

EFRA

Laro Take All Three Podium Positions!

COLIN LEAKE REPORTS FROM ETTLINGEN, GERMANY

Thursday's Pre-Qualifying Session

We arrived late (don't ask!), just in time to take part in the last Round of 'seeding', a series of ten minute Heats from which the fastest single lap time counted. Due to the high temperature, it was impossible to keep engines running quickly for long unless they were very rich at the start. The trouble was that by the time the



engine was on-song, the soft tyres that many drivers were using had melted! The serious drivers went out with engines set for maximum performance, did four or five laps on very soft tyres, then pulled in to change to new tyres and let the engines cool off. Clever! Some were doing this up to three times during each run just to get that one fast lap, which remember only served to decide which qualifying Heat they ran in.

No event in Germany takes place without a brass band to get things underway...

The ironical thing was that after some drivers had blown a small fortune on super soft, sticky tyres, the much more robust SLD S4 or S3 tyres later proved faster!

Technical Inspection

Two problems arose at technical inspection. The massive foam bumpers required were one area of contention that had several Teams, including us, hastily finding some foam and making bumpers, but the inspectors took a realistic, yet robust, view of what could be achieved so every car was eventually passed on this score.

The other problem area was fuel. An American electronic device was used to monitor all of the competitors fuel. It obviously didn't give a full chemical analysis, but it was uncommonly accurate at picking out fuel that had been tampered with, and as far as I know, none of the drivers who failed argued the point. All of the British drivers' fuel passed OK, whilst most of the failures were from the German contingent, with the driver of a Fuchs car powered by a Mathe engine recording the highest reading ever seen on the meter! It was strange that thereafter many of the Fuchs drivers had problems even starting their engines, let alone keeping them running properly...

We have the details of the instrument they were using, and are hoping to acquire one for the BRCA Series.

Qualifying

Friday began with a timed practice session in Heat order to ensure there were no interference problems. Every trans-mitter was impounded, and even if you were in one of the later Finals on the Sunday the transmitter still had to be handed in by 9.00 a.m. Non-compliance resulted in instant exclusion!

We were then treated to the opening ceremony, complete with the local band etc, then the first Round of qualifying Heats got underway.

The final qualifying Rounds were run on the Saturday, followed by a superb trackside banquet with excellent food, and some 300 hungry souls were fed with very little waiting. Indeed the whole event was run with that same superb efficiency. I spent a lot of my time working on our cars, and must say I much appreciated the fact that the press officer repeatedly came and found me in the pits with the days results all neatly presented. There were even two dogs in the pits with their own mechanics' passes round their necks complete with computer generated photographs!

The Brits? Well, Glen Clarke made it into the 1/32 A Final. Dave Roland was in the 1/16 A Final. The rest of the British contingent; Ian Oddie, Steve and Shaun Leake, all made the 1/4 A Final.

The four drivers to qualify straight through to the main Final were Philippe Lachat (half a lap clear of the rest of the field!), Flavio Budulig, Bruno Petiot and Christophe Lachat. The three French drivers were all driving near standard Laro cars, with Flavio Budulig's a much modified FG.

Unfortunately for Flavio, his FG race car (and his spare T car), was stolen during Saturday night, leaving him to struggle round into last place in the Final with a replacement that didn't handle at all well. One would like to think it was a opportunistic theft, but in view of the cars that were taken, it seems quite likely that they were specifically targeted.

The Finals

Glen Clarke was the first of the Brits out, but failed to progress after finishing 6th in his Final. Next up was Dave Rowland, who finished second in his 1/16 Final to move up into the 1/8 A where he finished a creditable 7th.

In the 1/4 A Final, Steve Leake found his car suddenly wouldn't handle. Later we found that the on the new set of rear tyres he'd fitted, the compound wasn't as marked!

Shaun Leake looked on for a secure Semi Final placing, when, with five minutes left, he suddenly lost all drive! All weekend we'd been having trouble with rubber picked up from the track building up in the teeth of the belt drive sprockets, and it was that which caused the loss of drive.

Ian Oddie took firm control of the 1/4 Final, winning with a comfortable margin without taking any chances.

In the Semi Final, Ian easily had the pace and handling to make it through into the main Final, but unfortunately too much involvement with the back markers ended his chances so there the British involvement in the proceedings sadly ended. A great shame.

The Main Final

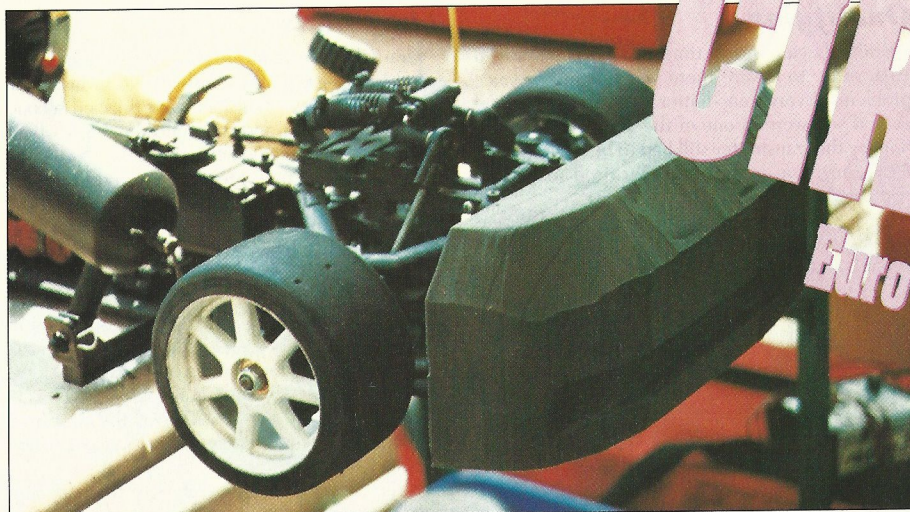
Christophe Lachat made an amazing start to shoot from 4th on the grid to lead away. He soon lost it though when he was called into the pits for his ten second jump start stop-go penalty!

With Christophe gone, the lead was taken up by his brother and pole position man Philippe. Philippe extended his lead with ease, finally crossing the line over two laps ahead of the rest of the field. As do all of the best drivers, Philippe made it all look incredibly easy, and there is little doubt that he could have gone faster if he needed to.

After the first five minutes, the real interest was between Brigitte Putanier (sorry Debbie, circuit racing has a new heroine now!) and Iff Rowland of Switzerland. Brigitte held 2nd for the first 15 minutes before twice being knocked off the circuit by an FG driver who then belatedly received an



The victorious Laro Team, 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 7th, lined up after the Final.



The fitment of large foam rubber bumpers was asked for by the scrutineers, which caused a bit of a panic at first. This massive bumper was seen on one of the winning Laro cars.

official warning. With only ten minutes left after the second incident, and a considerable amount of ground to make up, it looked all over for Brigitte, but she was well fired up so tore around the circuit and slipped past Iff to regain 2nd place with just two minutes of the race left!

In that closing two minutes, Laro were given even more cause to celebrate when Iff suddenly slipped back down to 6th, allowing Bruno Petiot to take over 3rd with his Laro, making it a clean sweep of the podium positions for the Laro Team.

Harrie Schiks of Holland drove the best placed FG to 4th place, followed by Peter Schneider of Germany.

The amazing thing was that after much talk of fuel stops being necessary, all ten drivers decided that the cooler conditions would allow them to run their engines just that little bit leaner and thus make it through the 30 minute race without stopping. Against all expectations they all made it!

The Cars FG

Numerically, FG had the strongest presence. Most of the quick cars used four wheel braking and loads of carbon-fibre and metal components all over. One driver even had a band of woven carbon-fibre moulded round his wheels to stiffen them up! Flavio Budulig's FG qualified 2nd, but his car was very heavily modified from standard.

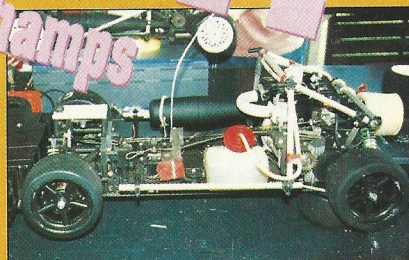


The British Team members.

1/5 Scale CIRCUIT Euro Champs

Yankee

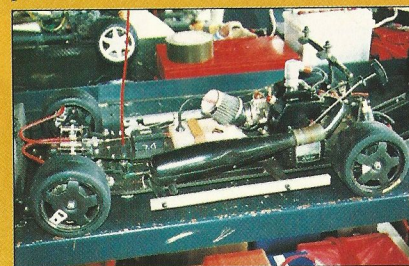
Yankee's new 1/5 cars are very obviously produced using 1/4 scale parts but for all that they worked very well, with sharp, precise, yet stable handling. These cars will be well worth watching out for in the future.



The new Yankee 1/5 car uses many of the components from the company's established 1/4 scale cars. Solid and traditional in design, it performs well.

Graupner

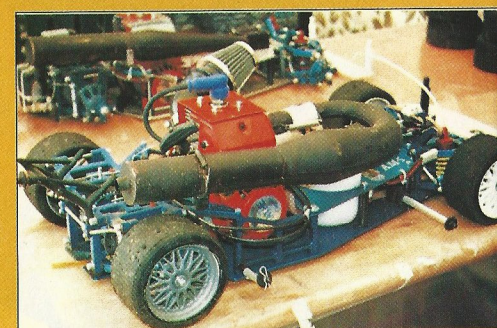
Graupner had a large stand with cars on display, with a few being raced. They performed well enough, but weren't outstanding. What I don't know, of course, is how good their drivers were, so it's difficult for me to pass judgement on the car's potential.



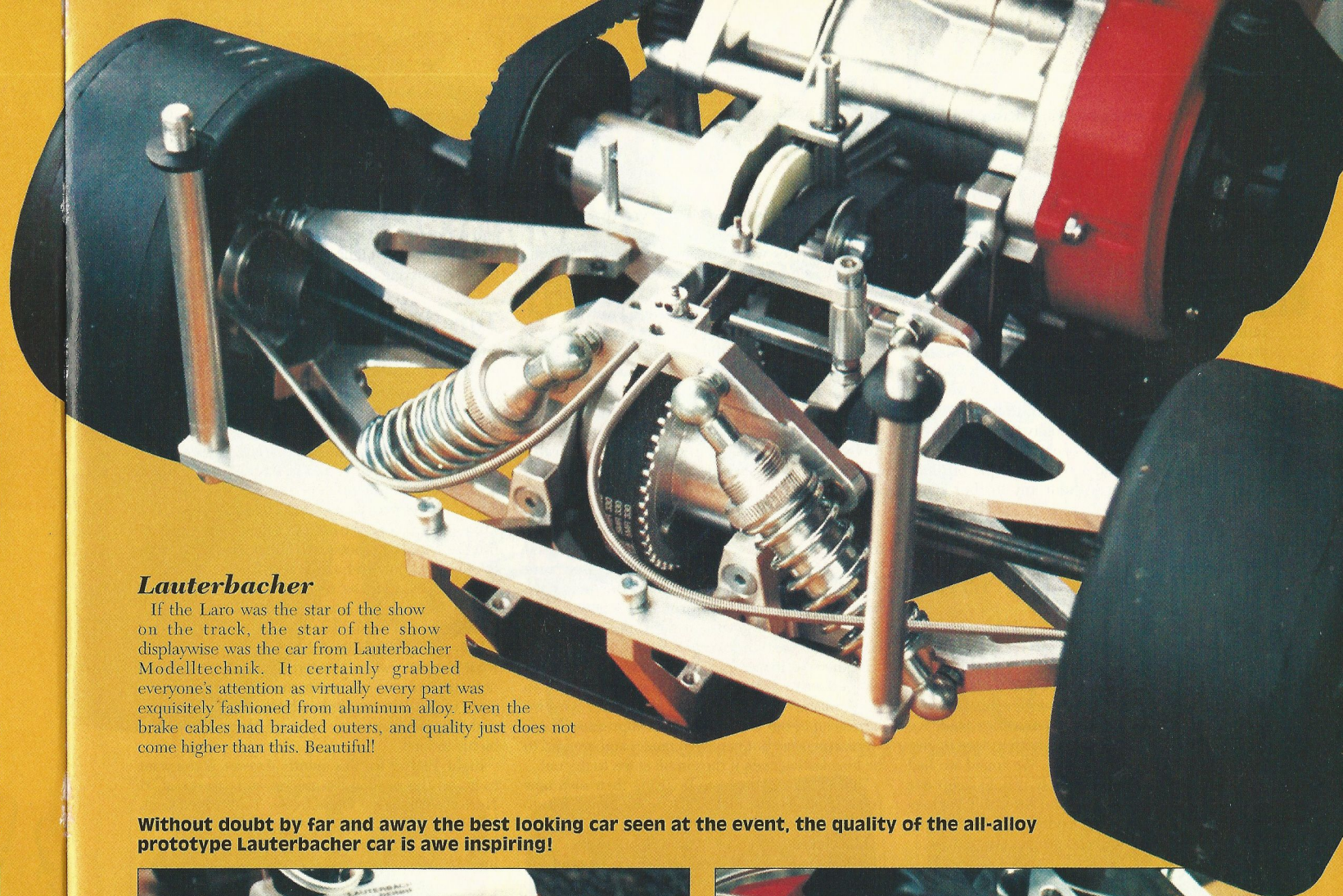
One of the 'full-spec' Graupner cars, complete with carbon fibre chassis and radio plate. Conventional in design, but very nicely made. How will they go with a star driver at the helm?

Fuchs

Perhaps the less said the better..!



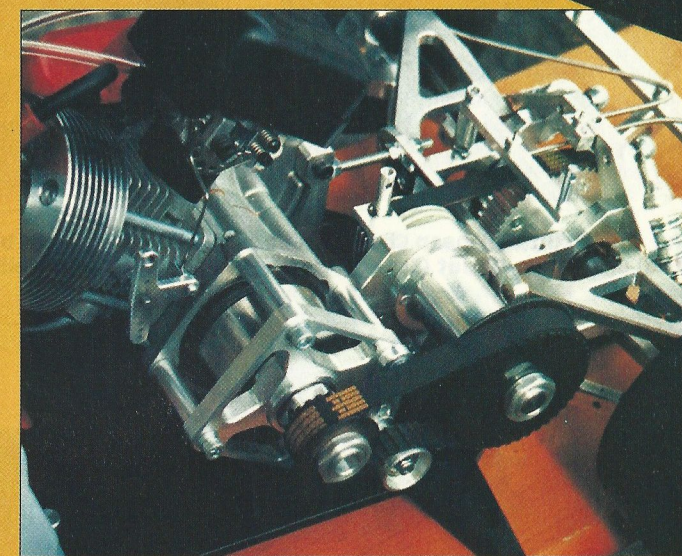
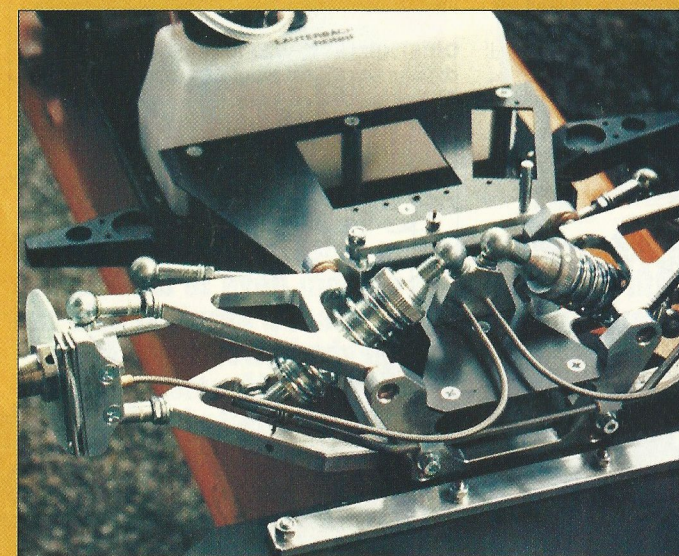
The massively constructed Fuchs car was overweight to say the least, and once the Team's original petrol was deemed illegal, their Mathe engines just wouldn't perform at all...



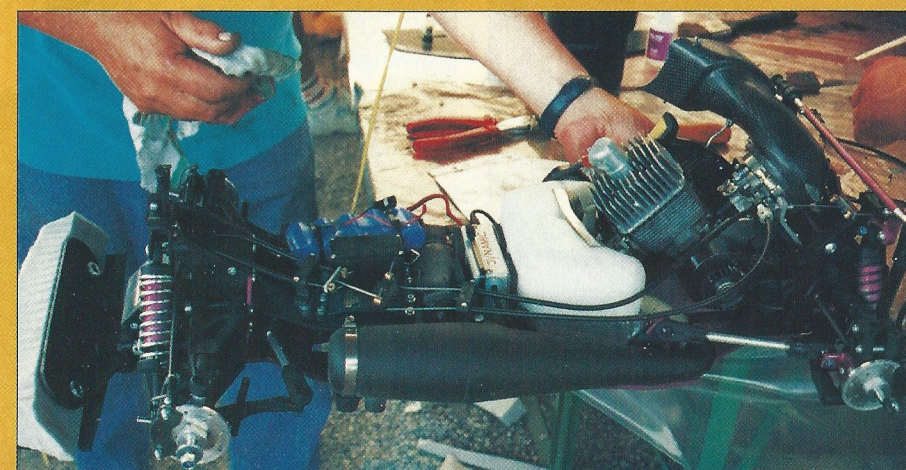
Lauterbacher

If the Laro was the star of the show on the track, the star of the show displaywise was the car from Lauterbacher Modelltechnik. It certainly grabbed everyone's attention as virtually every part was exquisitely fashioned from aluminum alloy. Even the brake cables had braided outers, and quality just does not come higher than this. Beautiful!

Without doubt by far and away the best looking car seen at the event, the quality of the all-alloy prototype Lauterbacher car is awe inspiring!



The fully equipped Italian Dynamic cars were beautifully prepared, right down to their superb carbon fibre air inlets. The car here bears no relation at all to the standard kit. Quick in testing in Italy, they didn't fare well at all at Ettlingen, but give them time...



Dynamic

There was a large Italian Team with six special racing versions of the Dynamic car, easily the most impressive looking cars actually racing. They even had F1 style moulded carbon fibre air intakes! Their hopes were very high, as back home the cars had gone very well indeed, so with a line up of drivers and mechanics that read like a who's who of IC circuit racing, great things were expected.

In reality, the cars simply refused to handle all week, and it wasn't just a case of suddenly finding the standard of competition had improved, they were simply undriveable. When a driver such as 4 time 1/8 circuit World Champion Lamberto Collari finishes 77th out of 80 drivers, things must be bad!

The only possible explanation is that there wasn't a compound available from PMT tyres, with which they remained all week, to suit the track's surface.

The somewhat strange looking chassis has been relentlessly developed until it really was in a Class of its own at this meeting. What was even more impressive was the fact that, apart from engines that had undoubtedly been worked on, the cars were basically standard. Apart from the removal of the rear anti-roll bar and a different front bumper, they were standard kit cars, even down to the standard rear brake set-up!

Their reliability was good, the drivers and mechanics spending most of their time chatting rather than working on the cars. The Team's F1 style uniforms were immaculate, and the impression they gave of relaxed supremacy said a great deal...

On the circuit they had incredible cornering power, coupled with great stability that made them easy to drive. If a driver over did it, a slight lift would see the back end squirm a couple of times and then settle down without any further input from the driver.

It wasn't just the one car that was like this, or even just the 'Works Team' cars, all of the Laros present looked equally good.

The Engines Zenoah

The Zenoah engine was by far the most popular, most of them having been tuned to some degree. Many of the Continental drivers, especially the French, used much lower gear ratios than we usually do, in conjunction with shorter pipes to give less bottom end but more revs. We found we had to follow suit as it was the only way to keep our engines cool, then, having done so, the engines gained the extra speed we needed, and also became very much more smooth and progressive to drive.

F7

Quite a few drivers used this engine, including the Italians Team. Its heavily finned barrel and separate, similarly heavily finned head, make it look very impressive. They certainly seemed to go very well, and apparently handled the high

temperature easily. The sooner these engines appear on British shores the better!

Tyres

There was clearly only one tyre that worked really well, the French SLD.

The FG tyres were literally melting in the heat. There were some prototype tyres there with built-in internal bracing, but it isn't known if any of them were raced. As for the Medial-Pro tyres, they weren't bad in qualifying, but they wouldn't last a Final. The Laro Team recognised this and switched to SLD tyres at least on the back of their cars for the Finals. Some silly rumours did the rounds in the UK to the effect that the SLD tyres were specials, moulded using compounds developed by Pirelli, and weren't generally available. I doubt if this is true, but, you never know!

PMT had some very well made tyres there that looked very similar to the SLD tyres, with a similar form of construction. The Italians exclusively used these tyres. Apparently the compounds used were completely new, so I suspect that this may have been the Italian Team's problem. Knowing the Italians, they will get them right, and when they do, they will be tyres to watch out for...

In the wet it was a very different story. PMT's very effective, internally braced wet tyres (not to be confused with the previous Italian wet tyres we have seen in the U.K.) were very impressive. These were expensive but very well made, and are said to be long lasting even if the circuit starts to dry out.

Yankee were thought to be using their own new tyres. They look so like SLD it was impossible to tell the difference. More on these later.

Many of the different 'Works Team' drivers were handicapped by their tyres. However, most of the faster independent drivers eventually changed to SLD rubber for the Finals and inevitably returned to the pits claiming their car's handling had been transformed, wondering why they hadn't tried them before. They should have read RRC in recent months, because after all, we did tell you so!

Thank You!

Finally, a big thank you to the organisers from the British Team, for a superbly run meeting that ran like clockwork, yet where any problems that arose were dealt with in a good humoured and friendly nature. It was a perfect example of how an event of this stature should, and can, be run. Oh, and a personal "Thanks!" to whoever re-opened the bar late one night for Steve and I after we'd finished working on the cars...

Tyre Wars - The Latest.

I promised some time ago to try and keep you up to date on what was happening at the front in the great tyre war. With this in mind, we recently tried the latest offering from Yankee in the A Final of a meeting at Mendip. The claim is that these tyres are made from the same compounds as the already well known and proven SLD tyres. They don't have internal bracing, Yankee claiming that the extra tread thickness they have makes this unnecessary. Unfortunately, they were already fitted on Yankee wheels, which we managed to fit to our MRC only with the loss of a large amount of steering lock. Even so, they gave handling and grip exactly like our SLD tyres so, despite the lack of lock, Steve still finished 2nd.

I do query the lack of bracing on the basis of what happens when the tyres wear a bit thin, eg deformation etc, but even so, with an estimated price of just £25 coupled with their good wear rate and fine performance, we rate these tyres very highly indeed.

Right, that's it for this month. As ever, if you want to go on the mailing list, please write to me at 91 Nortons Way, Five Oak Green, Tonbridge, Kent, BR8 8EX. If you want to phone me, the number is (01892) 833620, but only after 8.30 p.m. please, or my wife will sort you out!

Oh Brigitte! It was nice to see a lady driver take 2nd place overall. Brigitte Putanier drove very well indeed to claw her way onto the podium with her Laro Renault.

The 1/5 Circuit European Champion Philippe Lachat, flanked by Brigitte Putanier (2nd) and Bruno Petiot (3rd). All drove Laro cars made by Philippe's father's firm!

