

# Italian Job

Another tough Euros has fallen the way of the all conquering Italians - this time to Alessandro Catozzi driving the TAG car with power from OPS

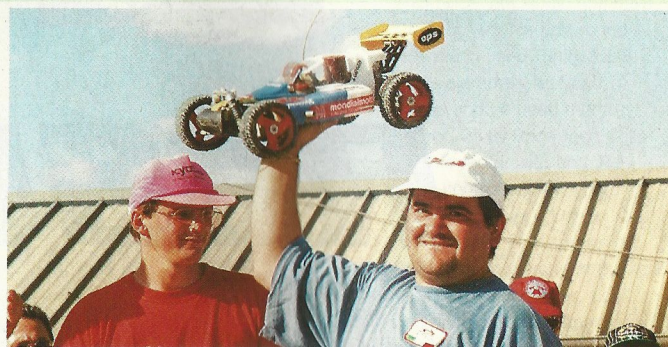
A strong British team of 16 drivers made the journey across to France for this year's European Championship. On arrival we were greeted with a very different track compared to what we normally encounter in the UK. The track was extremely fast and slippery, with almost no grip compared to our familiar grass back home. It was a very fast track indeed. The surface was very compact earth/sand, similar to a BMX track, but less dusty. When we first arrived the track was still damp, as they had only just finished the track due to the poor weather that they had been experiencing in France. This raised the question of how long the track would remain flat. Normally, the tracks cut up pretty bad abroad, especially with the amount of running time that is needed for a Euros. However in Longvic, the organisers had mixed cement with the sand mixture as they had laid the track, and so it held up very well indeed. Once the cars took off the first layer of dirt and dust, a smooth concrete/sand surface was left. Although a few bumps arrived towards the end, it was nowhere near as bad as usual, and meant the track was still quite enjoyable to drive at the end of the meeting. The only real problems for the drivers were the jumps which proved tricky towards the end as the approaches dug up.

During the practice runs most drivers were trying to find the correct tyre for the track. This was obviously going to make the most difference, because suspension set-up was not that important. Tyres like the Medial Pro Pulsar or Mantua Ghost type were popular, as spike tyres, such as Turbo Rats wore out very quickly on the Dijon track. The best tyre in the end was in fact a new tyre. (Why does this always happen at a Worlds/

Euros?) The new tyre was made by Medial Pro and is called the 'Whoops'. It looks quite similar to the old 'Quark' tyre made by the same manufacturer, with a series of zig-zags as its pattern. The tyre was certainly good, and with only a few exceptions, everyone at the meeting would end up using this tyre.

In practice, most of the Brits had a torrid time. A lot of drivers were breaking fuel-tanks as the cars were taking a real pounding coming off the jumps. The Kyosho team broke five or six fuel-tanks during the meeting, whilst yours truly broke three early on, before some modifications began to work! Adrian Svensson actually bent his chassis on his Mugen Super Athlete, emphasising the strain on the cars. Our top driver in practice was Tommy Chung (Mugen). The track was fairly similar to that in Evry in 1991, which was the last time the Euros were in France and there Tommy came 2nd. He was obviously returning to those 'good 'ol days'!

There were to be five rounds of qualifying which would be calculated on the round by round system, where each round is taken separately, and points are given for your position in that round. The top driver in the round would get 145 points, the next best driver gets 143 points then 142, 141, etc. The overall qualifying position would be given by calculating the driver's best 3 scores from the 5 rounds. This was very tough as you couldn't really afford any breakdowns in the heats if you were going to get 3 really good runs to count, but then again this was the European Championships, so it shouldn't be easy! The driver with the best combined score would qualify directly for the main final. The next 14 drivers are split into two groups (odd and even, called A and B) to make up the two



semi-finals. This means there is 7 in each semi final with the final 3 drivers to complete the 10 car line-up, moving up from the 1/4 finals. This process continues through the 1/8th finals, 1/16, 1/32 and so on. So, by finishing in the top 3 in say the 1/16 final, you move up into the 1/8th final, and so on.

In the first round of qualifying, it was clear you needed 12 laps to be anywhere near on the pace (the top half of drivers were on 12 laps) and if you were looking to be near the top you had to be in 'single figures', meaning your time was under the 12 laps in 5 mins 10 secs barrier. Spain's Daniel Vega, driving a Mugen Super Athlete, took the first 145 points available with a time of 12 laps in 5:04.49. He had looked good throughout practice and continued this form when it mattered. He was less than a second ahead of the Tag of Alessandro Catozzi (Italy) with Sebastien Leonard, the home country's best at this stage, in 3rd with a Kyosho Inferno MP5.

The Brits really got their act together as qualifying began. David Crompton showed the rest of

Europe why he is leading the British Championship as he put his Laro Diablo into 9th place overall. David had not looked very good in practice but that didn't matter now! Right behind David was another British Laro driver, John Isherwood. John, in his first ever European Championship, showed no signs of nerves, as he went into an unbelievable 10th position. It was a truly remarkable drive from such a young driver on his first outing at this level. Yours truly also performed well in round 1 finishing 13th with my Mantua Futura. My time of 12 laps in 5:10.55 was just what the doctor ordered!

The second round was all about Alex Lafranchi of Italy (Kyosho MP5). Alex, who uses a Picco engine, is very fast, but drives in a way which is 'all or nothing'. In this round he got it absolutely right as he stunned everyone with a time of 12 laps in 5:00.57, just missing the 13 laps. It is hard to express how fast this was! Most drivers, including some top drivers from this country, would never reach the 12 laps in 5:10.00 barrier and yet Lafranchi had gone almost a

second a lap quicker than this time! Jamie Booth came alive in this round as well. He put in a 12 in 5:08.09 to go 8th in the round and give Jamie a good score 'on the board'. The Kyosho ace was doing particularly well because he wasn't very well during the week, but he tried to forget this once he was out on the track. David Crompton again performed well finishing 12th in the round, giving him two good scores already. Tommy Chung (Mugen) was our only other driver in the top 20 in this round as he got back some of the form he had shown in practice.

The 3rd round saw Frenchman Sebastien Leonard take FTD for the round. His Inferno MP5 was powered by a Picco engine, and like Lafranchi's, it was very fast! Daniel Vega (Mugen) was in second place, meaning he had FTD combining the three rounds. Another Frenchman, Adrien Bertin, driving a Crono was 3rd in the round. Jamie Booth once again kept the Brits right at the top. He finished a brilliant 6th in the round with his MP5. With his 8th place in the previous round, Jamie knew

that one more good round tomorrow would secure a semi-final place. Yours truly also had an excellent round. I recorded my best time with the Futura and ended 10th in the round. This was a brilliant result for me to go with my 13th place in round 1. I needed another good result tomorrow, although I was already safely in the 1/4 finals.

On the Saturday morning it was evident that the Tag team had really found some answers! Marco Grandesso, who had been a little disappointing since practice, got back into top gear with a 12 in 5:02.65 and collect top spot in round 4. Right behind him was team-mate Alessandro Catozzi, who was looking for FTD overall and the direct qualification for the main final. However, Sebastien Leonard would have something to say about that! He came in 3rd in the round, and with two 3rd places (rounds 1 and 4) as well as an FTD in round 3, he was now top overall. It would be a battle between these two for FTD overall in the final round. The Brits disappointed slightly in this round (Had they





been out too late the night before?) David Crompton was the best for the British in 17th place with the Laro. This left David 11th overall, with Jamie Booth 12th going into the final round. Both would be very close to missing out on the top 15 and a place in the semi-finals if they didn't improve.

The final round had many talking points. The track had begun to cut up slightly by this stage, and although it wasn't very bumpy, there was enough on the track to just slow you down that little bit. The jumps were getting more difficult, and there were a few little bumps which might just put you a little off-line going into a corner and forcing you to lose that 1/10th of a second here and there. It doesn't sound much but it is enough at this level. Due to this fact, we were not really expecting anything spectacular. Catozzi of Italy drove his Tag to 12 laps in 5:04.23 and was looking good for FTD in the round and overall. Then, in the last heat of the last round, Sebastien Leonard set the Championships alight. He absolutely went for it and, with his Picco powered MP5 like a missile on the fast Longvic track, he recorded 13 laps in 5:23.40. 13 laps! It was absolutely breathtaking stuff, one of the best qualifying runs I have ever seen. To be able to do such a run under the pressure he was under, knowing he had to do a good run to get FTD overall was remarkable. It guaranteed him FTD overall, and his place in the final. Leonard has been around for some time, but he's never really shown anything like what he did in qualifying at Longvic. To do it in his home country must have been great for him.

On inspection of his Kyosho

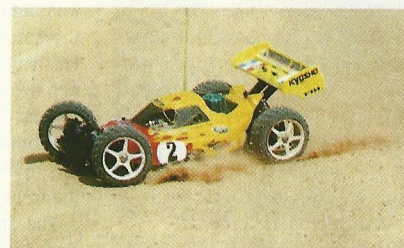
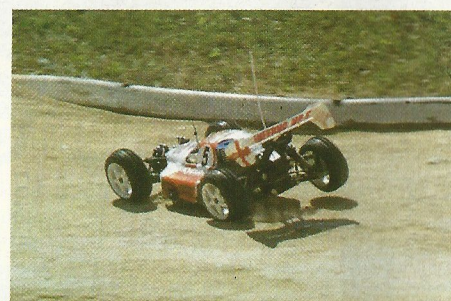
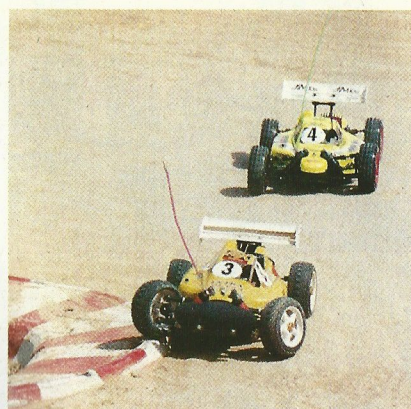


MP5, it could be seen that he had lengthened the wheel base of his car by around 7mm, which is possible with the MP5 chassis. He used a Hong Nor drive shaft from middle to rear to get over the problem of the Kyosho one being too short. The longer wheel base created more

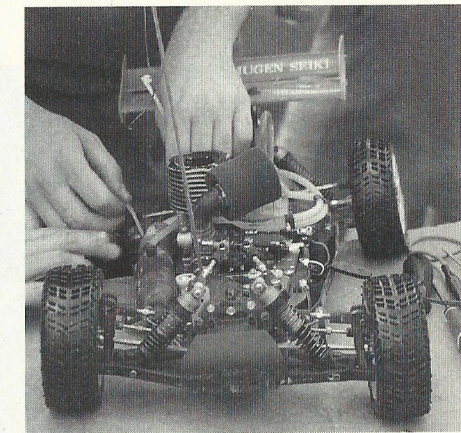
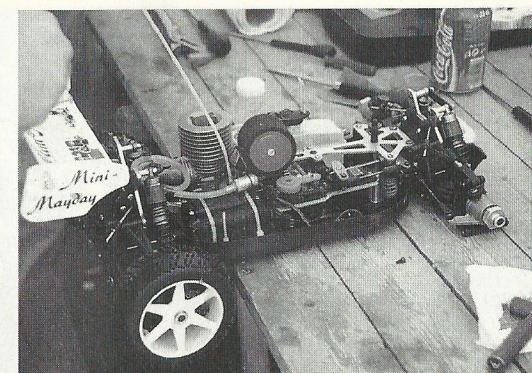
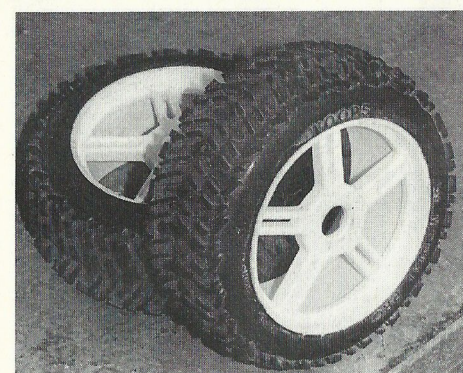
stability on the slippery surface, particularly on cornering. Perhaps on grippy grass in the UK this might not be needed, but after Leonard's performance, the British Kyosho team were soon lengthening their car's for the next day's finals!

Also in the last round, David Crompton showed his worth when it mattered. He put up his best result with his Laro as he finished 7th in the round. His last round run was by far the best of the Brits and meant David qualified 10th overall and comfortably secured his semi-final place. Jamie Booth, who was not really very well at all on the Saturday, didn't improve on his score from Friday. However, he

managed to hang on to a semi-final place and with his first 3 rounds counting he ended 15th, the last place in the semis! Yours truly just missed out on a semi-final place, ending 18th overall. Nevertheless, I was still really pleased with my result, and felt the Futura was going really well, as it was when we first arrived at the track. Right behind me in 19th place came John



Isherwood, who had done brilliantly to get into the 1/4 finals in his first excursion abroad. Tommy Chung ended 20th with his Mugen to give the Brits a respectable 5 in the top 20.



The French had had a superb qualifying with five of the top eight drivers coming from France. However, a lot of the names at the top of the leader board were relatively new to a lot of us. The main hope of France before the Championships was reigning European Champion, Philippe Lachat. The Laro man, on his local track, had an absolute nightmare in qualifying. It started well in round 1 as he finished 6th. But in rounds 2 and 3, he had engine and car trouble and didn't complete a lap. This meant that come Saturday he had to do two good runs out of two! The first run (round 4) went OK. He looked understandably nervous but still managed to finish 12th in the round. In the 5th and final round he was on course for another time, when with a couple of laps to go, his OPS engine went sick and eventually cut with a lap to go. This meant he finished 69th in the round, and overall 37th. He would have a lot to do on Sunday starting in the 1/8th finals...

Before that there were some of the lower finals taking place on Saturday afternoon, starting with the 1/1024th finals! A few of the low finals had taken place before any Brits were out on the track, and the first one out to cheer was Nick Soothill (Crono) in the 1/256th finals. Nick drove a nice steady race to finish 3rd and progress on up the finals. Another British Crono was out next, Ian Oddie in the 1/128th finals. Ian was leading comfortably until a broken shock put paid to his chances. He might have still qualified like that had the marshal not brought it back to the pits when it locked up.

In the other 1/128th final Nick Simmerson also looked like moving up, as he started from pole.

However trouble struck on lap 10 and he was never going to get back in the race. Nick Soothill's run also ended at this stage, but at least he had raced in a couple of finals.

The first finals on the 'main day' were the 1/64th finals. In the very first final, British Mugen drivers, Justin Mackey and Adrian Svensson were 1 and 2 on the grid. Both drivers were in the same final but it is fair to say that their aspirations for the week had been very different. Adrian was having his first European experience and had done well all week really, not messing up like most of us first time out in Europe! Justin, on the other hand, had made the final 12 months ago in Spoleto, Italy and would have been looking for at least a 1/4 final place. It had not gone his way in qualifying, with an engine cut in one of the rounds, and then to get 3 good runs from 4 is very difficult. However, he made amends in this final as he took the win comfortably, with Adrian completing a good 1-2.

There was only 20 minutes before Justin and Adrian were out again in the 1/32nd finals. Also in the same final, the Brits had Trevor Cadby (Laro) and Mike Cradock (Inferno MP5). Trevor Cadby started well, but a broken shock would end his run. Adrian Svensson (Mugen) should have moved up through another final, but an engine cut in the pit-lane cost him around 1/2 lap and in a tight final, where the first 7 drivers all ended on the same lap, this was to prove decisive. Justin Mackey (Mugen) used all his European experience as he worked his way up through the field, starting 8th on the grid but finishing first, to move up to his 3rd final of the day!

Mike Cradock was meanwhile

playing a dangerous game! He planned to go 10 minutes without a fuel-stop but it was very close whether the OS engine could do the 10 minutes without stopping and so Mike had to drive very carefully to conserve fuel, even if this meant letting people overtake when he was fighting them for position, as he knew he was going to gain 15 seconds or so later on, through the fuel-stops. The gamble paid off. As Mike continued along, the others came in for their second stop. Mike had a big enough gap to hold onto and finished 3rd, hence moving up to the 1/16ths. It was notable that even at this stage the finals were very fast indeed and hugely competitive. I don't think I can ever remember a Euros when the finals were so fast even down to the 1/32nd and 1/64th finals. If you went out at this stage, it really wasn't a disgrace.

In the first of the 1/16ths Justin Mackey was aiming for 3 in a row, but it wasn't to be. He had a nightmare start and this was where the race was lost. He tried in vain to climb up through the field, but just missed out, finishing 4th. Nevertheless Justin had restored some pride into his performances with 3 excellent drives in the finals. Lawrence Harris (Inferno MP5) was soon into the lead of the race, until a freak incident ruined his chances. A piece of rubber off his pipe/manifold came off and hit his flywheel, stopping the engine. It was terrible luck for Lawrence to go out in such a way. However, it was still a very disappointing Championships for Lawrence. Considering that he finished 3rd in the World Championships in 1994, he should really have been in the semi-finals here. He never really looked comfortable on the slippery

surface all week, which was a typical European track, unlike Austria, which started as grass, and was much more like in the UK. John Hazelwood also went out at this stage after an engine cut. It was a shame for John as his car had looked good all week. It was still a good performance in only his 2nd Euro's. Mike Cradock was really the one that could say "If only...". Mike was again playing 'The Fuel Game' and it looked like paying off as he was in 3rd place after all the stops. With 2 laps to go Mike came in for a 'Splash 'n' Dash' as he thought he was running out of fuel. This was not the case and Mike must have been hearing things in his mind! The stop cost Mike 3rd place and a place in the 1/8ths. Nightmare!

Danny Conway (Inferno MP5) also played 'The Fuel Game' in his 1/16th final. No troubles for Danny as he drove superbly, hardly putting a foot wrong to end 3rd and book his place in the 1/8ths. It was a particularly good result because this was a very fast race. The winner's time would have won the Jamie Booth's semi-final and yet this was only the 1/16ths! Danny's next race was going to be even tougher with European Champions from the last two years, Philippe Lachat and Andrea Gennari both racing! Stewart Wilcox (Laro) was also in this for Great Britain, and it proved to be the best race of the day.

Lachat was not a threat for long. He completed only 6 laps when a drive shaft came out of his Laro to end an utterly miserable defence of his European title, when he was the hot favourite. World No. 2, and ex-European Champion, Andrea Gennari, looked a forlorn figure as he finished 6th. His Crono didn't look good at all and seemed very difficult to drive, which must have



been the case as he is surely one of the best drivers in the World.

Danny's plan with the fuel stops looked like paying off again as he took the crucial 3rd spot ahead of Stewart after all the stops had taken place. With only a few laps to go Danny made a mistake on the big jump and this allowed Stewart and Germany's Horninger to catch up. The two Brits then took each other out, leaving Horninger in 3rd with Stewart and Danny out of the top 3. With just two corners to go, the German made a mistake, and Stewart took over. All three were unbelievably close, but Stewart held on to the vital 3rd spot. All three went under the finish line with only 1.18 seconds separating all three! Danny was obviously disappointed but he had put in a respectable performance in the Championships, getting to the 1/8ths. It was a big improvement on Spoleto last year, and Danny really drove very well on the European surface making only a handful of mistakes over the two finals.

In the first 1/4 final yours truly (Futura) fell back to 5th after a couple of laps but I soon moved up into the 3rd and vital spot. Tommy Chung (Mugen) had a terrible start but put in some blistering lap-times to try to make up the deficit. He was pushing too hard, however, as his engine ran out of fuel! This effectively put Tommy out of the race, and a further cut later on sealed his fate. Meanwhile, as I came in for fuel, the engine cut. Quickly re-started I lost about half a lap. With the car looking good, I managed to make up the time to get 3rd place back. However, on the second re-fuel, the engine cut again, and this time I lost nearly a lap, which also meant I wouldn't go any higher than the 1/4 finals.

The British disappointment was compounded in the second 1/4 final. Stewart Wilcox managed to break his Laro on the warm-up and so missed the start of the race! John Isherwood, also using the Laro, had a nightmare start and after only 5 minutes his race had



run. He was shunted by another car and this damaged John's exhaust. Although he was understandably disappointed at the final, he had performed remarkably well in his first Euros and hopefully there will be many more good Euros to come.

So into the semis we went with only the two drivers that had directly qualified, Jamie Booth and David Crompton. This was slightly disappointing for the Brits, but to be honest, the only times we have ever done really well were in Denmark and Austria, both of which were on English-type soil, as well as in Pendle.

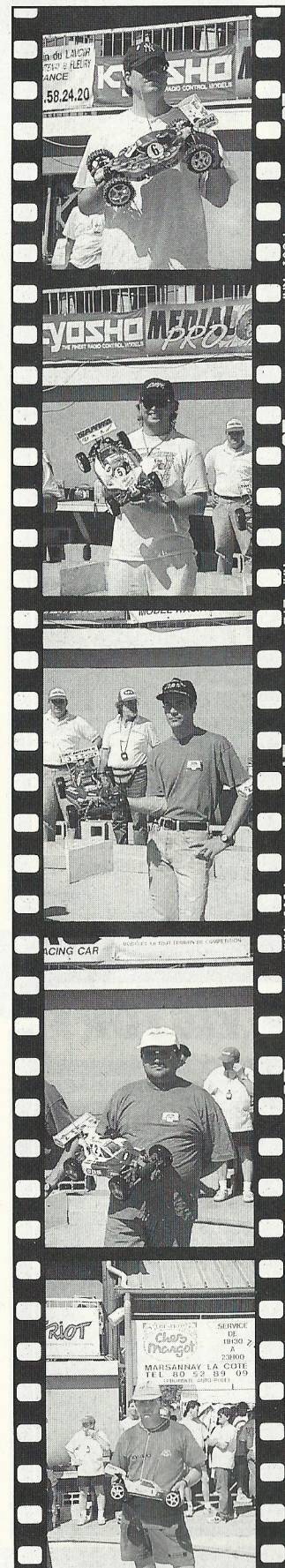
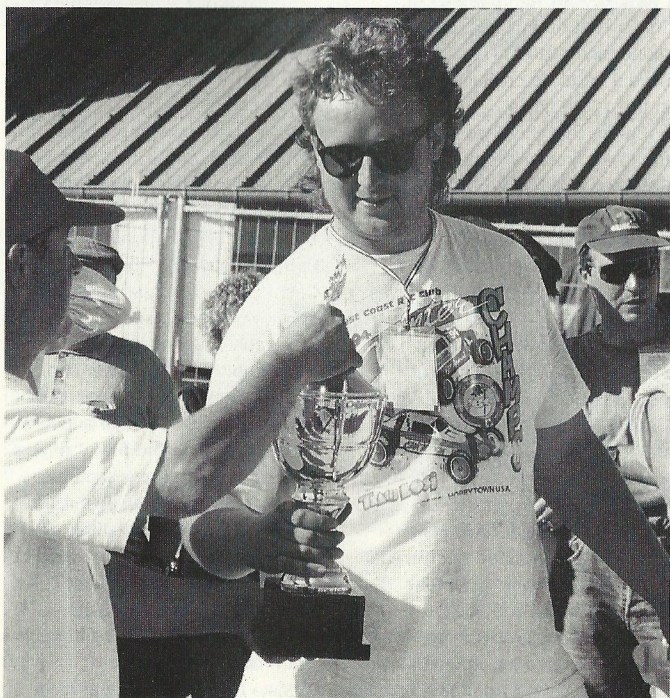
David Crompton was first up, and the Laro driver had a nightmare start, where everything went against him. He got himself together really well to get back into the race (which is normally impossible at this level) and eventually finished 5th, just 5 seconds off 4th place and certain qualification. David would have to wait to see whether he would get through as the fastest loser. The race was dominated by pole man Alessandro Catozzi (Tag). He actually won the race by nearly a lap to signal to the rest that he would be the man to beat, although Leonard (already in the final) might have argued the point! Marco Grandesso made it a Tag 1-2, Bertin of France (Crono) finished 3rd with Matteo Dapporto ending 4th, giving the Tag 3 out of the top 4 drivers. Dapporto had had an amazing day having started in the 1/8th finals.

The second semi-final gave the British something to cheer at long last. Jamie Booth got a reasonable

start with his MP5 and comfortably held 3rd place early on. The leader, Vega from Spain, left the rest for dead with his Mugen, but just after half-way his engine cut! With Vega out of contention, Betticher of Switzerland took over. He had already come up from the 1/4 finals but cruelly he would suffer an engine cut with just 3 laps left! This (although sad) gave the Brits something to cheer as Jamie had now taken the lead. His longer-wheel based MP5 looked good as he went on to a superb victory. Unfortunately, David Crompton missed out on a final place. This went to Michel Baruzzi (Crono) who had finished 5th in Jamie's final with his time being 8

seconds faster than David's. Julle Pedersen ended a very surprising 2nd with an MP5. A delighted Didier Perrin finished 3rd, to become Switzerland's first finalist for many years. Home support was not let down as Sebastien Chaffardon ended 4th.

The temperature at trackside was now extremely hot (both actually and metaphorically) as the drivers were introduced to the crowd. There was a buzz of excitement in the crowd and the British had Jamie Booth to cheer on. The final was a bit of a letdown really, not the classic we had hoped for. This was because the cars spreaded out a great deal, which is very unusual. Sebastien



Leonard (Inferno MP5) made a mistake on the first lap, and this allowed Catozzi's Tag into the lead. Just as in the semi-final, Catozzi began to pull away. Jamie had a nightmare start. He came off worst over the main jump and was last before he knew it. With the pace as it was it would not be long before he was going to be lapped. It was a very rough race indeed, nobody gave an inch, and Jamie found it difficult against the European opposition, just as he did in Spoleto last year.

At 8 mins Jamie suffered an engine cut. He was planning to stop every 9 minutes (the final was 45 minutes) and in the UK the OS engine would do this comfortably on a tank of fuel, but with the very hot weather and the fast track, it just couldn't manage it. After just over 1/2 hour Jamie was not really feeling at all well and required a drink during the race. The rostrum was completely covered in sun, with the roof not shading the drivers now that the sun was lower. Some radio interference for Jamie made up his mind. He stopped his race here, as he had lost a lot of time with the engine cuts, and he wasn't going to be anywhere near the top even if he had continued. He ended 9th, for the second year running, and although the final didn't go to plan, he had still done brilliant. To make the final once is special, but two years running is superb. I certainly wouldn't rule out his chances at the World's on UK soil!

Sebastien Leonard had a miserable final. After his start, he got through the field and up to second place. Then an engine cut struck and finally he broke his MP5 after 25 minutes to end 10th. Nevertheless his qualifying performances will certainly be remembered. Shortly after Jamie's first cut, Grandesso cut and with Leonard out, Didier Perrin moved into a clear 2nd place. However, by halfway he had been lapped (!), along with the rest of the field, by the flying Tag of Catozzi. Adrien Bertin also suffered an engine cut as the heat took its toll on the engines. He had many cuts during the race and finished 8th. Sebastien Chaffardon missed the start with a transmission problem

#### Final Positions Of British Team

Pos	Name	Car	Engine
9th	Jamie Booth	Kyosho Inferno MP5	OS RZB
12th	David Crompton	Laro Diablo	Nova Rossi
27th	Tommy Chung	Mugen Super Athlete	Nova Rossi
28th	Mark Stitson	Mantua Futura	Top
30th	Stewart Wilcox	Laro Diablo	Mondial
34th	John Isherwood	Laro Diablo	Mondial
37th	Danny Conway	Kyosho Inferno MP5	OS RZB
50th	Justin Mackey	Mugen Super Athlete	Nova Rossi
51st	Mike Cradock	Kyosho Inferno MP5	OS RZB
61st	John Hazelwood	Laro Diablo	OS RZB
63rd	Lawrence Harris	Kyosho Inferno MP5	OS RZB
65th	Adrian Svensson	Mugen Super Athlete	Nova Rossi
74th	Trevor Cadby	Laro Diablo	Nova Rossi
94th	Nick Soothill	Crono S'6	Picco
98th	Ian Oddie	Crono S'6	Picco
102nd	Nick Simmerson	Crono S'6	Picco

on his Mugen. He was way down and only finished 7th because of the other's misfortune. Marco Dapporto (Tag) finished 6th after he too had engine trouble, but he was still over the moon having qualified 36th! The Finnish driver, Pedersen, didn't have any trouble with his MP5/Mondial combination ending a brilliant 5th. He wasn't really on the pace, but it was still a result that he could surely never have imagined when he made the long journey from Finland. He was Finland's first Euro's finalist and only one of two drivers from Finland, the other finishing 123rd!

Back at the front, Catozzi continued his domination. Michel Baruzzi (Crono), who finished 2nd in Spoleto last year, looked like making it 2nd again as he took over from Perrin. An engine cut on the last lap cruelly stopped this and he would have to settle for 4th. It was still a good result for him, because he had to drive the socks off his car. The Crono didn't look good all week, with World Champion, Maurizio Monesi unable to progress from the 1/4 finals and Andrea Gennari ending in the 1/8ths. Supposedly, the World Championships will be their last meeting with the car.

Grandesso finished 3rd, despite an engine cut, showing how good the Tag was on this track. Perrin was a deliriously happy 2nd for Switzerland, their best result for many years but nobody could touch Catozzi. He wiped the floor with Europe's best to win the final by over 2 laps! I have never known such a winning margin in 10 years

of European events that I have witnessed. The car looked ultra-smooth, and Catozzi, who has led many European and World Championship finals, (but failed due to mechanical problems) showed his unflappable nature. He only made 1 mistake in the entire 45 minutes of racing, which itself is remarkable.

Overall, the Championships were a great success. After the 'Shambles Of Spoleto' last year, it was good to see our European counterparts put on a good show. The organisation was extremely efficient, without being heavy-handed and the track was superb, not cutting up too much at all. It was not the best of results for the Brits, but a realistic one, with Jamie Booth again showing that he is one of the best at the top level. It was an absolute disaster for Laro, not even having a finalist in their home country, and the performances from Crono were also disappointing. Although they did have two drivers in the final, the sheer amount of money they must have pumped into winning must have been enormous. Italian drivers showed they are still the best, with 4 of the top 6 places. Whether this will be the case against the Americans and Japanese - we shall see! The Tag car was outstanding at this meeting. Three drivers in the final (with only a couple more racing) and 2 in the top 3. The win will have given Catozzi so much confidence as he heads for the World Championships at Beaulieu!