their ability to stop the cars at the end of the straight and to keep the cars in a straight line whilst doing so.

Finally the whole team, which was mainly German with two Swiss drivers, were clearly working together with all the cars having very similar settings.

It is worth mentioning that whilst the car that set F.T.D. was heavily



View from the rostrum.



Behind the Union Jack the British Team are lead out.



modified the car driven by the final winner and new European Champion Oliver Bald, other than being widened looked very near to being a standard car.

Fuel

The organisers this year had a simple reliable test that would show that a fuel was other than the standard petrol available at all normal filling stations and backed that up with threats of ten year bans for drivers caught using illegal fuels.

So how come then that so many of the drivers were still using such fuels and were being let off with warnings

to change the fuel when caught?

Well it's quite simple really.

Firstly what is effectively racing fuel is available from filling stations on the Continent especially in Italy and France and this fuel would be legal under EFRA rules. All the tests showed that a racing type fuel was being used. If an attempt had been made to ban drivers they would have no doubt produced receipts showing where they bought the fuel, even if it had been more specialised, and claimed that their fuel was legal.

Secondly the sheer scale on which it was being used would have meant that banning all the drivers involved would have quite possibly decimated both this event and future ones.



Good, dry track surface...



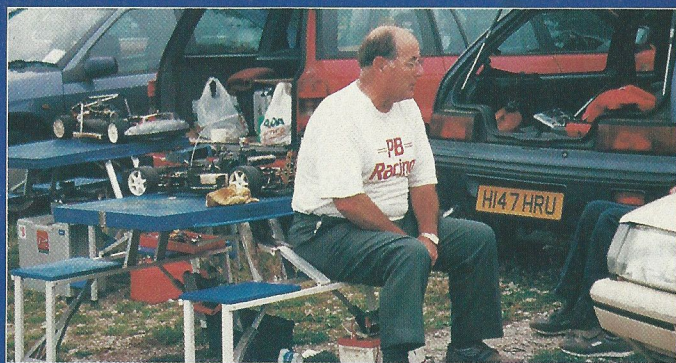
...but then a few spots of rain fell!



The Motley Crew! GB prepared!



The Halifax pits



Above: Mr PB, Keith Plested in reflective mood. Later he remembered to fit the front roll bar!



Quality Skidmore - pants and all!

responsible for the virtual disappearance of the dreaded additives in the UK, since it removed the need to use them.

That relatively small hole incidentally makes a tremendous difference to engine temperatures without spoiling the appearance of the car. Steve Leake tried to run for most of the season without one to get the engine sorted for the Euro's, but when he finally gave up and put one in his overheating problems were cured immediately, and we were even able to lean the engine out by a considerable amount.



Personally, I don't blame any driver who was using an illegal fuel. If the regulations are so slack that most of your rivals are doing so all you're doing is levelling up the playing field.

However, this is the second year that such fuel has been in wide spread use at a European Championship and indeed I understand it is regularly and widely used by many drivers on the Continent, especially in hot weather.

EFRA have got to get their act together and formulate the rules to leave no convenient-loop holes. At the same time it is a fact that with modern tyres, improvements in cars handling and the fact that this years standard engines are the equivalent to last years modified ones, it is

becoming more and more difficult, if not impossible, for the faster drivers to keep engines running on hot days at fast tracks using standard pump fuels.

EFRA need to consider either ways of slowing the cars down or improving ventilation and introduce these at the same time as cracking down on fuels. They may well like to consider the lead taken by the BRCA in this respect. In 1996 additives were in widespread use mainly as a way of dealing with the problem of overheating engines.

For 1997 the BRCA introduced draconian penalties for fuel infringements but at the same time permitted a 50mm hole in the front window to aid cooling and I'm convinced that it was the latter that is