

new blocks on the kits

Reckward wins with RB engines and Kyosho



Coimbra in Portugal is an old University town

Only a month after the European Championships in Sweden and it was already time for the event of the year, the World Championships. The venue was Coimbra, an old University town with the track situated within the University Sports Grounds - just had been the case 5 years earlier for the European Championships that had taken place. On that occasion, the track deterioration was the lasting memory - the worst ever - and in fact it was that event which persuaded EFRA to move to the round-by-round system of qualifying, scoring points on an individual round basis.

Subsequently, the world federation, IFMAR, followed EFRA's lead in adopting this method. The World Championships are a true test of consistency: six rounds of qualifying, with the best four to count as the drivers final total. An



A small selection from a top class field

extra dimension to the event compared to the European Championships is that the heats are of ten minutes duration, against the usual five - so even more concentration would be required, as well as fuel stops coming into play.

The track was a true-European track - very slippery sand/earth, although there were a couple of corners of tarmac. A small jump just before the loop was slightly difficult to judge from the drivers rostrum, but all in all there shouldn't have been too many problems. The only worry was how soon (not if) the bumps would arrive. For the first time at a major Championship, there was little debate about tyre choice. This was probably due to the fact that earlier in the year, the 'Worlds' Warm-Up event had taken place and so most people had found the best tyre then. This proved to be the Medial Pro 'Whoops' tyre, which originally came into fashion at the Euros in 1996 at Dijon, France.

Prior to the World Championships there is usually much discussion about will they, won't they be able to complete a 10 minute race without re-fuelling. On this occasion, there was an absence of talk with the hot weather seeming to rule it out from the start. Also, to complete a 10 minute heat, you also need to add the time for a warm-up lap and finishing lap, so in fact the duration required could be up to 12 minutes!

Nobody had even contemplated the idea, but in the very last heat of practice, just as most people were packing away, reigning World Champion, Alex Laffranchi from Italy struck a massive psychological blow to his rivals. He finished the heat without re-fuelling and managing almost 12 minutes from his special works-built Nova-Rossi engine! Observers in the pits were quickly checking the time sheets just in case they had missed the fuel-stop, but the smiles in the Italian camp told the story as we headed into qualifying

Qualifying

The first round saw two very familiar names at the top: 1st Daniel Reckward (MP5, RB), 2nd Alex Laffranchi (MP5), 3rd Stewart Wilcox (Mugen).

Round 2, and Alex Laffranchi looked so comfortable with the 8-12 second advantage in his pocket thanks to the efficiency of his engine.

Local lad, Miguel Matias, unknown before the event, shocked the world with 2nd place in the round. British driver Trevor Cadby was 4th, Jamie Booth (8th), Danny Conway (9th), Jon Hazelwood (10th) and Mike Craddock (12th). This continued the Brit packs amazing success at this highest level - comfortably outshining the rest of Europe as well as the USA and Japan.

Round 3 saw Alex Laffranchi putting in a near faultless run over ten minutes, as well as not re-fuelling. Reckward looked the only challenger to Laffranchi for overall FTD, 2nd place in this round. Danny Conway (MP5) was Britain's star man in this round with 4th place. David Crompton (Laro) added a 10th place to his score, after suffering problems in R2.

By Round 4, we wouldn't even see a 15 lapper - emphasising how bad the bumps were. David Crompton put in the best ever run by a British driver at a World Champs by finishing 2nd. Trevor Cadby (Crono) showed it was no fluke, finishing 9th. This meant that at the end of the penultimate days qualifying Trevor had an 11th, 4th, 25th and a 9th as his four scores. This was good enough to send him



Victory gains it's rightful reward



The successful Brit Pack



World Champion again!

home that night as 2nd in the World! Overall, Laffranchi was on top, with Trevor Cadby in 2nd place. Jamie Booth (MP5) ensured there were two Brits in the top five as he ended the day 4th overall.

The last day of qualifying and Round 5 saw Portuguese sensation, Matias, take top spot. With Laffranchi having had two poor runs since R3, FTD overall was still up for grabs with Laffranchi, Reckward and Matias all in with a shout. David Crompton practically booked his semi-final place with 7th place in the round, Trevor Cadby definitely made sure by putting in another excellent run in 11th place. Danny Conway (MP5) was 18th.

The final round saw a qualifying run to match Laffranchi's 3rd round run in terms of skill - this time from recently crowned European Champion, Yannick Aigon from France. He had really improved once the bumps began to show and in horrendous conditions he managed to secure the only 14 lapper of the round. At the start of the event, we saw 17 laps in ten minutes, with lap times around 35-36 seconds and yet by the end of qualifying we had practically all 13 lappers with 44-45 second lap! Those in the British camp that didn't believe the scare stories at the beginning of the event about the last visit to Coimbra were now believers!

Alex Laffranchi (MP5) was somewhat relieved to take FTD overall, thereby booking himself a place into the Grand Final. Reckward and Matias both had disappointing final runs - 11th and 8th respectively. It meant a clean 1-2-3 for Kyosho at the top. The top Mugen driver was Mark Pavidis from the USA in 4th. Mark had

driven under extreme pressure as with two breakdowns in his first three runs, he came into the final day having to do two excellent runs in very difficult conditions.

Danny Conway, put in another solid run in R6 and his fine work on the last day meant he had reached the semi finals, ending 14th overall. Jamie Booth (MP5) was never in any doubt, ending 11th. David Crompton ended 9th, a result that vindicated his decision to use Laro at the event.

The star of the show in qualifying for the Brit pack had been Trevor Cadby. He would end 7th overall. Overall, with four Brits in the semis and another two in the finals with Jon Hazelwood joining Mike Cradock, it was a superb result for the Brits.

Finals for the Brit pack

Darren Warburton, just missed out on progressing by 5 seconds. Nick Simmerson race had run its course after only one lap with interference the main problem. The BRCA Championship contender Philip Boyes' (MP5) progressed to the 1/32nd finals from the 1/64th finals. Unfortunately Jon Dell (Crono) just missed out on doing the same, and a trackrod problem ended Mark Stitson's chances with his Futura. Steve Haynes (Mugen) Steve Haynes continued his excellent form in the 1/16th final, finishing 2nd.

although Philip Boyes week ended at this stage after an engine cut. Stewart Wilcox also

moved up as he finished 3rd, meaning that Steve and Stewart would both race on the final day of the Championships.

Lawrence Harris (Mugen) just missed out on progression by five seconds. The 1/16th finals featured Samule Lenzi, Michele Baruzzi, Lawrence Harris and Marco Grandesso - all four drivers who have previously finished in the top three places at a World or European Championships! Stewart Wilcox must have wished he hadn't bothered to unload his car for the 1/8th final after his spur gear shattered as the car was started up! Mugen teammate, Tommy Chung also left at this stage after finishing 7th in his race. Jon Hazelwood (Mugen) and Mike Cradock ended their campaign in the 1/4 finals.

Semi-Finals

The first semi-final was always destined to be awesome, and we were not let down! Two of the favourites, Mark Pavidis (Mugen) and Yannick Aigon (Crono) both failed to make the final, after suffering engine problems. Daniel Reckward led from start to finish with Daniel Vega of Spain (Mugen) 2nd, Marcus Feldmann of Germany (Crono) 3rd (despite re-fuelling every 5 minutes!) with Philippe Lachat (Laro) 4th. Steve Haynes continued his fabulous run from 64th place in qualifying! Steve hung on in there but couldn't quite catch Lachat and would end 5th. With only the top 4 sure to go through, Steve would have to wait to see if he would make the final as the 'fastest loser' from

the two semis. Danny Conway just missed out in 6th place. A semi-final at the Worlds and a Euros final place is not bad going in a year, is it?!

In the second semi both Trevor Cadby (Crono) and Jamie Booth (MP5) were right up at the front early on, challenging for a Grand Final place. However, disaster struck Trevor as on his first 'in-lap' he tipped and it seemed that the marshal caught the flywheel by accident and Trevor's engine cut. A couple of laps later, Jamie Booth cut. Had he ran out of fuel? No, a problem with the fuel-pipe was the problem.

David Crompton was in with a shout of a final place, but on the penultimate lap, a mistake allowed Jerome Sartel of France through into the vital 4th place. With confusion in the pit-lane on who was where and how long was left, David just missed out on 4th by 3 seconds. With both the 5th place cars from the two races belonging to Brits, we would have one driver in the final. But who? It was Steve Haynes. The first semi was remarkably quicker than the second, so much so that 9th placed Mark Pavidis (who had a cut) from the first semi, would have still finished 3rd had he been in the second race!!

Grand Final

The home crowd were buzzing as the final approached. Local hero, Matias, had won the second semi with Wartelle from France ending 2nd, Richard Saxton 3rd (ensuring some US participation in the final) and Sartel 4th. However, it was hard to look past those from the first semi for the winner, along with Laffranchi who had not raced yet!

It was soon clear in the Final that Laffranchi wasn't going to win. After a bad first few laps he was always fighting in the pack and more surprisingly, wasn't going for 10-minute fuel-stops. Perhaps this was due to the faster track after the repairs, so 8mins 30 was the next best, but a few drivers managed this. Just before the first fuel stops, Matias ran out of fuel, and his challenge went in a flash, along with the hopes of the locals. Further engine trouble meant Matias would end 10th. Sartel of France also had engine cuts and would finish 9th.

At the halfway stage, Reckward was out in front but Philippe Lachat (Laro) had begun to find his rhythm. All week Lachat had not looked particularly impressive - but you write him off at your peril! He was well down early on, but in an hour-long race anything can happen and he was within 6 seconds of the lead.

Richard Saxton (Mugen) ended 8th, never coming to grips with the long race. Alex Laffranchi (MP5) finished a disappointing 7th, never for one minute looking on the pace with

his car bouncing around like a bucking bronco. Daniel Vega (Mugen) ended an unlucky 6th after a cruel engine cut with just a minute to go. Sebastien Wartelle of France (MP5) took advantage to move up to 5th, despite an engine cut of his own midway through the race.

So where was Steve Haynes? Well, the British Mugen driver was having the race of his life! With Reckward and Lachat clear of the rest, there was a three-way battle for third between Feldmann, Vega and Haynes. With 15 minutes left, Steve moved into 3rd but the positions swapped from lap to lap. With Vega exiting towards the end, Steve had to concentrate on Feldmann but the German had got one corner ahead and it was always going to be tough. Steve therefore ended 4th. However, it had been a truly great drive, perhaps one of the best drives by any driver at any World Championships. To have qualified 64th and then drive through the 1/32, 1/16, 1/8, 1/4 and semi finals, over two days, and then finish 4th in the Grand Final is quite incredible. He deserved all the congratulations he received for the outstanding performance which left him top Brit, top Mugen driver and top Nova Rossi driver!

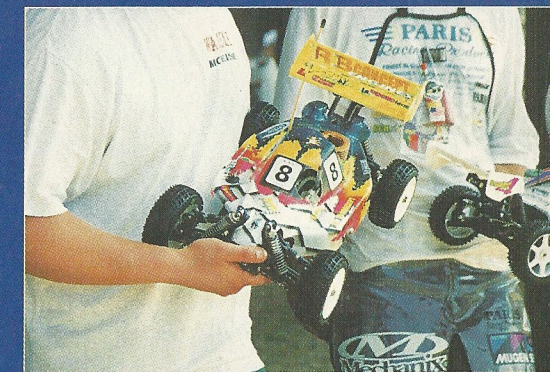
With Feldmann third with the Crono, we would have 4 manufacturers in the top four places. With about 20 minutes left, Lachat overtook Reckward after a couple of mistakes from the German. For the next 10 minutes there was a terrific tussle between the two with only a couple of seconds in it. Reckward pulled himself together to somehow catch and then pass the Frenchman. Despite his valiant efforts, the Laro driver could not make up the gap and Reckward would win by less than 4 seconds.

It was probably one of the best races we have ever seen. Throughout the whole 60 minutes there was never any let-up and the outcome was not known for sure until the last few corners. There was understandable disappointment in the Laro camp for Lachat, but on the other hand, delight in the German camp. It also meant Kyosho winning their 4th World Championships in a row, despite Mugen's efforts and we had a new engine World Champion in RB engines, who actually secured the top three places.

Loose Ends

Overall, the World Championships were a success. The track condition in qualifying should have been seen by the organisers, but the surface had to be laid several times for the event as it was. The repairs for the finals days were quite good and this enabled the top finals to be a brilliant spectacle for the spectators. The British camp had performed superbly, with 5

'another event to remember'



The three Five models line up

drivers in the semi-finals, and of course in Steve Haynes we had the drive of the Championships. Reckward can now call himself World Champion for the next two years, as this is a bi-annual event. Next time, it is thought Las Vegas will be the venue. No doubt if it takes place, it will be another event to remember. **BBC**

