

DAVID ELLIOT

TAMIYA Euro-cup

“Have you seen the circuit”

TAMIYA EURO CUP FINALS '97

Sixteen countries sent drivers to Palazzolo, Italy, to battle it out in the European Finals of the Tamiya Eurocup

This years Eurocup Finals took place at the Green Park circuit in northern Italy, and they turned out to be the most fantastic championships for the British team.

Each of the sixteen countries were allowed two drivers in each of the four classes, with the British team possessing 'Jonny Boy' Winter and David Pitcher in Formula 1, Mark Freeston and David Morris in Front Wheel Drive, Andrew 'Cowper' Cooper and Ben Elliott in M-Chassis, and finally Richard 'Ishy' Isherwood and Rob Marshall in Super Touring 4WD.

As well as the drivers the British team brought along a variety of supporters, from girlfriends and parents to help out as mechanics, arriving at the hotel near the circuit on Thursday evening ready for the start of the meeting on Friday.

The British team came from all directions, some flying into Milan and the rest of us taking the slower route across Europe by car.

'Have you seen the circuit' was one of the first questions asked on arrival and the first impression was stunning. Built in it's own area complete with snack bar and grandstand, the Italians had constructed a huge pit area behind the drivers rostrum for all the teams. Tamiya had a showroom and shop just outside the entrance with Mika Salo's Fl Nokia Tyrell (the real car and the model) on display.

The track itself was tighter and more technical than we had been lead to believe. The track surface was a shock, so abrasive it would take the skin from your fingers if you rubbed it with your hand. With some alarming ruts before the hairpin at the end of the straight we could only guess at the right set-up, as no practice was allowed until Friday.

On Friday morning all the teams had to be at the circuit early to receive equipment and deposit transmitters. The Eurocup Finals are

very closely policed with batteries and motors marked and supplied by the organisers and handed to the team managers just before the qualifying sessions start and collected at the end of the day.

To eliminate cheating in F1 the tyres are also issued and collected after every race and are not allowed out of the closely supervised checking area. Our domestic series could learn a lot from this organisation.

Only four five minute sessions are allowed for each heat and with this short track time finding a set-up and finding it fast was vital.

In Europe F1 is run with the Acto-Power modified motor and no tyre additive is allowed. In England we use the standard 540 motors with tyre additive and we put ourselves at an enormous disadvantage running to completely different rules.

David Pitcher went out first and found his car 'undrivable' and it wasn't until the last of his three finals on Sunday that he got the car really working. After his run 'Jonny Boy' Winter complained to the British team manager, Pete Stevens, that his car was wandering mysteriously on the straights. Pete took one look pointed out to Jon the absence of most of the chassis screws, and suggested the front and back of the car needed to be held together by something more solid than wishful thinking!

Pete Stevens was a late addition to the British team and having him around with all his experience proved invaluable. Pete has raced and won in every category he has competed in and to have a professional racer as team manager helped everybody. Pete worked quietly away in his corner with his motor dyno and improved the performance of the handed out motors from 28,000 to 33,000 revs with very little extra amp draw.

With practice underway both Dave Morris and Mark Freeston went out in the Front Wheel Drive class. Mark who is 16 and still at school qualified for Italy with an amazing shoe-string effort. Having bought his car second hand for thirty pounds at

the italian job



Concours winning F1 body shell of Jon Winter.



Guido Barbera - Italian Superstar.

the beginning of the season he competed all year just using the Eurobonds he won to finance his racing. I wouldn't just say his car had seen better days but at most of the meetings this year it bore more resemblance to a garden shed than a Renault Clio! For the finals he had a new body shell but close inspection revealed a very tired car that should by rights have been slower than Dave Cooper's driving on an Italian motorway!

The abrasive track surface caught out both Andy Cooper and Ben Elliott who hadn't glued their tyre's sufficiently onto their Mazda hubs. This ruined 'Coppers' run and he lost a quarter of his preparation time by not having a mechanic down by the track with a new set of glued tyres and hubs. Ben came away from his first practice delighted with his car and confident he had nearly found his ideal set-up. However, his jaw dropped when Guido Barbera, the Italian Champion, went out to practice. Green Park is Guido's home circuit and he won the Italian final by lapping the rest of the field. His car was fast and his car control was from the Colin McRae school of motoring, flinging his Mazda sideways over the ruts on a track he could drive blindfold. In Italy Guido is a superstar and banners placed around the circuit proclaimed him as everything except the new Pope.

Rob Marshall and Ishy played around with different tyre combinations, anti-roll bars and body shells on their TA03F's, Richard finally choosing the Nismo and Rob the Audi - Ishy preferring his car to oversteer in the infield and relying on superb car control to catch the sliding tail in the high speed bends.

As the track got hotter the grip disappeared and in the latter practice runs Richard's car was fast but impossible to drive through the banked corner connecting the two longest straights. Both Rob and Richard had come to win with no quarter asked or given and if the atmosphere was tense at the start of the meeting you could have cut it with a cricket stump at the end of the second 'A' Final.

At the end of the final timed practice run there was nothing between them with Ishy doing a 17.71 lap and Rob 17.94. This was only bettered by Alex Stocker of Belgium with a 17.71. Indeed all the Brits looked good with David Pitcher 3rd and Jonny Boy 5th in F1. Ben and Andrew were 2nd & 3rd behind Guido in M-Chassis, with Mark Freeston lying second right behind Lorenzo Bonomo of Italy in FWD and David Morris 8th.

With practice over now came the heats and Jon put in a tidy 17 lap-per to hold fifth after the first round in F1. David didn't drive well and a big 'off' ruined his run. Mark Freeston took 5th in FWD, fighting his way to the front after starting 6th in his heat but David Morris was down in 17th, his car lacking grip at the back.

In M-chassis Ben and Andy held station behind Guido but couldn't match his pace, being 5 and 12 seconds behind him respectively at the end of 5 minutes. Rob did well to hold fourth after starting from eighth in his heat and although Ishy was well back he showed what he was capable of by setting fastest lap, a 17.85 compared to Alex Stocker's 18.15.

As the track got hotter and the temperature climbed past 30 centigrade the grip changed noticeably. The conditions suited Jon Winter

perfectly as he found his F1 dialled and improved his time by a massive 10 seconds. Mark with his Clio in round 2 started right behind the Italian and showed his Mini-stock experience by passing him at the right-hander onto the straight by fainting to go to his left and then diving down his right hand side. Mark then held him for the rest of the race with cool precise lines under intense pressure and Lorenzo knew from that moment on he had a race on his hands.

This didn't please the Italian's one little bit and the British cars soon came under intense scrutiny. Now the controversy started. In previous years Tamiya ballraces had not been insisted on and Colin Spinner, the Marketing Manager for the UK importer, checked before the meeting and was told this was still the case. Suddenly the policy was changed and all cars had to have the new blue Tamiya bearings at £50 per set. Even old Tamiya ballraces would not be allowed. This not only put Mark and David Morris in a spin but also the Dutch and Hungarian competitors found themselves facing disqualification.

It's this sort of situation Colin Spinner relishes and he was back to the motivated, intimidating negotiator that has made Tamiya so successful in the UK. Tamiya ballraces started appearing from everywhere and the problem was solved with-



Guido had just a little local support!



The British Team "throwing up", left to right: (back) - Ben Elliott, David Pitcher, Pete Stevens, 'Jonny Boy' Winter, Richard (Ischy) Isherwood, Rob Marshall. (front) - Mark Freeston, David Morris.



What a body shell!



The superb track at Palazzolo, Italy

out a penny changing hands. We've missed this side of Colin lately and his driving force which created the Eurocup in Britain and made it so popular. Mark found replacing his worn ballraces with top grade Tamiya bearings made his car faster and in round 3 he put in a great run to claim second place in the 'A' final. David Morris was really upset over these accusations of cheating and a succession of needless remarks from race officials badly affected his driving. David was finally to qualify for the 'B' final and finish seventh.

While all this was going on Ischy changed from the Audi to the Nismo shell and got his act together, now standing second fastest in super touring. However, he felt the final qualifying rounds in the cool of Sunday morning would be decisive for grid position and how right he was.

David Pitcher changed everything on his car even missing the Tamiya party to completely rebuild his car. The work paid off and in round 4 David made 8th in the 'A' with his first 17 lapper in F1 and improved another 5 seconds in the last



Mark Freeston celebrating with the bubbly!

round. Guido Barbera and Ben Elliott went a whole lap faster in their Mazda's both getting 16 lappers and would you believe Mark Freeston got pole in the 'A' in FWD with a car that was sloppier than Jon Winter's hotel room.

All the 'A' finals were run three times with the best two runs counting with points from 1 to 10 awarded for each finishing position. The story has to be the drives by Mark Freeston in FWD and Richard Isherwood in Super touring.

In the front wheel drive 'A' finals the battle for Eurocup honours and a trip to Japan turned out to be between Mark Freeston (GB), Lorenzo Bonomo (It) and Beni Stutz (Sw). In the first final Mark got taken out at the first bend by the Italian champion who didn't gain much as he was travelling at high speed backwards at the time. Jochen Janik of Germany made a storming start from fourth on the grid getting past everybody to lead on the first lap. However, he went wide letting Mark through and then did him an enormous favour by taking out Lorenzo Bonomo on the main straight. Mark cruised through for his first victory.

The second final turned into a straight fight with Beni Stutz of Switzerland never more than two feet from the leader Mark Freeston's back bumper. Beni clipped Mark accidentally and disaster nearly struck as the Clio body shell on Mark's car got stuck over his rear wheel. Within a fraction of a second Mark's quick thinking had his Clio in reverse releasing the shell and he was off again in pursuit and putting pressure on the Swiss. The inevitable clash happened but Mark acknowledged he was at fault and waited for Beni to go back into the lead with the applause for his sportsmanship rippling through the Grandstand.

It all hung on the last final and once the Swiss got past the Italian he closed relentlessly on Mark. Not many young driver's can take this pressure for lap after lap but Mark stayed as a cool as ice, which was more than can be said for his dad who couldn't watch and had to be given a running commentary by Graham Hill in the Grandstand. Graham didn't mind telling Les what was happening but he warned him not to get over excited because there was no way he was giving him mouth to mouth resuscitation! The British supporters sat tense and quiet and then erupted after five minutes when Mark crossed the line to win the final.

The 4WD finals were all about Richard Isherwood. From fifth on the grid 'Ischy's' chances looked slim as he'd been out qualified by a German, Italian, Dutchman and Rob Marshall. In the first final Rob and Ischy quickly got into second and third place behind Alex Stocker and when the German made a mistake Ischy took the victory. However, it

was his drive in the second final which was truly outstanding.

It all started well enough with the first five keeping grid order. Ischy was behind Rob and searching for a way past but Rob was not about to give way and why should he - he had as good a chance of victory as anybody. Twice Rob took the meat cleaver to Richard's overtaking manoeuvre and chopped him good and proper. The third attempt ended in tears with Richard left sideways across the track. Ischy was then collected by Beat Knutti of Switzerland to go last.

Now there was two things Ischy could do! He could either go to pieces or he could go for it. In a spellbinding display of controlled aggression Richard sliced his way through the field. On a track with few overtaking places Nismo number 5 went past car after car climbing through the field until he finally went down the inside of Silvan Gilioli at the hairpin to take second place.

It all hung on the last final which started with a magnificent battle for the lead between Alex Stocker and Chris Van der Hagen of Holland with Ischy in third. Richard, controlling a car which seemed to want to spin at every corner, cut inside the Dutchman and then sliced past the German to take the lead. When Alex Stocker rolled Richard could back right off and he stroked it over the line for a superb victory. Rob with two fourths and a third took third place overall.

In F1 the best final for Jon and David was the last one when Jon got a brilliant start and took the lead followed by David who had a magical infield to move into second. David then protected Jon's tail until he clipped the chicane to finish fourth. In the second final 'Jonny Boy' again started well but a slight mistake made him settle for a safe third and this combined with a fifth in final one set him up for a possible podium position. 'Jonny Boy' then proceeded to have an attack of brain fade by losing concentration in the third final and letting Bart Loomans of Belgium through on the last corner. That bit of over generosity knocked him back to fifth place overall.

In M-Chassis Guido was untouchable and Ben did well to hold off Roeding Roemling from Germany who stuck to him like glue in two of the finals - Ben only securing second place in the championship when he snatched back second place from the German on the last corner. Andy Cooper finally finished fifth finding his car just didn't have the speed of those driver's more experienced with Acto-Tuned motors. On the podium Ben and Roemling at least had the satisfaction of spraying their bottles of champagne up each leg of Guido's very brief shorts! **BRCI**