

1/8 Off-Road European Championships, Furuland, Sweden.

With the World Championships taking place in Portugal next month, there had not been such a big build-up to the European Championships as in a normal year. The 1998 Championships were held by the Furuland RC Club, just a few miles outside the University town of Lund, in Southwest Sweden.

On arrival, the track and facilities were superb, once again starting the talk about comparisons with Britain. The track was a tricky mixture of a number of surfaces: very loose gravel, tarmac, concrete, 'crazy paving'

and even cobbles! Already tyre choice was the talk of the pits!

Qualifying would take place over two days. The basis would be the now familiar 'round-by-round' where scores are allotted for performances in that individual round, with each round being separate from the others. It would then be the drivers best three scores from the five rounds that would count as the drivers total for finals qualification.

Qualifying

After not looking so good in practise, World Champion, Alex Laffranchi from Italy recorded

the fastest time in round 1. Local man, Palsson, only just missed top spot by 0.75 seconds, with 1995 European Champion, Philippe Lachat (still using Laro, but now with RB engines) finishing 3rd. Top Brit, with a brilliant run was Philip Boyes who ended 11th in the round.

Round 2 saw the top three in the round come from heats 4 and 5, which were at the front of the round. Daniel Vega from Spain, driving the new Mugen MBX-4, took the spoils, but only just from Lachat of France and Zoppoletto of Italy. Philip Boyes made his heat 5 draw count as he secured another fantastic run to go 10th. Jason Beard, in his first ever European Championships, blasted his new Mugen into 12th place, having had an excellent opener of 22nd in round 1.

In round 3, Laffranchi (MP5) showed the way forward with another tremendous first place, to give him 1st, 4th, 1st as his day's work, leaving him top overall. Tommy Chung (Mugen) put in the best performance of the day by a British driver with a scintillating 6th place.

More rain greeted the drivers for round 4, but only after the first heat. This meant that Heat 10 (which started the round) had not only track condition advantage, but weather conditions as well! The result was that two Italian drivers, Samule Lenzi and Marrone Constantino ended 1-2 in the round. Vega was best of the rest only three seconds off top spot, despite being in a later heat.

Matthew Perry (Mugen) took full advantage of his Heat 10 draw with a solid drive to finish 21st in the round, in his first Euros. Matthew would go on and do even better in round 5 with a faultless drive for 16th in the round. However, the drive of round 4 from a British



European competition to lift British hearts as he took a win in the 1/8th final, beating Grandesso who had previously moved up from the 1/16th finals. David Crompton and Jason Beard were not so happy, both suffering engine cuts to end their weeks work. Jason should still be well pleased with his result although the problem he had (along with nearly every other Mugen car) was a stone hitting the flywheel, a problem that will need to be addressed before Portugal. In the second 1/8th finals, it was a bit like waiting for a London bus. The Brits had

point of view was from Philip Boyes. The seemingly unflappable lad from York ended a tremendous 9th, despite being in a later heat and his best three scores of 9th, 10th and 11th would surely be enough to keep him in the top 15 (the target for the semi-finals).

There was only one person to mention in round 5 Mike Cradock. The British MP5 driver who is having somewhat of a 'renaissance' in the last 12 months in the UK absolutely took the Championships by storm to record the top time for the round! It was a fantastic drive, reeling in the likes of Philip Lachat during his heat! This was surely the highlight of Mike's career to date and thoroughly deserved for the effort he puts in.

One person who was not so pleased was Daniel Vega. The Mugen driver ended second behind Mike in the round and the effect of this was that he missed FTD overall by just one point from Alex Laffranchi. The up-shot of this was that for the second year running, the Italian was FTD at the European Championships and therefore straight into the main final (the reward for doing so).

Philip Boyes (MP5) didn't have anything to worry about as he ended 8th overall, a tremendous achievement at this level. Tommy Chung (Mugen) joined Philip in the semi-finals after improving his score virtue of a 15th place in round 5. It was the first time for 5 years that Tommy had made the semis!

The Finals

The early finals were a nightmare for the Brits up to the 1/8th finals, with the first eight British drivers all failing to move up. It was left to Stewart Wilcox, a 'veteran' of

waited for one driver to go up a final and then Danny Conway (MP5) won the second race for Britain in a row!

Stewart Wilcox is a master at going up through the finals at these events and it looked like Stewart was on his way again, as he took control of his quarter final. Although he couldn't afford a mistake he looked as comfortable as one can be with Italians at your rear! Unfortunately a stone was to prove the downfall for another Mugen man and Stewart's run was brought to a cruel end.

Never fear, Danny was here! The Kyosho driver who had looked nothing better than average all week was now coming into his own. He took control of the other q/f final and this time there was no heartache as he took his second victory in a row, no mean achievement at this level. Danny's time of 32 laps in 20:00.05 was the quickest to date and if he repeated that in the semi, he would have a great chance of making the final. Unfortunately, Mike Cradock did not have the luck in running and couldn't progress with Danny. However, Mike had a brilliant Championships and will never forget his 5th round run.

Semi-Finals

The weather for the final day was thankfully

The British team



superb. This was what a Euros is all about, the best drivers racing a drive-able track in good weather! After the semi-finalists had their practise, it was time for the real thing. The pressure at this stage is considerable with just the top 4 drivers guaranteed a place in the main final, along with the fastest 5th place from the two races to join the FTD man already in the main final.

Philip Boyes (MP5) didn't have the best of starts in his semi-final, perhaps finding out that the driving can be a bit rough at this level?! However, he soon got into his rhythm and lap by lap he caught up the main group. However, just as he took 5th position, in sight of the last qualifying slot, he suffered an engine cut in the pit-lane. Remarkably he looked like he could make the gap up, but another cut would end any faint chance. It was a disappointing end, but he should be very proud of his performances throughout the week, performances that got him noticed by some of the best drivers in the world.

Danny Conway (MP5) got a brilliant start in the second semi-final and after a few laps was



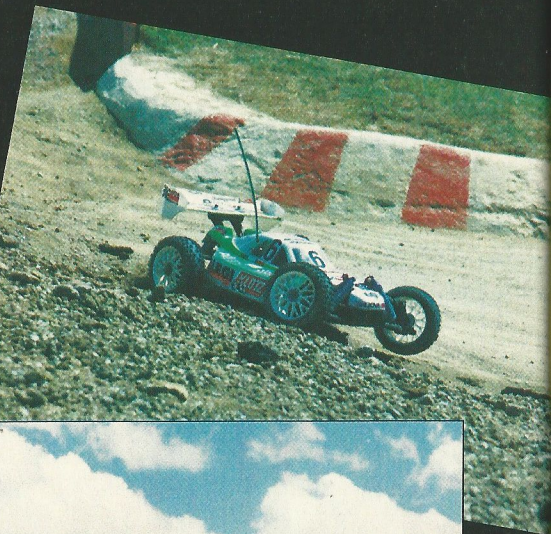
holding 2nd place, having started 8th on the grid. Tommy Chung didn't have a good start but he was exceptionally quick and made it back into the top 4. Just as Tommy was completing his lap before coming into the pits for his first fuel-stop, disaster struck. An engine cut! Was it a stone again? No, it was out of fuel! The hot weather was taken its toll on the engines and Tommy's Nova Rossi was just three corners from doing enough. A stone later caused a further cut for Tommy to end his Championships, but it was certainly good to see Tommy back to his best.

Danny Conway had looked good throughout the whole race. However, with just one lap to go, Danny had a crash, which dropped him to 4th (Even after 19 minutes of faultless driving, one crash and you could almost be out of it!). Danny put his supporters (and pit-crew!) through a nightmare last lap as he had the 5th place car swarming all over him for that final spot for the European final! However, to the delight of the Brits, Danny held on to secure a place in the main final for a British driver! It was a fantastic achievement, let alone in the manner in which Danny had done it, via the 1/8, 1/4 and semi-finals!!

The Grand Final

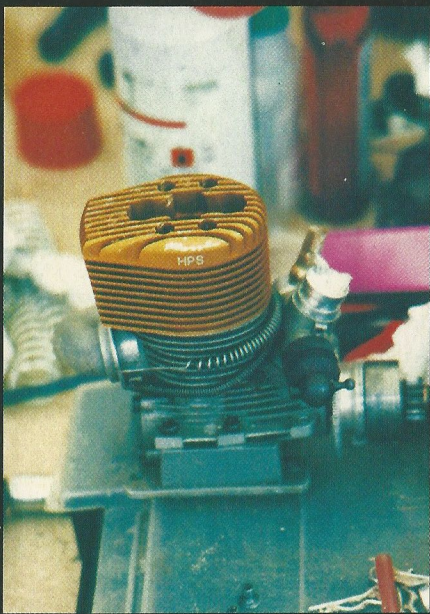
So, after five days of racing, we had reached the Grand Final. As normal, the excitement built before the race and the British 'Barmy Army' (led by Jason Beard and June Perry) were there to cheer Danny Conway on and to hopefully watch an enthralling race.

Alex Laffranchi (MP5) led from pole, but was soon under pressure from Yannick Aigon from



France, driving the only Crono in the race and who had started from 4th on the grid. Laffranchi was the fastest of the two, but made the odd mistake. By the halfway stage, it is fair to say that Laffranchi's Ellegi tyres were not performing as well as the Medial Pro tyres and he began to slip back.

It was the turn of 1995 European Champion, Philippe Lachat (Laro) to try to shoot Aigon down as he put a charge in. Defending champion, Daniel Reckward (MP5) from Germany was also there or thereabouts and these three would end well clear of the rest. Aigon was always in control of the race, but just as it looked like he'd built up a nice cushion, a slight mistake would put Lachat and Reckward within striking distance. With about five minutes to go, Aigon was still leading, but began to suffer slight radio interference on the banking. Panic set in the French camp in the pit-lane, but it need not have done. Aigon hung



on to claim victory by 7 seconds to become European Champion for 1998, with defending champion, Reckward 2nd and Lachat 3rd.

World Champion, Laffranchi, eventually fell to 6th place, just in front of Danny Conway. The British driver had performed admirably in his first foray at this highest level and it was a performance to be proud of. To come up though three stages of finals and to then finish 7th was unbelievable, a week he'll never forget.

Epilogue

All in all, the 1998 European Championships were a success. The organisation was first class, as was the track. At one point it seemed

The magnificent circuit

we would get the 'usual' track deterioration, but the repairs for finals day held up better than I've ever seen before and made the racing a fine spectacle on the Sunday.

There was no doubt that it was a massive shock that Crono took the title with their S6 Superlight car, particularly as there was no large Italian contingency taking part. The popularity of the Crono has dwindled from its hey-days in 92/93, but perhaps this may make people think again?! The British camp did probably better than expected, with a lot of relatively inexperienced drivers performing superbly at this level. The next stop will be the World Championships in Coimbra, Portugal, let's hope this good form continues. **RRCI**

Final Pos	Name	Result	Sponsor	Car	Engine	Fuel	Transmitter	Servo	Front Tyres	Rear Tyres	Qual Pos
1	Yannick Aigon (F)	72 laps in 45.03.17	Crono, Omega, KO Medial Pro	Crono S6 Superlight	Omega	Meccatop 25%	KO Mars	KO 2004	Medial Pro Adheris	Medial Pro Adheris	6
2	Daniel Reckward (G)	72 laps in 45.10.70	Kyosho, RB, KO RVB Dortmund	Kyosho MP5 Evo II	RB	Concept	KO Mars	KO 2001	Adheris	Adheris	4
3	Philippe Lachat (F)	72 laps in 45.23.58	Laro, RB, KO, Medial Pro	Laro D2	RB	Concept	KO Vantage	KO 2004	Adheris	Adheris	5
4	Magnus Amicon (S)	71 laps in 45.04.33	Kyosho, RB, Futaba	Kyosho MP5 Evo II	RB	Dynaglo 25%	Futaba 3PJ	Futaba 9402	Adheris	Adheris	7
5	Marco Granesso (I)	71 laps in 45.12.05	TAG, OPS	TAG	OPS	TAG	Sanwa Exzes	Sanwa ERG-ZZ	Adheris	Adheris	54
6	Alex Laffranchi (I)	71 laps in 45.17.27	Kyosho, Nova Rossi, KO Ellegi	Kyosho MP5 Evo II	Nova Rossi	Nova Rossi	KO Mars	KO 2004	Ellegi Cross	Ellegi Cross	1
7	Danny Conway (GB)	70 laps in 45.12.12	Kyosho, Ripmax, KO Three 5 Models	Kyosho MP5 Evo II	OS RZB	Superglo 25%	Sanwa Exzes	Futaba 9402	Medial Pro Whoops	Medial Pro Whoops	39
8	Julle Pedersen (Fin)	70 laps in 45.35.44	Kyosho, Nova Rossi Medial Pro	Kyosho MP5 Evo II	Nova Rossi	Roga	Sanwa Exzes	Futaba 9402	Whoops	Whoops	15
9	Fabrizio Magi (I)	69 laps in 45.29.66	Mugen, Rossi, Ellegi	Mugen MBX-4	Rossi	Rossi	JR X-756	JR 2825	Ellegi Atomic	Ellegi Atomic	22
10	Hakan Pettersson (S)	45 laps DNF	RB, Medial Pro	Kyosho MP5	RB	Home made	Futaba 3PJ	Futaba 9402	Adheris	Adheris	51