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## Contents

Club Staff.....	2
Swapmeets.....	3
Membership Update.....	4
Diary Dates.....	5
Factory Focus.....	7
Members Moments.....	8
Westcountry rambles.....	10
Paddock Pass.....	13
Mole.....	14
Ninco News.....	17
Letters.....	18
Grass Roots Racing.....	21
Lotus 16 Guide.....	22
Box Of Stuff.....	25
Club Racing Thoughts.....	29
Toys R Me.....	31
Club Focus.....	35
Mini Zs.....	36
Members Ads.....	38

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# The NSCC

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The independent club for slot-car enthusiasts

## ▤ Tracks Of My Tears ▤

I must confess that I didn't really see the point of some of the new Scalextric 'Sport' track sections at first. However, having watched the first two Grand Prix of the season, everything started to make sense.

The purpose of the 'sideswipe' straight is now blatantly obvious although it should really be named the 'Schumacher' straight - just place one immediately after the start line and you too can perform the infamous Schuey swerve! Similarly the crossover curve provides an ideal opportunity to deftly remove your opponent's front wing. Mind you, Scalextric have missed their chance with the superb new Williams' models; a removable nose cone would greatly have increased the realism! The reintroduction of the pitstop track must also be a priority now so we can recreate the "Montoya drive-through penalty" for anyone not driving a Ferrari.

I really don't understand why Schumacher is hailed as the greatest driver of all time; the "Let me through or crash" attitude that Senna pioneered and he has taken to a high art form is not my idea of motor racing. Alan Jones said it all when he observed that "Gilles Villeneuve was the hardest racer of them all but, if you beat him to a corner, he would never move over on you." Sadly, the great Gilles is long gone but his spirit surely lives on in Juan Pablo Montoya; the real joy of the Malaysian GP was watching him and Jenson Button racing wheel to wheel for three successive corners, each leaving just the right amount of track space for the other. Sheer magic!

**And Finally** - following a recent visit from Daft Idea Animal I rashly agreed to give a talk on the history of Scalextric to my local electrical association. I am, therefore, in need of an original Scalex clockwork car to illustrate the origins of the hobby; if anybody has one I could borrow for a short while perhaps they could get in touch.

*Till next month*  
 Brian

*Adrian Norman reports on current news  
from the Scalextric Headquarters in*



**Y**ou will be able to get the new McLaren and Williams F1 cars by the time you read this. I have recently tested them and I'm very impressed. The finish is stunning. For me though, the most important landmark is just about reached. This milestone marks the point at which racers will have to choose a Scalextric Formula 1 car over any other manufacturer's Formula 1 car if they want to win races. Controversial!?! Let me know your reasons if you agree or disagree strongly either way.

#### **In error**

Oh no, not again! I printed an error last month regarding a set. I incorrectly specified the C numbers for the Bash & Crash sets. They should be: C1077 'Bash & Crash 1' and C1078 'Bash & Crash 2'. Sorry, but thanks to Graham Smith, amongst others, for dropping me a line on this.

#### **In-set**

Set C1081 Opel Motorsport has revised livery cars, as you can tell from the catalogue. The C numbers for the cars are C2429W Opel Astra, No7, 'Opel Motorsport', white/yellow and C2430W Opel Astra, No3, 'Sport Bild', red. I understand that these will also be released as solo cars but this has yet to be confirmed.

#### **In-Continent!**

A dark blue Ford GT40 from New Zealand was seen at the Dutch Swapmeet in March, a very rare item indeed. The C77 Ford is usually only seen in light blue and white. GT40 fans will be glad to know that Scalextric will be producing this famous car in several liveries later this year.

#### **In-Car-Entertainment**

Scalextric are now shooting scenes for T.V. adverts for the 4th quarter of the year.

#### **In development**

As we speak, ideas and suggestions that NSCC members have made to Hornby Hobbies as to how to improve Scalextric cars are being worked into the cars currently on the drawing board. This is an ongoing process, and evolution if you like. Whilst not all suggestions (good or bad) get as far as final production, many of them do. Specifically, if the guys in the design team hear or read the requests from many different sources they will include the suggested design ideas if they are appropriate. A typical example of this is the guide blade positioning. Now, the design team know that the guide blade should be as far forward as possible but it was the continual feedback from enthusiasts that helped this to be implemented on all models since the year 2000 wherever feasible. Of course, not all car bodies are suitable and it is also not worthwhile going back and changing the chassis to accommodate a re-siting of the guide blade. Often, changes have to wait until the next completely new car design is on the drawing board. This can be evidenced with the Cadillac GT car which has the short post guide blade. The guide blade was redesigned, of course, to have a self-centring spring. However, the post was shortened so that the guide blade could be mounted further forward on the chassis whilst not causing an unsightly shape on the bonnet/nose of the car to accommodate the top end of the guide blade post. Some of the recent improvements in tyre compound, magnets and magnet positions were influenced by our members' input.

Keep your suggestions coming in. Address them to Members Letters if you want the whole world to know or directly through me to Hornby Hobbies. ■

# Westcountry rambles

BY VINE FENNEL.

Something slightly different this month. Whilst having a tidy up in the Hobby Room I came across the following article. It dates back to 1992 and was featured in GQ magazine, I think. It is copied as it was printed with a couple of add-ons from myself (you'll know which ones). I haven't bothered to include the photos that were with the article because they make it appear even more seedier than the article does. I have left all the names in to highlight the guilty. It was titled 'One-track Minds'. It's quite long so I will split it over two months. Here goes with part one:

"Mansell is not winning this one. The white, yellow and blue Williams has spun off - again - at the top hairpin, and its driver is contorted with frustration. "Nigel, how can you do this to me? Trackside commentary lacks both the Murray Walker squeak and the languor of James Hunt: we have to be content with "You complete b\*\*\*\*\*" spat out from an uncomfortable hunkered position in the direction of another small racing car that has just ricocheted off the far wall.

It is a lovely sunny Saturday in Weymouth, a blazing July weekend when the golden strand is jammed with deckchairs and windbreaks, and the avuncular voice inside the Punch and Judy kiosk is exhorting 40-odd kiddies to put their 30 pence into the collecting box so the 2.30 show can start. This is a day to be out building sandcastles, even dipping a toe in the water - which is why the Brownlow pub's charity Grand Prix to raise money for Telethon '92 is not seeing attendance figures commensurate with Silverstone. In fact, the punters hunched over the track spread out on the floor number half a dozen: the organizers and a couple of their mates. But the initial disappointment has long ago been assuaged by a few lagers, the planned Grand Prix has mutated into four-lap time-trials and then again into two-car heats in a knockout. It's halfway through the afternoon already, and things are well away. "I think I'll just have one more go

with the Ferrari," says Robert of the Trebor Toyshop, donor of a couple of the prizes, "and see if I can beat..."

It's nothing to be ashamed of. We all did it when we were young. Far more of us do it now than admit to it. As for those who don't we secretly yearn to be rid of our shame and spend the money that'll enable us to lead an honest life. "These days, there's a certain 'outing' going on," says Scott Brownlee, public relations director for BMW (UK), who does. "You'll come out with it at a dinner party, get comments of, 'Oh, do you do that?', and there'll be a joke about it. And then someone'll say, 'Actually, I've got an original Vanwall up in the loft...'

"No, that doesn't sound like him at all," says an agent at International Management Group, representatives of impassive tennis star Ivan Lendl - only to phone back after to checking to admit, through gritted teeth; "He's got it in his basement." The cast of the West End musical *Buddy Got Themselves Rocking* for the evening's performance with a few laps of the dressing-room layout; Salman Rushdie is rumoured to be an aficionado. As you and your partner traipse around Ikea looking for furniture to turn that boxroom into a spare bedroom, will you have the courage wistfully to pipe up; "You know, I could fit a damn good Scalextric layout in there"?

No one can pronounce it; everyone knows what it is. Implacably serious racers and collectors still stutter out Scalextrix or Scalectric as if it's a new Yugoslavian tennis player, but the serendipitous stirring of the folk memory ensures that even the most Nintendo-literate small boy will know the slot-car-racing game when he sees it. It's been with us since 1957, when Fred Francis, the inventor and Minimodels manufacturer of Scalex tinplate clockwork cars, each selling, at their peak, 7,000 a day, was watching his market collapse under the challenge of the new Matchbox range, and casting around for a new idea.

“It had always been in my mind to invent a track system for model cars,” Francis recalls. “You could have a collectors angle to it. I realised with Scalex that what I had thought of as a toy market had really been a model market: people were buying the cars because they were very good models. But it would also have enormous ‘play value’, a term much used in the fifties - the cars would only stay on the track if you exercised skill.” (My brackets - see Rambles - Feb 2002).

Never mind that after the war a toymaker’s rule of thumb was supposed to be “never make anything electrical, because electrical meant unreliable”: when the idea came to Francis, it was with epiphanic immediacy. “Oh, I can remember exactly where it happened. We were trying to resurrect the faltering Scalex, and I’d taken space at a London toyfair, Victory Toys were displaying a ‘Road Edge’ game, a poor track system with little play value: there was nothing you could do with the cars except start and stop them, and you couldn’t take the track up. Within five minutes I had in my mind the whole Scalextric picture - it’s extraordinary how you can visualise a new idea in its completed form, even in its final boxes. I rushed back to the factory at Havant, and by the end of that week I had a prototype single track made in perspex, an electrical motor in one of the Scalex cars, and a pick-up system.”

Scalextric, reflects Francis in passing, was “not a very good name”, but its coinage as the electric version of Scalex was obvious - and its success instant and enormous. By 1958, Francis had to decide whether to treble the size of his factory to meet existing demand and expand beyond the reach of any possible competitors, or to seek a buyer for Minimodels.

Unsentimentally, he sold out to Britain’s biggest toy manufacturers, Lines Brothers, and hasn’t even retained a royalty. Instead, he went on to run, as one does, a tugboat company, a riverbank piling operation and a road haulage concern. Indeed, from the tranquil vantage point of his bungalow overlooking Chichester yacht basin, Scalextric looks the least characteristic of this quiet entrepreneur’s many

successful inventions. A nautical man by nature, Francis has seen his electrical winches become standard equipment on Britain’s lifeboats and his Sailsaver hoods for the crosstrees of masts selling all over the world (eventually the “sheer tedium” of fulfilling the floods of orders drove him to sell out, yet again). And he can point out through his French windows all the yachts in the basin now using the electric sail-furling and reefing systems he developed.

Scalextric, meanwhile, has survived periodic changes of ownership and slumps. The mid-sixties saw a rash of short-lived competing systems manufactured by Airfix, Revell and Marx that nearly capsized the market altogether, and in the Seventies Matchbox’s Superfast and Mattel’s Hot Wheels again dented sales drastically. In middle age, Scalextric has also settled down by the seaside - in Margate, at a judicious distance from both the slumberous residential hotels and the brash amusement arcades. Nowadays, it’s manufactured by Hornby Hobbies alongside its even more venerable model railways, but the admirable production synergy - the same basic motor, for example, powers both cars and locos - only counterpoints their mutually exclusive markets. Let us be absolutely clear: Scalextric is not a second train set.

“We all watch trains as they go by,” muses Simon Kohler, Hornby’s marketing director. “There’s something quite poetic about a locomotive: Mallard, the Flying Scotsman.... ‘Let the train take the strain...’ Your toy trains man is probably a modeller, quite genteel, finds it all soothing. Whereas your Scalextric man - how did you get here today? By car? Did he drive at 85 all the way? Exactly. Your Scalextric fan wants speed...adrenalin...pressure...pure, unadulterated AGGRESSION! I know by the number of lap-counters we sell: people don’t want to know how many laps they’ve done; they want to be there, jockeying for the lead - in front - winning - and when they come off - s\*\*\*.”

“We’ll get the first example of a new model off the line,” adds Kohler in mild exasperation, “and bring it to the showroom here to test on the track. Then you think, ‘I wonder how it’d go⇒



against the Lamborghini Diablo?' - and before we know it we're in a race."

Which is why, in a dusky, strip-lit skittle alley behind a pub in Leicestershire, the curtains have been drawn across another radiant summer Sunday, and the tension of the Quorn Sport Saloon Open Event 1992 is raising a sour, sweaty fug. On a militaristic bark of "Marshals please", all those who aren't racing this time round are summoned to mind the corners of the vast six-lane track.

"Watch the lights, drivers..." Up on the dais, six drivers stand to attention side by side as if taking a pee in the gents. Red to green, just like the real thing - and whoosh. Wide eyes flicker about the circuit; hand throttles are organically assumed into a variety of transfixed postures. Arms rigid at his sides, there is the mortified defendant in the dock. Hands clasped serenely over invisible surplice, a priest is about to pronounce benediction. Club co-secretary Dave Norton, trigger-thumb hooked on hip, is Levi's ad cool, (My brackets - Dave?) tensing to appendix twinge when his red BMW is skittering around neck-and-neck with the RS200 of his colleague Bob Bott, who is doubled up from a phantom kick in the goolies (My brackets - hands up all those who haven't wanted to kick Bob in the goolies?) A Ferrari F40 clatters off beneath the flyover section. "Blue lane," snaps the driver to a marshal who's watching the race, not his bend. "Blue! BLUE!"

A carload of guys is over from the Birmingham club; another delegation has driven all the way up from Croydon; Vince, a Quorn emigre, has even prodigally returned for the weekend from the West Country: this is top-class Scalextric racing, which is why these cars are flashing round. You wouldn't win the RAC Rally with a Ford Sierra bought at Currie Motors, and you don't turn up at Quorn with your Hamley's Porsche 911, take it out of its box and plonk it on the starting grid. It would get spanked.

For a start, the Quorn racers are using imported Spanish-made SCX cars - formerly

made under licence for the market in Spain, but now selling here in direct competition with Margate. Not only does their superior engineering and attention to detail meet with the approval of serious racers, but for this twisting track their SRS (Special Racing System) motors, race-tuned with a longer commutator, are ideal. "It's really horses for courses," explains Norton. "The English motor's got more speed, the Spanish accelerates better on a tightly curved circuit like this, but it runs out of puff on a long straight. My car'd get walloped on the Croydon track."

Then there's the pre-race preparation - the principles are much the same as in full-size motor racing. Oil in the engine: too thick, and it'll create drag, but a squirt of WD40 to loosen up the motor and, according to Steve Carter of the London Scalextric Club, "It'll go like stink". Some racers will even go so far as to warm up their tyres before a race on an electric treadmill - the equivalent of Formula One's heated jackets - and everybody fishes a canister of Stain Devils solvent out of their toolbox to give them added traction. "It says on the side, 'not to be used on rubber products.'" says Carter, "that's because the rubber'll go all soft and sticky. Which of course, is exactly what we want." There are also the obvious race tactics. "If you've got a prat racing next to you, you'll make sure to keep out the bloody way," says Norton, "because he's going to come off. The person who wins in this game isn't the fastest: it's the person who stays on." And the less obvious: most of today's gathering are racing identical red Ferraris, red BMWs and blue Porsches, but Tony Fryer, up from the Croydon club, wins the Visitors Class with a Toyota Celica decked out in all-over rally-sport mud-spatter brown, even down to the double-crescent cleared on the windscreen by the wipers. "Psychology, see," confides the urbane Fryer. "You race cars out of the box, and on the track they all look the same. You end up watching somebody else's car..." ■

*Continued next month*

# Paddock pass

BY RUSS GANNICOTT

Carole and I have recently been designing and making some various track layout features for some American slot-car contacts we have. Basically these consist of 'modular' panels and buildings that will fit within an existing 1/32 scale layout. Everything is made from 3mm self coloured rigid plastic and combines with applied vinyl graphics to give a professional finish.

The photo shows the combination of three units; a paddock road, scrutineer's shelter and car park/paddock. The possibilities are endless and can be made to fit the profile of a circuit to give realistic looking roadways, car parks and features without having to resort to MDF and paint.

We are currently designing a building that combines a modern looking bar/cafe with a

spectator viewing gallery with modern style multi-pent roofing! The idea of all of these items is to give the impression of an up-to-date 'club' circuit, and can include your own circuit name logo on the buildings etc. All the items are 'bespoke' and designed in consultation with the customer, but as it's for fun, not profit, the costs are really quite low. The three units in the photo would be a total of about £25.00 including the logo. If you went to a plastic fabrication and signmaking company (like mine!!) you'd pay through the nose for this kind of one off, but we are just happy to play at being 1/32 scale architects in our spare time!!

If anyone wants more information, they can email us on; [russ.gannicott@btinternet.com](mailto:russ.gannicott@btinternet.com) or phone Russ on 01202 418422 ■





**The Malaysian manoeuvre - a cartoon from Dave Yerbury. For those of you reading this in black and white - The Jordans are in the yellow strip.**

**mole@nsc.co.uk**

**M**ole has become quite intrigued by the large number of different track systems now, or soon to be, available. It brings back thoughts of the heydays of the hobby with a range of track systems available from different manufacturers. Among the tracks Mole used to use were Airfix, VIP, MRRC and I think Revell. Even though they were not compatible systems they had one thing in common, and that was the fact that the tracks were the same distance apart.

The modern trend seems to be to make the track centres as far apart as possible, which makes for unrealistic racing and very wide tracks. When, apart from a FF race, did you last see 8 cars going round a corner side-by-side and 4 feet apart? In Mole's opinion, if we are to keep to the illusion of scale model motor racing then corners should all be chicaned, but as many people keep telling me, "It's only a toy", and the new Hornby 'Side Swipe Track' seems to reinforce this.

There was a track system invented in 1953 by a Leicestershire man that allowed drivers to switch lanes so that they could decide whether to go the long way round the outside of a bend (and try a demon overtaking manoeuvre) or to follow the rest of the field round the inside of a bend. I think the reason it probably failed was that it required a very deep guide blade as all the pick-ups were down the inside of the slot, and therefore the tracks would have been much more expensive to produce.

Deep in the bowels of Mole Towers are many exciting things including some VIP track, which is metal, and with the current interest in magnet cars Mole thought he would conduct a little experiment as he was not sure what sort of metal the track was made from. It appears to be made from aluminium but it is obviously coated with a ferrous covering as cars not only stick over the slot but over the whole track. It is even possible to turn the track upside down and the cars still stay there.

If you have enough track to build a good circuit, then Mole would be interested in hearing from you. ■



Dear Brian,

An observation regarding Swapmeets.

As a reasonably new member I've only had the opportunity to attend Bishops Stortford, last October and Milton Keynes this year. I enjoyed both. They were well organised, in good venues and both well attended.

I can understand that long standing members, like yourself, would prefer these to be social meetings rather than trade markets. I go because I know there will be items I wish to buy for my collection, in abundance. There will be things I've never seen before and things I will never pay the price for. But it's brilliant! It is like walking through a slot-car encyclopaedia.

If you don't want the heavy trade aspect of it then don't allow the traders to have tables. As much as the likes of Scale Models and Pendle contribute to the NSCC I'm sure they've got better things to do on a Sunday if they weren't going to be taking money (bearing in mind they live and breathe slot-cars for the rest of the week). For example, at MK, I spent £300 with Pendle alone. That was on obsolete Scalextric items and not new goods that I can buy everyday from his web site.

However, my friend and I still had time to stop and chat with Derek Cooper, Peter Day, Phil Smith and many others who were there "doing business". If you just want a social gathering, discussing slot-cars, over a piece of Mrs Miggins' fruit slice and a nice cuppa, then maybe that should be a separate event. I somehow think though, that members aren't going to travel the length and breadth of the UK or come over from Europe to do what they can achieve by telephone.

Better still, why not create a chat room at each swapmeet to cater for this. Just a thought. I'm not the kind of person who must have the latest offering from every manufacturer. The buzz of walking around all those tables bursting with goodies, in the hope that I will find a rarity that's gone unnoticed, or something that's unusual, is far better than sitting at home surfing the net or looking at the zillionth piece of used track on eBay.

At MK my friend picked up a lovely 1/32 Cox GT40 for £30 from a French member. It needed restoring, but then so did the one on another table for £75 from an English member. Both of these were hidden away amongst the "junk" and were real finds. I went home happy to have found a Revell Corvette Stingray with the split style rear window. A bit of a rarity and therefore a good find sensibly priced. Thanks to Barry at B.T.S for that one and for knocking a fiver off as I'd bought loads of parts.

Anyway Brian I've probably filled up far too much space with my ramblings. Keep up the good work on the Journal.

Regards

Colin Spark

**And what exactly is wrong with Mrs. Miggins' comestibles may I ask? Baldrick and myself have hatched many a cunning plan with the aid of her Earl Grey tea!**



Dear Brian,

Rob Smith's Toy Fair 2002 report (March issue) was interesting reading as I had limped up there myself and done a small report for our local club magazine.

As I enjoy having a good look round at the model stands (Revell etc.) I was not able to spend very long at the slot-car ones. Colette Clarke is always busy so I was unable to see all the ranges Rob listed; thanks for the information.

Rob mentioned that none of the staff at the Nikko stand seemed interested in discussing or demonstrating the 2002 range. This was unfortunate; I had completely the opposite experience. I was approached by a member of staff who explained that he would help out with any queries as soon as he had returned from visiting the conveniences - apparently they were as far from the stand as possible. This prompted another staff member to step forward; a very informative forty five minutes later he identified himself as Matthias Zuckermeier, Carrera's international sales manager! I think it was just a case of being in the right place at the right time, due to the fact that I had a similar problem to Rob, but with SCX! Maybe by the time he visited, Bachman had relaxed and got used to dealing with slot-car fanatics and Nikko were having a much needed rest; they had a very busy first day.

Next year is the 50th Toy Fair; must remember to take a camera with me. My favourite exhibit was the Carrera limited edition DB3 entitled "Aston Mayhem"; a Union Jack embellished car driven by a "well built" redhead and her Old English Sheepdog. I've bought some slot-cars in the past which were real dogs but I have never seen one as a passenger!

Yours sincerely

Graham D. Smith (No relation)

.....

Dear Brian,

At the recent Milton Keynes fair I purchased the Robert Schleicher book 'Racing And Collecting Slot Cars' from a trader. At the time he said he only had one copy on display and if I wanted one he would send it on and in about 2 weeks. I paid there and then, filled out my name, address and phone number on a label and waited. After 4 weeks I have heard or seen nothing; unfortunately I forgot to take his name and address, but he was the only one displaying books to buy as far as I could remember. Could he please give me a ring on 01902 337473 and let me know what has happened to it.

Regarding Vine Fennel's article on Entex kits available on eBay; a few years ago I bought the same Aston Martin V-8 kit for around £20 from Carkits International. It's a bit like an old Monogram kit for quality, perhaps not as good as an Airfix one, although it does come with chrome plated parts and is the only available kit in 1/32 scale of that particular car. The rarer Ferrari 512BB is a much more detailed kit than the Aston V8 and makes a good slot conversion. Entex also make other kits in 1/32 scale including a Lamborghini Countach, Safari Jeep and large Ford F1 transporters for Elf-Tyrrell, Porsche and Ferrari. These trucks are also made by Airfix, Matchbox and A.M.T. and make good display models for layouts. Entex itself was owned by Bandai and I would guess that its kits date from 1981 as it then produced a catalogue which included 1/32 snapkits so there's possibly other ones out there.

Talking of Aston Martins I have a Lindberg kit of one described as a sparkle speeder. I presume this was a made up name due to the fact that the body, chassis, wheels etc. are made of what I can only describe as plastic impregnated with glitter; does anyone out there know its real name?

Yours Sincerely

Keith Phillips

# (Blue) grass roots racing

BY BILL GRIGG

Unfortunately there's no suitable spare room in our house for a permanent slot-car track, at least not for just under fifty feet of four lane Plexitrack. So, after suitable negotiations with the other resident, it's a case of dismantling the bed in the largest bedroom and moving it and the lighter items of furniture out so that I can lay out the circuit shortly before the chaps arrive for another bout of concentrated racing. That also explains why the heavier items of furniture are positioned where they are. "I think that chest of drawers looks just right there, poked away in the corner."

Having cleared the decks I carefully vacuum clean the carpet (should have got a plain green one, rather than plain blue to match the décor – Goodwood grass green for choice) but that still doesn't stop the cars from getting full of fluff. I don't know how there's any pile left on that carpet. Which highlights a problem with these new super detailed full-length driver models. They look great in the box and standing still, but after a hard session over the carpet the full-length pilote begins to look like an Edwardian racing driver after twenty laps of a dusty road circuit. For practicality give me an olde worlde slot-car with full upper body protection courtesy of the marginally detailed black plastic slab and half driver any time. How *do* you get all the fluff out without dismantling the (obviously not intended to be dismantled by the manufacturers) insides – perhaps with a 1/32 scale Hoover?

By common consensus we like a reasonably fast flowing track so the 'Long Circuit' has only standard and outer curves with no chicanes. (The 'Short Circuit' is set up in the spare bedroom and causes much less disruption to the running of the household – but it's not as much fun.) There are no barriers, just outer track borders (and now lumps of foam in front of the chest of drawers etc. to save adding to the strange scuffmarks along their bottoms). We operate 'once you're off you're out' rules so no sharp curves tends to keep us all on for a bit longer. We tried chicanes, but as our races are usually pretty close we all too often used to get carried away and forget where

the chicanes were, ending up in regular two or even four car carambolages.

As usual the four lanes are not exactly comparable with regard to lap times; however, by now we all know the peculiarities of each lane and often have a Formula Libre race with four different sorts of car to suit our particular lanes and talents so that the lap times are as near the same as possible. In this context we are all sufficiently fly (with a little F) to recognise sandbagging when we see it. Starting is by Scalextric gantry with the yellow countdown lights blanked off, the better to test reactions. Timing hasn't reached ultra sophistication yet, but we're reasonably happy with a couple of the latest Scalextric battery operated counter/timers.

As for cars, at the moment our outright favourites for close and exciting racing are Ninco McLarens, closely followed by the Pro Slot GT3s. Both cars handle very well in standard form and are forgiving so that you can lose the back end and stand a chance of recovering if you slightly overdo it, just losing time rather than flying off the road. They are also a nice round blobby shape so they bounce off each other rather than locking horns and crashing! We also enjoy 60's Scalextric F1 cars. Although the pace is slower they handle surprisingly well when fitted with new rubber. They still demand concentration to drive as quickly as possible but, fortunately for one of my age, the corners don't come up in such quick succession as with a Fly Panoz!

Afterwards the track goes back into its boxes (inflicting another bout of Plexitrack Dismantler's Sore Thumbitis) and the carpet gets a courtesy vacuuming after the odd bits of detached Fly detailing have been collected from the floor. As I stand there, Dyson at the ready, I see the faint outline of the 'Long Circuit' etched in the carpet pile and feel like James Garner in the closing scene of *Grand Prix* when he stands on the empty grid at Monza. I can almost hear the whine of high revving electric motors, the clunk, clunk, clunk of guide shoes over uneven joints and cries of, "Oh no, same corner again!", as someone slides off into the chest of drawers. ■

# Guide to - C54 Lotus 16

BY NEIL DUNHAM

When Lines Brothers bought Scalextric from Fred Francis late in 1958 they knew that one of their first developments would need to be improving the cars. The look and racing ability of the tinplate cars was deemed somewhat primitive and needed a total overhaul. This was done relatively quickly, indeed the patents for new plastic cars were registered as early as mid 1959 with the first models appearing in early 1960.

The new cars were announced in Scalextric bulletin 6 (Spring 1960) with pictures and information on the new C54 Lotus, C55 Vanwall, C56 Lister Jaguar and C57 Aston Martin DBR. The most obvious change was that the new cars were plastic bodied but they had changed entirely. They now incorporated easy access locking clips, a slightly modified Triang 3-pole RX railway motor, a new loop braid pick-up system to allow 75° swing, and TV/radio suppression. One of the most distinctive features of the early plastic cars is the 'Big'/'Ugly' drivers head which is unpopular with some collectors, although I quite like them myself.

The first car to be released was the C54 Lotus 16, based on Colin Chapman's design that was Lotus' first foray into Formula 1 (1958-59). The model was initially available in red, green, two shades of yellow (mustard and standard) and 2 shades of blue (light and mid blue). The light blue being replaced by the more common mid blue quite early in the production run. The

mustard yellow is a mystery to me and I have only ever seen two of them myself. The car was initially available as an individually boxed item, then soon after in sets GP1, GP2, and GP3.

During 1962 more modifications were made to the range and the scale was changed from 1/30<sup>th</sup> to 1/32<sup>nd</sup>. Interestingly, though, the dimensions of the cars did not alter; however Triang did recruit a more handsome driver with body, arms and a 'medium head'. The 'round pin' guide was also introduced at this time to allow better track conductivity and easier access for braid replacement. These changes were implemented simultaneously, so don't trust anyone who tries to sell you a round pin car with a big head driver or vice-versa!

Version 2 was available in red, green, mid blue and, for reasons unknown, two different yellows again. The standard yellow is the most common but there are also a rarer light yellow.

Versions 1 and 2 of the English made car were more commonly issued with the yellow wheels, but were probably sometimes issued with the chromed version, as was common with Scalextric production in the 1960s.

The C54 remained in the UK catalogues from issue 1 to issue 9 but production had stopped long before 1968.

Now, so far we have 11 different variations of the C54. Sounds like a nightmare for completist collectors like myself. But it gets worse. The French factory joined in the fun early on, as well as the Antipodians down under. Strangely, all three factories seem to have had their own tooling. None of the different nationalities' car bodies will fit with the others. Does this mean that C54 'cut and shuts' are as bad as the real thing?!?

French cars were available in version 1 and 2 but had much stronger reinforced body and wheel mounts. The French cars are also slightly



shorter than the English versions. It is also worth noting that the French colours differ slightly from the English ones, my personal favourite being the French dark red.

The Australian and New Zealand cars were also produced in both versions and are slightly shorter again than the French cars. These cars have very poor mounts and are made with cheaper plastic so they are quite hard to find completely intact. They are also prone to shrinking slightly so will often be found with a large gap between the body halves. On the plus side the colours of these cars are fantastic although more toy-like in appearance.

The Australian and New Zealand cars usually included a 'small head' and the drivers bodies were not painted, but would be the same colour as the car body. These were issued with either yellow or chrome wheels.

I have produced a list of the versions of the C54 that I have been able to find, but will probably be shown up by Roger Gillham's new listing so please go easy on me.

I'll end with a quick Scalextric tie-in factette. Jim Clark, who was associated with Scalextric during the 1960s was invited to try out the Formula 2 Lotus 16 by Colin Chapman in 1958 before his entry into single seat racing. He clocked some promising lap times but was not confident of the car's speed or performance. He

then happened to be watching as Graham Hill, driving a F2 1.5 Coventry Climax version, proceeded to lose a wheel and roll the car. Needless to say Jim didn't sign on.

### English

**Version 1** - Big head, Loop braids: red, green, mustard yellow, yellow, light blue, blue

**Version 2** - Medium head, Round pin: red, green, light yellow, yellow, blue

### French

**Version 1** - Big head, Loop braids: dark red, green, yellow, blue

**Version 2** - Medium head, Round pin: dark red, green, yellow, aqua blue, blue

### Australia and New Zealand

**Version 1** - Big head, Loop braids, 'Made in Australia' on the base: dark red, green

**Version 2** - Small head, Round pin, 'Made in Aus + NZ' on the base: red, dark red, dark green, apple green, yellow, navy blue ■

★ **An easy winner this month as this is the only Scalextric orientated article I have received! A "Motor Show" Ferrari 643 is yours Neil. I have one more of these rare cars - only 12 produced - to give away. The odds look good so why not have a go?** ★





# Tales from the box of stuff

## The car that put the 'C' in Coupé.

BY DAVE YERBURY

Only six of these beasts were ever made. They raced for just two seasons but left a lasting impression on everyone that saw them.

This is the car that boyhood memories are made of; I have vivid recollections of them being tested up and down the M1 in the wee small hours in preparation for Le Mans. It must have given a few lorry drivers the wake up call going by at nearly 200 mph. This Aurora shell nearly made it out of the box with the Bugatti Atlantic last time. With this body in mind, a competitively priced MRRC AC Cobra was purchased from Mark Scales at the Leeds swapmeet.

It was virtually a straight fit into the Coupé shell being the same wheelbase and fortunately having the correct wheels and tyres; it was just a matter of a few minor adjustments and the chassis was secured into the shell. The only other addition was a parcel shelf and spare wheel fitted inside the rear so it can be viewed through the rear window, finished in Viking blue metallic paint and with the obligatory white stripes.



Cobra roadsters had dominated the tracks of America in 1963; Shelby had an eye on European racing but he knew that the roadster's barn door aerodynamics would not allow him to do it with this car. The rules stated 100 identical cars had to be built to allow it to race. In 1962, Ferrari had managed to pressurise the FIA to finally accept the 250G.T. The FIA considered it a new car but through a loophole that allowed small European manufacturers to make small

body modifications allowing for technological advancements during the model year, by the time the car was submitted it had grown new brakes and shocks, suspension, and magnesium transmission casing. On top of the 3 Litre V12, 6 dual throated Weber carbs. By accepting this the FIA opened up the rules to cars from other manufacturers including the Lightweight E-Types and the Aston Martin project 212 and in time the Cobra Daytona Coupé.

Most European racecars engines were under the FIA 3 Litre limit because it was more economical to use the road car engine tooling. Ferrari's GTO circumvented this requirement as well so opening the door to a 5 Litre Cobra.

Ferrari was dominating the European scene in 1963 as the Cobras were in the American USRRC. Shelby's cars had performed so well in the U.S. that Ford agreed to back his effort against Ferrari. It was obvious that with the Cobra Roadster's small block engine limiting the car to 160 mph flat out it would not compete against the enclosed 260 GTOs so another weapon would be needed to catch them.

Aerodynamics in car racing was very new in this era and usually linked to aircraft. Shelby had a 24-year-old called Peter Brock who convinced him he could design such a beast. He previously worked for G.M. and was involved with the 57/58 design of the Corvette Stingrays. He was convinced about the closed Coupé and how it would have the speed if the aerodynamics were right. With this sorted and a 5 Litre engine the car would qualify for FIA rules as Ferrari's interpretation on their 250 GTO had.

The Daytona Coupé project got underway in October 1963. Some of Shelby's employees were not convinced about the Coupé but the Brock design with the help of driver Ken Miles and John Ohlsen, a New Zealand fabricator, managed to convince Carroll Shelby it was a sound idea. ⇒

The Cobra CSX2014 289 chassis was used to form a plywood body buck on. Panels of aluminium were formed over this to form the Coupé body. To everyone present it certainly looked fast enough to catch the Ferraris. Some people were yet to be convinced that the hot 289 engine could push this body shape to 200 mph. The plans went to California Metal Shaping in Los Angeles to form the inner and outer panels. The first Coupé to be assembled was CSX2287 and it looked like no other with its odd shaped roof and chopped off rear end. It also sported a moveable rear wing.

The features did not impress everyone but the die was cast and it was assembled. Shelby liked Brock's design but agreed with Phil Remington (Chief Engineer) about the ring type aerofoil so it was out and the compromise was to add a wing later if needed. The key to the success of Shelby cars was the people employed to build them; Californians came to see what Shelby's shop and the Texan were up to. Some of the people recruited were not engineers but highly experienced USAC oval track racers; Shelby trusted their individual ability. According to Brock they could build cars that were both fast and stayed together. The Coupé project was a product of an experienced group of racers, none of whom were engineers and very few drawings were made. The first track tests were carried out at Riverside where Ken Miles broke the track record by 3.5 seconds. Miles managed 183 mph and only at nine tenths; he was 20 mph faster than the roadsters. A full out test was not possible, as the straights were not long enough but Shelby was pleased he had kept faith in Brock's design. The only glitch with the car was the suspension not being stiff enough; putting a triangulated subframe over a twin parallel tube frame to increase torsional stiffness along with a basic roll bar cured this. During the weeks of testing, larger Goodyear stock car tyres were fitted making it even faster. The stiffened frame and these larger tyres worked even better to keep the Coupé on the track. This also cured the tendency for lift at high speed. All at Shelby were now very excited about its debut in the Daytona race.

The first car tested at Daytona Beach in preparation for the Daytona Continental in February 1964. Derek Holgate, PR Man at Shelby, referred to the car as the Daytona Coupé and the name was to stick; from then on the Cobra name was rarely used. At the practice runs for Daytona Team Manager Miles limited RPM to 6300 and Holbert duly broke the GT lap record and was 3 seconds faster than the Ferraris. Even when lowered to 6000 it still outran the GTOs. In the race it was well ahead after a couple of hours but, after 6 hours, Holbert pitted with smoke in the cockpit. The diff was leaking; after a temporary top up it was back in after a few laps to refill the diff but disaster struck. The fuel tank was still nearly full and an attempted top up spilled out hitting the rear brakes, the resulting fireball cooked the wiring and the seals on the diff.

The Coupé was rebuilt for the Sebring 12 hours three weeks later in March. No mistakes this time as Holbert and Macdonald cruised to victory. The only problem they faced was a roasting cockpit through the lack of adequate venting; this was only partly cured during the race as the heat dropped enough for the driver's top finish. The Coupés performance had impressed Ford who came up with the financial backing for a full assault into Europe. For this foray, five more cars were needed. The first four to be built at A.C Cars at Thames Ditton then shipped back to Shelby for modification. He was snowed under and a lot of work was subbed out with two of the five chassis being sent to Carrozzeria Gransport in Modena. The prototype was also supposed to go there but it ended up at Sarthe in France for official testing. Ford's new GT 40s were also there attracting a lot of attention; as they were unstable at high speed both of them (billed as the world's most technically advanced car) crashed during testing.

This gave Jo Schlessor a chance to drive the Coupé after his shunt. He liked the car and the handling so much he managed 198 mph and Shelby signed him up to do some European races. At the Coupés first race at Spa Phil Hill had found the car unstable at over 180 mph. He had driven the Ferrari 250 GTO and reckoned

it was the rear wing that made the difference; the new tail wing was fabricated overnight. Hill went out the next day, with the improved handling and broke the track record, putting the Coupé on pole.

Out in front in the race from the start the car encountered fuel problems. After a long stop to clean the tank and filters Hill was far behind, but he caught up the laps and broke the lap record 3 times before further fuel problems occurred. The tank and filters were again clogged with a fibrous material; sabotage was suggested but it was never proven

At this time Carrozzeria Gransport was building up 2 new Coupés - CSX 2299 and CSX 2300 - without a prototype to copy from. So they used their own initiative; when they had finished the roofline didn't look quite right. The mistake was corrected and the roof took on a different look. When the prototype finally arrived at Modena, they could see that their initiative was a bit out but it was too late to correct their mistake. The cars had to be shipped in time to be prepared for Le Mans. Dan Gurney and Bob Bondurant were assigned CSX2299 and the prototype CSX 2287 to Chris Amon and Jochen Neerspasch for the 24-Hour race.

The Prototype was 11 mph faster down the Mulsane straight. Apart from the roofline, the cars were identical. Dan Gurney being both larger and taller than Miles (who the seating was designed around) fitted into CSX2299 better as it had the taller roof. He won his class and set the fastest GT lap of 3mins 58.7secs. Amon and Neerspasch in the prototype were disqualified for an illegal jump-start from a separate battery. At the time it was leading the GT category when it was blacked in the 10th hour.

Although CSX2299 had the taller windscreen, it became the most successful Coupé of them all. Notably 4th at Le Mans in 1964 with Gurney and Bondurant and in 1965 Gurney won the Manufacturers Championship from Ferrari.

Ferrari and the Daytona Coupé battled it out for the rest of the season in 1964. With the last race scheduled for Monza, Ferrari were

leading by a couple of points but looking worried by the four Coupés ready to compete there. It looked like the game was up and Shelby could win the European Championship. However, no one could have foreseen the outcome; with Ferrari expecting to lose he somehow managed with his political clout to get the race cancelled and win the Trophy.

The 1965 season was looming and Ferrari sensed he could not beat the Shelby Coupés so he withdrew and went into the Prototype Class to take on the Ford GT 40s. A good move as he won this class against a GT 40 that was not able to put the results together. In some races they were chased hard by the GT Daytona Coupés which won nearly every race they entered with Gurney the Champion.

After the Coupés' outstanding performance Ford turned over the GT 40s to Shelby with instructions to win with the car and not the Coupé. The project finished there at the end of 1965 with the Daytona Coupés to become part of history. The Peter Brock designed Daytona Coupés were the last of the specials; a watershed point in race car design. From 1965 onwards the technology was led by the GT 40 based on the Broadley design built using proper drawings and the latest advanced materials available. It would never be possible again to build a winning car on the shop floor by using the combined experience of mechanics and drivers - the end of an era.

I have owned this particular Aurora body shell for many years and have always been puzzled how 2 different manufacturers of this car could arrive at two distinctly different versions. It was only when researching this article that the penny dropped. In my humble opinion it looks, as in real life, a story of two different roof line versions. I think Aurora have modelled the Italian high roofline model i.e. Dan Gurney 1965 World Champion and that Auto Hobbies have modelled the Prototype version with the original lower roofs line.

Right! Now I've got that off my chest. I can hear those immortal words being uttered by all - "Thank God for that"! I think its well past the time I should put my anorak back on again and do something constructive like dig the garden.■

# Some thoughts on club racing

BY COLIN SPARK

**H**aving just read the March Journal and the continuing comments regarding magnets and tuning I feel I must make some comment myself.

I am reasonably new to the art of racing toy cars. Although always a childhood interest, it was only in 2000 when I started racing at a club. My friend, who is a complete slot-car nut, introduced me to Mick Potters' club (NASA) in Croydon. I had no idea what to expect. As it turned out the rules were very straightforward. No magnets and Scalextric cars only, with Scalextric engines, wheels, tyres etc. No problem there then. Wrong!

"You need to sand your tyres", "you'll need a can of lighter fuel to slosh over the tyres just before racing", "test all your engines in both directions as they rev faster one way than the other" and so on. Well what do you do? I wanted to be competitive, although at that time the best car in the world wasn't going to make me win, so I listened to all the advice and used what I considered to be helpful. To be honest, it was a few simple tuning tips to help the car go as quickly as possible but still remain within the realms of pocket money costs. I enjoyed racing at the club and it certainly set me off into the marvellous world of slot-cars.

Sadly, by mid 2001 my business interests were beginning to clash with club night and my attendance became erratic, as did my ability to control that confounded toy car. It was at this time that I discovered Medway Model Racing Group who, fortunately, raced on a different evening. So off I went.

## Pleasant surprise

I was pleasantly surprised to find a huge six lane Scalextric layout and a considerable number of members in attendance. I was used to between six and ten people turning up and here was over twenty! I was given a list of all the classes raced and it was interesting to see that all the major manufacturers were used across the classes. For

example there is SCX Rally, Scalextric F1, Ninco Euro Saloons, Fly Classic etc.

With each class you are provided with a very professional printout telling you which cars are allowed, whether it is a magnet class or not, which engine and ah yes.....the modifications that are allowed. There is however one golden rule.....no tyre additives.

Nine months have passed since I joined MMRG and what a fantastic time it has been. I didn't think that racing toy cars could be so much fun. As we race both magnet and non magnet classes everyone is catered for, although personally I am a non magnet man. I love the way you can drift the rear end. There is certainly more skill in driving the car and when you do de-slot it doesn't let go with such huge force that your pride and joy ends up in kit form.

As for the tuning, I think the mild amount of tinkering that I perform on my cars adds to the appeal of the racing. Perhaps, when we spend our £25 on the latest offerings the wheels stayed on the axles and didn't run in that strange elliptical fashion we might consider running them straight out of the box.

Providing everyone works within the rules and they are not too involved, a bit of mild "correcting" of the original product to make it perform at its best adds to the satisfaction of winning a race. If it came to going to the shop, buying a car, going to the club, opening the box, racing the car, putting it back in the box and going home, then I think it would be a sad day for everyone.

## Extremes

I'm not suggesting we go to the extreme of liquifying the poor driver's insides or sanding the bodywork to the thickness of a Rizla, but trueing the wheels and sanding the tyres? Well why not? What does it cost? And if it makes you feel more confident when your car is no longer bouncing along like a three wheeler with square wheels, then that's good! Sure, I glue the motor in.⇒⇒



Only because after ninety laps in the first evening the motor would have popped out more times than a cuckoo clock and there is still another four evenings' racing to do with that car. I loosen the body screws as well to give the effect of some suspension for cornering i.e. body roll. That's about it. That's the extent of our "modifications" rules. Hardly rocket science is it?

## Super magnets

The only thing that I've encountered that I truly do not like is the use of the latest super magnets. They have been introduced as a modification so that older F1 cars will be equal to the new Sport Scalextric cars, which, I believe, have the super magnet as standard.

I took my trusty Ferrari 643 out of my race box, fitted the super magnet, went to put the car on the start line for a practice session and it was sucked out of my hand and on to the track. When I put the pedal to the metal, as it were, the car never moved!! I had to get a push start! Removing the car from the track with a crow bar and inspecting the once reliable, fast engine, now in meltdown, made me realise that this was not a good step forward.

I decided that my ten year old car which had been lowered and built to run as a non magnet car was now redundant. Out of the loft came a nice shiny new Williams FW20 Mecachrome Limited Edition. In went the super magnet along with the usual tinkering and then off to the club for the first night of this class.

I'm sure you can guess the obvious result. Yes it was incredibly fast. The club lap record was broken by one of our junior members! It was the earliest we have finished an evening's racing since I've been attending, due to the speed at which races were completed. However, the cars still came off if you didn't brake a little for the bends and marshalling was a nightmare. The cars came round so quickly that you often clipped a passing car while trying to put another one on. I noticed that if you did come off, by the time you were back in the slot you had lost at least a lap, sometimes two, and there was no point in continuing. The worst thing was that my prediction about the state of my car at the end

was correct. What started out as a perfect example of a Williams ended up, after only ninety laps, as a wreck.

I can't say I enjoyed it, but other members did. That's the point. Everyone gets to race a type that they really enjoy. Although, I noticed several pro-magnet members complaining about these being too strong. My point here, is that I will still attend for the next four weeks because it's about being a club member and taking on board all that that involves. If I only wanted to race my choice of car under my rules then I would have stayed at home a long time ago.

So if you want some variety and challenges in your racing take a look at MMRG. It is a well run club with excellent attendance in a good venue and the friendliest people you could wish to meet. But most of all, it's FUN! ■

# 'Toys R Me'

BY TONY SECCHI

Over the past couple of years, I have written several articles containing sporadic references to the cars that we used to race when I competed in the early sixties. It seemed logical to me that a complete article on the way that those cars were made would make an interesting, even historical viewpoint for younger readers and may jog the memory of older ones - that is if anybody as old as me is still participating in our hobby

Our old club was set up before I joined and raced in 1/24 scale. I later learned that this decision was originally made to allow for the use of the 'Merit' range of static self assembly kits that were then currently available. These included, to the best of my memory, the following range of cars.

## FORMULA CARS

- '47 Maserati 4CLT
- '49 Lago-Talbot
- '50 Alfa Romeo 158
- '52 Gordini 2 litre
- '54 Lancia Ferrari D50
- '54 Ferrari D246
- '54 Mercedes W196
- '55 Mercedes W196 (streamlined)
- '56 Connaught
- '56 B.R.M.
- '56 Vanwall F1
- '56 Maserati 250F

## SPORTS CARS

- '54 Jaguar D type
- '56 Aston Martin DB3S
- '56 Lotus XI

Later other 1/24 scale static kits/models came out and supersede those listed above. The club amended its category of types and classes and, by the time that I joined, the 'Merit' range of cars were in the process of becoming obsolete and Formula cars particularly were being phased out.

This was probably due to the fact that closed wheel bodied cars do not so easily become entangled and therefore deslotting was reduced (some things never change). With the rising popularity of the sport; the increasing membership of our club; the extra races ensuing and rules which stated that if you came out you stayed out, I suspect that this point became paramount.

Engines too, were changing, the old 'sledge' type motors being replaced by both 'Raymond' and 'Johnson' rectangular 'can' types and these were more difficult to fit into single seater bodies than the sports car equivalent.

Also the use of ballast started to become universal, lead and plasticine being the most common and once again sports car bodies gave more variation in the choice of location - single seat/open wheelers being very restricted in this area. Nevertheless, when I started racing my first car was a 1/24 scale Cooper-Climax (bought from Woolworths) as a ready-made 'push-push' model. I based it upon the Rob Walker private entry for Stirling Moss, which won the 1958 Argentinian Grand Prix. This was the first win for Cooper-Climax and the first for a rear engined car since the Auto Union days of 1938.

## No open wheels

I had converted it into a slot racer but due to my lack of construction knowledge and skill (mainly skill), I wrecked it first time out and after extensive rebuilding, managed to de-slot it on a regular basis. Well, we all have to learn! After that first season the club concentrated on three classes, all with enclosed wheels - Saloons, Sports, Grand Touring (or in my native parlance 'Gran Turissimo'). Using the aforementioned advantages offered by the bodies of enclosed wheel cars, I found the construction, tuning and racing of this type of car more to my liking and thirty five years later still do. My own home track races with my friends still only utilise these three classes - no open wheelers for us. ➤

Anyway, in those far off days of my misguided middle age we converted, modified and constructed our own cars and this, if you dear reader are interested, is how we did it.

The 1/24 scale racing format in use at our club was relatively rare in this country at that time and although universally used in California when I visited in 1965 did not generally appear here until 1968 when Scalextric introduced its Super 124 car. These little masterpieces, as most of you probably know, were offered in two sets -Alfa Romeo GTZ with the Jaguar E Type and Ferrari V8 158 Fl with the Lotus Indianapolis Type 38. Both sets were aimed at the American market but arrived too late on the scene. Consequently, our range of 1/24 scale model choice was small, limited to what bodies we could find from other sources. There were a few American static kits around - Revell, Monogram etc., both in 1/24 and 1/25 scales (we were allowed to use the latter scale, as the difference was minimal).

## Shop at Woolworths

However, if you wanted to race British car makes then you had to resort to plastic toys. Fortunately Woolworths had many branches at that time and they served as a cornucopia of supply for us. 1/24 scale Jaguar E Types and Mk 10s, Ford Zephyrs and Consuls, Aston Martin DB1s, MGBs etc. They could be found very cheaply and were (relatively) accurately made. They were usually the “push push” type which were made in two pieces with a horizontal sealed joint just below the door line. This meant that when the joint was split you had a bottom half with sills that served as a monolithic chassis. The top part usually had seats so that the driver could be mounted correctly and some even had dashboards and steering wheels.

Choice of pick ups, engines, running gear and tyres was also limited until about 1963/64 when along with the small MRRC range, specialist shops began to import spares from America - mainly Cox and Monogram.

## Donor cars

The most common method of construction was

to buy a 1/32 Scalextric car (usually a C64 Bentley 4.5 litre because of its length) and use the chassis. This was trimmed to suit and glued into cut outs in the 1/24 scale chassis/underpan, making sure that the wheelbase of the donor car lined up with its recipient. The circular pin guide (G3) was sometimes inserted directly into the chassis via a similar diameter drilled hole.

## Motors

The engine, generally a Triang RX 3-pole type E2, was kept in its original mount and with the rear axle fixed directly into the chassis. The same went for the front axle. So you had your 1/24 sports or saloon car with 1/32 pick ups, motor and running gear mounted in the chassis and (hopefully) aligned correctly. On some cars we made our own chassis with engine and axle mounts, wheel recesses etc. from industrial perspex or plastic sheet.

Later on, along with the Raymond and Johnson cans, early American 1/24 motors were installed directly into the chassis via a rectangular cut out and a self-made aluminium holding strap bent over the engine cover and screwed down on each side. Incidentally, I must have bought five or six C64 Bentleys as donor cars at that time - what would they be worth now I wonder?

Obviously, with the increase in working scale, axle width was inappropriate depending upon the width of your car so this was replaced with brass rod of the same diameter cut to length. The pinion and crown wheels were kept and used as our club rules dictated.

## Round black things

Wheels and tyres however, posed the biggest problem. Fronts could sometimes be kept from the donor car, but rears were a real headache until spares came over from the States. In the interim years, we used whatever was to hand. Some of the static kits used plastic wheels with rubber tyres as did some model toy cars, so that it became a lottery to scour the shops and try to find items that were suitable, sometimes having to purchase a whole kit or toy to obtain them.

Replacing them, however, was another story. As I stated in a previous article if the tyres wore down to an unraceable level half way through a championship you were up the creek as by then the donor toy was probably not stocked any more. Quite often, using unsuitable replacement tyres could cost you a good championship placing and if on occasion you had to transfer your precious rear tyres to another car, they became so worn that they were virtually useless. Still it was all part of the fun and the same situation generally applied to everybody.

Pick up braids were also hard to find and once your set from the donor car had worn down you had a hell of a job finding new ones, most toy shops not bothering to stock spares. Some members used thin copper strips but these proved to be so stiff and inflexible that they were quickly rejected. I myself used to buy cheap television extension lead and strip out the copper braided insulation screening. When stretched out and flattened, this gave a two-sided braid that could be cut to suit. Wear rate was high but as that cable was about three feet long, you had plenty of replacements. Some of my fellow racers still use this today - so once again some things never change.

## Ballast

Another thing that has not changed is ballast. With most of today's cars fitted with Magnatraction it is refreshing to hear that some clubs still run classes for cars without magnets or magnets removed. The roadholding on our cars then was effected, as it is in those clubs today, by ballast. It was allowed in our rules and (probably also as today) comprised of lead and plasticine. I personally used to plug the nose of my car with plasticine to keep the guide in the slot and use lead car wheel balance weights at the back behind the rear axle. This gave a 'tail out' cornering action, with the car being pivoted on the pin and held in a power slide by judicious use of the throttle; akin to the oversteering real racers of the day.

When completed, the top and bottom of the

car were screwed together using 1/16" (2mm) dia. brass screws and nuts purchased from the local ironmonger. These projected above the bonnet and boot - there were no internal plastic tube mounting posts at that time.

From scratch, it usually took about a month to complete a car, most of the time being taken by searches for the appropriate bits and pieces. Painting was done by hand, aerosols being in their infancy, using 'Humbrol' tins and because decals were also rare, race discs and numbers were from 'Letraset' or again by hand (my work in a drawing office being very handy for this).

Assembly, modification, manufacture and testing had to be completed for the coming class of racing whilst competing in the current one and as we had two similar classes of each car every year this had to be done twice because you were not allowed to race with the same car in both classes. So sometimes you used parts from your, say, first GT car to help construct your second later in the season.

With the advent of more static kits being imported from America this problem eased as time progressed and this along with the parallel import of spares meant that you could construct your cars as unique whole items and allowed you the choice of favourites that were not available in slot-car form. Much later, when our hobby was at its height, the local specialist slot-car shops (there were many at that time) stocked ample supplies of British and American kits or ready to race cars. By popular request, we incorporated a special 'free formula' class to allow for participation of these cars. My friends and I still have a few of these along with some of our self-made cars that we race on occasion for old times' sake.

They were different times to today when we have a collection of nearly one hundred 1/32 models to race, but the odd modification and rebuild goes on and we allow ourselves the pleasure of converting the 'Airfix' range of static cars and some of the many resin or vacuum formed bodies that are advertised in the excellent pages of our Journal.

The fun (and the serious racing) goes on. ■





# Club Focus

## How to increase club membership

BY ADRIAN NORMAN

Since I created the UKSlotCarClubs.co.uk website a few years ago, I have had many enquiries about how to create, advertise and organise a slot-car club. Having had experience in all three aspects it was a natural step to use my interest in the building of websites to create [www.ukslotcarclubs.co.uk](http://www.ukslotcarclubs.co.uk).

The website club reference map now has three sections, UK, Europe and ROW. The UK map has a rash of little red dots representing the location of a slot-car club. Clicking on a red dot will display the club details such as a contact name, a road map and a link to their club website. All very handy for advertising your club. But, and here's the big question, 'How many people could you expect to attract in your neck of the woods?' Frankly, I don't know! If there's anyone amongst our readership experienced in demographics and population calculations then this magazine would like to hear from you. You may be able to answer the question above that is on the minds of many club organisers. 'Can I increase the membership?'

Here's a few regular circumstances that seem to be quite typical of many clubs looking to increase their membership numbers. The club only holds races once a week. Half the membership have been regular attendees of variable expertise since the club started; the other half represent a slow turnover of membership. From time-to-time adverts are placed in a local hobby shop. The club has a website - usually a club member's private web space through his ISP. There is an average weekly attendance of 10 to 20; this can fluctuate from 6 to 30. Racing requires an attendance of at least 12 to have enough people to race and marshal. More than 24 people will restrict the amount of track time.

If you run a club and feel at a loss about what to do next, don't worry! We've all been in that situation. Even on the opening night of the club you're never sure how many people will really turn up to race. Here is a brief history of our club and the circumstances we've been through. I run Viking SCC, which is situated on the Isle of Thanet - a corner of the Garden of England in North East Kent where the seaside towns of Ramsgate and Margate bask in all their glory on the seaside sands, as does Eric - a potential club racer. The surrounding catchment area of 75% is sea. Eric the dyslexic halibut's interest was peaked by the news of cheap scale models available from a slot warehouse. It's doubtful, whether Eric can tell the difference between a slot-car and a sand bar, therefore we can only look to the other 25% of sparsely populated land upon which to trawl for potential club members. The nearest population areas outside Thanet are Canterbury and Dover, 20 miles; France, a little further; or the Medway area, a veritable expedition of 50 miles away.

We've looked at increasing (and at one point, decreasing!) our membership over the five years we've been up and running. The club, for the majority of that time, is located away from towns and villages in a comfortable Social Club in the middle of nowhere. Not the most ideal place, you would have thought!

When we first launched the club we worried that the remote location would restrict the membership numbers. It didn't! For a short while we also spent six months in a room in Ramsgate town centre. We thought that moving there would increase our membership and that we could run on several nights a week. It didn't! Despite the move to central Ramsgate, then subsequently back to Pfizer Social Club, our ➡➡

club has continued to enjoy a reliable and friendly membership completely unaffected by the change of venues.

In my experience, the rule of thumb is that enthusiasts will travel a maximum of 25 miles to race and that the venue and its location does not appear to be a deciding factor on membership numbers. It seems that we can expect an average of five people from each town within this area. These members, in the main, will hear of the club by word of mouth.

It's also apparent that the average club enthusiast is prepared to go racing no more than once a week and is likely not to attend on 8 of the 52 weeks of the year. Hardened enthusiasts from other clubs willingly drive down to Thanet from London, Southend and Medway for inter-club matches. For special events, enthusiasts will willingly travel hundreds of miles.

Using these very basic figures we can assume that if your club does not have 5 town populations within a 25 miles radius then you would struggle to achieve a regular weekly attendance of 25 members. If your club is not situated between these population areas then you'll need to advertise more aggressively to attract members. Not scientific by any means, but hopefully enough to promote other club organisers to write in with their concerns and ideas on what makes a club successful.

So, for geographically disadvantaged Slot-car clubs, this is what you might like to consider doing:

\* Write an article for the NSCC Journal. This will aid awareness of the whereabouts of your club and what you club races.

\* Write to Hornby for a similarly written article for inclusion in their Racer magazine.

\* Model Slot Car magazine is a new magazine that depends upon clubs and hobby shops purchasing the magazine for distribution and sale amongst club members and enthusiasts.

\* Visit the slot-car reference library at [www.slotcarportal.com](http://www.slotcarportal.com) and go to the Clubs section to get your club on the UK, European or World map.

\* Ensure your club is listed on the NSCC website.

\* Ask your local dealer if he wouldn't mind keeping a stack of your club's adverts next to his slot-car cabinet.

\* Contact your local paper and ask if they would like to run a community/fun feature in their paper.

Try all the above suggestions and you might double your membership or even end up with a 'Waiting List'! Oh Yes, and those of you who are quite happy with your own clubs, write in and tell us what aspects have contributed to making it a successful club. There are at least 40 clubs listed on [www.slotcarportal.com](http://www.slotcarportal.com) in the UK - one article from each club published each month will keep Brian busy for another 4 years!

In conclusion, we could make allowances for Eric the Halibut's colour blindness and ham-fisted marshalling but he has yet to negotiate the difficult task of evolving two legs, lungs and a gripping action with a digit for depressing the controller trigger! Although our club welcomes new enthusiasts, applicants from a certain 75% of this club's catchment area will first be rigorously vetted by the Editor's cat! ■

# Mini-Zs

BY MARTIN WEBB

After another evening spent browsing the slot-car sites on the internet, I decided to have a look at a few radio control sites, just out of idle curiosity. The result was the discovery of some wonderful looking R/C cars called Mini-Z racers. Now I know we are a 100% slot club, but I think they may be of interest to us as well as R/C enthusiasts.

Mini-Z cars are 'grown up' radio control models rather than just kids toys, but with a difference: they are 1:28 scale, making them only a little larger than your average 1:32 slot-car. They come, of course, from Japan and are produced by Kyosho, who are perhaps best known over here for their range of excellent die-cast model cars. Tune up parts are available from Kyosho and a number of other companies.

Being of such small size means they can be run in a very small area indeed, especially with a typical turning radius of only 200mm. They could easily be run in the space taken up by a moderately sized home Scalextric layout and up to six can be run at any one time.

Some twenty odd bodies are available at present, including a few which have yet to grace a Scalextric type slot-car (Nissan Skyline R34, Lexus IS, Honda NSX and S2000 and even a Toyota Yaris). A few slot favourites are included too, such as the Viper, Imprezza, Audi TT, Porsche GT3 and Lancia Stratos as are Ferrari, BMW-Williams, McLaren and Jordan F1 cars.

So even if the cars themselves don't appeal, the bodyshells, which are detailed hard plastic, might lend themselves to a few interesting conversions if you can live with the slightly larger scale and can find a suitable chassis. Some

dealers list them as 1:24 scale, but the enthusiasts websites made it clear they were 1:28.

I have not found much evidence of them being widely available in the UK yet and I failed to find a single British based website dedicated to them, although there are plenty of American and Japanese sites, together with a number from Hong Kong and Europe. UK prices for the tin top cars seem to be around £110-£120 with the single seaters around £140-£150. This includes all the radio gear etc. and the cars come fully factory assembled. For anyone with internet access a couple of interesting websites are: [www.mini-zracer.com](http://www.mini-zracer.com) and [www.geocities.com/minizracing/](http://www.geocities.com/minizracing/).

Before anyone thinks I'm simply trying to turn Scalextric enthusiasts into R/C ones let me say that I've been an NSCC member for the past eight years and have 600 odd cars scattered throughout the house. My knowledge of radio control is limited to say the least and I would have to regard myself as being totally unfit to be left in charge of a 1:10 scale rally car powered by a real miniature internal combustion engine! I write from (a very scary) experience on that point. So, has anyone tried a Mini-Z racer and if so what are they like? Do they pose some kind of threat to slot-racing? Am I wrong to consider them as some kind of Scalextric car which has escaped from the slot? At least one US raceway which is dedicated to Ninco, Fly et al has installed a Mini-Z track and I have found other evidence of slot racers enthusing about Mini-Zs, so perhaps they too consider these cars as much of interest to the slot racer as the radio controller. ■