

Rolling >>>

THUNDER!

issue no 1



- * ALL THE NEWS FROM BRANDS HATCH ROUND ONE.
- * IF YOU WERE THERE YOU'RE IN HERE.
- * IN DEPTH REPORT AND FULL RESULTS.

ROLLING THUNDER

Welcome to issue number one of "ROLLING THUNDER" the first newsletter solely devoted to the exciting world of Thundersaloon racing.

Now as our efforts are constrained by a complete lack of finance, we cannot promise you neatly set text and glossy photographs. What we do intend to provide is in depth coverage of each round of the Johnson Tiles series, with each and every entrants progress reported.

"ROLLING THUNDER" will normally (see footnote) be published after each round of the Championship, and further copies will be available from the editorial address. For the present we will be retaining our rather basic format, unless someone out there would like to back our efforts.....

Attention Thundersaloon teams, this is your newsletter and we want to hear from you. News, views, comments, anecdotes will all be welcome either by letter or phone. So - get in touch, and hopefully we can stimulate even greater interest in the fastest saloon car series around today.

NOTE. Due to the Editor marrying the assitant Ed., and disappearing off for a honeymoon, the next action-filled issue of "ROLLING THUNDER" will be published to coincide with round four. It will be a bumper edition with full coverage of the Oulton Park and Zandvoort races. (Incidentally the last weekend of our honeymoon will be spent at Zandvoort!)

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Brands Hatch

Glorious sunshine graced Brands Hatch on Sunday morning and the view down the pitlane was no less inspiring. All 24 of the listed entries had turned up, and it was soon apparent that the teams had spent some time in making their cars look the part with their smart new paint-schemes glinting in the sunlight.

A range of new class A machinery lined up to do battle with last year's all conquering Vauxhall Carlton, but with just a half-hour practice for the drivers to test their unraced cars the Vauxhall Dealersport machine was still regarded as the one to beat - which by the end of the session it had been.

Pole position was secured by the debutant Manns Racing Mazda RX7, Holman Blackburn whirling the virgin-white machine around in 48.3 seconds to the delight of owner Mike Wilson, unaccustomed to front-row starting spots after driving a Rover in the series last season. Completed last October, the Mazda has been built up by Manns around a shell which started life as a rallysprint car driven by none other than Jody Scheckter. Kevlar doors and aluminium wings add to the looks, whilst grunt is provided by an ex-Rod Birley 3.4 litre V6 Cosworth unit which pushes out 435bhp. Early test sessions resulted in new harder rear springs being fitted and by the time it arrived at Brands the car was flying.

The team did not have things all their own way however, the car lost its clutch very early in the session and then sustained a severely dented front near-side in an incident with the Sierra driven by Mick Quaife. "My fault" admitted the transmission supremo after, "Les was closing on me along the top straight when I missed a gear." The punt sent the Ford into a vicious fish-tail which gave it's driver a heart-stopping moment or two, but damage was confined to a bent rear bumper.



In contrast to the changes going on around them Vauxhall Dealersport appeared with a basically unghanged Carlton. "It's had a new paint job," John Cleland had said earlier. The little Scotsman was absent for the race, off chasing points in the Esso Touring Car Championship, so his place was taken by Tony Lanfranchi no less. After his incredibly frustrating time in the Hugh Marshall Escort last year, Tony was looking forward to the Carlton. "I drove it in the snow last week, and it's a lovely car," he enthused - and he should know, he's driven a few in his time. Regular driver Vince Woodman was less happy however; "We've got a bit of a vibration, an orange light keeps flickering on the engine management computer and the track is very slippery," he said, accounting for the team's six-tenths deficit on the Mazda.

Over a second further back was the next car, the sensational new Group C Porsche turbo engined Gartrac Sierra. Rod Birley's mount epitomises what Thundersaloons are all about, with the 3.2 litre flat six power unit shoehorned into the engine bay. Single turbocharging gives an output of almost 700bhp, which is channelled to the wheels by Hewland transmission and a specially-designed Jaguar diff. It has taken two years for Dave Bignold to get the car to the grid, calling upon the assistance of Andrew Whiting at Formula One Accessories and Rod's long-time backers Curtis Holt who are sponsoring the team at Brands Hatch races. The second driving spot is filled by the experienced Terry Nicholls, and both men, like many others, are still looking for further sponsorship.

The team arrived at Brands from a Donington test session where everything seemed to go wrong including an oil leak and a seized gearbox. "We've been right through the car so hopefully it will be better today." A loose plug, which sprayed oil all over the engine bay, proved little bar to the team's progress, and soon the Sierra was displaying it's potential, in particular an incredible straight-line speed. At sessions end however Rod was less than happy, "It's not handling at all well through the corners" he said.

Alongside the new car lined up one starting it's fourth season, the Vauxhall Senator of Pete Stevens. The car, not seen since it's serious shunt at Mallory Park last August, had obviously benefitted from the neccessary major rebuild, turning in a competitive 50.3. "We've only just completed putting it back together " said Stevens, who would be joined by Chuck Nicholson whilst regular partner Neil Facey fulfilled Hot Rod commitments, "It's a strong car, we had to straighten it a bit, but we've no real problems."

Jim Mensley was back for more, the big Honda Legend now decked out in the colours of Palma Express. "We've been through it with a fine toothcomb, it's got better aerodynamics, bigger wheels and a revamped engine - a full 6.5 litres now," said a spokesman for the team. All of which was expected to suit Mensley's new co-driver Tony Wolfe, more accustomed to piloting a Chevrolet Camaro. The team looked in good shape, confident of achieving the reliability to match the speed of last year.

A 51.1 gained sixth grid spot for the second Sierra in the field, the 5.7 litre XR4 of Brian Powles and Don Manley, the white machine three-tenths down on the Honda. A new five speed gearbox and Gleeson diff were the major modifications in evidence, in addition to the customary rebuild.

The inside of row four belonged to the first class B car, the Oliservice Escort of the very happy Steve King and Tony Paxman, who always seem to go well at Brands. "It's got a lightened 2.1 litre BDG in it - we stripped the car right down at the end of last season," enthused King. "We lost an ignition pack after three laps, but apart from that it's great."

Though a mere tenth behind the Powles Sierra, the Oliservice crew were by no means dominant, the next four class B cars covered by a second, led by

Paul Sherlock and Robert Bridger in their Escort. This car now boasts a 2.5 litre Cosworth and an extremely smart body which the pair revealed had been acid dipped over the winter. Last year's class B championship car reappeared still in it's yellow Ecurie Ecosse livery but now owned by Joe Ward and Tony Dickinson, replacing the raucous Mazda which gained the pair runners-up spot last season. "We'll quite happily repaint it if someone gives us lots of money to do so," said Ward, who revealed that the only change to the car was a new differential oil cooler.

Another 'class A Sierra split the smaller-capacity pack, driven by Mick Quaife and rallycross exponent Graham Hathaway. The car was sadly not the ex-Birley machine which is still in Hathaway's workshop undergoing substantial mods including the installation of four-wheel drive, but the car that Graham used in Group A and the final Thundersaloon round at Donington last year. Apart from the savaging by Blackburn's Mazda the team experienced no problem.

Certainly the brightest car in the field was the Escort of Graham Joy and Colin Richardson, which turned out in a very luminous yellow and red paint-job. Sporadically seen last year, the car spoilt the regulation rebuilt engine and gearbox, and had been used to good effect over the Easter holiday to raise money for Capital Radio's "Help A London Child" appeal, the two drivers collecting over £1000 by taking the machine to fetes, collecting money in buckets and auctioning grandstand tickets with the help of their sponsors.

In truth there was very little new in the class B field, the exception being the very smart Peugeot 205 of Danny and Ricky Morris. This outfit are yet another to be drawn from the world of short-circuit racing, a category from which Thundersaloons seems to attract many of it's entrants. The two brothers have put together a very neat machine, whose 2.4 litre Manta 400 unit pushes out 272bhp. At Brands Danny shared driving duties with John Devereaux, Ricky forced to stand on the sidelines until he collects enough signatures to upgrade his licence. "I'll be doing Brands and Oulton for the team," said Devereaux, "and I may well be out later in the year - but I'm not telling you what in!" The team's major practice problem was handling, as the car tended to understeer into corners and oversteer out, and the half-hour was spent messing about with roll-bars.

John Goldacre's Opel Manta; which achieved notoriety last year when it shed a wheel which squashed a spectator's sandwiches; lined up on the inside of row seven after setting a 52.6 in the hands of it's owner and Thundersaloon regular Tony Davies. The pair confined themselves to 6000rpm on the rebuilt powerunit which had been mated to a new gearbox, and problems centred around the rear brakes which were tending to grab and a lost oil seal.

Next spot was taken by Julian Swayland in his small but meaty class A Toyota Starlet, and for this team it was a case of what is going to be done rather than what had been. "It will be getting a new gearbox, and new rims and tyres," said Swayland, who was joined by production saloon exponent Sean Brown.

Up from the south coast were the happy pairing of Barry Andrews and Keith Atkins with their Belgrave Racing Evans Halshaw Astra Mk1, the car unghanged despite the programme claiming that the 16 valve unit had been discarded in favour of a Cosworth. The car looked smoky but more competitive than ever it did last season, and after Barry declared that it was "flying!" "The smoke's not serious, just an overfilled catch-tank," he added, "Our only problem was a rooted tyre. We still haven't got that new exhaust though!"

Last season's hardest trier Hugh Marshall reappeared with his Escort, and the personal black cloud was gone as he enthused over the car. "It's been

