

# EFRA 1/10th

## Off Road European Championships - Teesside, Great Britain.

Craig and Jukka back for more!

**T**he Teesside Club, Britain's largest, were the hosts of this, the premier event in Europe. Major sponsors were Barclaycard, Company Barclaycard and M-Troniks. Tremendous efforts had been put into organising it all. A massive marquee, complete with tables and chairs for all, provided covered pitting and plenty of space. A further marquee was provided for scrutineering and this was even big enough to include a couple of model shops. Next up was the mains electricity supply, and here Teesside had a problem. There is no mains supply nearby and they had to hire a generator, but when I say a generator, I mean a piece of kit that looked like a small power station - no problem with that! Finishing touches included a fully equipped Race Control, St John Ambulance on site and even a great set of flags hung out for all the nations taking part. The venue really did look the business and instantly set that great event atmosphere.

Craig, Jukka and Ryan enjoy the applause



THE CHAMPIONS' CHUI



A moment to savour for Graham, Jukka and Philip



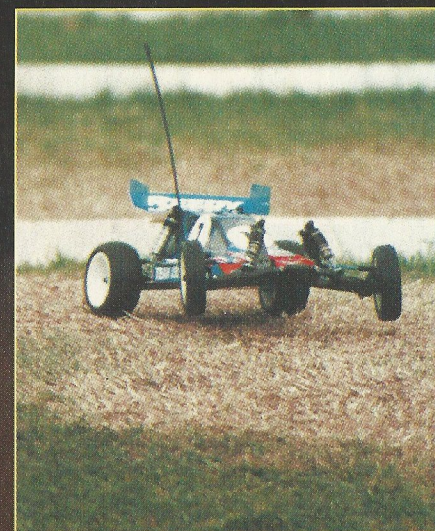
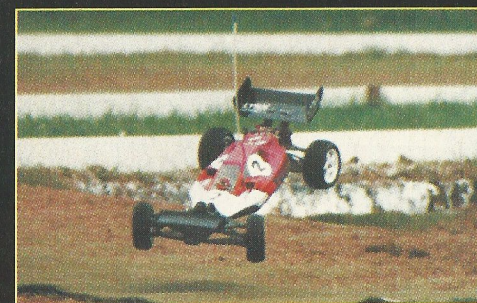
### The Track

This was a fresh design by Teesside's Simon Cook. The dominant feature was a huge banked turn, constructed in plywood, that was like a wall of death. The surface had been repainted with a coarse grained coating to give high grip. This it did, but there was a downside - severe tyre wear. A set of tyres would only last two runs - thankfully not a problem at the Euros as the EFRA tyre rule permits a

new set after every two runs. The rest of the lap contained undulating terrain, a bomb hole, a ramp jump and a tricky concrete slab on the inside apex of the corner leading on to the straight. The racing surface was virtually all grass and hard wearing. It was going to be a real test of man and machine.



Jukka's Losi XX4

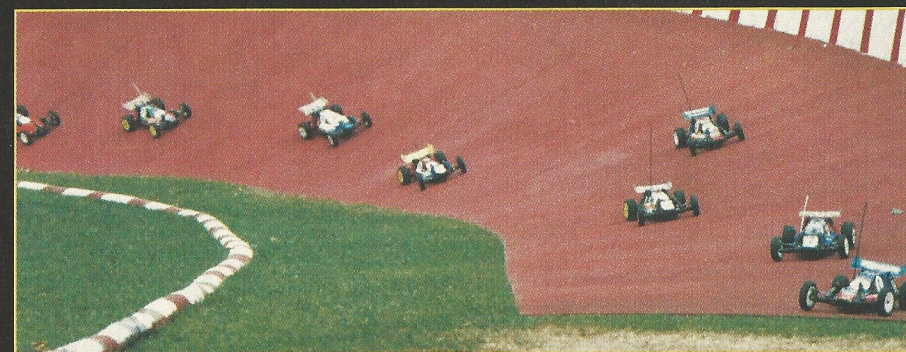


### Practise

During free practise the cars were put through technical inspection and also all the transmitters were thoroughly tested. Teesside had a very interesting new radio analyser that was capable of scanning every frequency, including those from abroad. It certainly sorted out any poor gear, and avoided any interference problems. On Wednesday morning there were two more practise sessions but this time in heat order and with the timing equipment fitted. A driver's best time from the controlled practise would determine the starting order for the first round of qualifying. This is a great idea as it usually means the fastest drivers get to start first in their heats, rather than having to sort this out in round one of qualifying.



Graham Allsop's Predator



### 2WD - Qualifying

It had to be round by round qualifying, given the British weather, qualifying over two days and the grass surface. EFRA rules dictate that three out of the five rounds will count and this does make life a trifle difficult as three good runs are needed. Consistency is needed more than outright speed. A wide variety of tyres were being used in the early sessions but the favourite was Schumacher Green or Blue Minispiques on the back. Either two row studs or slim minispiques were used up front depending on how much steering each driver wanted. The French tyre company, Medial Pro, was

putting in a big presence after their tyres had proved so good at the earlier warm up race. These tyres worked but required a lot of effort in preparation. Some drivers were cutting out part of the width of the tyre, others took out some of the diameter, and all cut down the length of the spikes. It was quite usual to spend an hour preparing just one pair of tyres. By the time all qualifying was over, the grass on the track had worn and the weather was quite hot. Conditions then favoured Schumacher's yellow compound minispike and this was to be the exclusive tyre used by all the top ten drivers in the finals.

### Round 1

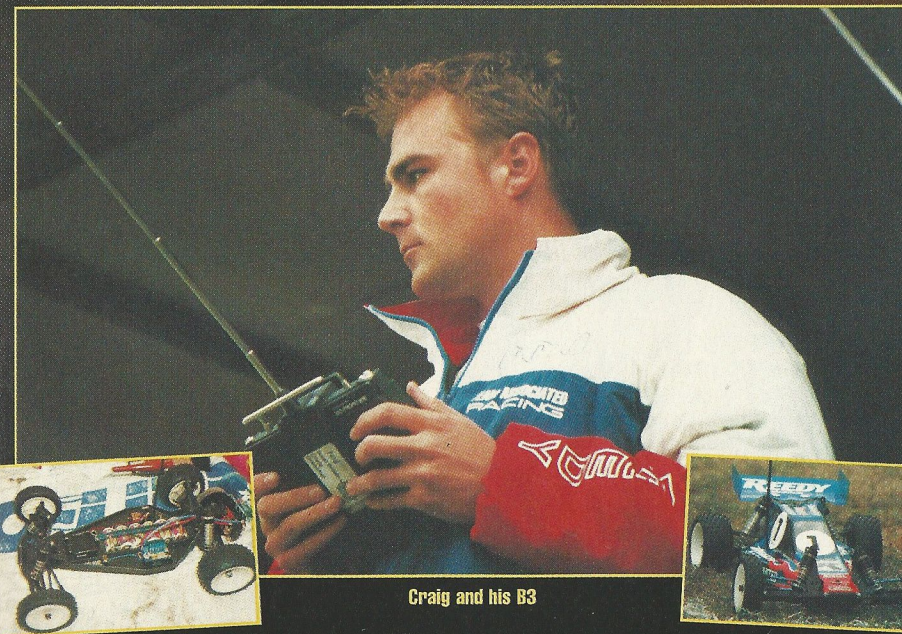
A great start by the Brits. Fifteen of the top twenty places with Ellis Stafford fastest, Graham Alsop second and reigning 2wd champion, Craig Drescher, fifth. The main threat to Craig's title was of course, Jukka Steenari from Finland, and he placed seventh.

### Round 2

Graham Alsop got a great run in his Losi, and was easily the quickest in round two. Ellis goes second, Dave Duggan with the B3 an impressive third, Jukka fourth and Craig fifth. The wear on the racing line was causing some understeer on the Associated cars and Craig was the first to try the 'aggressive' steering set-up that is hardly ever used.

### Round 3

The steering change gave Craig the edge he was looking for and he took round three by storm. His time was also the fastest qualifying time so far, and this was enough to move him into the top qualifier spot when all three rounds were taken into account. Jukka Steenari was second, only one point adrift, and



Craig and his B3





The Losi of Ryan Coxall

then Graham Alsop and Dave Duggan tied for third place. These top four drivers had been very consistent and the points gap back to fifth place was huge. However, there were plenty of drivers who had two good scores and just needed one more to move up.

## Round 4

Another day and there is no stopping Craig. He got within one second of his fastest time in round three to take round four. Ryan Coxall driving for Team Losi just pips Dave Duggan to second in the round by two hundredths of a second. Ryan takes a place in the top ten but Dave goes second overall.

## Round 5

The final sort out. Jukka Steenari pushes his Losi to a new personal best time, takes the round and moves up to third overall. Ian Joyce with the Schumacher Fireblade pulls off a great result with second in the round. Ellis Stafford went third whilst Craig had a bad run. Ellis and Craig both had the same overall points score but Craig took the tie break for TQ because he had won two rounds to Ellis' one. Most consistent driver in qualifying? Dave Duggan - never lower than eighth in a round. Great result for the British Team - nine of the top ten, six in the B final, seven in the C final and so on.

## The Finals

### A Final - Leg 1

Craig stormed off from pole and then put on one of those demonstration type runs we have seen so many times before. Jukka was not as quick as Craig at the start but at the half way stage upped his pace and started closing in. It was a fantastic effort and lap after lap he cut into Craig's lead. At the end it wasn't quite enough but Jukka got to within less than a second. Great drive but leg one to Craig Drescher.

### A Final - Leg 2

This time the start was not so good and Craig didn't get away as quickly and made an error coming off the banking for the first time. Several cars got caught up in the accident but Ellis was out front with Jukka right with him.

It stayed like that for a while and then Ellis crashed on lap twelve handing the win to Jukka. Ellis took second but was coming under pressure from a hard charging Ryan Coxall and Dave Duggan.

## A Final - Leg 3

All to play for and the top two drivers in Europe had one leg win each. Craig made no mistake at this third leg start but Jukka was also in determined mood. Fantastic racing follows for lap after lap with Jukka right on Craig's back door. It looked very much like Jukka could just do it but two laps from the flag, the last ditch effort proved too much and the crash costs two seconds. Craig takes the win and the European 2wd Championship for 1998. Jukka is runner up and Ryan Coxall made the podium in third. Once again it was all about Craig and Jukka and it was clear that these two are in a different performance league from the rest.

Trophy presentation went with all the usual raz-a-ma-taz, and then Craig got bombed with a bucket load of the most amazing 'mush'. Pizza, beer and heaven only knows what else - he looked a right mess! Happy though!

## 4wd - Qualifying

We started all over again with a fresh event, but there was one big change. 2wd had enjoyed settled weather and consistent track conditions but it was going to be very different in 4wd. The weather turned, the temperature dropped and the rain clouds came rolling in. The big trouble was that it didn't rain all the time but came and went in showers. Worse was that it did this part way through some of the qualifying rounds.

## Round 1

Everything was going fine up to heat 9 out of the 15. The better drivers were getting fast 15 lap runs. Then it rained and immediately the lap times dropped dramatically. All the big name drivers went in the top three heats and none of them could better a 13 lap run. Reigning (raining!) European champion, Jukka Steenari could only get 96th place in the round. As far as the top drivers were concerned the round was wasted, which meant they only



Ron and Sue Harker headed up the Teeside Team, the uniforms are a bit strange Ron!

had four left, of which three had to count - tough one!

## Round 2

It was wet at the start of the round but the track was drying out and lap times improving. Philip Murton, driving his Predator in heat 10, made the most of the improved conditions and put in a good 15 lap run to TQ the round, but as heat 12 got under way it started raining again. Disaster! Drivers were now two whole laps off the pace. The rain did stop quite quickly and the times improved a little by heat 15 to allow Jukka a good 14 lap run to go ninth in that round. Others like Craig Drescher and William Mitcham, were well down the order and had now suffered two bad rounds and would have to make all the remaining three count. Mike Drescher, the EFRA Chairman, called all the Team Managers to a meeting to see if they could sort something out to try and compensate for the unfair qualifying conditions. Unfortunately the EFRA rules are so tightly written that nothing could be done that would change the situation. With the benefit of hindsight, the referees and the race director should have invoked the EFRA rain rule and stopped qualifying as soon as the rain started. The session should then have been restarted after the track had dried.

## Round 3

Mercifully round three was virtually unaffected by rain and all drivers had similar conditions. The names at the top now had a more familiar sound. Jamie Booth went fastest with fellow Predator team-mates, Graham Alsop third, William Mitcham fifth and Phil Murton sixth. Jukka went second in the round, Craig fourth.

## Round 4

Sunday and the rain held off in round four and 46 drivers managed 15 lap runs. The Tenth Technology Predators were easily the best, taking the top three positions with Phil Murton having another great run to TQ the round. Phil now had a commanding lead in the overall points score and Jukka was second, Graham Alsop third. So many drivers like Craig Drescher



The TQ Predator of Philip Murton

British National series we were expecting Jamie Booth and Graham Alsop to make the running with the reigning European Champion, Jukka Steenari, well placed to retain his title. How would Phil Murton fare from pole position with such awesome talent right behind him. Certainly his car and driving had looked first rate during qualifying.

## A Final - Leg 1

Phil made the most of pole and got a great start. Jamie powered from fifth to second while Jukka got binned out in a first corner pile up. Simon Delph held third making it a Predator 1,2,3. These three just drove away from the field and we were treated to a display of great driving. Phil stuck right on the racing line and made no mistakes. Jamie looked like he could go a bit quicker but could never find enough to make a clean pass - he is far too good a driver to knock Phil out of the way. It stayed like that and leg one went to Phil Murton.

## A Final - Leg 2

Phil got away again but Jukka had refined his car set up and seemed to have an awesome Orion motor. He shot straight into second and then on the main straight, blasted past Phil like the turbo just cut in. Phil fought back and made a great pass to take the lead again. He defended his line like a Pro and continued to hold off Jukka for lap after lap. Jukka was rather more forceful than Jamie had been in leg 1 and eventually he muscled his way through. Phil made another attempt to get back but crashed in the effort. It ended up with Jukka winning the leg, Graham Alsop second, Simon Delph third, and Phil fourth.

## A Final - Leg 3

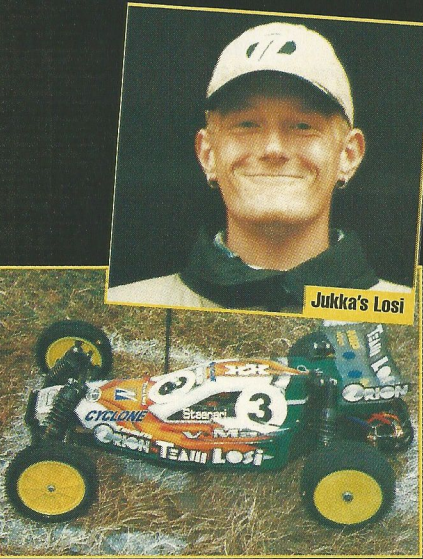
Blazing start from Phil with Simon away well and riding shotgun. Jukka right there in third, his car seeming to have just the right balance between good handling and outright speed. Second lap and Jukka powered up the inside of Simon and took second place. Great driving by Simon as he retook second place in a superb

move, but not for long as he then crashed out. That was a pivotal moment in the race as Simon's crash left Jukka with a clear shot at Phil. Jukka pushed so hard that eventually Phil slid wide and Jukka dived through for the lead. No catching him then as he lapped quicker than anyone else - he won by over 4 seconds. Phil came in second, Graham Alsop third. Jukka Steenari retained his 4wd title but only just. Phil Murton drove brilliantly and led home a strong Tenth Technology team who filled the next four places.

## Epilogue

What a fantastic event, great track, great organising team and Europe's best drivers. What is it with Craig Drescher? He always finds that little bit of magic and rises above all the challengers - yet another 2wd title for Associated, Reedy and Orion. The rain played its part in 4wd but this did not stop Jukka Steenari doing a fabulous job for Team Losi. Gil Losi Jnr. had made the long trip from California and was rewarded with the success of the XX4. Phil Murton - what a star! He had just missed the A final in Barcelona last year, but at Teesside he drove brilliantly and took the 4wd TQ and so nearly won. Surely a future champion.

My last abiding memory was of Ron Harker, the Race Director, dressed up in full Elvis gear and doing the Karaoke at the big Party. He will never live it down! **RRCI**



4WD

2WD