

# Now That Reminds Me...

*What's the difference between Michael Schumacher, Carlos Sainz and Sylva's Jeremy Phillips? Michael and Carlos lose their cool under extreme pressure but Jeremy doesn't. Ian Hyne witnessed a day of high drama.*

When Michael Schumacher's Ferrari blew a rear tyre at Suzuka, the World Championship went with it. Michael heaved it onto the verge, slammed the wheel on the scuttle and stomped off.

Carlos Sainz and co-driver, Luis Moya, were rather more demonstrative following the fire that robbed them of a World Rally Championship within five hundred yards of the end of the last stage of the Network Q Rally of Great Britain. All restraint gone, Carlos kicked the car to inflict nothing more serious than a Schumacher-style dent, while Luis fared better by smashing the rear window with a perfectly weighted swing of his helmet. Faced with such all-consuming frustration, I might have thrown my teddy out of

the pram too, but not Sylva's Jeremy Phillips.

While everyone else was preparing to rip a branch off the nearest tree to administer a Basil Fawlty-style thrashing to the endlessly unco-operative new Sylva Phoenix, Jeremy alone remained focused on the problem at hand and finally fixed it. And just what was the problem that pushed a group of men dangerously near to physically assaulting a defenseless Phoenix? You can take your pick.

The car, a new version of Sylva's familiar road/race smoothie, was hurriedly finished and fired up just in time to make its hastily arranged public debut at Ireland's Mondello Park circuit. Run late on Thursday, it went onto a trailer and over to Ireland on the Friday, and

arrived at the circuit on Saturday to be greeted by members of the grid who had contested Ireland's inaugural Sylva Striker Sports Car Challenge for 1998.

Off the trailer, it fired once and died, after which it failed to start again. The problem was traced to the fuel pump that had given faultless service for the previous season but which was adamant it would not serve for another. The ever-helpful lads at the circuit soon found a replacement, which was duly fitted. Sadly, this too proved faulty and burned out a bit of wiring to underline the fact.

At least it was sunny, so Jeremy gritted his teeth, smiled and fitted a third pump, which did the trick. The car ticked over happily to warm up, after which Jeremy took it for a quick circuit of the paddock to check all systems were go.

Predictably, they were not. The throttle jammed wide open, causing momentary panic in the cockpit before Jeremy hit the ignition cut-out just as the jammed throttle threatened to override the brakes and cause a collision between the Sylva's sexy new bodywork and an unyielding oil-drum. Bonnet up and linkage fiddled with, Jeremy started the car in gear and almost accomplished what the jammed throttle had failed to do. Clutch dipped and car restarted, a tentative tour of the paddock had the throttle jammed again but at least he avoided the oil-drums!

This time it was twin Webers off and a good bit more fiddling, during which process the carbs were tipped over, upside-down and generally shaken about. It all went back on, the car started and the throttle jammed!

This time erudite advice prompted some peering up the chokes

where a bit of gravel was found stuck under the butterfly. How it hadn't been sucked into the engine or dislodged during the removal and refitting of the carbs, heaven only knows. With a cry of triumph, it was removed. The car started on the button and executed a perfect lap of the paddock. Relief...

Sensing success, Jeremy slipped into race overalls, helmet and goggles and took to the track, only to discover the challenging nature of Mondello's tight, complex-cornered circuit. He also lost the fan belt.

True to form, the trackside assistants came up with a replacement, which the motor shredded inside twenty seconds! Alternator pulley out of line. With that fixed with the aid of a few strategically placed washers, the Italian twin-cam-powered car took to the track in earnest and ran faultlessly with only a brief pause while sheep were removed from the circuit. A Toyota van played the part of the dog. Then the Phoenix played its joker.

The engine was actually a Lancia unit which, due to being canted over in its original home, had a sloping sump when fitted upright in the Sylva. Increasingly enthusiastic use round hard right-handers caused the predictable oil starvation with the result that the first knock was heard on the last but one lap of the day. When the car came to rest in the paddock, the continuous rattle was instantly and unanimously diagnosed. No need for collective head scratching, pursed lips, sharp intakes of breath or swapping of technical theories; it was an open-and-shut case. Big-end failure. Oh happy day!

I'm sure Ferrari and Toyota could recount similar tales of endless woe, but Jeremy gets full marks for retaining his cool and taking a philosophical view of the day's events - made easier by having taken an order for a car. His surrender to stress came several hours later when, as a fine dinner drew to a convivial close, he uttered the soon to be famous phrase: "Oh dear. I seem to have drunk too much wine!"

**Below: Following a morning of unrelenting problems, the new Sylva Phoenix was enthusiastically pedalled by most drivers present prior to its final and insurmountable mechanical malady.**

