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It's not for girls

What have slot-cars and Yorkie Bars got in common? Yes, they are both for men only. That is the common perception but, in the light of recent events, I am beginning to have my doubts. At last year's Ramsgate weekend two ladies took great delight in beating their male partners in the racing and we currently have two female members at the local club.

One of them, Michelle, initially came along to watch and keep her husband, Martin, company. Before long she was persuaded to join in and was duly slaughtered, as all novices inevitably are, for the first few months. Gradually she got the hang of things, clawed her way off the bottom rung of the ladder and began to beat some of the men, including yours truly on numerous occasions. It caused great merriment the first time she finished ahead of her husband and also led to Martin delving deep into the slot racer's book of excuses!

At first she happily raced with whatever car Martin provided for her but, early this year, she turned up with a brand new Slot.It Porsche 962 - apparently a letter to Santa had brought the desired result! Soon afterwards Michelle recorded her first, well deserved race win.

It was at this point that I became convinced that the female of the species is perfectly capable of adopting a male attitude to the hobby. For the first few months an enquiry about her race results would bring a beaming smile and the words, "last again!" I posed the same question a few weeks ago and the reply came through gritted teeth, "Third - but I should have been second!" Vicky, our other lady member, is also beginning to show signs of a competitive nature - remember girls - it's only a bit of fun! Oh, and hands off that Yorkie Bar.

And Finally - Many thanks to those who participated in the auction at the recent Loughborough swapmeet. Adrian Norman's selection of Scalextric advertising material raised over £300 for Hornby's nominated charity. Well done everybody.

Till next month
Brian



NSCC International Slot Car Championship - update

By Gareth Jex

Since we announced the Championship last month in the journal lots has happened. The full rules and regulations are now available to view and download on the NSCC web site. There is also a link from the official Scalextric web site as well as a discussion forum on www.slotforum.com giving hints and tips on the various classes.

Demand for copies of rules and regs has been steady over the last month and apologies to those of you still waiting for copies, I have been away on business and will deal with your requests ASAP. Several clubs have already confirmed that they will be running a mini championship; we will begin to list these clubs next month with contact details so, if your club is planning to run an event, don't forget to let us know.

First open Round: Slough

With the release of Scalextric Lister Storm all the cars are now available and clubs can start their own championships from the beginning of May. The first open round of the championship will be a fastest lap competition at the Slough Slot event. We also plan to have a full four lane championship circuit on display for you to use along with examples of all the championship cars. If it arrives in time we also hope to have an SCX Digital track for you to play with, hope to see you there – don't forget to bring along your NSCC membership card, not only to get cheaper entry but also so we can note and record your times!

Rule Change!

Writing rules and regulations for any type of competition is always fraught with possible errors and several have cropped up over the last month and been corrected, however if you think there is still some room for improvement please let me know.

However there is one rule change that you should be all aware of. The original intention was for clubs and individuals to run all six classes to qualify for invitation to the finals. Following requests from clubs, members and sponsors we have decided to reduce the minimum number of classes required to three. You can still run all six if you wish and the finals will still be run with all six classes. Just for clarification the three classes must be different.

Wrong Number!

Thanks to W. Charters for pointing out another mistake in the rules and regs! The reference number for the Ninco BMW M3 GTR is wrong! Here is a list of the correct ref numbers:

- Ref 50335 "Amprex" Black No.15 (TBC awaiting NC5/NC2 clarification)
- Ref 50295 "Meijers"
- Ref 50307 "Euro GT"
- Ref 50269 "Road Car Silver"
- Ref 50271 "Motorsport 43"
- Ref 50270 "Motorsport 42"



Just to confirm the Ninco BMW M3 GTRs need to have an NC2 motor, I understand that some of the new models to come out this year will be equipped with NC5 motors – these are not eligible!

Happy racing. ■



In the last month several new releases have reached the shops. Most have been re-liveries but at last the new Lister Storm LMP has arrived.

New Items

C2563 Mini Cooper "John Cooper Challenge" #15

This Mini is of the standard Cooper variety and looks really good in the Welsh colours. However, look out for the typographical error on the URL on the rear of C2562. Fancy not being able to spell Robert!

C2569 Opel V8 Coupe "GMAC" #8 and C2579 Porsche 911 GT3R Friesinger Motorsport #50

These reliveries are well up to Hornby's current standards with very clear and precise printing and bold colours.

C2578A Ford GT40 "Le Mans 1966" #59

This GT40 release is very similar to the German only release C2534 being mainly off-white in colour with a red band running from front to back. Like the German release it also has two filler caps, a different bonnet vent and printing on the tyres. It is only available as a Sport version in a limited edition of 5000.

C2566 Chevrolet Corvette 1969 #1

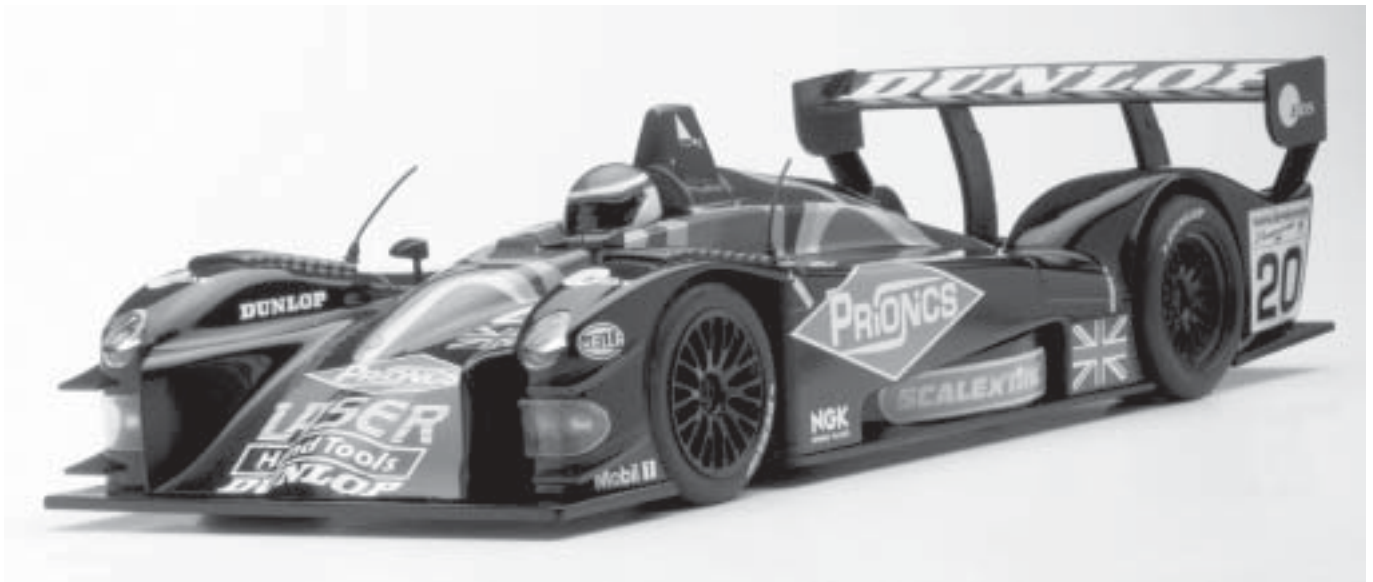
Not counting the lack of roof, the open version of the Corvette has many differences from the closed version; the most noticeable being the closed front lights. Having no roof makes the interior much easier to see and the car shows a

great deal of detail with the dashboard fully printed.



C2521A Lister Storm LMP Le Mans 2003 #20

The Lister LMP shows another step forward in slot-car technology with the adoption of a sub-chassis. This holds the motor and back axle together with the magnet. One screw holds the sub-chassis in place and is all that needs to be removed to get at the bits requiring servicing. The motor wires have two small plugs which need separating to remove the motor. Loosening the single screw provides the small amount of movement between chassis and body favoured by most racers. The magnet is stepped giving greater strength at the ends than in the middle. Later in the year a Sport version of the sub-chassis will be available, together with the other motor, axle and gear tuning parts to make an even higher performance version. As this car arrived just at the print deadline a bigger review will have to wait.



Publications

MotoGP Catalogue No1

The new MotoGP catalogue states Edition 1. It will be interesting to see if it makes it to Edition 44. This is now readily available in most shops. It doesn't provide a huge amount of detail of the forthcoming range as I expect that there will be a certain amount of change.

Development continues apace on the bikes themselves to improve their performance. The stabilising wings have been made more rigid to prevent some side to side shimmer that the early prototypes suffered from and the rider is now lighter to lower the centre of gravity.

Sport Digital

At the UK Toyfair Hornby were giving out two sided, A4 sized posters giving some highlights of the forthcoming digital system.

Model Kits

Also at the UK Toyfair Hornby were giving out single sided A4 sized posters giving details of the six new additions to the kit range. Although the poster states that all kits come with paint and glue I understand from Hornby that versions without paint and glue will also be available as per last year.

Shop Display Boards

At least two new shop display boards have also been seen. One shows the red and yellow John Cooper Challenge Mini Coopers and the other the Sport logo.

New Announcements

Two new twin packs are planned but details are as yet a bit vague. Firstly there is Starsky and Hutch twin pack with the Grand Torino and Corvette. This will be a Sport version. The Torino will also be available as a standard release. Secondly there is a Goodwood twin pack of Vanwall and Maserati which will be launched at the Goodwood Festival Of Speed in July. How these differ from the standard cars is not yet known.

Although Hornby are not yet confirming these details, news of new NASCARs appears on the web sites of several major dealers. Three Ford Taurus and three Pontiac Grand Prix are on the cards but licensing discussions between Hornby and the teams is still progressing.

The Skoda Fabia may not be everyone's idea of their dream car but the Scalextric version will definitely be worth waiting for as it has 4 wheel drive. Exactly how this has been engineered will be revealed next month.

Competition

Thanks for all of the what's missing competition entries. Not only did many of you spot what I was looking for but several of you found something else too. Answers and results next month. ■

Traders travels

By Robert Learmouth
(Westwood Models)

The long-anticipated expansion by Hornby into the hugely lucrative Spanish market appears to be underway. Whilst Scalextric (UK) has a greatly regarded position in the collector's market over there, it is comparatively unheard of in the 'Dads and Lads' market. A recent visit to a Toys R Us store in Spain saw a bewildering range (much better than a UK branch) of Scalextric (Spain), Fly and Ninco but barely a trace of Superslot (brand name in Spain). Acquisition of Fly had been touted for a while but the answer has arrived in the shape of Spanish company Electrotren. This company manufactures model railway equipment but, more importantly to us lot, they are the Superslot distributors. Aha! I see a clever plan emerging! Hornby already have a declared global domination and acquisition strategy so this is unlikely to be the last move. Penetration in Germany could be vastly improved and this is one big market, bigger than the UK one many will tell you but currently dominated by home-grown brands. Talking of which...

Slotmania

This event, in late March, again lived up to expectations. The volume of Scalextric, Fly and Ninco showed a perceivable increase from the November show in a country that you must remember is traditionally a bastion of its own makes such as Carrera, Fleischmann and Marklin. Prices in Germany are varied. The new car market is every bit as, and probably more, competitive than in the UK. Whereas obsolete stuff can either be a grab it quick bargain or more often "how much!" When is a car with a broken motor worth more than one with a working motor? When it's an E4 Ferrari 250GT in yellow which was never used by its original owner because it didn't work! How many other mint examples of this little fella are there? This was a much prized car talked of but staying

firmly put in Germany. Quote of the weekend went to Derek Cooper who proudly told Phil Smith that his was "twice as thick as Phil's and could achieve more in one stroke". He was actually talking about scooping up ice cream with his wafer... Congrats to the Stuttgart Airport security staff. I've never been stopped at x-ray before with slot-cars but got pulled up twice on the way back. You'd think motors/wires would look extremely suspicious on x-ray and questionable every time. Mind you it's a very sad indication of our times when you see a 4-year old child being body searched from top to toe.

SLN

We've just come back from Lelystad, the SLN club swapmeet in Holland. As well as the usual suspects in Phil, Derek and myself, this time Mark Scale, Steve Cannon and Roger Barker were in attendance. Add in Nasseem and the event had a decidedly British feel to it! Lelystad (30 mins north-east of Amsterdam) certainly proved a bit of a hike from Calais with the family accompanying too. Rotterdam and Utrecht seem just that bit more comfortable to reach. It wouldn't have been so bad but the weekend didn't start off too well with an unscheduled day spent in Newport on the Friday following our last-minute realisation that Karen's passport had expired! And it didn't end too well either when our 9:30PM boat didn't leave until 12 midnight! - driving home to Swindon at 1 AM in the morning from Dover is not recommended! Anyhow, as usual with all Dutch events this otherwise proved to be another enjoyable trip with an excellent range of items on sale. And Lelystad itself was a pleasant enough place, if very modern, appearing to be the Dutch equivalent of Milton Keynes.

Joining the slot-car bandwagon continues apace. The current trend seems to be for well-established model railway dealers to get in on the act. Mind you, one recent convert thinks =>

that £150 is the going rate for a mint/boxed Hawaiian Cruiser so I'm not too sure how long he'll last. As I've said before in this column, many of these people won't see the year out. 2004 has incredible levels of new product from across the manufacturers and it's going to take a very clever man who has no experience in this field to get his ordering right on everything. Mistakes can be very expensive.

New arrival

The first of the 2004 range cars have been arriving. The heavy-weight so far is the GT40 relivery. Issued (so far) only in Sport trim the run is just 5000 worldwide, so maybe around 2000 in the UK. An entirely sensible number to satisfy initial demand but create a bit of a buzz once sold out. Whether all the Sport cars will be issued this year in those numbers remains to be seen. One suspects nothing is cast in stone at the start of the year and decisions can be altered subject to the admittedly constraining Chinese production schedule.

Ebay saw a boxed Loop the Loop go for £120. I've seen this item go for as little as £20 recently and thought it was an undervalued collectable (how many do you see?) but now it seems to have gone the other way. A really worthy discovery was the four pre-catalogue bulletins of 1957. These fetched £170 and that seems entirely reasonable for something of this rarity.

Meanwhile, a Hornby employee's husband chanced it with a £700 opening bid for her employee TVR. Not surprisingly there were no bidders. A Jersey Police Vectra fetched £130. These are proving hugely difficult to track down and whilst £130 seems a bit obscene it's a direct reflection of the continuing clamour for this model.

As well as the established English Church swapmeet in Madrid in June, there is going to be what looks like a very big event in the north of the city at the end of May. Distributors and manufacturers are booked in so it seems like as much of a show as a swapmeet. With Easyjet flights available from £55 return inclusive it's an affordable weekend break. ■



Norman's conquest – revisited

Norman Griffiths – who oversaw Scalextric production from 1964-1971 – recalls the problems of manufacturing Plexytrack.

Paul Strange reports

Part 4: on the right track

When he arrived to take up his new role as general manager of the Minimodels factory at Havant in February 1964, Norman Griffiths discovered 30,000 returned Formula Junior Scalextric sets. “They were piled high in the repair department,” he remembers, as we continue our chat at his home in Broadstairs, Kent. He tackled this vast mountain by improving the manufacture of the Formula Junior motor, the crown gear and the hand

throttle. The returns started to reduce, the FJ series began to blossom and Norman turned his attention to increasing the output and reducing the manufacturing costs of a vital Scalextric component.

“The next problem with production was the track,” says Norman. “It was bulky and we used tons and tons and tons of material.”

Unlike today, where Scalextric Sport track is plentiful, and Plexytrack (rebranded Classic) is readily available at swapmeets and toyfairs, in the early 60s there was a dearth of Plexytrack.

“For my first two years, track was produced 24 hours a day – I tell a lie, 23 on Sunday – seven days a week, almost throughout the year,” continues Norman. “We had a big moulding shop and the pattern was the day shift came =>



in 8am-8pm and the night shift worked 8pm-8am. On other sections – on the rails and that sort of thing – we used female labour. They worked 8am-6pm, and 6pm-10pm evening shift and then – if necessary – I would bring in additional labour. But in the main, the track had to be moulded 24 hours a day – demand for Scalextric was very high and we simply couldn't make enough of it.

“There was nothing complicated about making the track. The only thing was it was a pliable material and consequently, according to the way it was moulded, you could get a distortion as it cooled down, but that was controlled by the man who was working the mould. It was a very noisy factory – you had machines knocking out metal parts for the cars and whatnot, plus there was a constant hydraulic pressure noise all the time from the presses making the track.”

The women working on track production were extremely efficient. “We had people who could work faster than the machines. I had women who assembled this track who could beat gravity, putting the rails in quicker than the machine. It was fantastic the way they worked.”

But despite this speed and efficiency, Norman was convinced he could make cost improvements. He achieved them in two ways. First he refined the track manufacturing presses, making them more efficient.

“When you assemble the track, you have a hydraulic press and a pile of plastic by the side of you,” he explains. “There's a tool in which the plastic base for the track goes down. You take four rails – for the curves they're all various radiuses, obviously – and you go plonk! plonk! plonk! plonk!, dropping them down, press the pedal from underneath and that turns the lugs over on the bottom and the rail is retained in the track. You take out the piece, put it on to a conveyor belt and that takes it away. I developed a machine whereby the rails were put under a magnetic bar, then located, the track was slipped in and the tool came down to complete the piece of track.”

The second cost improvement was on the rails themselves. Originally they were blanked out of a strip of tinplate, 12-14 inches wide, on a roll in a coil. After manufacture, a long ribbon of scrap metal (about 1/8th inch wide) was left over. Norman realised that with the millions of track pieces being made, this scrap was piling up, costing Minimodels thousands of pounds.

“I devised a method whereby the rail is formed and then the tool that crops it comes down with the track forming tool as well, so there's no waste, only on the end of each piece of track. This was a good costing improvement and also it made a better rail. The only thing was whereas previously you'll find on older track that the lugs had a radius on them, the new rail lugs were square across.

“Over the years since I left Scalextric, I've had a look at the Classic track and they made minor improvements to it, but essentially it remained much the same as it was more than 30 years ago. I couldn't see how they could improve the track really; so much money had been spent on it and it would have been difficult to have modified it out of any context anyway.” ■

Next month: attention to detail

From Peter Solari

First of all this month, I have managed to get hold of good quality pictures of some of Ninco's latest releases (*well, they were good quality when I passed them on to our Ed!*). Even in black and white, the new Porsche 911 Turbo looks fantastic.



50338 Porsche 911 Turbo "Anthracite"



50335 BMW M3 GTR "Amprax"

Born to Race

The next Porsche to grace the Ninco line-up is the 934 in the famous white, red and blue livery of Brumos Racing. This offering (50332) is identical to that successfully raced by Peter Gregg and Jim Busby in the late 70s, in particular the 1977 Daytona 24 hour. The 934 was born in 1976 from the Type 930/911 Turbo

as a result of the FIA dividing sportscar racing into six classes, 1 through to 6. To be eligible for group 4, at least 400 road cars had to be built within 2 years and the dimensions of the race car had to be the same as those of the road going version. The subtle differences between the Ninco 911 and 934 are most notably the design of the front and rear spoilers. As well as sharing much of the detail and innovation with its "older brother", it contains the same NC-5 Speeder motor and also comes fitted with ProShock suspension. The 934 notched up victories on both sides of the Atlantic, winning the TransAm and European GT championship. Even with the introduction of the 935, for Group 5 competition, the 934 won three successive LeMans from '77 to '79.

An Elf is not just for Christmas...

The second of the Pro Trucks in the Raid series is imminent. This time it is released as ASM Racecars "Elf" sponsored Ford Ranger (50329) as driven by Frenchman, Bruno Saby, during the 2001 Dakar Rally. The 1:32nd scale Ninco replica is fitted with the ProArm drop guide system, ProShock suspension and powerful NC-7 "Raider" motor. As before, the Pro Truck carries a high level of model and print detail.

"O" dear!

Another relivery for the new Renault Clio is the "Agrafe" sponsored car as driven by Fabien Vericel during the 2002 Alsace stage of the Super 1600 class. This follows hot on the heels of last month's Punto and joins the recent releases of the Saxo. Can anybody tell me if it's a requirement of the Super 1600 class that all models entered must end with the letter "O"? The new Clio is fitted with full all-round ProShock suspension and the NC-5 motor. ■

NINCO

track test

50326 Pro-Truck BF Goodrich

Reviewed by Mel Turbutt

Ninco's latest release in their rally raid series is the BF Goodrich sponsored Ford Ranger as driven by Bruno Saby in the Pro Truck division of the FIA Cross-Country Rally Championship. The model comes packaged in the same "rough terrain" box as the earlier Mitsubishi Pajero. Its colour scheme is a pretty basic white with flashes of orange and blue. The tampo printed finish is faultless, as we have come to expect from Ninco since their move away from those awful stickers.

Make no mistake; this is no run of the mill pick-up truck. It's a serious piece of racing kit. For a start, there are no unnecessary trimmings like a glass windscreen or side windows. Instead there's a small Perspex wind deflector and safety nets attached to the complex roll cage. Not surprising then that the $\frac{3}{4}$ length crew are wearing full-face helmets with visors. You wouldn't want to get caught in a sandstorm in this baby! An unusual detail is that the rear view mirrors are attached to the dashboard rather than the doors making them less vulnerable in the event of a roll-over (as I was about to find out!). The roll-cage extends right back to the rear of the load bed, which is far from empty, carrying spare fuel and water tanks, shovels, ramps and two spare wheels with tyres. And it's in these details that Ninco have excelled themselves. For this is not some painted lump of plastic. Each is an individual item. So, when you buy this model, you get two usable spare tyres thrown in, but more of this later.

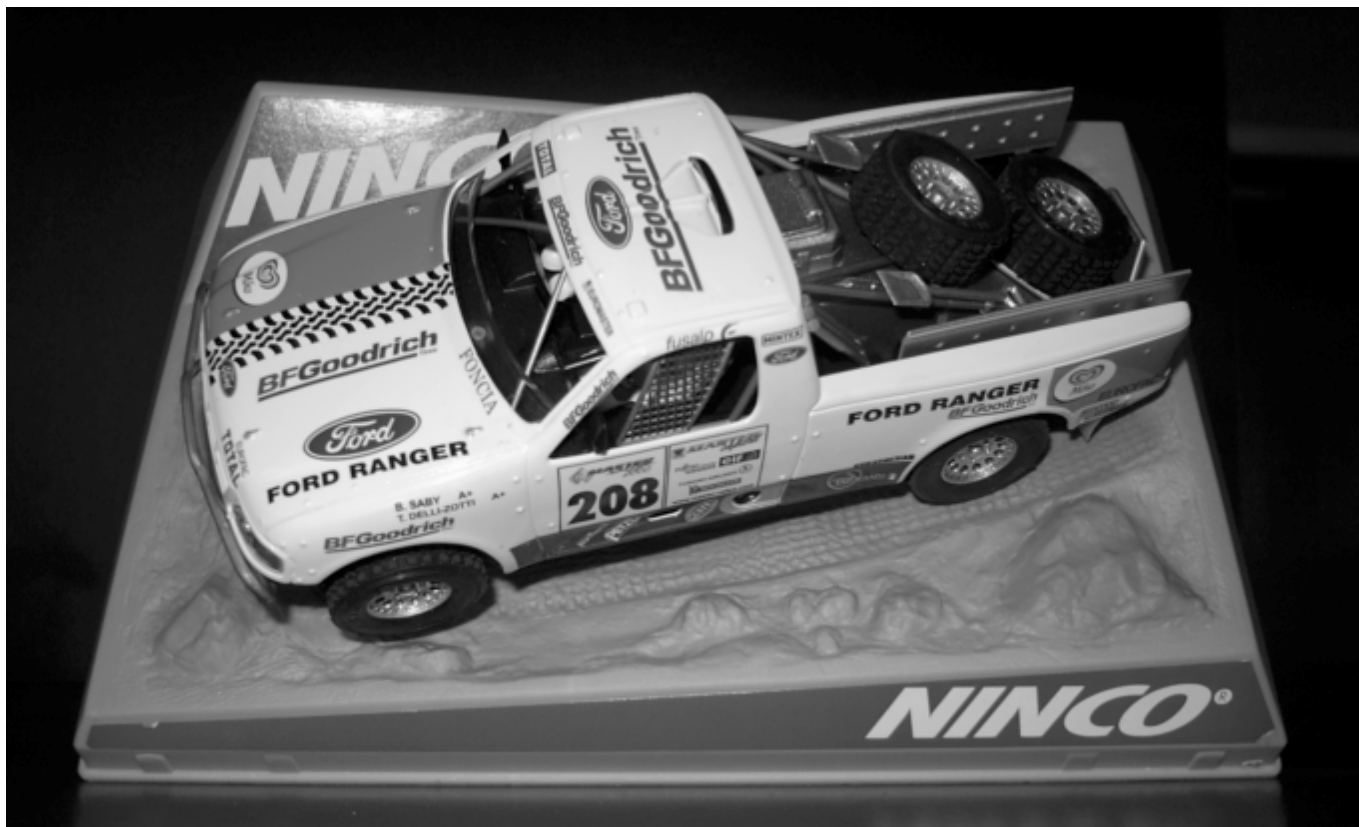
Comparison with the Pajero is inevitable. The Ranger is considerably longer and has a narrower track. It also has two wheel drive as opposed to four. Both cars use the same cross country balloon tyres, although the Ranger's are fitted to beautiful slotted chrome wheels rather

than the plastic, spoked ones on the Mitsubishi. The Ford's roofline is much lower, but both cars have a similar floor pan layout, which puts the NC7 motor quite close to the track. So the centre of gravity should be much the same, except.... Well, we'll come back to that.

Track test

First I tried the Ranger on the Oakwood Park circuit straight out of the box and with the magnet fitted. Result? Three laps at scale speeds of about 200 mph followed by a massive accident. Anybody remember Charlie Cox rolling his Mondeo at Thruxton in the BTCC some years ago? One of those. Apologies to those who race these cars with the magnets fitted, but I can't be doing with driving rally cars like that. And I definitely can't be doing with destroying such a lovely model before it's even got ten laps on the clock. So out with the magnet and back to the shake-down. Result this time? A lovely car to drive. It's surprising how good those cross-country tyres are on "tarmac". And why is it that Ninco can make a chassis that works, as it should, without the magnet fitted when some of their competitors don't seem to be able to?

Compared to the Pajero the Ranger is faster in a straight line (less power being sapped by the four wheel drive), but decidedly skittish around the bends. The harder yellow Pro-Shock springs probably help on the smooth stuff too. Overall lap times are comparable, but the Pajero is much more sure footed, the Ford having a nasty habit of suddenly rolling on fast bends. The reason? In my opinion those spare tyres that raise the Ranger's centre of gravity quite considerably. Also, one of them sits behind the line of the rear axle and this probably contributes to the oversteer due to the pendulum principle.



Best times on Oakwood Park circuit

Ford Ranger 20.00 secs
Mitsubishi Pajero 19.93 secs

Next it was onto the Penmaendyfi rally stage with a quick cry of “let’s go off-roading!” Once again times are very similar, but Mr Saby would be all arms and elbows around the slippery forest section having to cope with two-wheel drive. The softer sprung Pajero seems to handle the bumps a little easier, whilst the Ranger is decidedly sluggish accelerating away from very slow corners. Again it’s down to those spare tyres, which add a lot of weight to the Ford.

Best times on Penmaendyfi rally stage

Ford Ranger 21.38 secs
Mitsubishi Pajero 21.40 secs

So there you have it. Well done Ninco, another beautiful model with no compromises in the finishing touches. A joy to drive as always (though I’m still not convinced about that “suspension”) and not a bad racer too I would imagine. Although, if any clubs out there are considering running a class for these cars, you might want to think about allowing the removal of one or both of the spare wheels from the Ranger to make it more consistently competitive with the Pajero.

One last thought for Ninco. How about combining your excellent flashing light bar with these trucks to make some support vehicles to go with the safety cars? The Mitsubishi would make a very passable medical car or rescue tender, while the Ford would make a cracking fire truck. Better fit a windscreen though. We firefighters are such wimps! Can’t wait for the BMW X5! Any chance of a Bowler? ■

Flying High

Fly and other news

from Aaron Foord of Gaugemaster Controls

Occasionally I am caught out by exactly how popular a model will be, and find myself in the situation that I wish I had ordered more! This was certainly the case with the two latest Fly Alfa Romeo 147s, A721 and A722, and also with the A653 Ferrari 365 Carrefour. They literally flew off the shelf (sorry for the pun) and the next Alfa release (A723) looks as though it will be just as popular.

Fly Racing continues to be a range that is growing as more and more racers try them and like them, and more Saleen and Capris are on the way along with the new Lola B98/10. The new Fly catalogue is now available too and, at only £7.50 rrp, it is great value for money. It also includes a cd-rom with all the pictures of Fly cars past and present. Lastly, the UK limited edition twin set E651 is now available in the usual maroon colours and this year is a BMW 3.5CSL and Ferrari 365GTB, rrp£109.00.

Spirit have been busy, and we shall shortly be seeing their new limited edition set SPT100208 which comprises of two Ferrari 512S. Also here very soon will be the new Dallaras in two liveries, the SPT300401 Showcar and the SPT300402 Oreca. Both these have an rrp of £37.95, and having seen the pictures these will be superb. Worth a special mention is the running gear, with large bearings and metal guided crown-wheel (see picture).



Lastly, another 512 is now available, the SPT100203 Montjuic edition.

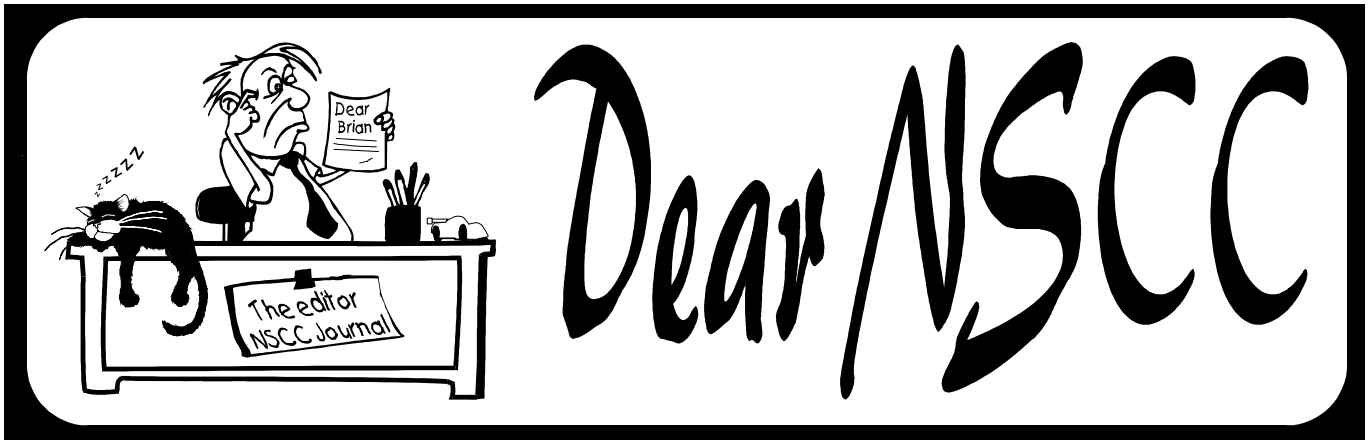
Bumslot have at last released the model that many of you have been waiting for, the BS81 Fire Truck/Emergency Service vehicle. With a price tag of £52.00rrp it is admittedly not cheap, but will make a splendid addition to any circuit. They are very limited though, with a production run of about 100 pieces worldwide of any model, so make sure you order soon.



Gaugemaster are sponsoring a series of Races to be held on 27th June at Phoenix Raceway, Studley, Warwickshire.

Contact Jon Sword for further details, at enquiries@phoenixscalextriccircuit.com. Also, we have arranged for Fly to help sponsor the NSCC International Race Championships, I have no doubt that details are elsewhere in this issue.

Following my last article I have had lots of you contacting me about missing brake discs from your Ferrari 365 Daytona. I do still have some discs if anyone else needs them, but please contact me soon as stocks are now limited. I also still have Ford GT40 chassis and rear axles to replace those found on the first release Gulf livery cars from Fly, and also I was told of BMW 3.0 CSL rear axles with wheels falling off, so I have a limited number of replacements for these too. As usual, call 01903 884321 or email me on aaron.foord@gaugemaster.co.uk. ■



Sir,
 After reading the question posed by Glen Jackson in last month's journal, I'm tempted to add a "Product Focus" section to my Ninco News reports. Until then, I hope that this will go some way to answering Glen's questions.

1) - Ninco Pole Position lap counter (10403) - Yes, I have tried it and in fact I use two linked together to control my own 4-lane circuit. Its full functions are very impressive and may take a while to explain in detail so I'll try to be brief and save a detailed explanation for a future Ninco News article.

Cars are detected using photoelectronic sensors that send signals to a small control box. These signals can be used to control a race in one of four different modes counting down laps or time, starting from a given audio/visual signal or when the car first passes the sensor. The control box shows number of laps, fastest time and winning lane as well as recording fastest laps for each lane. You can even set one of twenty-two national anthems to be played as the winner crosses the line!

The packaging does state that it has a PC connection but I am not aware of any software available for this unit. However, the same connection can be used to link two units together via a Network Cable (10309). With regards to cost, I believe the current price to be in the region of £80.

2) - Ninco Transformers - There is no easy answer to this one as I have transformers supplied with sets and purchased separately.

Both types show exactly the same rating of 14.8V, 0.9A - Ninco safety notices and the current catalogue only refer to one type of transformer. However, I am reliably informed that different health and safety rules apply to transformers depending on whether they are "wall mounted" or "free standing"; it has something to do with the heat generated - apparently wall mounted transformers must comply to a lower running temperature than free-standing transformers where the mains plug is at the end of a lead rather than part of the transformer housing. As for the best one to use, I'd stick with the 14.8V Transformer (10301).

Happy racing to one and all,
 I am, yours etc,
 Peter Solari

.....
 Sir,
 Some time ago, I wrote a letter in response to a member who was having problems connecting Scalextric RMS to his laptop in order to point him in the right direction.

Another member e-mailed me as a result of said letter, and advised me that he had a reliable race management system that he had been selling for some time if I was still looking. I wasn't then, but I am now, and have binned the e-mail address by mistake. If you were that member, could you please contact me again at holtchris959@aol.com ?

I am, yours etc.
 Chris Holt

Sir,

Am I the only person on Planet Scalextric who is saddened by the apparent loss of the NASCARs from the new catalogue?

Here are the reasons I think they should be re-introduced: close racing (isn't that what it's all about), just like the real thing, (check out Eurosport, Motors TV or NASN) they look and act the same but thanks to a wide variety of sponsorship they appear different.

There are no wing mirrors and other bits just waiting to be broken or lost while racing. The size and weight of each model ensured a driveability level that made all the members of our small club competitive.

Sadly due to the fact that NASCAR is still a relatively unknown racing series over here I very much doubt if these cars really caught on. Business is business after all.

Perhaps if we contacted Adrian and he took our case to Hornby things may change. But, until then, traders keep your stock I need all those different liveries.

I am, yours etc,
Ken Elston

.....
Sir,

Looking through my old newsletters I came across an NSCC survey. One question that got my attention was should there be an auction at swapmeets? The results were yes 180, yes (with conditions) 71, and no 18.

I would like to suggest that the auction is reintroduced. Possibly near the end of the meeting so that table holders and others can enter items at very reasonable reserves. As for an auctioneer, I remember Geoff Spencer doing a great job in the "old" days and more recently Richard Winter extracting vast amounts at the Hornby weekend.

Finally to give the idea a push, how about 10% of the sale price to be collected from the seller and given to one of the Hornby charities.

I am, yours etc,
Chris Gregory

Sir,

Just a short note to thank Archie for picking me as a winner in the Christmas competition.

I usually show willing and enter but, as someone who only plays with slot-cars and having no real interest in full size ones, I can never normally understand the questions let alone give correct answers. To actually win, not just something, but the prize I coveted most - what can I say!

The Pit Lane Babes are now on the museum layout making an exotic and colourful addition to the 150 or so Scalextric clones, there would have been more but I stopped painting figures long ago when I ran out of permutations of clothing colours.



The picture shows the babes having a photo session, however, each morning I now find I have to replace all the layout male figures that for some mysterious reason also seem to end up round the car. Scalextric males may be ancient but they patently still have an eye for the girls. I think I had better stop there otherwise I can foresee trouble from the wife.

I am, yours etc,
Rod Moore (Cumberland Toy and Model Museum)



Spain
by Gareth Jex

Several new models and new liveries to look out for in the next few weeks coming from SCX. First off are new liveries for the DTM cars:

Opel Astra V8 Coupe DTM ref 61380

Bright red livery, number 19 of 'TV Today' this is based on the car driven by the British driver Peter Dumbreck.

Audi TT-R DTM 'Tomczyk' ref 61390

Stunning red and silver livery, number 15. (See review SCX for more details)



Mercedes CLK DTM 'Mucke' ref 61400

Pale blue livery of the number 42 Mercedes-Benz Service 24hr team.



All the above feature the two wheel drive system with the RX-41 motor, removable magnet, guide suspension, return to centre guide and 'Xenon' lights. These three new liveries should be in shops by the time you read this. It's worth noting that these are the same liveries as the first releases from the SCX Digital range.

Due over the next few weeks are two more re-liveries and a new body shape for the Subaru.

Dome Judd 'Le Mans' ref 61450

Two wheel drive with the floating RX62C motor, lighter body shell, competition spec braids and tyres. A very bright livery in yellow, green and blue based on a Japanese entry in the Le Mans race.



That's all the new releases for this month, but expect more over the next few months as production picks up speed.



Subaru Impreza WRC 'World Champion' ref 61490

Early shots indicate that this is a brand new body design based on Solberg's WRC winning car and features the substantial rear spoiler. The car is presented in the 'Snow Effect'.

Fiat Abarth 'Tisot' ref 61460

Following on from the very pretty Gulf liveried Fiat this version is in bright yellow with a red chequered roof. Once again the boot lid is open to expose the engine bay. It contains an RX-41 motor, removable magnet and Xenon lights.

For those of you awaiting info on the SCX Digital system I have some good news. Tecnitoys and Bachmann have agreed to loan the NSCC an SCX Digital system for members to try. We will take it to various events thought out the year (based around swapmeets and NSCC Race Championship events) members will be free to have a go and see what you think. We hope to have a set ready in time to take to the Slough Slot Event in May. ■



61390 SCX Audi TT-R DTM

“Tomczyk”

By Adrian Leggett

SCX

I have only recently started racing at my local club in Farnham after Christmas and, as my performances at the NSCC weekend show, I am in the “Crap Racer” category. Thank you Stephen Barber for being the only person to keep me from the bottom of the score sheet! However, I do have my moments, and by managing to stay in the slot, I can occasionally finish a race and gain a few points. My only previous racing experience came as a callow youth when I competed against my school mates in the early to mid seventies but that was more akin to a destruction derby than any racing. You do not want to see the state of my UK Sunbeam Tiger. I cry every time I look at it now!

I was surprised then, when the NSCC SCX representative, Gareth Jex, asked me to review a car. This is something of a departure for me as normally, being a collector, any new car goes straight into my collection.

So first things first, how does it look? Well, very good indeed. It has a striking red and silver Audi based livery with additional sponsorship from the DTM series backers and S Line, whoever they are. It sits on silver BBS labelled wheels, which look a little smaller than I would expect because they don't fill the arches fully. The detailing is good with a nicely moulded grille and body vents, strong looking door mirrors and a large spoiler protruding from the



rear. The interior has a full roll cage with an accurate representation of the dash top moulding and the usual, cut off at the chest, driver. The decoration is quite superb with crisp printing and lustrous paint, apart from when viewed from the rear, where the printing is smudged and off centre. Now to remove the car from its box and have a look underneath. This is where I embarrassingly struggled. Expecting a normal screw, SCX have now come up with a clever locking pin that holds the car to the box base by spreading open the outer jaws with a centre pin. Once I discovered the pictogram on the base of the box instructing me to turn it clockwise, instead of anticlockwise as I had been doing, it was soon in my hands. It has the compact RX-41 motor, a strong adjustable magnet and an auto return, double braided guide with suspension.

On the track

Placing the Audi on the track, I instantly felt the grip of the magnet as it almost sucked itself onto the rail. Even before I move off it looks great; it sits so low to the track with only two or three millimetres of clearance. Off on the first few exploratory laps and the first thing that really strikes me is how good the headlamps are, giving a bright, blue tinted beam very akin to the type of lights on most new road cars. Getting in to the swing of it, it's fast down the straight and sticks like glue through the S curves. The tail just steps out when power is applied too early on the corner before the long straight and on the dreaded hairpin. It's here that I first lose it totally. The tail drifts out too far and seems to pull the front out of the slot. A few more laps and a few more offs and I notice a similar trait happening, again at the hairpin and at the tight downhill corner off the bridge. Fellow club racer, Gareth asked if I've oiled it. Err.... No. Should I have done? Out with a screwdriver and he's got the base off the car and oiling and greasing all the moving parts with some of the magic potions and lubes he has in his toolbox. Quickly back together again and back on the track and the difference is quite amazing. It not only sounds so

much quieter, but it feels quicker too. The body screws were left slightly loose to allow "a bit of body rock" and now it seems more progressive. The tail still drifts out but it stays in the slot much better until I finally take the hairpin too fast and roll it. No harm done though, nothing broken.

All in all, I'm very impressed with the TT and as we run a DTM class at Farnham, I think I might use it. It will make a change from the Ninco Alfas and Calibras which are the popular choice. It does go against the grain though, for a Calibra owner to run a TT. I will have to remove the magnet, which will make it more interesting. My thanks to Gareth and Tecnitoys for the car.

The only real criticism I can think of is, if lubricating the gears, motor and axles makes so much difference then why isn't it done at the factory? But then I suppose that's half the fun of preparing the car for racing and trying to gain that edge. Now, where's my Parma Lube? ■



Adrian Norman paid a recent visit to my local club to take part in a six hour endurance race. I don't know what he actually does during office hours - suffice to say that his racing skills have improved dramatically!

In fact we got comprehensively thrashed by his Viking team - Mussel Bay were some 200 laps behind at the finish. Mind you a 20 minute breakdown didn't help the cause much and our two man pit crew, John Kelly and John Watts, will not find the Formula 1 teams rushing to employ them! The Viking car ran faultlessly for the whole six hours and one wonders whether Adrian had provided them with a "Works" car!

While he was there he handed over a couple of recent Scalextric cars for review - an IRL car for me and a Corvette which I gave to John Watts for his views. Now saying that he is not the world's greatest fan of front-engined cars is a bit of an understatement - he loathes them - so I was interested to see whether the Corvette would change his mind!

Corvette

"When Brian asked me to try this car I had a look underneath and shuddered - front engine, rear wheel drive - Aarrgh! I was beginning to think I had upset him.

Brief reviews of a couple of recently released cars

All that fear vanished when I drove the car as it handled extremely well. I don't think I have ever driven an example of this type of car which went so well straight out of the box. I expected it to be a bit of a handful round the corners because of the difference in width between the front and rear axles, but, once again, I was pleasantly surprised. Without doubt this will hold its own against other front engined models from any manufacturer.

The quality of Scalextric bodies is so good these days that it is almost pointless to comment on the actual livery - yet another superb job from Hornby. Likewise the internal detail is brilliant and, unlike the TVR, you don't have to take it to bits in order to see it!

A couple of minor criticisms - from a racing point of view - the front axle could be a little wider, just to bring the front tyres to the edge of the wheel arches and help cornering. Secondly, the body is not very easy to remove and is a complete pig to refit. How the Chinese assembly workers put them together is beyond me. I have had four attempts now and I still can't get the self-centring steering spring to locate properly!

Overall though a cracking car; I still don't like front engines but, if we had a class for them, then this is the one I would race."

John Watts ⇒⇒



Dallara IRL cars

Hornby's marketing department really are doing a first class job at the moment and the IRL (Indy Racing League) cars are a prime example of their current approach.

The American series is highly successful and has, to all intents and purposes, destroyed the rival Champcar series. From a Motorsport fan's point of view this is a major disaster but in the slot-car world it is a different matter - one-make series, loads of liveries from one mould and Hornby have cornered the market! Scalextric heaven for them I would have thought.

The marketing men have had an extra bright idea though; authentically liveried models for the enthusiast and generic (no licence fees!) liveries for the entry level cars. Thus everybody wins; the kids get cheap cars to wreck and the adults happily pay an extra fiver for their favourite teams. Mind you I do wonder whether the licence fee really puts £5 on the cost - or is the retail price being tweaked, one way or another, to Hornby's benefit?

We have a class for these cars at Mussel Bay so, although Adrian has provided me with a freebie, I am qualified to do an independent review because I have already purchased two of them with my own money. The reason I kept this one? - Read on.

The cars themselves are good looking, authentic models, which are tremendous fun to race. We use them completely 'box standard' at the club and they are actually faster, mainly due to the wider rear track, than the current range of F1 cars. They also reward the better racers (guess who is not included in that category!) who can really drive them on the limit while being relatively forgiving to the less skilled.

The downside is their extreme fragility - in short you only have to breathe on them and they fall apart. In just 80 racing laps I have trashed two of them; a front wing snapped when it hit a marshal; our track is littered with the tiny bits of plastic which hold in the front suspension and self centring mechanism; half the members have broken front axle assemblies; I have a standing order with Mark Scale for new rear wings and several people have even managed to break the rear axle lugs on them! I dread to think what happens on magnetised plexytrack with its significantly higher accident speeds!

Spending £15 or £20 on a car which lasts for one evening's racing is not my idea of value for money so, thanks very much for the free replacement Adrian, but please could you get your design department to have another look at them and beef the chassis up!

Brian ■

Vintage stuff

The Gipsy Hill Modern and Revival Meeting

By Paul Strange

It took some planning – about 15 phone calls, numerous emails, a couple of rearranged dates for the fixture to avoid clashing with Formula One races, nearly a day's effort to prepare the room for the event, and an out-of-control power-shower to contend with – but finally, a few weeks back, I managed to put together a very friendly Sunday-afternoon's racing for six slot-car enthusiasts. The overall tone of the event was fun, but serious, and it certainly lived up to it.

The meeting had been a long time coming. About three years previously I'd run a similar two-lane event for friends. It had been tremendous fun and I'd promised to put another one together at some stage. This time I was determined to have a four-lane circuit, and, if possible, to continue with the theme of that last meeting – modern and revival.

While I'm certainly into the speed and handling of modern Scalex, Fly and Ninco magnet cars, and like having classes for them, I still hanker after seeing older, non-magnet Scalextric vehicles powering around a circuit, big tail slides a go-go, with that distinctive RX motor throb amid the gentle murmur of sweetly meshed pinions and crown wheels. And that smell! Nothing can beat the distinctive aroma of hot armatures and singed braids. Wonderful.

So I planned an event featuring older and newer cars, hence the title Modern and Revival. Originally I'd intended to include classes for Formula Juniors and early 60s F1s, but sadly in the days running up to the meeting I'd been unable to service and restore sufficient vehicles to fulfil the classes. I therefore compromised slightly, choosing one 70s vintage, one modern-retro, and four modern classes.

And, to retain that vintage touch, I added a number of parade laps – and some fast ones – for my 60s Scalextric and Airfix cars, and invited competitors to bring additional classic cars to test and parade.

The venue was the main bedroom in my house in south London, and I had my work cut out right from the start. The day before the meeting I had begun disassembling my bed and stripping the room of nearly all furniture to provide sufficient space for the proposed four-lane Ninco layout. There was so much to do that I'd only just finished the room at 10.50am on the Sunday morning as old friend and NSCC member David Nunn arrived from north London with extra Ninco track, including – crucially – the inners, outers and outer-outers needed to make up the four-lane.

Dave had been severely delayed. He'd had a power cut in the middle of the night and when the electricity came back on in the early hours, the power shower, which had been inadvertently left on, burst into life, sending water spurting everywhere, including downstairs. When Dave woke up, he found that he'd loads of mopping up to do before leaping in his van to drive over to me. How he'd also found time to make sandwiches for his fellow competitors was well beyond me, but he had!

A cup of tea later, and Dave went into action. Experienced at building four-lane Ninco circuits (which have proved popular at Bishops Stortford and Ashford swapmeets), he quickly put together a challenging circuit on my carpeted floor. Running clockwise, a fast start/finish straight led into a long sweeping right hand bend, flowing into another sweeping right hander, then into a further fast straight, before slowing for a tight right hand parabolica and then jinxing through some vicious esses into a nifty tight-left switchback section, then back out into another right hand parabolica before rejoining the main straight. Glorious.

While the two main straights and sweeping top bends were definitely very fast, care was required through the switchback, the esses and the parabolicas, particularly on the inner and outer lanes. It was a reasonably balanced =>

circuit, although there were some advantages on having the middle lanes. To equal things out, competitors were encouraged to swap lanes between events, and we ran box-standard cars with standard Ninco throttles and separate power supplies for each lane. As ever, the Ninco track worked a dream, giving a smooth run; it's great stuff.

Having tested the track, we were just putting the borders in, when the door bell rang. It was 12.55pm, five minutes before the agreed start time for practising, and competitors were already arriving. We'd just finished building the Gipsy Hill Modern and Revival circuit in the nick of time!

The competitors – four of whom are current NSCC members – were all reasonably good friends, although for some it was nearly three or four years since they'd last met. The racing pedigree was quite high, with nearly all of us having raced in the late 1960s and early 70s in different parts of the UK, and in various stages of competition, from home circuits to serious eight-lane slot racing. Of late, four of us had been regulars at Blyth Hill – originally a Scalextric club in Catford in the mid-90s that later became a four-lane wooden circuit in a car-welding garage.

Parade laps

As people started arriving, parade laps began in earnest. It was a particular joy to christen the circuit with my E5 Aston Martin Marshal's car, followed by an original C64 black Bentley and my C83 Sunbeam Tiger and C84 Triumph TR4. The mood of the occasion had definitely been set, and fingers were getting itchy for those throttles.

After some free practice and more parade laps – including a beautiful hand-built Robin Reliant, an FJ Lotus really gunning it and performing some terrific drifts, a modified MRRC Lotus Cortina, a C59 red BRM going like the clappers and a sedate tour of the circuit by an Airfix Sunbeam Rapier – we broke for lunch, then returned for the first racing class – four Ninco Mini Coopers, supplied by Dave.

The format we quickly adopted was retained for all classes: two qualifying five-lap sprint heats with three competitors, the winner of each heat immediately going into the four-competitor A final. The four losers from each heat went into a B-final play-off, and the top two of the B went into the A final. Points were awarded for all places in the A final, one point for fourth, two for third, three for second and four for first, giving a possible 24 points across all six classes, and a bottle of bubbly for the winner. Strategy was key – you could decide to play it safe in your heat, but if you were beaten you had to go hell for leather in the B if you were to make the A.

As space – and marshals – were at a premium, and we wanted to get through a lot of classes in just three hours, we adopted crash and burn, with the second long sweeping bend designated as a restart zone.

The Ninco Mini Coopers – red, yellow, green and blue – proved an extremely colourful and lively first class. Despite the magnets, and good handling, there was a shower of wing mirrors as the first five-lap heat got underway, and we were quickly into a restart. As the heat progressed, Billy Jenkins – who hadn't raced in ages – showed class, and stormed into the A final. In the second heat, Niall Connolly was dominant and decisively went into the A. The B final (amid ribald shouts of “losers, losers!” as the competitors gathered at the start) saw Andy Edmondson and Dave blast into the A. The A final itself was a tricky affair, with plenty of nerfing to contend with, and Niall came a cropper early on. Billy took a commanding win, taking four points, followed home by Dave (three points) and Andy (two points).

Phew! Cheers all round as that first class was over, but what were these coming up? Crikey! Seventies vintage Scalextric March 240 six-wheeler F1s – the C129 blue Rothmans and blue March and the C131 sister cars in green! In the late 70s/early 80s, these cars were pretty much state of the art for Scalextric, but after the lightning-quick, modern-magnet Ninco Minis,

they felt decidedly sluggish and outdated. Competitors relished the challenge though, and quickly adapted their technique.

Practice revealed that the handling of all the cars needed more sorting, and masking tape wiped over the rears improved things. Despite that, I failed to make it into the final, as my heat got off to a roaring start, all flying aerofoils and air boxes, with huge drifts around the parabolics. From the two heats and the B final, David, Niall, Billy and Andy went through into the A, which turned into a blistering affair. In the end, a delighted Andy came through strongly to take the final, followed home by Billy, David and Niall. Tremendous stuff.

We were into the third class, and a complete change of pace as David's flotilla of Fly/GB Track trucks lumbered onto the Gipsy Hill circuit. The two Sisus – a black one and a red and white – plus a yellow Mercedes Benz seemed well sorted, but Dave's green Merc truck was straight out of the box and needed a few laps to settle. For some competitors it was their first encounter with the trucks, and reactions were mixed, but no one could doubt that the sight of these huge monsters in tight formation was awesome. The parabolics – even with borders – proved very tricky for the trucks, and a few became croppers during the heats as they put a wheel or two wrong, or deslotted and ran straight into the barriers and the odd competitor's knee. Ouch!

The heats progressed and to my astonishment I found myself in the A final, along with Billy (who was having a very consistent afternoon), Dave and Niall. I'm afraid I was one of the first to make a mistake, crashing inevitably at the first parabolica, and was grateful to pick up a point in fourth, Billy came third, David second, and Niall romped home in first. Some thrilling encounters, and great fun for all.

Halfway stage

We'd now reached the halfway stage of the meeting, so I totted up the scores. Martyn Hey had yet to score, I was in fifth with one point from my recent truck meanderings, ahead of me were Andy and Niall with six points each, in

second place was Dave with eight, and Billy was leading the competition with a storming nine.

A short break, with some more parade laps followed. My C1 Alpine Renault and C2 Matra Jet rumbled into life and roared round the circuit, followed by a variety of American stockers from Martyn, and then – with a dramatic amount of drifts and Ackermann steering antics – my green Airfix Zodiac toured majestically round for a couple of laps. Fantastic.

Soon we were back racing, this time with those devilish Ninco go karts. You need deft and smooth trigger control to get the best out of them, and on this circuit they fairly hummed along, although again the parabolics caught people out. With the heats out of the way, the A final took off. I was astounded to find myself in second early on, and managed to hold the position, but I couldn't catch Billy who was way out front. And that's how it finished, Martyn picking up one point, Dave two, three for myself and Billy taking four.

Modern SCX Le Mans cars, with their Xenon lights flaring, were the penultimate class. With the cars' extraordinary performance, almost glued to the track, lap times zoomed up. Consequently we boosted the heats to ten laps in length, and they were some of the closest yet. Billy was a surprise loser in his heat, giving us all a chance to catch him up in the championship.

Into the A went Niall, Martyn, David and myself for what could prove to be a vital race. No sooner were we away when there was a big off at the first bend. Away we went again, and there was another big off, this time involving even more cars. Two restarts meant a sudden-death start, which really racked up the tension. The third time we were away cleanly, and a fast, very hectic final followed, with David picking up a point, Martyn taking third, myself second, and Niall on unbeatable form in first.

As we came up to the final class I quickly looked at the scores. Although Billy was still leading the championship on 13 points, David – on 11 – was a definite contender for the title if he could make it through to the final and win. Niall – now on 10 – still had a dog's leg chance

of taking the championship, but the rest of us ⇒ myself on seven, Andy still on six, and Martyn on three – were out of the running, although naturally we gamely battled on!

So, on to that final class – Fly and GB Track retro Le Mans Porsches. I'd picked up all of the cars, brand new, for about £11 each (a great bargain!) at the Milton Keynes swapmeet. Bought specially for this event, this was their first proper outing. The heats were great, with the little Porsche 908/3s proving slightly more nimble than the 917 Spyders, and again lap times were so fast that we pushed both the heats and the finals up to ten laps. Into the A final came championship leader Billy, along with David, Martyn and myself. Now only David could beat Billy. It was just possible, but only just.

A flurry of laps unfolded, and it was fast and furious stuff as the Porsches flew around the circuit, with David ending up scraping one point, myself in third picking up two, Martyn

getting his best result of the afternoon in second, and, triumphantly Billy in first place, picking up a full four points.

I totted up the final scores for the championship – in joint fifth were Andy and Martyn with six points, I was fourth on nine points, in third was Niall with ten points, David was second with 12 points, and the afternoon's worthy winner was Billy on 17 points. He may not have raced for a few years, but had lost none of his edge. Not only that, but having donated the winning bubbly in the first place, he actually ended up giving his prize to me, as he's not very keen on bubbly!

That was the end of the official Gipsy Hill Modern and Revival meeting, but not the end of a great afternoon. As some competitors left for home, we went down to three-lane racing, using Power Sledge 60s Scalex cars, and the recent Scalextric and Carrera American muscle cars (brilliant fun!). I was quite sad when we eventually called a halt and took the track down at about 7pm.

Five days later, and I've still yet to reassemble my bed. In fact I'm quite tempted to put up a large and tricky two-laner for myself. Now, where's that Scalextric Austin Healey 3000 and the Mercedes 190? . . . ■

BITS AND PIECES

Carrera Bargain?

“Hi Brian, out shopping in Argos last night with the better half and a quick flick through the Easter sale catalogue revealed a bargain Carrera Le Mans set including Audi and Bentley for only £17.99! Hope this is of interest - *John Palmer.*”

Thus ran a recent email I received; naturally enough I had a brief look at the Argos website and quickly bought one of the sets. I had been thinking about buying the cars for some time and this was too good an opportunity to miss; even if I threw the track away I was still quids in!

I later discovered that the news had also appeared on various slot-car websites and stores throughout the country were quickly stripped of all the available sets. Within 24 hours the offer was withdrawn - only to reappear a few days later at the higher price of £27.99!

Strangely enough huge numbers of sets (minus cars) and individual Audis and Bentleys soon began to surface on eBay. Needless to say, the people who bid for them didn't get quite such a bargain!

Slot-Tech Porsche Challenge 2004

The Porsche Challenge is now a National event. Last year's Winners were Ross McKie (Seniors) and James Johnson (Juniors).

This year's event will be run at five venues including:

North Staffs (Sandtex routed track), Hamilton (Sandtex routed track), Preston (Polyurethane routed track), Pendle (Polyurethane routed track) and Wolverhampton (Ninco sectional track). Entries are limited to about 50 racers depending on the computer system that is being used. Three pin plugs are used at all events with most power supplies being regulated except North Staffs.

For more information contact Jim Brown on 01772 703375.

Bargain slot-car hunt?

For those of you with Sky TV *Brian Mitchell* informs me of a newish programme on the Men and Motors channel called “Automobilia”. It is a car enthusiasts version of “Bargain Hunt” where two teams are given some cash to spend on motoring related items. Apparently this includes diecasts and slot-cars and, with digital racing on the horizon, gives a new meaning to the phrase “cheap as chips”!



Letter from Canada

By Gary Clift

Having emigrated to Canada some 18 months ago now, there are certain things about Blighty in general, and the NSCC in particular that one can reflect on from afar. Think along the lines of, “you appreciate a good thing when its gone,” from this side of the Atlantic. From the UK side, one should be thinking “you’ve never had it so good,” or “make hay whilst the sun shines.”

On the question of swappies, what this means is that if some people think there are not enough, then they certainly get a lot more than here. Toy fairs and swappies are non-existent in Canada! So, before adversely commenting about location/date/frequency then please appreciate that they are there at all. Not everyone is unhappy, one way or the other, but please consider that it is better than none at all.

As well as swapmeets and toyfairs you also have all the wonderful motor sport events where there are many opportunities for slot, or car in general, purchases to be had, e.g. Autosport International, Goodwood, etc. I think you can tell what I “miss” about UK the most!

Running a club is a generally thankless task, as you can never please all the people all the time. I know this from first hand experience, having formed and run VW clubs in the UK in the early 80s. The biggest asset for any club is its members. It is generally formed by, and run for, the members, and the biggest beneficiary should be its members. BUT, it’s a two way street. What you get out of the club, enjoyment/facility wise, is directly proportional to what you put in. So, if you join up, receive the (excellent) Journal, but never attend a swapmeet, then that’s fine, but it can be so much more. The NSCC’s biggest asset is the meeting of its members to exchange ideas, buy/sell/swap items, and socialise about all

things slot/motorsport/cars in general. This is what swapmeets are all about, and should be the core of the club social scene. This is also why the NSCC/Hornby weekend is such a great event.

With reference to swapmeet location, it’s really one of those “can’t please all the people all the time” things, as no matter where you live, there will always be one that’s real close, and another that’s a pain to get to. From my point of view, these were Liphook (close in mileage, but a cross country journey), and Bishop’s Stortford (even though in the South, took longer to get to than Loughborough due to motorway link, etc). So all locations are both good and bad to all people!

Law of sod says: “when can get to swappies, nearest is at least 1 hour away. When move to place where there’s no swapmeets, nearest arrives less than 30 minutes from where you used to live.” Talking about Slough of course!

Whatever one you attend though, the atmosphere is what they are all about. The sight of all the tables stacked high with slot goodies from all over the world, the smell of plastic, and buzz of excitement are amazing. I eagerly await the bottled or canned version in time for Christmas!

Ours is a great hobby, and the difference from when I (re)started collecting in 1990 and now is amazing. More manufacturers, more choice, more swappies, more deals to be had, as more dealers equals more competition, etc. So, enjoy it all whilst it’s here (there!) Try and think what it would be like if it wasn’t, and then be thankful for what you’ve got!

Hopefully, now I have settled in I can contribute a bit more to the Journal from this side of the pond. ■

Challenger III - not the space vehicle

By Tony Secchi

Reading the previous two reports in the March 2004 issue of the Journal which related to the Scalextric Challenger system, I was interested to read what Graeme Thoburn and our esteemed Editor had to say on the subject.

I myself have recently purchased this piece of kit, ostensibly to while away the spare and dwindling hours of my lonely life racing in circles against a computer car - well something like that, although in reality I have enough trouble keeping up with my OAP mates and their cars on our conventional race days at my home track.

My observations encompass a lot of the points raised by both Graeme and Brian, although I differed in some details.

Initially I found, like Graeme, that the car either crept around slowly or flew off at the first bend, but changing the start position and using a scale rule to measure the spacing of the ancillary items correctly improved the running of the car greatly.

However, when set up to run by itself it did keep spinning out on entry to bends at various parts of my circuit. This was very frustrating as I could not get a run at it with my own car.

I had been to the Milton Keynes swapmeet (where I managed to miss meeting both Brian and Robert Bott - my fault and I do apologise). But I had the great pleasure of catching up with Colin Spark of R/S Slot Racing who supplies Ortmann replacement tyres. I had contacted him previously about these in response to the recent articles in the Journal that related to the deterioration of 'Fly' rear tyres over a period of time.

My mates and I run over 100 cars and a large majority of them are fitted with 'Fly' Marcos/Venturi rear wheels and tyres which suit our track and are more authentic for diameter, width and looks on the older sports/GT cars

that we use - particularly the Scalextric Porsche 962C Jaguar XJR/9 and Mercedes C9 etc. These cars are raced throughout the year, generally only being used once per annum whilst in competition for six races. The 'Fly' tyres have always in the past produced the goods on race days but to be honest when that particular championship class is over the cars go back into their boxes and are left to the following year.

Our season started a bit early this year and it soon became apparent that, all else being equal, some of the 'Fly' shod cars were not as quick as last year and when 'pushed' they started spinning out - cars that had super roadholding a year ago could not complete a few laps at racing speed. Most bizarre!

I then recalled the aforementioned articles about 'Fly' tyres and re-read them. This prompted me to look more closely at the rears on some of our cars and sure enough, they were going soft and becoming covered with a kind of 'oily' dampness or slime. One particular tyre (on an SRS 1 vacuum formed lexan bodied Lancia LC2) had flatted under the very light weight of the car itself whilst in storage. I decided to change the tyre, but when I tried to remove it the tyre had 'glued' itself onto the rim of the wheel and I had to cut it off, whence it excluded a profuse amount of this 'oily' gunk.

I got on to Colin and relayed my findings, with which he generally concluded. I met him the following weekend at Milton Keynes and purchased several sets of Ortmann's excellent tyres and am in the process of replacing all of the 'Fly' items that look or perform 'dodgy'. This is ongoing and I have since purchased further sets. These tyres are rubber resin slicks with terrific grip (superb as it states in the Journal advert). Every car that has them fitted has been quicker on both lanes than it was last year. Well done Colin and Mr. Ortmann. ⇨⇨

So, what has this got to do with the Challenger system? Well, after reading Brian's comments about the ovality of the set cars tyres I took them off and had a good look at them. They are treaded so not slicks and therefore have a reduced surface grip area, also they are quite firm so do not have the flexibility of other tyres that I could mention. I changed them for a set of my Ortmann tyres and hey presto! The Challenger car was transformed. No problems with grip on a dirty track, faster cornering, no wheelspin and faster top speed down the straights, also acceleration was better because the new tyres are of a slightly smaller diameter giving a better gear ratio. So far they do not seem to be affected by any debris picked up from the track and more importantly neither do the sensors.

I can now run the Challenger car over twenty five or fifty laps without it flying off or spinning out, though unfortunately it is not all that quick. With an average car I can lap it four times in 25 laps at the slow speed setting and twice at the high even though it is on the shorter inner lane and my car is on the outer longer one.

O.K O.K my cars have all been race tuned and worked on whereas the Challenger is bog standard except for the rear tyres. However, all the cars I used have standard 'old style' Mabuchi motors and drive trains and are themselves very old.

The Challenger is good value for under £50.00 but I think that it is still in the 'toy' stage. It is a bit fiddly and pedantic to set up and can at times be erratic in use - time may improve it but like Brian I also think that customers are entitled to have it run properly out of the box.

Of course, it is a compromise and probably aimed at the general public for a 'now and again' racing session with young children over Christmas. It could be modified and at the risk of invalidating the guarantee I may open it up and have a go at the innards. A more powerful, flexible engine with a bigger pinion may do the trick but I will leave that to the future.

The product shows originality and ingenuity in the technical sense but for us hardened 'pros' of slot racing it is not quite up to the mark. This, of course, is only my own personal opinion, other buyers may differ but that is not the fault of the product - you could not expect Hornby to produce a system that beats the crap out of every average customer. They would not sell many would they?

The system has to be set up every time you use it - the magnetic holder plate cannot be left in-situ under the track as it would interfere and slow down the progress of any conventional car driven on that lane. The smart key that fits into the power base takes the place of the feed to that lane and the batteries should not be left in place within the gantry base to prevent leakage. However, once you have made provision for these items and marked out where they go it is only a few minutes to get set up.

As stated, I think that this system is more of a toy than a serious racing tool. It cannot cheat, it stays on the track but it is not all that fast. To coin a suggestion from Brian it would be interesting to run two Challenger cars on the same circuit and just spectate from your easy chair. In the meantime, I am trawling through over 100 race results to find the slowest times recorded one of my own cars so that I can compete with the Challenger on relatively equal terms. At the end of the day I did not find it developed properly or quick enough and for a seasoned racer that is not good enough. Maybe my expectations were too high but that is how I found it.

Just as a closer, if anyone has a rear end grip problem with their race cars I suggest that they get in touch with Colin Spark at R/S Slot Racing (see the advert in the Journal). He carries a vast range of replacement tyres for all makes and eras and I can recommend them.

Once again, I have no vested interest. I am just a very satisfied customer of a very fine product and find Colin, like all NSCC members, very approachable and a pleasure to talk to and do business with. He not only delivers he proffers advice and experience and is a nice bloke. You cannot ask for more than that. ■

Slot-Car display cabinet for around £50

By Dave Morrison

Here is a way to build your own display cabinet for slot-cars which looks reasonable, and has sliding 'glass' doors, for around £50. The size described below will hold 40 cars, but you can make it bigger or smaller as you require. The cars sit on shelves with a slot for the guide blade, and at an angle of about 30 degrees, so it is viewed front/side and on all its wheels.

Parts needed

Here's what you'll need to make a cabinet 910mm wide x 590mm high x 235mm deep (don't ask why the odd measurements – that's just how this one turned out in order to fit in the wall space allocated to it):

❶ **Contiboard 230mm wide 15mm**, cut into the following lengths: 2x590mm (side panels), 2x880mm (top and bottom panels), 3x880mm (shelves). The 3 shelves then need to have their width reduced to 200mm. B & Q £9.66.

I used white Contiboard, but you can use whatever you like. Get B & Q to cut the pieces for you. They may charge a total of £2.50 for this including the hardboard below.

❷ **White faced hardboard**, 1200mm x 750mm reduced to 910mm x 590mm. £2.18. Again, get B & Q to cut it for you. This will be the backboard.

❸ **Corner Flange Brackets x 4**. B & Q £2.88.

These will be used at the top and bottom inside corners.

❹ **1 x top 'M' channel, 1 x bottom 'W' channel**. B & Q £5.62.

These are for the 'glass' sliding doors and are

plastic extrusions which accept 4mm thick glass. The 'M' channel has deeper slots than the 'W' channel.

❺ **1 x pack 1 ft square polystyrene ceiling tiles**. B & Q £4.28.

These will be cut-up and used to cover the shelves.

❻ **2 x Plastic mushroom knobs**. B & Q £1.36.

For the 'glass' doors.

❼ **1 x Clear Polystyrene sheet 1200mm x 600mm x 4mm**, cut to two pieces 450mm wide x 550mm high. B & Q £20.97.

These are the sliding (bathroom cabinet-style) doors.

❽ **20 x 35mm and 16 x 5/8ths counter-sunk chipboard screws**. B & Q £2.50, or find some from a previous project.

❾ **20 x 1 inch nails**, for attaching the backboard.

❿ **Glue Stick (Pritt or Uhu)**, Staples 49p or something.



Main parts required

Assembly instructions

Take the side panels, and mark and drill holes where the top/bottom panels, and the shelves will go. Shelves should be flush to the rear face. Countersink the holes and use the 35mm chipboard screws to fit the top and bottom panels first. Now fit the corner flange brackets using the small screws. These brackets will be used to mount the cabinet to the wall. Next fit the three shelves in the same manner as the top and bottom. Turn the structure onto its front face, and measure corner to corner to ensure the structure is square. Now fit the hardboard using the 1 inch nails, and with the white face innermost.

The 'glass' doors slide in the dual-channel plastic 'M' and 'W' extrusions glued to the top and bottom panels. These channels can be bought with an adhesive strip already fitted. If your local B & Q doesn't stock these, then you can buy just the extrusion and glue it yourself using some plastic adhesive. Glue them to the top and bottom panels, just forward of the three shelves. The top channel is deeper than the bottom one, so that the doors can be inserted into the top channel and dropped into the bottom one.

Slot-cars have the guide-blade which needs to be accommodated in the shelves. Do this by covering the shelves with pieces of polystyrene ceiling tiles. Cut the tiles to trapezoid and triangle shapes, and glue them a slot-width apart on to the shelves using the glue stick. Weigh the tile pieces down with some books, and leave until the following day.



The shelves in place complete with guide slots

The clear polystyrene sheeting needs to be cut, and this is a pig of a job. If you saw it, you risk breaking or chipping it. Also, if you use a powersaw, the polystyrene will melt. The only real way to cut it is to score it with a Stanley-knife, and snap it. It's scary but it does work. Next drill a couple of holes for the knobs. The cabinet can now be mounted on the wall and the doors inserted.



Now populate it with your favourite cars and admire your handiwork, and your cars. ■