



WWW.NSCC.CO.UK

THE INDEPENDENT CLUB FOR SLOT-CAR ENTHUSIASTS

No.269 AUGUST 2004

Contents

| | |
|-----------------------------|----|
| Swapmeet..... | 2 |
| Diary Dates..... | 3 |
| Messages From Margate..... | 5 |
| Traders Travels..... | 9 |
| Ebay Watch..... | 10 |
| Ninco News..... | 11 |
| Improving On A Classic..... | 13 |
| Letters..... | 16 |
| Bits And Pieces..... | 18 |
| Achtung Panzer..... | 19 |
| Duck Soup..... | 20 |
| SCX Review..... | 25 |
| Norman's Conquest..... | 29 |
| Circuit 24..... | 31 |
| A Plasterer's Tale..... | 34 |
| Power To The People..... | 37 |
| Adverts..... | 39 |

Twelve minutes to the hour

It is July 15th 1989 and we are standing near the exit of Copse corner at Silverstone during the final hour of qualifying. The turbo era is at its peak; all the front runners have completed their first run on qualifying tyres and have put banker times on the board.

As we approach the final quarter of an hour there is a flurry of activity as everyone goes for their last shot at pole. Then, with exactly 12 minutes to go, a red and white McLaren with the distinctive helmet of Ayrton Senna emerges from pit lane. You could set your watch by him - barring mechanical problems he would always make his final run at the same time. An expectant buzz surges through the crowd - they can see the white stickers on his final set of qualifiers and the smoke haze reminiscent of a horde of angry bees trailing behind the exhausts - the sure sign of a Honda turbo on full boost pushing out in excess of 1300bhp.

The cheers follow him round the warm-up lap but, as he crosses the start line for the hot one, the crowd fall eerily silent and prepare to savour a few brief moments in the presence of a racing genius. He is through Copse in a blur of red and white before we have time to blink but we can hear that unique Senna throttle sound all the way round the lap. There are other cars on the track but they part like the Red Sea as Ayrton storms to yet another pole position and, as he completes his slowing down lap, we are surrounded by people with silly grins on their faces saying, "Wow!"

If I could have my own personal 'Groundhog Day' then it would forever be mid July in the late 80s at Silverstone and 12 minutes to the hour!

And Finally - fast forward to Silverstone, early July 2004 - 21 alleged F1 drivers trying to go slower than the rest in pre-qualifying! Ayrton must be spinning in his grave. Thank heaven for Jenson Button - a true racer and the only one to go for it. I wonder which slot-car manufacturer has had the foresight to acquire the B.A.R. licensing rights?

Till next month
Brian



Editor

Brian Rogers
27 Paige Close
Watlington
King's Lynn
Norfolk
PE33 0TQ

Tel/Fax:- 01553 813090
e-mail:- editor@nsc.co.uk

Trade Advertising

Adrian Leggett
Roseville
Westwood Lane
Normandy
Guildford
Surrey
GU3 2JG

Tel:- 07773 967333
between 09:00 - 18:00
01483 810102 evenings
e-mail:- sales@nsc.co.uk



The focus this month has been very much on people – well 1/32nd scale people anyway. We have seen the first pit crew sets and several street cars containing new driver and passenger figures in civvies rather than nomex racing overalls.

Starsky and Hutch

C2603A Starsky and Hutch / Limited Edition
C2553 and C2553A Ford Gran Torino 1976

C2602A Chevrolet Corvette 1969

C2603A Starsky and Hutch twin pack is in the same size display box as last year's Goodwood GT40 trio, decorated with images from the old 70's TV show, not the recent film. The Ford Gran Torino is available in C2603A as C2553A sport version and is also available separately as C2553. The base for the standard crystal case had to have the slot lengthened to accommodate the Torino which only just fits in the box. ⇒⇒



The Corvette is available in C2603A as C2602A sport version and is not available separately. The chassis has been updated to use the latest guide and braided disk. Both of these chassis contain the fittings to convert them to Digital versions at a future date. Set versions C2553W and C2602W will be available in set C1137 Starsky and Hutch Set. A special version of this set with a different track layout will be sold in Marks and Spencer stores.

Street cars

There are street versions of several of the classic American cars this year.

C2573 Chevrolet Camaro 'SS' street car

This is in red with two bold white stripes from front to back. Of particular note is the very fine tampon printing of the badges and fine white lining around each wheel arch. It also features new chrome wheels, windscreen wipers and a wing mirror not seen on the racers.

C2574 Mustang and C2575 Corvette are also released but as mine haven't arrived yet I will describe them next month.

C2478 Porsche Boxster "Red '04"

The first of the budget priced sports cars to be released is the red Boxster. Decorated with two silver stripes and a Boxster script it looks good. The front and rear lights are printed and there are no windows. Designed to withstand brutal treatment these cars should be popular with the younger enthusiast. The Porsche is in a new box type too. This is predominantly purple with the yellow and black chequered decoration. It has a rigid cellophane window rather than Perspex and it was quite hard to remove the car without destroying the box. The car is held in place with the familiar knurled screw and also two pieces of plastic coated wire.



C2607 Subaru Impreza getaway car

This is only available in set C1147 Hot Pursuit. In a vivid orange fading to purple colour scheme it has mirror finished flashes up the sides. Disappointingly it has blacked out windows and black light lenses. I wonder why as it would look so much better with an interior and lights and the set is not cheap at around £80 in the shops.



The set also contains C2488W Ford Focus "Police Car". This is identical to the solo release last September. The set is an X2 layout 5.32m in length.

Race + set accessories

At last some modern figures to work on your Scalextric cars. The new Race+ Set Accessories are a very welcome addition to the range. There are two different sets of figures each available in either blue or silver Nomex. These are also bundled with the new livery Indy Cars.

What we have is as follows:

C8291 Race+ Pit Crew blue and C8292 Race+ Pit Crew – silver; each contains eight figures. Six of them are a tyre crew and two are refuellers complete with rig and hose. Two spare wheels are also included.

C8293 Race+ Pit Crew - blue and C8294 Race+ Pit Crew - silver; each contains 10 figures. These are the same six tyre crew as before and four general mechanics complete with a jack.

C8302 Race + Pit Team – silver contains C8292

figures and C2600W Indianapolis silver.

C8303 Race + Pit Team – blue contains C8293 figures and C2601W Indianapolis blue.

These very attractive Sport decorated Dallara Indy Cars are only available in the new Race+ combination packs of car and pit figures.

These new Race+ items are nicely packaged in purple and yellow boxes with stiff cellophane windows and bold Race+ Set Accessories script. They will be eye catching on the retailer's shelf.

Kits

Several of the Hornby branded plastic kits are also available. These are the versions without paint and glue:

K2007A Ford GT40 JW Automotive Gulf

K2009A Chevrolet Corvette

K2011A Mini Cooper John Cooper Challenge

An interesting variation is K2006 Ford GT40 Plastic Kit. This is identical to K2007 with paint and glue but is in completely different packaging. It is being sold in Marks and Spencer stores branded with a strange circular logo and the letters BT as well as the familiar M&S logo. There is absolutely no mention of Hornby anywhere.

Track sections

Those of us who attended the NSCC Hornby weekend 2003 were shown a new track piece designed to provide a much sturdier bridge structure. This has now been released as C8295 Elevated Crossover. This comprises of two half straights each with two large circular lugs on each side. Together with 4 pillars one piece can be positioned above the other either at 90 degrees or in the same direction.

Coming soon

Nothing new to report this month that hasn't already been mentioned but with the Index and Argos catalogues due by the time you read this there may be several new items to discover soon.

If you find any variations in any of these items, or hear of any new specials please let me know so we can share our knowledge. ■

Traders travels

By Robert Learmouth
(Westwood Models)

Orpington swapmeet in early July proved there was still space for more events in the calendar. Though I have to say my personal view is that with Swindon (and another Orpington event) coming up either side of the turn of the year we now have enough events for the time being.

Orpington had over 150 paying guests through the door and, as with Slough, the vast majority of faces were totally unfamiliar 'on the circuit'. With the wide choice of events now on offer there would seem to be a trend towards regionalised events. Prising people off the virtual world of eBay and into the real world of swapmeets was one of the prime aims of having more events and in my view this is being achieved with a high degree of success. I have only two reservations. It is becoming hard work attending all these events as a dealer and with a young family it is becoming difficult for me personally to do so. Apart from the usual small hard-core of dealers at nearly every event I suspect others feel the same way. But perhaps this is a good thing to mix it up a bit. My other concern is that the event calendar is very fat around the September-November area with less going on in the first half of the year. This will end in tears unless organisers sit down and are prepared to move dates around, perhaps drastically so if required. Evesham will not be the only casualty otherwise and I have a nasty feeling the next one could also be an NSCC event unless we all get our heads together.

Not to be outdone by Scalextric, SCX and Carrera, good old Ninco have also announced a digital system. No details known at this time but if I was Mr Ninco I would have observed that Scalextric, on paper, are currently winning the race and I would be asking to license the technology from them. If I was Mr Hornby I would be saying yes to help squeeze out SCX and Carrera.

The new Scalextric budget cars are now amongst us. The Boxster is every inch a toy and unlikely to catch the eye of serious collectors but let's remember us lot are the tiny minority and I would expect Hornby to sell bucket loads of these at 15 quid each to their mainstream customers. It's also interesting to note that a Digital set will be produced with these cars. It seems a strange marriage but I would guess this is being done to make the technology available as cheaply as possible to new entrants.

The great eBay price slide is showing signs of stabilising. A red reissue 1980s Bugatti as facilitated by Steve De Havilland fetched £580. Earlier in the year bidding stumbled around at about half of this price for one. A black 'Perris' Bugatti fetched £570 although to the best of my knowledge Graham only produced his cars in blue and red. With the base apparently injection moulded I suspect this was the model produced around the same time with a genuine test-shot 80s base and resin top. I stand to be corrected. An NSCC Race Weekend GT40 fetched £400 so the money is still out there for the right stuff.■

Ebay watch.....

A quiet month on eBay; guess it's the holiday season and people would rather be relaxing with a beer in the garden than sitting in front of the saddo monitor... cheers to that!

Highlight of the past month was a pair of Scalextric vintage Bugattis, well nearly but not exactly..... Perris and de Havilland (sorry Steve, but that's what everyone knows them as) Bugattis actually.

A very nice MB black replica Bugatti (resin top and pukka 'Scalextric' underpan I understand) went for a heady £570.

The red mint deHavilland Bugatti (complete bodysHELLS from the Scalextric original mould in red/yellow/green, were commissioned by Steve deH. in the 80s) went for a reasonable £580.

I don't buy many new Scalextric releases these days but the Starsky and Hutch Ford Torino caught my eye last weekend and I had to have it for its sheer size! It just fits in a standard box lengthwise and is soooooo wide. The Motorbikes look good too, but at £30+ each, no

By Tony Frewin

thanks. After the initial minority interest, I think they'll sit on the shelves at that price; try £19.99 Hornby and don't be so greedy!

I've not had much time to view eBay, but here are a few random sale results from the past month (note the last two items; how prices can fluctuate for two almost identical cars) :-

| | | |
|------------------------------|-----|----------|
| SCX | | |
| 83170 Lancia 'R6' | MB | 36 |
| Scalextric | | |
| F40 'Liverpool' | MB | 38 |
| CK1 Cobra made up - nice | VGB | 156 |
| B1 typhoons yellow and blue | VGB | 126 pair |
| Replica Bugatti black | MB | 570 |
| 'de Hav Bugatti red | M | 580 |
| Exin | | |
| Ferrari GTO Espanola white | M | 69 |
| Fly | | |
| BMW CSL & 320i set 96034 | MB | 77 |
| Ferrari 365GTB Mini auto l/e | MB | 75 |
| C69 Ferrari green French | VG | 205 |
| E4 Ferrari green French | VG | 81 |
| Happy eBaying! | | ■ |



From Peter Solari

Digital revolution

Just before going to print this month, I received notification of Ninco's venture into Digital Track. This new digital system is due to be launched next year and will enable several cars to compete on the traditional two lane track. The decision to venture along the digital route was only taken after extensive market studies and with development already underway, the new Ninco Digital System will soon be a reality.

Compatibility is the fundamental objective in this project and Ninco's aim is to offer a new alternative to be used in conjunction with their existing range of track and vehicles. They are keen to point out that this is not a break away from their successful system but more "a broadening of the slot spectrum".

New Champ

The second livery for the Reynard Champ Car (50341) will soon be on the shelves. This latest decoration is, in my opinion, the most striking of the CART/Champ Car series produced so far. It is based on the 2003 "Corona" sponsored Walker Racing team car piloted by Rodolfo Lavín. As with other Champ/CART and F1 cars, full front wheel steering is featured. In place of the Ford Cosworth power plant, an NC-5 Speeder motor is fitted and grip is supplied by wide rear slick tyres.

**3rd 934; 1st G4, 7th 1977
24hr...**

Now let me explain the subheading; Ninco's third offering of the Porsche 934, replicates the Group 4 winning car, seventh overall, from the 1977 24 hour Le Mans. Once again, the man responsible for steering the real one to victory was Bob Wollek - widely regarded as the best Porsche driver, ever! Predominantly white with blue roof and bonnet, the simple "Burton of

London" graphics depict an amusing pin-stripe driver-figure painted on each side of the car, creating an x-ray effect of the driver. This 934 shares the same NC-5 motor as the two earlier models and is also fitted with all round "Pro-Shock" suspension. Oh, and just two more numbers of interest... the car's race number was 58 and the Ninco reference number is 50334.

Let's Off Road!

As more and more Raid track sections become available, the range of Raid cars also increases. Next to appear is the totally new BMW X5 (50343) produced as a 4-wheel-drive off-road vehicle to compete with the Mitsubishi Pajero and Ford Ranger. Finished in a beautiful mid-blue, this Sachs sponsored X5 comes fitted with all the Raid features such as ProArm drop guide, Proshock suspension and NC-7 Raider motor.

Fast and furious

Two new Subaru are also due for release soon. Both cars are painted in the same "Imola" orange/yellow colour scheme but from the outside the only difference is that one of them is a "muddy effect". A quick peek under the body shell shows the real difference. One is ProRace specification, fitted with hardened axles, ballrace bearings and NC-6 Crusher motor - that's the fast one. The other has standard components fitted, identical to those in the 2003 Turkey model. But what's this? All that lovely hi-gloss finish has been covered in mud. When the paint-shop sees that, they'll be furious! (Reference numbers are 50344 and 50346 respectively).

Special offer details

Thanks to all those members who registered for details about the special Ninco Club Car offer last month. Final details will be with you very soon. ■

Improving On A Classic

By Aaron Foord
(Gaugemaster Controls)

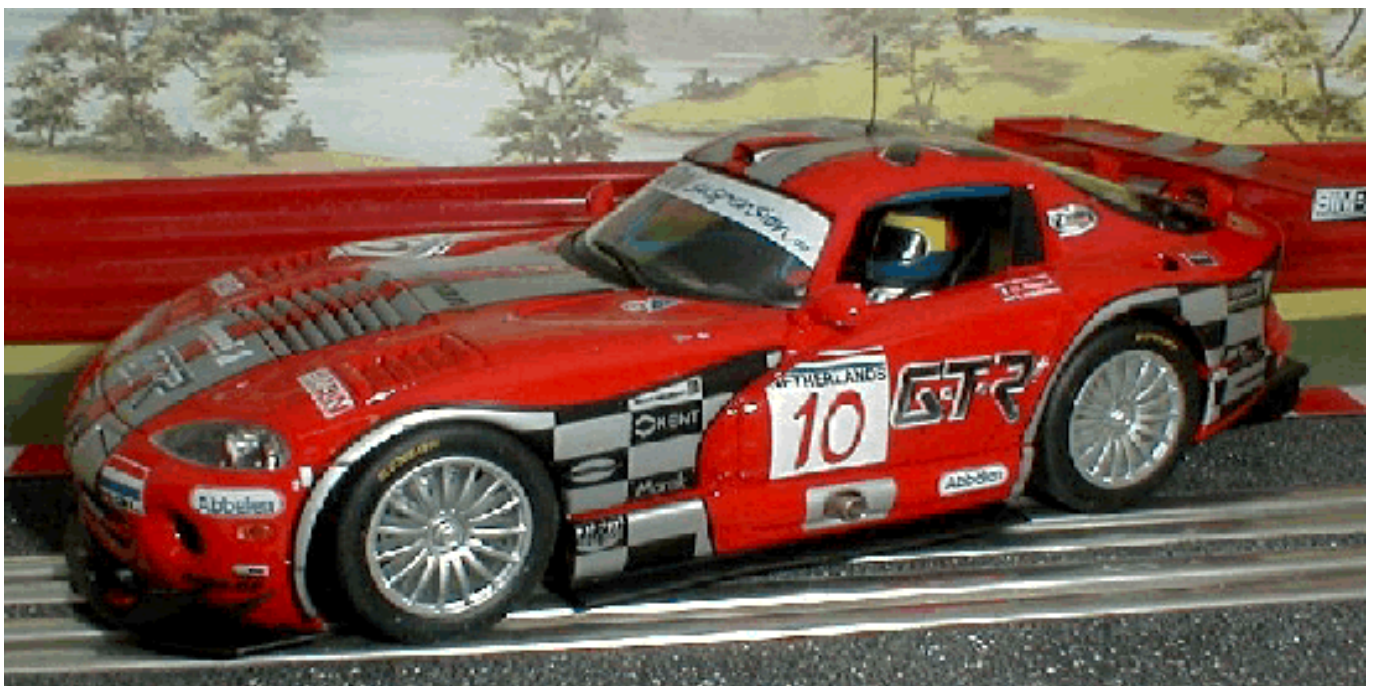
It was back in 1995 when Fly appeared in the market place with their first model, the Dodge Viper. It took the slot-car world by storm – up until that time no-one had seen detailing on a car like this, and the Viper not only became a marker point in the history of slot-cars, but very soon became the most popular Fly car of them all. To date, there have been 35 versions of this model, with the latest two only recently having been released after a major change in the design of how the model is put together.

Of course, the Viper body has changed a little over the years, and extra detailing has been added, but none of these changes have been to the extent of the two current models. The first of the new releases is the A84 Chrysler Viper Oreca, which also was released as part of one of the now infamous ‘Team’ series making three versions in all. The last one, the A205 Valencia 2004, is a stunning livery and has carried on the Fly Viper tradition in style.

The main difference though with these models is the chassis and the way it fits on the car. Firstly, lets take a look at the overall shape.



As you can see, the rear of the chassis is now straight with the rear bodywork curving under to meet it. Also, on the old design you will notice the large magnet holder. This has been the biggest problem over the years as being so low meant that it will catch on the slightest of =>

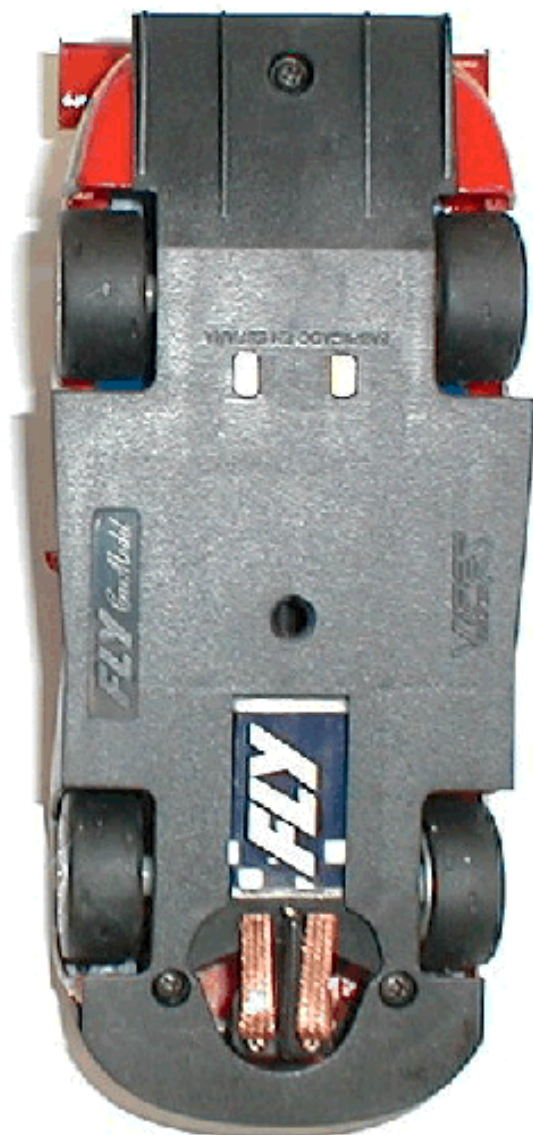


non-flat connections in Plexytrack, causing the car to stop just for a split second and putting extra strain on the crownwheel. Eventually it will simply shred its teeth or the driveshaft will pop out of its mounting. On the new design, this area is flatter and so the whole chassis has a slightly higher ride height. The magnet is now fitted from the inside of the model and can easily be removed if required. The guide sits in a small recess, and has a greater degree of turn than the original models.



The rear of the chassis is longer and does not curve upward in the same way as the older one. This will help prevent de-slotting. The older design also had the side exhaust outlets moulded to it and this was an integral part of the chassis fixing to the body.

On the newer cars, the exhaust ports are moulded onto the body itself. The new chassis is also designed to take the new racing motors, and the motor sits further back, helping with the overall balance of the car and helps prevent rear end slide. This also gives more stability to the drive shaft and drive shaft mount in the chassis itself. Lastly, the new chassis has a slightly narrower and slightly shorter wheelbase, making the model more accurate and nearer the original real car.



On the body, the model is available with both types of rear wing, additional air vents have been formed each side to the rear of the cockpit and the cockpit has full interior detail.



All these changes mean that the spares previously available will not fit the new Vipers, so make sure that you get the right spares for your vehicle. The older ones are still available, but there is a complete new range for the A84, A205 and beyond. There are some others due for release before Christmas, and Fly have just announced their schedule from now up until the end of December. As you can see, we do not have all the details yet but as soon as we get more information I will print it in a future article. Otherwise, lock up your wallets – Fly are coming through!!

July

A412 (88121) Porsche 908 Flunder LH white and blue
Team 08 (96042) Team Alfa Romeo-Spain 147
A782 (88114) Alfa Romeo 156 ETCC Ruberti yellow
E684 (96048) BMW CSL ArtCar Calder in special box
C89 (88117) Porsche 917K Martini silver
Fly 25 (07039) Capri racing
C73 (88118) Ferrari 512S Coda Lunga metal finish
Truck 51(08028) MAN Webasto blue
A671(88136) Ferrari Daytona street version yellow

August

C94 (88119) Lola T70 Toad Hall blue
A77 (88120) Porsche GT1-98 Warsteiner white

September

A206 (88113) Dodge Viper IGOL-Festina blue
Team 09 Team Ferrari Daytona Thompson LM
A655 Ferrari Daytona Thompson LM white and red
Fly 44 Lola Racing R new rims
A625 BMW 320 ETCC A.García
Truck 32 Mercedes black and silver
A685 BMW 3.5 CSL metal finish
S300 Viper Special Edition for 2 million units made

October

A207 Dodge Viper FIA GT 03 #18
Truck 71Buggyra CEPSA-FLY Jarama 2003 red
A207L Dodge Viper FIA GT 03 #18 with lights
Team 10 Team Autodelta Alfa 156
A783Alfa Romeo 156 ETCC 2003 Autodelta red
E83 Viper 10th Anniversary of Interkits
A801 Alfa Romeo GTV Osona 76 red/white

November

A 15 Venturi tiled finish
Truck 72 Buggyra blue
A901Porsche 911RS LM Keyser yellow
A802 Alfa GTV Bertone
S81 Porsche 917K Compte Rossi silver (box)
E901 Porsche 911 MasSlot magazine
Fly 45 Lola racing R
LM 02 Porsche 917K Mickey LM Disney
LM 03 Ferrari 512S CL Donald LM Disney

December

A208 Dodge Viper LeMans 03 #68 black-red
Truck 52 MAN TR1400
A656 Ferrari Daytona #64 Minter-Chinetti
Alfa TV Alfa Romeo 147 GTA TV Camera
A961 Alfa Romeo GTV 2000
E685 BMW CSL Art Car Stella
A931 Porsche 911T Montecarlo 70 red
Fly 45 Lola racing R
A185 Ford GT40



Sir,
Having read your remarks in response to my letter in the July issue, I thought I should expand my original comments. Having waded through reams of corporate nonsense over the years, brevity is attractive, but perhaps 'pants' took it to the extreme!

The cornering abilities of the bikes are poor. Lo and behold! Hornby announce on their website on 9 July that they are introducing additional weights for the stabilisers to help with the cornering problems. This dressed up with patronising spin about handling characteristics! What's the point of them being blistering in a straight line when they can only corner at a crawl? The majority of the club members here in Jersey have been racing for over 20 years and the consensus has been 'great looking product, poor on track'. Can I assume that these weights will be issued free to those of us who have purchased units already?

In order to improve handling, the unit could do with a stronger magnet or perhaps the sets could be sold with 100 ohm resistor throttles in order to soften the power application. (Yes, one of our members is an electronics engineer!). Also, on a minor point, the stabiliser scraping on the track is yet another annoyance, albeit unavoidable.

I am also concerned at the impact of this product on newcomers to the hobby. If I was standing in Toys 'r' Us, thinking of buying a first set and paid good money for the Moto GP set, then I'd be hugely disappointed and unlikely to pursue the hobby further. As NSCC members, we need to consider that we have an ageing demographic for the hobby and there is a need

to attract and retain new, younger enthusiasts. Poorly performing product like the Moto GP bikes is not the way to do it.

Personally, I do not believe that Digital is the way forward for either Hornby or SCX. I stand by my 'dodgem' comments. I have no problem with the pursuit of new initiatives, but are the 'hard core' NSCC enthusiasts sounded out about some of these developments? If so, it's surprising that Digital and Sport World were enthusiastically received.

A quick improvement that Hornby could make is to their Rally Cars. How many WRC Rally Cars these days are two wheel drive? Provide proper 4WD shaft driven units like the SCX equivalents. There's a simple product development for starters that would improve the Slot-car experience. Another is to give us proper race tuned cars via their 'Sport' branding and not charge us an extra £4 for a chassis badge and an opaque blue box.

Hornby cars do not perform well without magnets unlike their SCX or Ninco competitors. A substantial amount of alteration is required to make them work well and the magnets seem to mask a number of poor handling characteristics. A proper racing equivalent (aka Fly) of their standard models via the Sport branding could perhaps find following amongst the club racing fraternity?

We pursue and enjoy an expensive hobby, if I pay £30 for a poor product then my Victor Meldrew side will emerge. I genuinely believe that Hornby can improve more on some of the basics before providing the grand gestures.

I am, yours etc,
Richard Painter

Sir,
I'd like to reply to the letter from Phil Lanham in the July issue. I do not know Phil but I find I already hate him; he has reminded me of how long I have been messing with model cars!

He asks if anyone recalls racing on the Clarendon circuit - The first national finals were run on the track - it was built for this event. All the area finalists (Sports and GP) of the (then) ECRA came together in London to decide who would be National champion in 1964.

I ran a Ferrari 375mm carved from balsa, it had been very good in the area heats so I thought I was in with a shout, how wrong can one be! I was up against the likes of Rob Philpott, Barry Adams and Allan Hedley - I got roasted! I'll get you next year I thought, but in 65 we took on the Beckenham Bombshell, but that another story.

A thing that stood out on this track, in the infield was a model of a guy flying a control line aircraft that rotated! I can't remember if it worked on finals day, probably not. As for Alex Gee's clothing, you must remember this was pre-thong days; it was considered "not on" to appear without shirt and tie at such an event.

On a sadder note, looking through the names that were there, many of them are no longer with us. I wonder what they would think of today's racing. One guy is still with us, that's Joe Dutton; a few months ago he reminded me he had to take me to task for shouting at the marshals at the Clarendon track, things ain't changed much over the years!

I am, yours etc,
Mac Pinches

.....
Sir,

I'm trying to get a new slot car club off the ground in the Cardiff and South Wales Valleys area. The club is called Valley Slot Car Racers Club. We meet every other Thursday at 7pm at the Van Community Centre in Caerphilly.

Open to all 1/32 scale cars, the track is Scalextric sport two lane. We have a new layout at every meeting based on famous circuits of the world. Please phone 029 20868584 or email me at robertowenprice@hotmail.com

I am, yours etc,
Bob Price

BITS & PIECES

D.I.V.O.R.C.E

When bidding on a Scrapyard Sale Auction on eBay recently, I read the description to find out more about the item. Unfortunately, it gives more information on the couple's marital status than the pile of bodies in the digital photograph;

"Here we have what's left of my wife's patience, it goes or I do; so I hope it's of use to someone or I'll need to buy a suitcase. All the cars at the back are runners, some of the others don't go any more and I'm no longer allowed to fix them because we have a new table! There are some spare engines that are new and a shed load of body shells and other running bits. There are more axles than I can be bothered to count. Please feel free to ask questions. I will also be selling some cars very soon, so keep checking back."

The least I could do was start the bidding at a pound to guarantee the poor guy a sale.

Stephen Daniel

SCX Mini offer

Gareth Jex has received a reasonable quantity of orders for the Vintage SCX Mini - providing there isn't a last minute rush everybody will receive one. Delivery will not be until mid September so please be patient.

Happy Birthday to Eric

Andy Carmichael's Father, Eric, recently celebrated his 80th Birthday - does this make him the oldest member of the NSCC?

I have a Ninco Punto available as a prize for anyone prepared to admit to the greatest age while still playing with toy plastic cars!

Advert time

A Renault advert featuring Circuit 24 submitted by *Don Siegel*. The French tagline is: "As man gets older he doesn't abandon his dreams, he perfects them!" This also shows that for a certain age group, Circuit-24 is as much a part of French boyhood as Scalextric...

En grandissant l'homme n'abandonne pas ses rêves d'enfant, il les perfectionne.

Renault 19 - 16 soupapes, nouvelle pour longtemps.

Achtung Panzer!

By Steve Westby

Every club seems to have one, the racer who is friendly and pleasant away from the track, but with the beast lurking inside! They tell you it's "just a bit of fun", but are seized by "slot rage" the instant they get their paws around a hand throttle. They scream at the slightest hesitation by the marshals and no collision is ever their fault. If the race has gone badly, you learn to avoid Mr Hyde for 10 or 15 minutes until the affable Dr Jekyll re-emerges.

Imagine then the delight next time they come round to lap you. They have to wait through the bend as you're a little too wide to pass. Once onto the straight they accelerate past you. Then that look of smug triumph turns to disbelief as a ball of flame engulfs their car and they have to wait until the molten lump of plastic that was their super duper Slot Emperor Wizard Thingy has cooled down enough to be prised from the track.

You see, I'm having to lie low at the moment. I recently found a few vintage items that have been on my "most wanted" list for some time. Unfortunately, this involved spending not only this month's purchasing budget, but the next three months' as well. Still it could have been worse. If I'd eaten my words on Fly special editions and succumbed to the temptations of the beautiful T6 yellow Ferrari on sale at the Ashford swapmeet, I wouldn't have been allowed out of the house again until 2006! As it is, I've further strained the marital patience (and the breaking strain of our bookshelves) by acquiring 40 years of Motor Sport magazines.

So I've had to find something to occupy myself that doesn't involve spending money. An ideal time to start tackling that shelf of uncompleted projects you say. The only problem being, that once I know I've got all the bits, I tend to regard the project as completed and am far more interested in getting the bits for the next project, than completing the current one. But as spending money is out, I thought I might have no option but to break out the allen keys and spray paint and get on with it.

However, as anyone who's worked with me could tell you, my motto is "sometimes I sits and thinks..... and sometimes I just sits". So a far better prospect soon emerged, working out the details of one of my fantasy projects.

Yes, a slot-car tank! However, not just any tank. I've seen one before, I think it was one of Jon Sword's models used on the TV series where he built all the tracks and scenery used in their championship. I felt this wasn't nearly extreme enough. What I wanted was something that would really make a statement, something that would allow the underdogs to fight back!

So, there's a company that makes radio controlled 1/32 tanks which should be a good starting point, a cigarette lighter could provide the flame, all I need now is the means to provide a puff of air to direct the flame down the barrel and I'm there.

And people say I'm just bitter because I'm a crap racer! ■

Duck Soup

By Joel Thura

Regular readers may remember that I normally tell of my travels to either Evesham or Paris. This article is a little different; it is the tale of my travels to the 2004 Bordeaux vintage slot race held on June 5th and 6th.

To recap, about 4 years ago, a man called Samy Beraha decided to organise a “vintage slot race” in the town of Bordeaux. The idea was to race only old cars, and most importantly, to have fun doing so, I seem to recall that the first event was won by a Polistil car! Now ably helped by an American in Paris (also known as Don Siegel), Samy organises a very friendly meeting every year. The rules are simple, all cars to be pre 1968 and built from pre 1971 slot parts. Points are awarded as follows: 50% for the “Concours d’élégance” and 50% for the racing. Both 1/32nd and 1/24th cars are catered for.

Way back in 2002, David Lawson and I decided to attend the 2003 meeting - we even bought 1/24th plastic kits to convert. Alas, my daughter decided to get married in May 2003 and by January of that year, it was obvious that I could only cope with one major ordeal in a year. Sadly, I had to cancel attending the Bordeaux event.

This year was different, David and I were determined to attend; we did the rounds of all the known and unknown models shops in the London area looking for that elusive unusual model that would stand out from the crowd.

After months of faffing around with various cars, I settled for the Bruce McLaren Cooper Oldsmobile (also known as the Jolly Green Giant) starting from a 1/32nd Beta Classic fibreglass body, and a 1/24th Monogram Chaparral 2D kit that I started building immediately. I even sent away to Professor Motor for a repro Monogram chassis and a mighty 36D motor. At the Paris swapmeet in March, disaster struck: I saw a Monogram 2D next to a Cox 2D, it was obvious that Mr Monogram had got it very wrong, the kit is quite inaccurate.

On our return to the UK it was back to the drawing board. Fortunately, the Cooper was progressing fine if somewhat slowly. I had a rummage through my collection, and came up with another great looking car: a very old 1/24th Strombecker Scarab plastic model, (also sold by MPC).

Work progressed on the Cooper, all the details were scratchbuilt, and the car was tested on the club track. It turned out to be easy to drive, thanks to its Pittman motor and Atlas chassis, as recommended by Phil Smith. The Scarab was painted, many of the detail parts were built, and a K&B chassis was chosen, but otherwise it made little progress, the cockpit area proving quite troublesome. With a week to go, the Cooper Olds was more or less ready, when shown to Derek Cooper and Phil Smith at the Liphook swapmeet, they both remarked that the cockpit would need reworking, and a decent driver needed fitting. Phil kindly agreed to send me a Maxi-Model driver he had.

Alas, at this stage David Lawson had to pull out. With three days to go I had done the work on the Cooper and totally rebuilt the interior; as promised, Phil’s driver turned up. Annoyingly, it would have required too much surgery to fit in the Cooper so a Ninco driver was bullied into impersonating Bruce McLaren.

I was still waiting for transfers for the Scarab, and had by now decided that my first chassis choice was inadequate, I tried to fit a Cox brass chassis instead of the K&B (more room for the cockpit you see).

With no transfers and no cockpit, it was back to plan B. Grab a 1/24th car from my collection, and rush prepare it.

Luckily, I had a nicely painted Hasegawa Ferrari Dino built about seven years ago and mounted on an equally nice Cox Iso fulcrum chassis. A few details were added for good measure, and it was fitted with a mean Mura group 12 motor; when tested it promptly demolished its gears in three laps. Just to be safe



Joel's Concours winning Cooper Oldsmobile

(who wants to be stuck in Bordeaux with no gears?) I fitted it with a Revell 26D instead and a new set of gears.

I packed all the small bits and tools I could think of (including plenty of spare gears), and flew to Bordeaux alone on the Friday afternoon.

I arrived about 4pm, went to the hotel, met up with Phil Smith, Derek Cooper with son Jamie and Phil's American friend Brad Blohm. We walked to the track for a quick look and practice session.

The Bordeaux club is based in an indoor Tennis club, it is a bit of a dark dungeon, but there is plenty of space. One room with the tracks and bar (this is France after all), a second room with all the competitors/traders tables, and a long, long, long, corridor with the Drag strip.

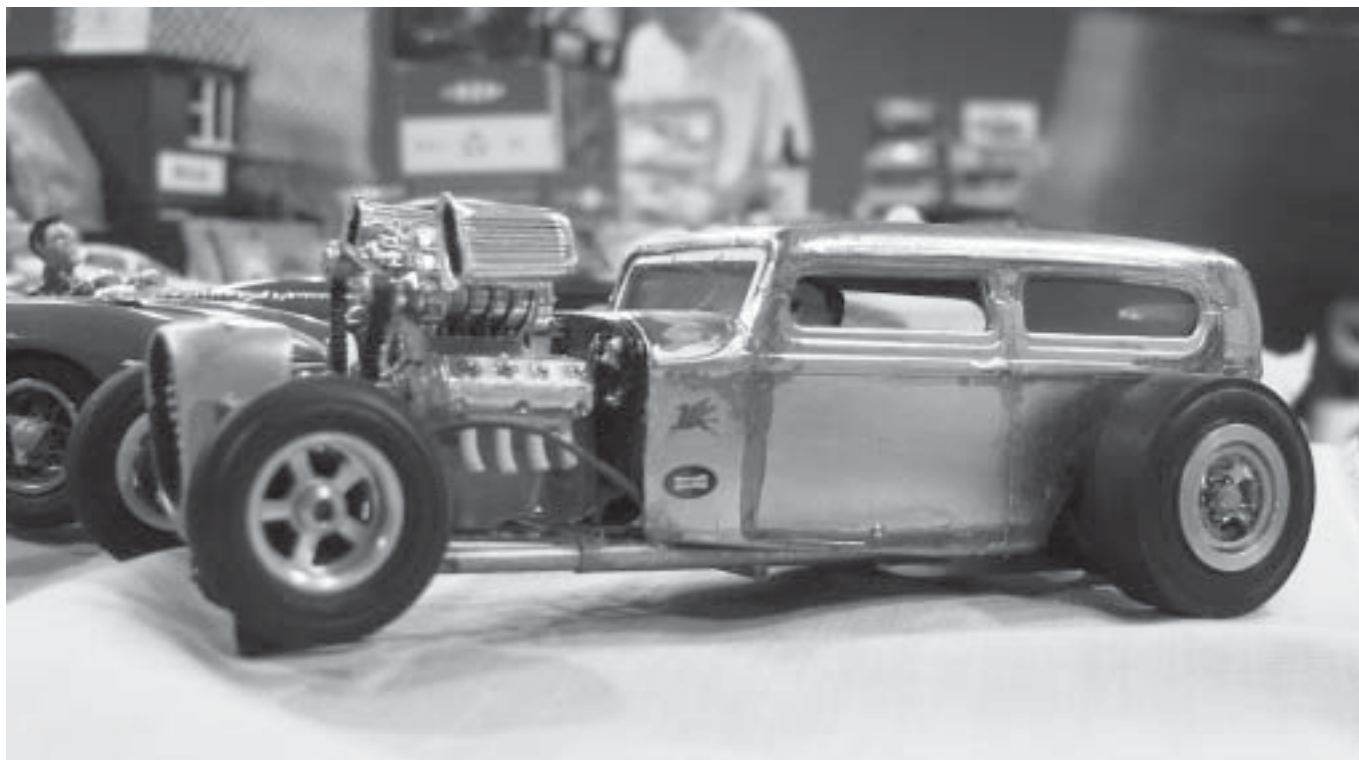
Both tracks looked tricky, the 1/32nd has a very sharp unsighted corner under the bridge! The 1/24th track is painted with gloss paint, and I found it very slippery, but otherwise nice and flowing.

In the evening, we met up with the rest of the English contingent (Ralph Parker with daughters, and Eddie Grice with wife and daughter) and went to the Irish pub, followed by an Italian restaurant!

Saturday morning, bright and early, we all went to the track with a hangover and started practising. We met with Scottish Gary who has little racing or modelling experience, but made it with his girlfriend all the way down from Glasgow! The atmosphere was really friendly; everyone was borrowing tools, motors, tyres etc, from each other or helping with spares and advice.



One thing was very noticeable though, the 1/24th cars were all better looking than my rush prepared seven year old Dino. Also, on the track, the thing was just fishtailing everywhere with no grip at all! One of the reasons was that I had not sanded the treads off my tyres; I was running =>



Many people had brought along Dragsters and hotrods, the drag strip proved very popular with the kids throughout the weekend.

on Ortmann 1/24th Scalex repros just as they were. I think foam would have been more effective! The car was also jumping out of the slot too readily. Over on the 1/32nd track, the Cooper Olds was behaving itself very well, not the fastest but safe handling, and looking around at the other cars, although a little dull in colour, it was on par with most for the Concours, the characteristic organ pipe exhaust attracting a lot of attention.

As I came back to my table, Phil was all in a tizz, his 1/32nd car had lost a headlight for the second time that day. We all searched the floor, his table, the floor again, but to no avail. Only one thing for it, shape one out a bit of clear plastic. I cut a strip out of an Evian bottle, and, in about ½ hr shaped another headlight. Using the first one as a template, I cut a second one, which Phil sanded down to its final shape, glued both to the car, and it looked much better than with the original toy like items.

As lunchtime came, Derek, Phil and James decided to go for a pizza, in spite of the cheap meal made available by the organisers. I protested that they had to sample the local cuisine, at which point James Cooper said, "I bet its bloody duck, its always bloody duck!" Well,

yes, as it happens it was duck salad followed by duck breast. Off they went, and I tucked into my smoked duck and gizzards salad topped by duck liver pate (Foix Gras to you erudite people), promptly followed by duck breast with sauté potatoes, washed down with a glass of decent Bordeaux, all for about £4. Brad, who had stayed behind, ordered himself the same meal, gulped it down and exclaimed, " I have tried most French food, except Foix Gras!" Well Brad, you have now!

In the afternoon, I sorted out the Dino; the problem was that the body was mounted too tight on the chassis. A bit of soldering later, and the car was really smooth, still no grip, but now I could keep it in the slot.

We all got ready for the Concours judging, I was marking the 1/24th class, and as I went along the grid, it was obvious that some cars were actually using handling bodies, 20% wider and longer than they should be, and about 40% lower. The wheels on some cars were also much too small and wide, no wonder that during practice some guys were lapping me every third lap! One car in particular was a stunning model, all perfectly to scale with the most amazing detail I have ever seen on a slot-car; alas the

wheels were clearly wrong, what a shame to compromise such a beautiful model with the wrong wheels. There were many really nice models, including a 1950 Talbot Lago with headlights and cycle wings. Scratchbuilt by Samy from a Heller kit, including the underpan which kept all the chassis and motor hidden, it was hopeless on the track against all the 60s cars, but what a brave move, totally in the spirit of the meeting. Quite rightly, Samy won the 1/24th concours.

Marking done, we all went down to a hotel for the evening meal and auction, and guess what was on the menu? Well duck of course, what else? I began to think that perhaps James was right.

Come Sunday morning at 8 o'clock sharp, we arrived for the racing. After about ½ hr, the lights went out, total power failure! Someone must have been using a seriously high current motor.

Eventually, the man from EDF turned up and reset the circuit breaker, all worked well for the rest of the day.

We found out the result of the concours, and I am proud to say that my Cooper Oldsmobile won the 1/32nd class (by only two points mind), over in 1/24th, the Dino was 15th, which is just about all it deserved. Winning the 1/32nd Concours made my day, I could have gone home there and then.

We got on with the racing, starting with 1/32nd. I was in the second batch, and the Cooper's handling allowed me to put in some good laps, ⇒⇒



1/24th Concours winning Talbot Lago

I only fell off a couple of times in lane two and finished 20th with 107 laps, which is quite good considering my skills.

Once all the 1/32nd drivers had taken their turn, we had a brief stop for lunch, and you'll be glad to hear that there was no duck on the menu.

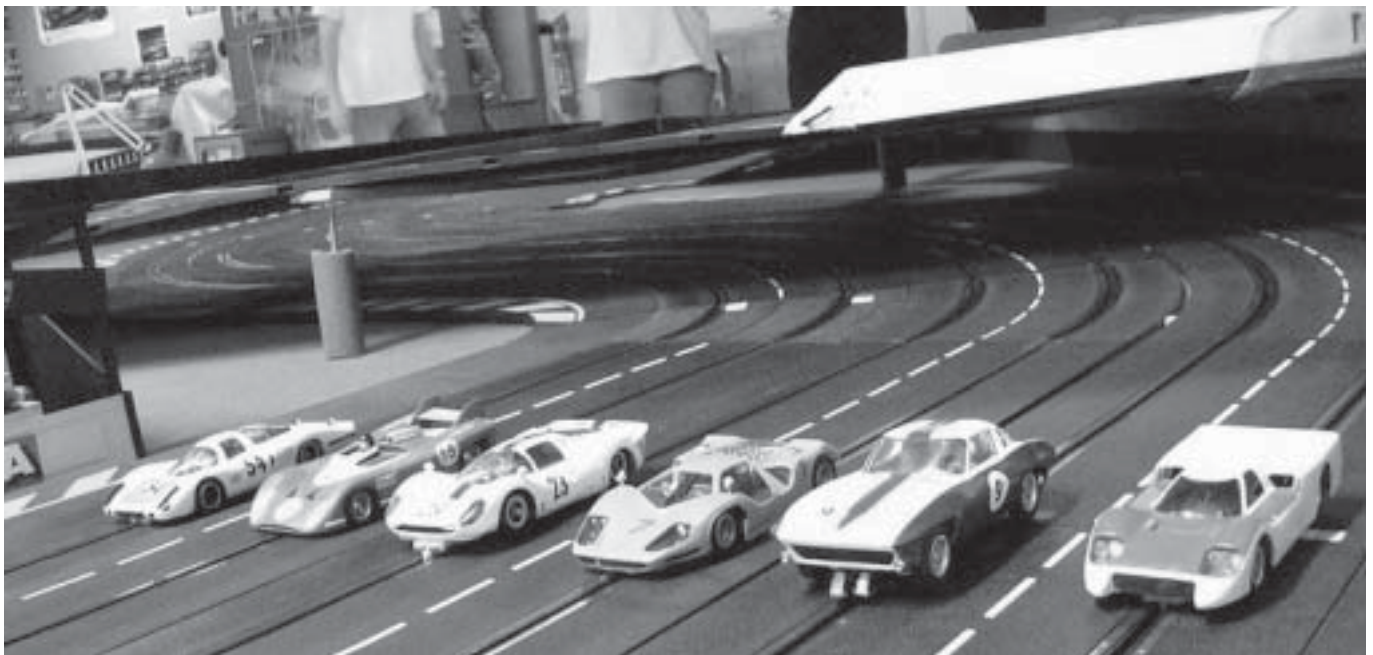
Now for the pièce de résistance, "proper" 1/24th slot racing on a painted wooden track (not something I have ever done before) just like you can read about in all those old 60's magazines.

Slip sliding away I went, the German guy in my heat was lapping me every third lap. But I was not last by far, many other people had worse cars than mine, or they were pushing too hard and falling off. The system is that all racers run in every lane in succession, this means 8 heats on the trot without stopping! By the last heat I was unlapping myself from the German rocket, his foam tyres were gone, mine were just warming up! Sadly, I can't tell you where I finished, because I had a plane to catch and could not wait for the prize-giving ceremony.

airport when my hand luggage went through: Trophy, cars, spare motors, modelling knife etc. He insisted that my luggage should go in the hold because of two small screwdrivers I was carrying, so I left them with him. Mind you his young assistant was very impressed by the trophy, I felt like Michael Schumacher on his way home after a day in the office.

I will return to Bordeaux next year, it's a beautiful city, Samy and Don are nice guys, the whole event is friendly, the racing is great, and the Concours result made all the months of scratchbuilding worthwhile!

Why don't you give it a try? The trick is to do what the other British racers do, combine it with a short family holiday, send your partner and/or kids shopping whilst you are racing, and afterwards spend a couple of extra days in the south of France. With all the cheap airline tickets floating around, cost need not be a problem.



A typical grid in the 1/32 class

Samy was kind enough to work out the overall result for 1/32nd before I went, and, adding Concours and racing together, I finished 7th, one point behind Don Siegel. Samy gave me a big trophy, a Tee shirt and a decent bottle of wine to take home! You should have seen the look on the face of the security man at Bordeaux

A cheap holiday, sunshine, shopping, lots of slot racing; and all the duck you can eat, what more do you want from life? In the meantime, you can see more pictures on our club website: www.ssrcworld.com

Now if you'll excuse me, I have some cars to prepare for next year's event. ■



61440 Champ Car "Servia" Reviewed by Jamie Coles

SCX

When I was offered the chance to test out the new SCX Champ Car part of me was thinking, "Hmm- another single-seater slot-car to race", and another part of me was thinking, "What on earth are these Champ Cars?"! Whilst F1 cars are lean mean racing machines this one looked like it had eaten too many hamburgers and should book a stint at Weight Watchers!

So off I virtually trotted to the wonderful world wide web and the land of Google to learn a little more about single seater racing from across the Pond.

I'm still not clear, but I think there used to be single seater racing called by some acronym which evades me!

Then, in the land of the free and the right to choose (and the land of the wish to make a huge profit), some people thought that they would like more money and so there became two separate racing series – both of which seem to be struggling to continue – F1 take note.

The Indy Racing League and Championship Auto Racing Team series are basically two versions of the same thing which are then abbreviated to IRL and CART to make things easier to understand! The main difference being that IRL cars run purely on ovals while CART/Champ Cars include road and street courses on their schedule as well. Somewhere in the mix is a series called Indy Lights – which I thought were a low tar cigarette!

There seems to be a sudden influx of IRL and Champ Cars from various manufacturers which I think is a good thing as they provide model racing cars with different handling characteristics. Also, if they are similar to existing modern F1 cars then the benefit is that you can race different liveries and pick out your car amongst the blur.

I know there are a number of readers who like some background information, so this is what I have found about the car and the driver.

Oriel Servia has raced in Indy Lights and Formula 3 and drove for a trial period with the Visteon sponsored Patrick Racing team in July 2002 and was re-signed for the 2003 series.

This SCX model represents his 2003 car and the first thing that struck me is the overall lack of sponsors plastered all over the car – this may be because it is less expensive to race in the US or more money is given by the main sponsor – or, as I suspect, there are too many cars for the number of sponsors.

The car is predominantly orange with a white broad band along the side advertising Visteon (who have a wonderful website written in marketing-ese but were part of Ford once and provide bits for cars) and a white spoiler at the front and rear.



The cockpit area is well detailed with a $\frac{3}{4}$ length figure in red and white overalls, red seat belt harness and the yellow and red helmet – I assume depicting the Catalonian area of Spain that Oriel hails from.

⇒

The rear spoiler is very similar to F1 cars but at the front looks like two sets of kitchen steps! Clearly a lot of down force is required when turning corners in CART racing.

This front spoiler seems only attached by two small plastic heat welds and my concern would be that if it breaks then the Superglue would be needed.

The next impression of the car is the size – of the side pods. These remind me of the 70s when the F1 racers would fill up for the day and power off down the track for a couple of hours and not come back into the pit apart from tyre changes.

Performance

OK next step - put the car on the track and see how it goes. Yep - the strong vari-height magnet pulls the car to the track - reminiscent of my favourite F1 car at the moment - the SCX Jaguar.

I find with SCX cars that even out of the box they react fast to the throttle and reach their top speed soon and then hold on well. On my local track - which has two long straights and Ss and then a twisty infield this is an ideal set up. For longer top speed circuits it may not be.

Also the SCX engines tend to be a little stiff at first but copious WD40 and switch cleaner and oiling of the wheel bearings soon sorts them out.

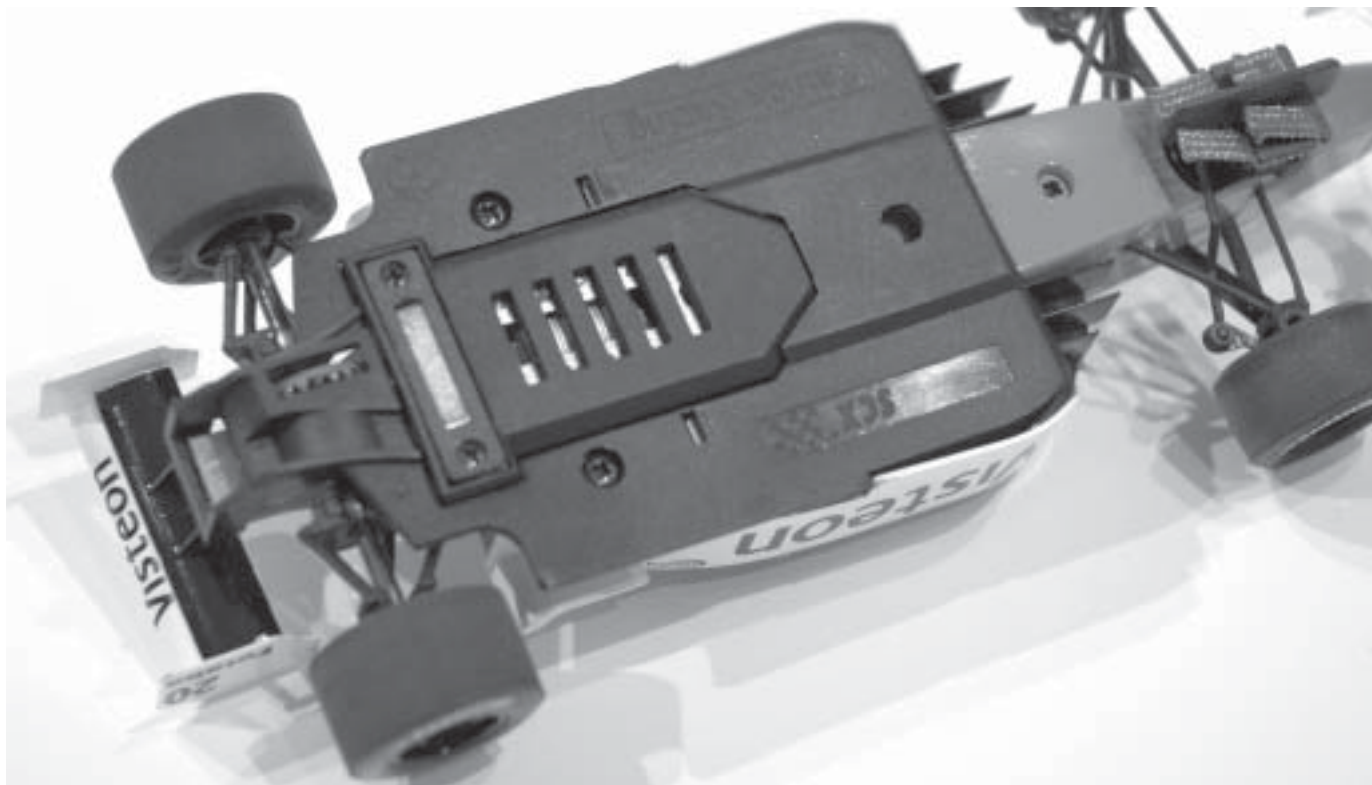
On my home track (a mix of new SCX and old Classic) – which I just use for checking cars out – the Champ Car scuttled away down the short straight before entering a tight corner and then accelerating out along the fast part of the track which is basically three sides of a oblong with 90 degree turns.

The infield part of the track is a bit twistier and has a 180 before the short start finish straight. I only had to reduce the throttle slightly in order to negotiate this for the completion of a lap.

After a few runs I was getting more confident and even after a few “offs” I had the time down to 7.2 seconds which is just faster than the Jag. Wow!

The other good thing was that despite some hairy off-road experiences the tail and front spoilers look fine. Next, the bit I hate doing but, for a comprehensive review, I have to “lift the bonnet” or in the case of slot-cars “unscrew the base”.





OK, so turn the car over and straight away it can be seen that the springy guide that turns the front wheels has a longer than normal column of plastic – so no more cases of the little stub coming detached during racing and the car not steering correctly.

One slight concern, only in terms of quality control, is that between the bodywork and the chassis there is a slight gap where it bends round in front of the driver - but that could simply be because my sample was left in my car on a very hot day before running it.

My other worry about the three antennae and the two driver mirrors being lost during racing again proved to be wrong.

The next bit was to try and detach the underpan from the chassis and I admitted defeat. I was able to take out the three screws which held the chassis to the bodywork and a longer screw than normal at the front.

The rear of the upper body un-hooked from under the chassis by the rear spoiler and at least allowed me to peek in at the gubbins inside!

SCX's now standard copper tape from the Auto Return System (the acronym still appeals to my schoolboy sense of humour!) of the guide runs along the floor pan to the

What's this?..

The back end with the motor and rear wheels is all loose and floppy... surely that can't be right.. quick, where's my receipt!!

Phew. no problem – this is the same set up as applied to the new Dome. SCX call it a rocking body – but it's really a rocking engine and rear axle - in effect it means that the rear drive assembly stays true to the track with less loss of traction during cornering.

The rear axle also has rounded rear bushes which self-centre the axle.

This would explain the ability to take the corners a lot faster than I thought possible. Also it looks like the motor is a new one, an RX42 – which I presume means it is faster than the RX41 – but I don't know by how much.

So in conclusion the SCX Champ Car is an excellent car in terms of performance and my doubts about the front wing were unfounded. I would have liked to run it on a bigger track but there wasn't time.

With the wheel base being the same as the Jaguar but with a slightly wider rear axle – and with the “rocking” engine, I shall race this in the next magnet F1 class as sadly there don't appear to be any others about to be released and the SCX Jaguar can have the night off. ■



Norman's conquest – revisited

Norman Griffiths – who oversaw Scalextric production from 1964-1971 – recalls the development of the all-in-one chassis unit that powered the C5, C6, C8, C9 and C14 cars.

Paul Strange reports

Part 7: the power sledge

To fight increasing competition from other slot-car manufacturers during the late 60s, the Scalextric management team were not adverse to innovative ideas from the factory staff. In fact, they actively encouraged it. “Lines Brothers were very keen on suggestion boxes – ideas from the shop floor,” says Norman Griffiths, as we continue our discussion at his home in Broadstairs, Kent. “And it was surprising some of the reasonably realistic ideas that came from these people who weren’t supposed to know anything about anything.”

Norman thinks it’s more than likely that the Power Sledge – the all-in-one drive unit which first emerged in 1968 on the C5 Europa Vee and C6 Panther – originally stemmed from an idea placed in a staff suggestion box. Designed to handle supremely well, the sledge cars were primarily aimed at inexperienced drivers, enabling them to race the cars straight out of the box with the minimum of spins and crashes. The cars were deliberately included in the big four-lane sets, because the whole family – particularly women – would find them easy to drive. Today the thinking behind this may seem somewhat naff and supremely sexist, but Scalextric were keen to increase family sales at a time of falling demand. And, in an effort to disguise this philosophy and to attract more experienced racers to the product, in the catalogues they touted the sledge as a state-of-the-art, high-performance design.

“The sledge would have been mentioned at one of the suggestion meetings that we used to have between the sales, the development and the production people, chaired by a senior director,” says Norman. “This, by the way, seemed to be a Lines Brothers’ thing because Rovex – the train people – had these meetings as well. The sales people would know what they could sell, the development wouldn’t care a monkey’s – they’d just develop it – and ideas would be tossed on to the table. Occasionally these things would go to development, we’d have another look at it then. And, in the case of many items, they would come to fruition and would be produced. Development would do the bulk of the work on it up to a point where production would take over. It’s one thing for someone to make a one-off on development. Then we’ve got to discuss it for tooling for large-scale manufacturing.”

A clever and innovative design, the sledge used a number of specially modified components. “It had a modified RX motor [the E8]. The pole pieces were obviously new, the armature shaft was longer and the carbon brushes were smaller. There was a moulded nylon gearbox on the drive end. The power to the sledge was provided by a metal pinion on the motor shaft driving a nylon moulded crown gear. The bulk of the sledge was made in-house, apart from the bought-outs, which would have been the metal pinion, the armature shaft and the magnet – similar to most of the bought-out items with the RX motor.”

It’s known that spare Bugatti bodies were used in the original testing (see June 1996 Newsletter), but Norman suggests that train bodies may also have played their part. “I recall a number of bodies being used on the sledge, but not the Bugatti. The sledge would virtually go round on its own without a car body! You could put anything on top of that – even a locomotive body if you could achieve a method of holding it on! The sledge was a good design because it =>

held the track. It hinged from the back, you clipped it in and you could almost change bodies at a pit stop.”

With its sliding, adjustable pick up, the sledge was capable of being fitted into a variety of F1 bodies. The initial Panther and Europa Vee bodies were in-house designs and later variants were updated by fitting aerofoils. These were soon overshadowed by the more-detailed and desirable Lotus Indianapolis (C8), Ferrari V8 (C9) and Matra MS11 (C14). Unfortunately all of the Power Sledge cars had vulnerable, very thin windscreens, and today it's quite hard to find good examples with screens fully intact.



But the sledge car's main fault was its lack of top-end grunt. In "A Look Behind The Scenes" (February 1994 Newsletter), it was suggested that this was because the prototype vanished during the first week it was on display at the the Tri-ang showrooms and the production version never quite had the same performance. Norman has a more practical explanation.

"The main problem was the drive. The sledge was a heavier thing to start off – in other words, when you operate the hand throttle, there's a lot more resistance than on an ordinary Scalextric car. The pinion was metal and on the initial start of the car, the torque or surge required to start the vehicle, instead of turning the crown wheel, stripped the teeth in that position, similar to the problems we encountered

with the early Formula Juniors. It's quite possible that we may have modified the armature windings to slow down the power of the motor in order to overcome the problem of the gear stripping. You've got to remember that the RX motor would drive a model railway engine, pulling anything up to 30 or 40 trucks from a standing start. Fair enough, you've got a different drive on the Scalextric RX motor, but at the same time, it shows the power that could go into it.



"I think it was quite possible that the original prototype was faster because the gear stripping problem didn't occur on it. With a stroke of luck you might not shear that one. When you make just one, you have no variation. When you mould a thousand, it's possible that you get variation in the teeth depth and all sorts of things, so therefore you've got to modify the power in order to accommodate the problems that arise in multiple production.

"What we did find with the Power Sledge, of course, was there was much better roadholding. The sledge cars were aimed at younger drivers and families, and this was why we persevered with it, despite all the initial faults. The cars were easy to drive and the roadholding was so much better – the ladies of the family could also have a go!" ■

Next month: the 1/24th series

Circuit 24 – Scalextric, French Style!

By Don Siegel

It was only around for about twelve years, with a baker's dozen cars to its credit. But Circuit 24 is still the generic name for home slot racing in France, like Scalextric in England.

Circuit 24 entered the French market in 1961, four years after Scalextric's debut in the UK and a year prior to the official launch of Scalextric in France. In other words, the market was ripe for the taking. And in the minds of many a 10-year old boy in 1962 it did just that. But Circuit 24 was to fall by the wayside like so many other home racing sets, although leaving more of a legacy – at least in France.

300 km/h in your living room

Circuit 24 was launched by “Usine à Idée” (part of a company called Les Jouets Rationnels), later known as Idé France, then Société Idé. Right from the start, they played the French card: their ads claimed “300 km/h in your living room,” followed by: “The 24 Hours of Le Mans in 1/30 Scale.” However, the first car to be released was a better known Italian one, the Ferrari Testa Rossa, which would eventually be available in four colours: red, blue, green and the very rare yellow.



Right from the start, the Ferrari Testa Rossa set the tone: Circuit 24 did not attempt to make racing cars in miniature, but rather toys in the best sense of the word: colourful, rugged, with real character, and, to top it all off, noisy as hell!

Following their own quirky path, this French company chose not a normal DC rotating motor, but a huge AC vibrator; that is, an electromagnet, ratchet and pawl arrangement not unlike a huge door buzzer. And it made the same incredible racket – heaven for little boys and hell for parents. You haven't lived until you've experienced a 6-car Circuit 24 race, the closest thing in miniature to a real Le Mans start! It was basically the same system as Aurora had introduced on their little HO cars in the United States the previous year (derived from the unsuccessful English Playcraft system). But in HO, the vibrator motor made sense because it really saved space. According to Dominique Jouët, the son of the inventor of Circuit 24, his father spent six months developing this vibrator system, and chose it so the car would duplicate as closely as possible the sound of a real motor.



The second year of Circuit 24 would see the introduction of its most emblematic (and common) model, the DB Panhard – still the only model of this car in the world of slot-cars. The Ferrari was also released in a “Super-Competition” model, featuring a “hotter” winding, and above all a mechanical braking system – a tacit admission that the C-24 cars had no brakes to speak of. (The Panhard, Type-E and Ford GT were also released in competition versions.)

⇒

1963 would see the appearance of two of the rarer C-24 models, namely a Go-Kart and a Cooper F1 which was closer to 1/24 scale. The Cooper would only be available for a year, making it undoubtedly the hardest model in the range to find. The French factory offered Coopers in red and green, while a blue one was produced in England (see below). The Go-Kart is not that rare, but is a good-looking model esteemed by collectors. Also coming out that year were a very ordinary E-Type Jaguar and a Porsche Abarth, also the only slot-car of this model.



In 1967 came the first new Circuit 24 cars after a very dry patch: a Ford GT40 and a Matra Jet. The GT40 was the first, and perhaps only C-24 car to come with decals. But in 1966 the company took a small detour, releasing the “Grand Prix de France” set under a new brand name, Fanacourse, with two 1950’s style Ferrari F1 cars, this time with conventional DC motors.



In 1969, the company finally added two more cars, a very ugly Ferrari P4 and a decent Chaparral 2H – very hard to find with its wing intact! Its ultimate releases came in 1971-72, a Matra 650 barquette, only with the Buehler DC motor, and a Porsche 917, in white, red or yellow.



The end of Circuit 24 is a little vague. The main plant in the Paris suburb of Suresnes seems to have closed in 1972. Production of Circuit 24’s line of 1/30 cars came to an end in 1973. But German company Carrera bought the Circuit 24 brand, and a plant was opened in Drancy, in eastern France. This plant turned out four fairly well detailed Formula 1 cars in 1/24 scale, a BRM, Brabham, Ferrari and Lotus, very similar to Carrera’s own cars. Production halted in 1978, as the Drancy plant was closed and L’Usine à Idé filed for bankruptcy. The Circuit 24 brand name still belongs to Carrera.

On track

There are many curious aspects to the Circuit 24 story, but one of the most striking is that they seem to have paid more attention to accessories than the cars! While Scalextric was coming out with a full line of cars, adding to the range almost every year, Circuit 24 offered a number of different tracks and accessories, but new cars were few and far between. Even in 1966, French boys had to pretend they were winning Le Mans with a Testa Rossa or Panhard.

Circuit 24 eventually offered 6-lane racing and a generous supply of accessories, not to mention various versions of the cars: the Super-Competition models of course, but also the “S” series, which just meant a “silent” DC motor,

and also a lane change pack with two diode-fitted cars plus a mechanical lane-change section. The vibrator type motor was relatively fast for the time, but made a lot of noise, and needed constant adjustment. Furthermore, tuning was limited to these adjustments. You didn't need to add weight, because these cars were already the heaviest mothers on the track.

While the marque was established in its home country, it had more difficulty in other lands. It was released in England under the Meccano brand from 1962 to 1964, as well as in the U.S., although with even less success.

Horses for courses

The "Idea Factory" did have one last idea up its sleeve, however. In 1965 it introduced Tiercé 24, a horse and sulky slot racing set that won the "Oscar" as French toy of the year. It is by nearly universal acclaim the most successful set of this type, as the horses' legs moved realistically thanks to fine wires. And it was promoted by

Leon Zitrone, an announcer synonymous with French horse racing at the time ("tiercé" means the daily triple, and the set included paper money and all the betting accoutrements). But as good as it was, you wouldn't bet the company on Tiercé 24.

All in all, Circuit 24 was inimitably French, and a noble failure that added a phrase to the French language.

Acknowledgements:

This article was, in large part, based on information in the article "Circuit 24" by Frédéric Remise in the French monthly "La Vie du Jouet", June 2001; the book "Le Circuit dans le monde de la collection" by Emile Standart; research by Marius Thollon-Pommerol; and email exchanges with Dominique Jouët. A book on Circuit 24 by the latter is scheduled to come out in early 2005; he can be contacted at (33) 06 07 01 94 95, or circuit.24@free.fr / <http://www.Circuit24.com>) ■

Loadsamoney – a plasterer's tale

By Ken Elston

Back in March 2003 they said, “You won't notice we've been here.” The now famous (well, in my head anyway) Silver Hatch circuit resides in the mother in law's spare room. One day the landlord rang and informed us that he was going to replace the old windows with a brand new set. The downside of this was that the circuit would have to be covered up for the fortnight or so that it would take to complete the job. No problem with that, I would use the spare time to perform some maintenance on the cars and other small jobs that I had been putting

off. While fitting the windows they discovered that the walls were falling away and that they would have to be re-plastered.

Again no problem – we covered the circuit and removed the majority of the buildings and then sat back and waited for them to finish. The summer came and the summer went. Finally on September 1st, a full 6 months after they started the job was completed.

Now imagine my dismay when we took the covers off and found the scene below.



No way were we going to be racing in the near future. However, after the initial shock and disappointment wore off I went into positive mode and decided that this was a glorious opportunity to re-build the circuit. A rebuild rather than a new layout was decided on because I have nearly 700 cars all with their own qualifying times and I didn't fancy having to re-qualify them all again! Little did I know.

The first step was to assess exactly what was needed and would it require much funding. There were two areas of the track that I felt needed completely replacing, the elevated section and the straight underneath it.

The red and white run off borders needed cleaning and re-painting. The buildings needed at least a clean, in some cases a complete repaint was necessary. I also decided the boards would benefit from a complete re-paint.

I was fortunate that the other four members of the club agreed to split the costs with me before I began the work so that at least was something I didn't have to worry about.

The second step was to decide how to go about the task. To keep from dying of boredom painting or washing I took the decision to split the track into sections and process each one in turn. I had read a review in the Journal of the Plebys Track Cleaning kit and was impressed enough to give it a go.

I was able to spend about four hours a week working on the circuit and the picture below shows the progress I had made after four weeks. The section in the middle is the new elevated section composed entirely of the new Sport track.



As mentioned earlier the red and white track borders were individually washed and painted so that they regained their original look.

Two types of track borders were used, the original white version for the bends and elevated straight sections as they are more likely to stop a speeding de-slotted missile and the modern ones for the flat straight sections. The picture below shows the completed bend at the end of the back straight.



The biggest advantage of constructing the circuit in sections was that the power supply could be checked every time a new section was completed.

On the 15th December the moment of truth arrived. As you can see from the following picture one last connection was to be made and the track was complete. Life is all about timing, completion and a fortnight's break from work neatly coinciding!

⇒



Now the trouble started. I placed the car on lane 1, pressed the controller and off I went on one of the slowest, most slippery laps I have ever made around a Scalextric track. My jaw hit the floor, four months hard work had led to the ultimate driving experience – slot on ice. A novelty I grant you but I doubt it would ever catch on?

On close inspection the “Goodyear Eagle” tyres on the car had gone rock hard. I checked a number of other cars and the results were the same. The next logical step was to use one of my new cars – I had still been adding to my collection in the time when the track was inaccessible. Better grip but still way off the pace.

Here’s some examples from my qualifying times database recorded on the old circuit.

| | |
|-----------------------------|--------|
| Scalextric Jordan Peugeot | 8.468 |
| Scalextric Parmalat Brabham | 10.065 |
| Scalextric Saudia Williams | 10.475 |

Compare this to the times set on the new circuit.

| | |
|-----------------------------|--------|
| Scalextric Jordan Peugeot | 9.995 |
| Scalextric Parmalat Brabham | 13.332 |
| Scalextric Saudia Williams | 13.842 |
| Scalextric Compaq Williams | 10.255 |

The Compaq Williams car was straight out of the box. I would have expected times similar if not a tad quicker than those recorded by the Jordan and a lot faster than those recorded by the Saudi Williams in 2002 but as you can see this was not the case.

So what had caused this situation? In the case of the tyres I feel the extremely hot summer must have contributed in some way. I don’t know

for sure as I am not a tyre expert. I would be grateful if there is someone out there who could confirm it.

As for the track I remembered reading in the Plebys review that the cleaning fluid would make the track more slippery; however this could be remedied by wiping clean with a damp cloth. In addition I had read in the Journal the advertisement for Ortmann tyres – could this be a practical and financially viable solution?

The tyres arrived and were placed on a Hornby Parmalaat Brabham. Would there be an improvement? The Brabham was 3 seconds a lap slower than it was on soft “Goodyear Eagles”!

I contacted Colin Spark who supplied the tyres and outlined the problem and he suggested sanding the tyres. I did this for a while, how much do you do? The results were astonishing - a whole second’s improvement on the average lap time but still 2.3 seconds away from the original time. I sent the results back to Colin and wondered if perhaps I had inadvertently received a dodgy set but he assured (and convinced) me that his tyres were OK and that the problem was with the track. So back to cleaning I went.

At the same time I contacted Adrian at Plebys and reported the problem to him and although sympathetic all he could advise was to keep watering the track as each time more and more of the fluid would be diluted.

To date I have done about 10,000 timed laps since the circuit rebuild was completed.

So it’s now March 2004 and I’m engaged in cleaning, sanding and more tests.

Our season was due to restart on April 29th – how would it go? ■

Power to the people

By Tony Secchi

As regular readers of our Journal may know, since my retirement in 1997, I have run a 55ft two lane Scalextric track in my spare room for the benefit of myself and a few friends who come round a couple of times a week to race in our various championship series.

The competition is consistent and intense, time having not yet dulled the desire to win in all of us. Our standards tend to be high and our requirements, although not pedantic, are very demanding (on second thoughts maybe they are pedantic).

If anything goes wrong with the track, or if any type of improvement is needed, I bear the brunt of complaints, trying as best as I can to sort out the many (or few) rantings and ravings that come about. As I think I have said before in previous articles, old farts we may be but we still like everything to be right.

Over the years that we have used the track there has been a big increase in the number and variety of cars (and consequently engines) that we race. Different classes of models have evolved, many having more powerful motors and Magnatraction than the original old Scalextric Mabuchis and bar magnets ever had. For instance, how many of Ninco's current issues have the NC1 motor installed irrespective of their initial age and racing history?

Generally, most slot-car racing motors need about 1 amp output per lane, but if in a case like ours, you have several classes of differently powered cars, some with very powerful engines you may need 2 amps plus (some really fast cars used on commercial circuits use even more).

Each lane of our track was originally powered by a Hornby C912 wall mounted transformer with approximately 13 volts and an output of about 1 amp which, when we first started, was sufficient. Additionally we used (and still do) a DS lap counter with its own 12 volt

transformer. All three of these were plugged into a four gang individually switched electrical socket.

Of late it had become glaringly obvious that the demands being put on this system have outgrown the capacity of the power supply - after all these Scalextric transformers are really meant for table top use with boxed sets.

Over the years we have gone through a couple of these units per annum - a total of some six or eight and at £9.50 a time (including VAT and carriage) they were proving to be inconsistent not to say costly.

As slot-car motors become more powerful and are pushed to their limits with lots of speed and magnetic downforce two things can go wrong - either the motor can burn out or, as in our case, the transformers themselves can go 'off song'.

In theory the higher the voltage the faster the car, but that assumes an adequate supply of amps and herein lies the problem. The voltage of the C912 is generally sufficient but as stated earlier the output is about 1 amp. This proved to be just not good enough for some of our cars. Power would drop on any lane where the relevant transformer 'went off'; surges of power were commonplace and the inconsistency of the performance that the C912s were producing was giving us serious problems let alone frustration and anger at making our pleasure of racing a complete farce.

Cue Pendle

So as is usual when in a slot racing dilemma I spoke to my friend Sean Fothersgill of Pendle Slot Racing and after an informative chat we decided on a more powerful, reliable power source. I purchased an Eagle EP 907 DC regulated power supply. This has a volt variable rating and a variable output of up to 6 amps maximum. It also has two glass fronted meters⇒⇒

to show exactly how many volts and amps are being used by each car. In addition there are two fixed 12 volt outputs for track-side accessories. Young Nick at Pendle Slot made me up a great set of gold plated connecting leads and we were in business.

The power pack is more expensive than the two C912 transformers but as we had bought six or eight of these along with the extension socket, the price of the Eagle EP 907 was compatible. Like all regulated power sources it filters out the AC current and delivers pure DC current to the track.

Digression

As we all probably know, voltage is electrical pressure (or current).

The amp is the rate of electrical flow - the higher the amperage the greater the rate of flow and therefore power (think of a river with a waterfall).

The ohm is the unit of electrical resistance - the lower the ohm rating of your controller the faster your car will go.

So, a pressure of 1 volt acting against a resistance of 1 ohm causes a current of 1 amp to flow.

Without going into too much detail it is known that AC current will 'alternate' as its name implies) first in one direction and then in the other between the North and South poles of the magnet. The use of a switch changes the direction of the current so that it is drawn in one direction only. This is direct current or DC.

A dynamo generates AC current although the output is DC (a one way current). This change is brought about by the commutator, which acts as the switch. A power pack uses diode bridges to get the same effect.

End of digression

Once installed we were delighted with the effect. We can now power both lanes and the DS lap counter direct from the power pack. We have done away with the wiring clutter and space consumption of the four gang socket, the three transformers and a mess of connecting leads. We have plenty of consistent regulated power, no track troubles and smoother, faster, more reliable cars. Even more importantly, if a car does play up or run slow we now know that the power source is not to blame.

The unit supplies fully stabilised voltage and output so that we always know the exact current that we are running with.

There is, however, another advantage to a variable power supply which although we do not use ourselves has been mentioned previously by Robert Gillham and Peter Novani. If you race vintage cars you can vary the outputs to give parity and realistic speed levels according to each car whatever the engine fitted.

Manufacturers these days are inclined to fit their latest and therefore more powerful motors into whatever car they are currently issuing so that you can get a situation where a (circa) 1969 Ford GT40 can lap your circuit as quick as a 2003 Dome Judd S101 or Lola B98/10 and that can't be right. This can be rectified however if you vary the outputs and race the cars according to their year and heritage.

In conclusion, the use of a regulated power supply ensures consistency, reliability, and flexibility. It does cost more initially but in the long run will pay for itself in peace of mind and a level of performance that cannot be equalled.

As for the old farts (myself excluded of course) they are less likely to moan and that is OK by me. ■