

JOHN FIFE

THE STRAIGHT-TALKING SCOT

Protecting our future heritage

Do any of you remember a time when Britain ruled the Tarmac and the gravel? For sure, the French had their endurance events and light cars, while the Germans took engineering subtlety to new levels building 17-mile race circuits and putting aircraft engines in racing cars.

But when it came to engineering excellence, ingenuity and finesse, few could touch us Brits. For instance, who would ever have thought of taking the engine out of a forklift truck and fitting it into a racing car? Colin Chapman did it for Lotus. Ken Tyrrell turned a woodshed into a Formula One factory, only a few years later leading Jackie Stewart to world domination.

If that's our heritage now, what will it be tomorrow?

We're in danger of becoming a second-class nation. We don't make motorcycles any more, damn few cars and even less vans and trucks. The Korean Hyundai-Kia conglomerate is now the world's fifth largest car producer ahead of Nissan and Honda.

China is hosting the Olympics, has a GP venue and wants a round of the World Rally Championship. It's also gobbling up the world's steel and oil, before selling it back to us as re-badged vehicles.

India is buying our luxury carmakers and all wheel drive icons, and the Russians are buying England.

It gets worse. Rally GB might drop out of the WRC in 2010 and Donington Park is being lined up to host F1 GP. I don't doubt

Donington's intentions for a minute, but I am suspicious of the motives and movements behind it all. Silverstone has made some serious investments over recent years and further plans were in place for the future. And all they get is a smack in the teeth with a torque wrench.

From footballers to F1, contracts are as bullet proof as toilet paper, which brings me to young Phillip Morrow.

Now correct me if I'm wrong, but did he, or did he not win a prize drive for a season? And what happens? The results are not instant, so he's out on his ear.

It's the same for Guy Wilks. He's proved himself, and he's still struggling to find a seat in the world championship.

What sort of message is that sending out to the sport's ambitious and talented youngsters? Here in Scotland, we're spoiled for choice at present with the likes of David Bogie, Euan Thorburn, Stevie Brown, Alick Kerr, Dave Weston and others. There's no shortage of advice, but there is no established structure to help.

The fewer manufacturers and rally teams we have in this country, the harder it will be for any of these youngsters to make it. On this basis, Louise Aitken-Walker, Colin McRae and Richard Burns will go down in the history books as GB's only World Rally Champions – and largely because no-one else will get the chance to follow them.

“Britain is becoming a second class nation”



Burns had Subaru support



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