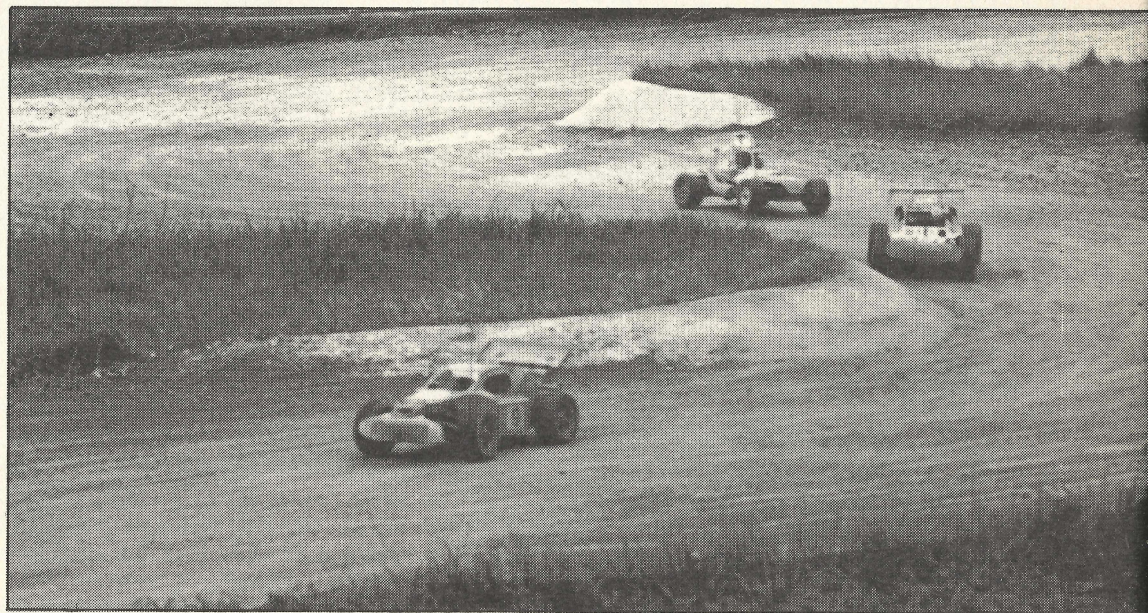


# Race Report

by Bill Burkinshaw

FOR THE FOURTH EFRA European 1/8th Buggy Championships the 'A' Team Ring in Graz, Austria was selected as the track. The date of July 21st augured well for the weather which usually holds fine and sunny around mid-summer. Already earlier this year the Graz circuit had been used for the Austrian Grand Prix, a test for both track surface and organisation: both proved to be well up to the job.

A full entry list of 110 drivers from 12 of the European nations including eight British drivers were to compete in this the premier event of the calendar over three rounds of heats plus the EFRA 'Christmas Tree' finals ladder which allows for 80 of the entrants to



Above: racing action from Graz.

## 1/8th Off-Road Euro's

*The war of attrition continues as Europe's best battle it out in Graz, Austria. Report by Bill Burkinshaw*

qualify for the finals day.

It had been seen during the Austrian GP that the hard packed gravel surface of the track was well able to cope with the demands made by racing four-wheel drive buggies over several days and it was with some surprise that the surface was seen to have been further hardened by application of a binding agent which produced a surface that was in many ways similar to tarmac. As the free practice started it did loosen with considerable quantities of loose gravel finding their way to the outside edges on corners making deviation from the correct racing line a time consuming mistake.

Two AMB electronic timing systems were in use, both fully automatic requiring nothing more than close supervision during racing. During the finals a third AMB system was used to time entry and exit of cars from the pit road, added insurance for the timekeepers should

accusations of missed laps be made.

Organisation was good, although bad weather had hampered last minute work on car parking and spectator areas, free practice was able to start during Thursday morning amidst the usual feverish work on last minute details.

Technical inspection of the cars produced surprisingly few problems although more than a dozen competitors' transmitters failed the exacting tests carried out by a technician from the Austrian Broadcasting Company. Some worries about the compliance with the revised appearance rules introduced for the 1985 season had been felt but proved to be groundless with all cars complying well with the spirit of the rules.

### Timed heats and qualification

The event programme called for two full rounds of timed practice to enable all

competitors to check for proper operation of the auto-count transponders and double check for interference free operation with the other drivers in their groups. The first eight heats passed without trouble but just as the eighth group were to run, the heavens opened accompanied by the most violent electrical storm and rain that I have ever experienced. Huddled in the long narrow converted bus amidst electronic equipment and German language conversation I was irresistibly reminded of the classic film 'Das Boot' especially so as the fuse box exploded in a shower of sparks!

As four inches of rain fell in the space of just over one hour, track conditions were such that the remaining timed practice had to be abandoned in favour of four rounds of heats on the Saturday. Heats commenced at 9.30am on a rapidly drying track still suffering from the effects of

further overnight rain. The benefit of the hard surface and flattish nature of the track were nonetheless apparent, an earth based track would almost certainly have churned up into a quagmire within the space of a couple of heats.

The British team of David Chung ('Mustang Xi2'), Tommy Chung ('Mustang Xi2'), John Glazbrook ('Mustang Xi2'), Alan Harman ('Mustang Xi2'), Gary Marsden ('Mustang Xi2'), Tony Marsden ('Garbo Gepard'), Steve Marr ('Mustang Xi2'), Keith Plested ('Mustang Xi2') and James Weedon ('Garbo Gepard') were soon in the thick of it. The PB Mustang was most definitely a competitive car, despite weight disadvantage which was repaid by the excellent handling and the staggering power of the Nova-Rossi motors used by most of the team. The track surface which was undoubtedly smooth by British standards did the PB no favours, a rougher track would have been much to their advantage so the times put up showed that we do have drivers that can match the best in Europe.

Alan Harman, Gary Marsden and James Weedon showed straight away that they were equal to the pace of the fastest by recording very fast 13 lap times whilst Keith Plested produced a 14 lapper to finish third fastest of the round behind Martinez and Ghedini. As the track surface dried out from the overnight rain speeds started to rise during the second round only a one lap penalty for a jumped start prevented Keith from recording the fastest time of the round. All starts were recorded on video tape. Even so this did not prevent the occasional driver from disputing the penalty, such disputes setting a pattern which was to take the pleasurable edge off the meeting.

John Glazbrook managed his fastest time during the second round as did James Weedon, the latter's 14 lap score assuring him of a place straight into a semi-final. A jump start penalty cost Tony Marsden a

qualifying run, his best score was only 12 laps, not good enough to make the top 80. Both David and son Tommy Chung experienced engine cutting problems but managed to produce quick enough times in the fourth and final round to live and compete in the Sunday's racing.

Twice European Champion Pedro Martinez was not in the meantime having things entirely his own way. Stiff opposition from the fast Italians was forcing him to try ever harder to obtain the top qualifying spot. Pedro finished second at the end of the first round, headed the second round with a time 1.8 seconds short of 15 laps, produced a 15 lap score in the third only to be topped by Monesi of Italy and finally in his last run clinched the top qualifying spot with 15 laps in five minutes 14.1 seconds.

As the fourth round progressed times continued to improve, Alan Harman put in his best run to give him sixth position overall followed by Gary, Keith and James in 12th, 13th and 14th places respectively. Further British qualifiers were John Glazbrook 33rd, Dave Chung 47th, Steve Marr 50th, Tommy Chung 58th.

### Finals Day

Some overnight rain produced a damp track but demands of time necessitated a prompt start. The track surface looked

good, small potholes and rough areas were by now making the cars' suspension work harder but the essentially flat surface kept speeds high and tyre wear rapid. A new set of tyres for each race was the order of the day, the edge still soon wearing off.

No British drivers figured in the 1/32 finals, first British interest being focussed on the 1/16 finals where Steve Marr, David and Tommy Chung were to race. Both races were very closely fought, Steve and David managing to hold one of the coveted top three places and move up into the 1/8 finals, unlucky Tommy did not make it and had to be content with retaining his 58th place.

In the 1/8 finals that followed both David and Steve were always in the running for the top three places but could not quite match the pace long enough to retain their positions. Steve held the lead for a brief moment then steadily slipped down the field to finish fourth just out of the money, along with John Glazbrook who suffered his second engine cut of the meeting after 11 laps and was unable to restart.

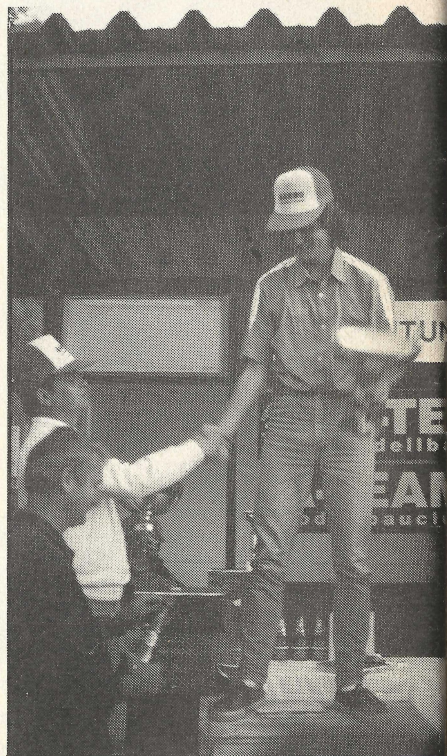
No British drivers were to be found in the desert of the quarter finals, but it was apparent from the way in which one or two drivers were performing in the 1/8 and 1/4's that stiff competition could be expected in the semis. Peter Lind of Denmark who

eventually made the final and Frank Cromberge of Holland in particular were flying. Alan Harman, top British qualifier took pole position for the Le Mans start to semi-final A.

James Weedon on number 5 damaged the front suspension of his car during the warm-up period and a frantic repair session followed as drive shaft spacers were instantly fabricated from fuel tubing by Tony Marsden as Ken Weedon tore into the reassembly job. An unsettling experience for any competitor let alone a 17 year old and once the race had started James was never really able to make up his tail end position.

Both Alan and Gary proceeded to throw away their noticeable advantage gained from excellent starts and superb engines by very wild driving, Alan gaining two warnings from myself as EFRA referee for corner cutting in as many laps. It is easy to criticise and maybe a little unfair. A lot was expected of these two youngsters whose experience of international

Below: feverish anticipation as marshalls wait to release their cars for five minutes of intense competition.



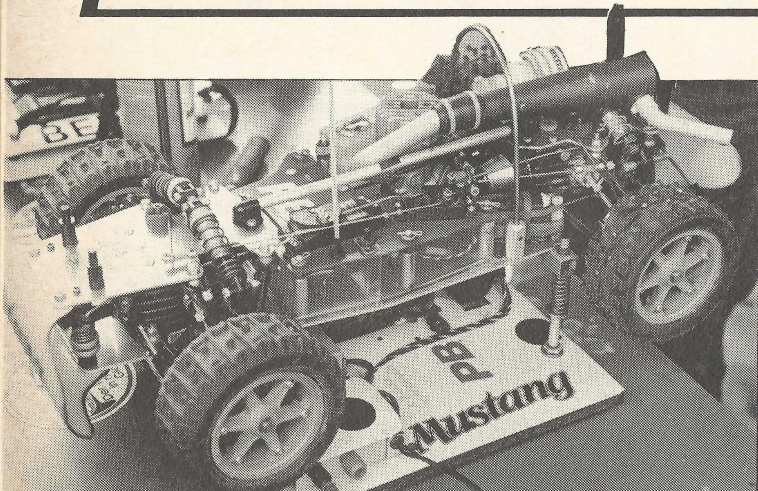
Above: the 1985 European 1/8th Off Road Champion Maurizio Monesi of Italy.

MODEL CARS





# Race Report



Above: Keith Plested's mainly prototype PB 'Mustang Xi2' which went all the way to the final only to lose radio power after ten minutes.

racing is limited. Their performances to reach the semi-finals was far better than the best produced by a British driver in three previous championships, this year's experiences will certainly make all three forces to be reckoned with in European racing in future years.

Semi-final B contained the last hope of a British European Champ in the person of Keith Plested. Keith driving his very own PB 'Mustang' showed more signs of nerves than he is wont, an indication of the state that the less experienced younger drivers were in. Fifth place on the grid gave some cause for concern and in spite of what at first looked to be a clean start the first lap chaos put Keith right at the back of the field with everything to do in the space of 20 minutes. Steady controlled driving saw his Nova Rossi powered 'Mustang' steadily work its way towards the goal of the first three place which was achieved by the halfway point of the race. The leaders were by this time some way in front, however fast one drives, working up through back markers is a slower process than driving off with a clear track. Paulo Baruchello closely pursued by Peter Lind led the race home with a lead that had been reduced to six seconds by Keith at the end of the race.

## Final

Almost before the names for the final had been read out a protest from the Dutch team on behalf of Ronnie Ton landed on the Race

Director's lap. EFRA rules currently provide two methods of determining the composition of the final depending upon the weather conditions prevailing during the semi finals. If the weather is deemed to be the same for both semis then the top two from each semi plus the fastest two from the remaining semi finalists go through. The Dutch protested that the track was continually drying during the semis and was therefore not the same and thus the alternative arrangement of one, two and three from each semi should go through. This protest was upheld putting Ronnie Ton in the final and displacing Claude Lachat of France who immediately initiated protest proceedings himself only to have his protest deemed unacceptable because the international jury had already effectively decided once that track conditions were different.

The 45 minute final got under way with top qualifier Pedro Martinez' Garbo stalled on the line. For the third successive year it looked as though Pedro was to win from behind as from a position just less than one lap down he started to work his way to the front. Just on five minutes into the race a timing disaster struck, it was

noticed that one of the leading group of cars was not registering on the auto count system as it had lost its transponder. As both systems were automatic and as the loss had coincided with the timing official's announcement of the race positions at the five minute mark, the loss was not noticed immediately. There was no alternative but to stop the race and in the natural hullabaloo that followed the drivers totally disregarded the standard procedure for this occurrence and instead of leaving the cars untouched in the pits many picked up their cars forcing the Race Director to order a re-run.

The second start enabled Martinez to quickly establish a lead of sorts. Competition was exceedingly tough but he seemed to be able to pull out the stops when it mattered to maintain his position. Cars were soon spread out round the track and after the inevitable tangles of the first few laps an excellent race developed. Keith Plested driving steadily looked to be comfortably in touch with the leading bunch during the early stages but the pressure steadily told and within six or seven minutes he was to be lapped by the leader.

At the 10 minute point disaster struck. Keith's 'Mustang' hurtled across the track on full throttle to end up against the barriers whereupon a marshal returned it to the track for a repeat performance. In the pits examination revealed that the battery pack had come adrift and unplugged itself. Repairs and restart put Keith sufficiently far down the field to remove all chance of a top place.

Baruchello and Martinez were in the meantime having a close fight with Martinez only taking the lead with real conviction after some 20 minutes racing. At the 30

minute point Baruchello's engine cut but a quick restart lost him little time. Meanwhile Pascal Gueye was fighting hard with Lind and Ton for fourth place.

Just on 35 minutes despondency struck the Spanish camp as Martinez' car limped into the pits with what turned out to be a failed throttle servo. A two lap advantage soon evaporated and Monesi took the lead now closely pursued by Baruchello and Gueye the latter having resolved the Lind and Ton situation in his favour. The last few minutes of the race proved very close as although Monesi led by one lap over Baruchello, Gueye, Ton and Lind were all on the same lap with only four seconds separating them.

At the end of the 45 minutes the order remained the same with the leading five followed by Martinez who had rejoined the race to record 102 laps. A good clean final which contrasted well with some of the over-aggressive even unsporting behaviour of the more excitable of the southern continental drivers. Their bad manners went as far as to accuse the EFRA President Saul Manashe of 'fixing' the results and even doubting the word of race officials (myself included) over the integrity of our post race engine and fuel tank measurement.

It is not pleasant to end such a race meeting on a sour note but those who do insist on heavy criticism of the voluntary officials who run these race meetings for them, could well find themselves with no officials and no race meetings!

On a happier note, the hospitality of Herr Krackollinig and his team of organisers was without parallel, we will be lucky indeed to find such a circuit and organisation for the European Championships in future years.

## Results

Position/Name	Nationality	Car	Motor	Laps
1. M. Monesi	I	Garbo	Picco	116
2. P. Baruchello	I	Garbo	Picco	115
3. P. Gueye	F	Yankee	Cipolla	112
4. R. Ton	NL	Serpent	Picco	112
5. P. Lind	DK	Serpent	OPS	112
6. P. Martinez	E	Garbo	Picco	112
7. K. Plested	GB	PB	Rossi	98
8. F. Groeschi	D	Garbo	Picco	97
9. R. Ghedini	I	Garbo	Picco	94
10. D. Saille	F	Yankee	Cipolla	76