

1991 European Championship — Rucphen, Holland

Just a few weeks later it was the other major event of the year, this time the European Championships. The event was held in Holland at the Rucphen circuit.

The event attracted a large contingent from the UK, some fifteen in all, due probably to the short distance involved and also the excellent reputation of the Dutch organisation. The circuit itself was really quite excellent and certainly fast and smooth if only having a strange surface which caught some people out early on when it came to choice of tyres. As well as the fifteen competing Brits, a whole entourage of supporters, family and pit crew were there, making England's contingent the largest for some years.

As we said, the surface was a bit strange, as at no time did a black line appear, although the amount of grip did improve resulting in most competitors running on the firmer grade compounds. Tyre wear was not high, but with so many cars circulating, the amount of rubber dust on the outside of the racing line was building to such an extent that if a car were to stray far off the line, then it would be like driving on marbles, and the car would probably go straight on amidst clouds of rubber dust. Perhaps the organisers should have arranged for the track to be hoovered clean for finals day, but this is the only thing that they could be criticized for over the whole event.

Looking around the pits at the cars competing, it was apparent that most were using the solid axle set up. Something

that has not so far proved very successful in the UK, except by Gary Culver and Dave Preston with their modified Serpent cars. Not surprisingly, Serpent had the majority of cars present, but, what was surprising was the amount of BMT cars even within the Dutch team, as well as their presence in most other countries' line up.

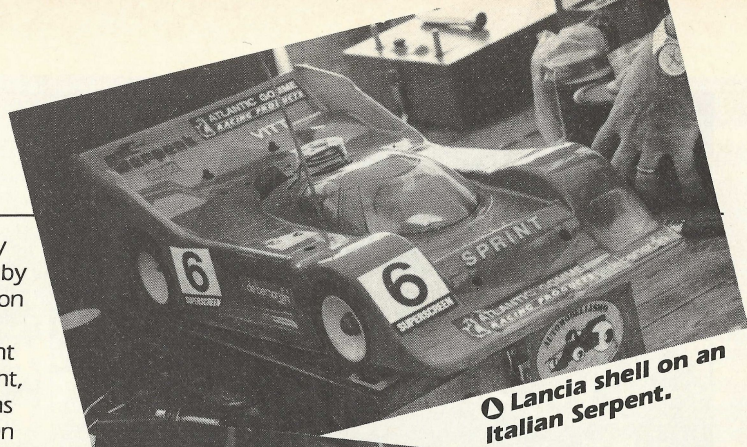
Disappointingly there were only eleven PB cars, and five of these were from the UK. In all there were sixty-one Serpents, thirty-three BMT, eleven PB, ten Parsec, five Picco, one Associated and one scratch-built car. The last two being from the Czechoslovakian two man team of Jiri Plachy and Pavel Hanzel. To see the scratch built car was quite an eye opener as the guy had made his own wheels as well!! Prices in Czechoslovakia are so high relative to wages, that we were informed that it would take three months wages to buy a car motor!

On the motor side of things, one engine has shot to the forefront despite its current lack of availability. Thirty-four Top engines were running, followed by thirty-three Rex, twenty Picco's, nineteen Serpent PS's, ten OPS, four Mondial and just two Nova Rossi. Making it a grand total of sixty-nine from the Rossi stables, thirty-nine from Picco and fourteen from OPS.

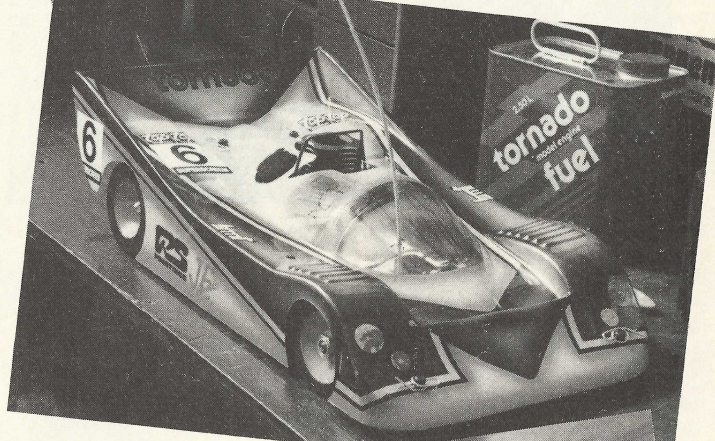
Back to the cars then. Within the Serpent camp there seemed to be a lot of discussion about long or short wheelbase, narrow or wide front end, and diff or solid axle. BMT were mostly settled on the solid axle. They had experimented with a shorter wheelbase, achieved by different wishbones, but this

did not seem to offer any advantages. The Picco cars present had gone back to identical BMT geometry, having moved away from it for a few months, and seemed to be

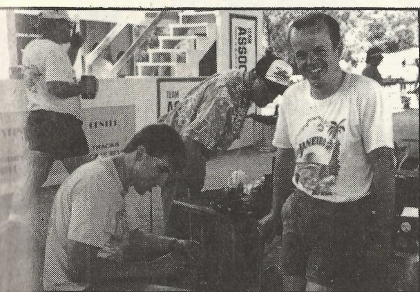
going quick as well. There was also a mixture of two and three speed gearboxes from those that had them. Here though, three speed offered no advantages.



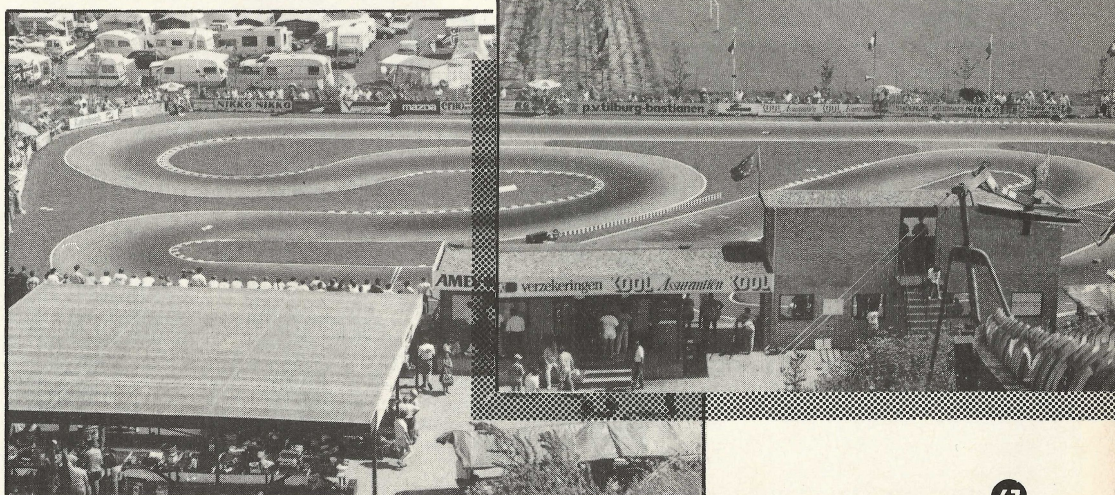
◉ Lancia shell on an Italian Serpent.

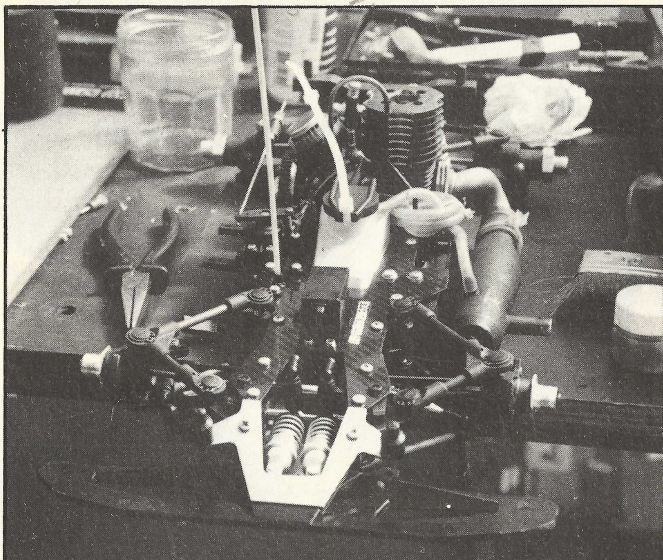


◉ New Picco car with Sarik bodyshell.



◉ Pieter Bervoets works on Gary Culver's car.





One of the Parsec cars.

As regards car bodies, there was quite a variety in use. Most popular was probably the Sarik Porsche 962, the pioneer of Group C bodyshells. Also popular were the JE Mercedes C11, the new BMT Porsche (the Mk 5), the PB produced Lancia and a few of some other shells.

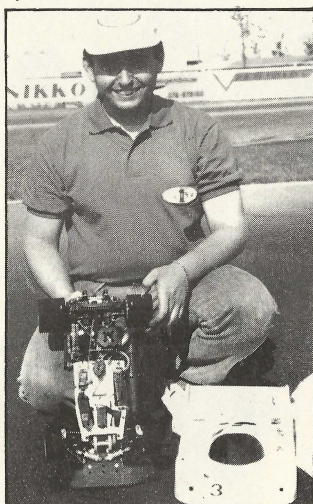
In the early untimed, practice a couple of names were being 'bounced' about. Fastest was claimed to be the OPS Blitz of Stephane Solarli. Quickest motor was observed as the Serpent/Picco of Michael Salven, however, his cornering ability was not good, it was merely the horsepower between bends.

Thursday afternoon's practice was halted by an absolute deluge of rain, which persisted for over an hour, absolutely flooding the track and the pits. The corner of the pits where the English were, eventually went underwater by about two full inches (50mm to those metricated amongst you), and paddling became the only way to pack the gear away.

Friday saw the opening ceremony with all countries parading out onto the circuit. The Italians once again looked professional, with all drivers wearing neat AMSCII jackets, but it was also nice to hear a good round of applause for the two Czechoslovakians, at this, their first Euro's.

Qualifying itself got spread over two days in that the first round was held on Friday afternoon, and the other three rounds run on the Saturday as normal. Other than having a good clean run, times did not alter much at all. The top six never improved leaving Alberto Picco as top qualifier. Dave

Dixon, who has not had the best of years in England, was our top man and was hanging on to the last semi final spot as we entered the last round. It was not to be though as Jacob Buehler, Milko Tenthoe and Thierry Guillemier all went quicker dropping Dave into the quarters.



1991 European Champion, Massimo Fantini.

No English in the semis then, which must be our worst performance since anyone racing cars can remember. Only

Dave Dixon made the quarters, with Steve White, Paul Cook and James Haydon into the eighths. Dave Ashton, Nigel Sayles and Bob Errington the sixteenths, Chris White and Steve Tilley the thirty seconds, and Neil Woodhead and Mark White the sixty fourths. This left four drivers not making the 96 point cut.

Jim Warren had the immense pleasure of driving his own produced bodyshell, the Lancia C2, to a race long victory aided by two up and coming pitmen, Haydon and Errington. Jim drove well throughout the race, fending off a charge from Peter Gorman and actually was running quicker than he had done in the qualifying itself. Well at least we had one victory, could we move anyone up to the semis?

Well the simple answer was no! One or two Brits managed to move up one final when it came to Sunday, with the best of these being Paul Cook and James Haydon who both got through their eighth finals to join Dave Dixon in the quarters, but that was where all three of them stopped. No one in the semis.

So to the main final itself. It was to be 45 minutes long, so it would be hard on tyres, would anyone change? For the first time, BMT were the dominant force with five cars in the final. Serpent had three, with Parsec and Picco having one a piece, and with it being Rody Roem with the Parsec you had to wonder how much was due to the driver.

At the start Alberto Picco led away from the Klaus Engel, with Massimo Fantini starting safely and surely in third. As they approached the first fuel stop, Fantini had moved into

second and was closing the gap on Picco. After that first stop Fantini was in the lead and looked able to hold it. Shortly afterwards, Picco's car went straight into the fencing with radio problems that he was not able to cure. The Serpent cars could not run at the lead pace so it was Rody Roem who found himself in second spot with his Parsec.

By the twenty five minute mark the lead was just over a lap as Fantini came in for fuel and all four tyres. He exited the pits just behind Roem who was thus in the lead. So all four tyres in about fifteen seconds, with just the two mechanics, as apposed to eight seconds in Formula one with about fourteen mechanics! How? Quite simply BMT had developed a decent quick release front wheel mechanism that requires a tool to recover them but is as quick as changing rears. Quite neat.

Fantini quickly closed up on Roem but only made vague gestures at passing just to let Roem know that he was there. Roem's tyres were quite worn and there was no way that he could stop Fantini. A few laps later and Roem inevitably went wide letting Fantini through whereupon he started to pull away, eventually taking a full lap out of Roem in the closing stages.

Fantini had driven a well calculated race and had shown great maturity when in the lead. At the end his tyres were in excellent shape whilst Roem's fronts were non existent with the rim thickness being greater than that of the rubber.

With Stefan Habbecke, from Germany third with his BMT, the result was BMT, Parsec and BMT. Serpent were not as competitive as in the past. Their hospitality bus had been much welcomed by their own drivers, but questions were certainly being asked.

Once again congratulations must go the Dutch organisers at the "De Baanbrekers" club, for a superb, trouble free event. Let's hope next years event at the supposedly re-surfaced Evry club in France is as good. And next year it's with Formula bodies.

Well done all! ●

