

WORK HARD

CCC's adopted rally hero Gwyndaf Evans is a Ford man no more. He's gone all cosmopolitan and joined rally funsters Seat. Keith Walker joined the World Formula 2 Champions and Gwyndaf for the duration of the RAC Rally. It's a story of mud guts and dodgy wheel nuts!

In the game of rallying driver and manufacturer word association, the names Gwyndaf Evans and Ford have been synonymous for as long as we can remember. But not anymore. CCC's own adopted rally star (poor old Gwyndaf can't go for a pee without a CCC journo and photographer turning up) has switched camps to drive for World F2 rally champs Seat. And who can blame him? Seat has shown not only form, but serious manufacturer commitment to the World and British Rally Championships. And boy, is it working for them?

Gwyndaf's first outing in his Seat Ibiza Evolution Two Kit Car was at the Phil Price Rally school in Powys just two days before the rally. When the car arrived it had been fitted with Gwyndaf's custom-made seat and there was just time to adjust co-driver Howard Davies's seat before the boys went sideways for the first time. The only changes made for Gwyndaf since the car came out of the box were to move the shift light into his line of sight, and add a second light



RALLY SPORT

ENJOY

BUT...



to tell him when he is in second gear as a point of reference. Mind you, when you think that the car comes out of the box with about 270bhp, revving to 9500rpm, then it's not a bad box to open is it?

After five or six gravel raising laps of the rally school stage, Gwyndaf returned to the paddock. Obviously there was only one question: what did he think of the car? Once his balaclava came off this question seemed redundant, his ear-to-ear grin spoke volumes. His only concerns at this point were getting a little more roll in the front suspension and getting used to the position of the handbrake.

The handbrake on the Evo Two car is vertical and located right next to the sequential gear change. This makes sense, it is easier to pull something towards you than it is to lift something up from the side when you are sitting down. The only reason Gwyndaf had a problem with this is that after years of conditioning he instinctively reaches to the side when he is approaching a corner.

After experimenting with anti-roll bars and different ride heights Gwyndaf completed the morning's testing and was generally pleased. You must remember that this is a car which was prepared with settings for team mate Oriol Gomez. Oriol was now driving an Evolution One car run by Seat UK which he ended up crashing during the first morning of the RAC. The decision to put Gwyndaf in an Evo Two car was to have repercussions later in the Rally, but for now everything was looking as rosy as a Welshman's cheeks.

STAGE STRUCK

Saturday November 22 was the first day of the new improved rally Show in the grounds of Cheltenham race course. This year there were a record number of visitors on the opening day. Stands were taken by all the competing manufacturers as well as leading motorsport mags such as your very own **CCC**.

The rally started on the following morning and 10,000 visitors poured through the gates before 7:30am to see the start. What most of them actually saw was fog and then more fog, interrupted by bright lights. The fog did clear and when I caught up with Gwyndaf at service in the Milton Keynes Bowl he seemed relaxed but expressed some concern that he might not have been pushing hard enough in the gloom. Nevertheless the chassis was working well and his only concern was getting used to the amount of torque that was available. Gwyndaf lost some time to Alister McRae on the first two stages of the day but he had only spent three hours in the car before the rally, and was literally still leaping the ropes. Over the next six stages Gwyndaf equalled Alister's time on two stages, beat the Scot on three and was just two down on one. A spin at Silverstone cost four or five seconds and he had to cut across the field at the hairpin. Unfortunately that mistake cost Les Kolczak, **CCC's** photographer, even more. Gwyndaf ran over his camera bag and lunched a £1700 lens! Gwyndaf says he's really sorry Les.

YOURSELF

WORK HARD BUT...



● The Seat PR team spent their days painting faces and dishing out 30,000 goodie bags to grateful specccys. The service crews had to work just as hard to send Harri Rovanpera to eventual F2 victory after the disqualification of Alister McRae's Golf

it's just getting used to the car," he said.

After 10 stages Gwyndaf was a healthy second in Formula 2, 20s adrift of McRae's Golf. On the final stage of the day Gwyndaf had reduced this gap by a staggering 14s to enter day two just 6s behind. Day two started in thick fog and Gwyndaf's choice of

the hard compound, wide tyres didn't pay great dividends but he didn't go off the road either.

At the next services Gwyndaf plumped for hard compound tyres with extra cuts on the front, and a softer compound on the rear. The plan was to complete one stage and then swap the compounds round and put the harder tyres on the back when they stopped during a road section. The bizarre series of events that started when Gwyndaf was put into an Evo Two car were starting to come together.

Over the next three stages he lost a bit more time to Alister (who was driving fantastically). Gwyndaf related where the time was lost: "Through a couple of small things really, the clutch started to slip on one of the stages and when we tried to take the hard compounds off the front, two of the nuts sheared and we couldn't get the wheels off." This clutch slip and wheel nut problem were to combine with dire consequences as the day wore on. At this point Gwyndaf was second in F2 and 16th overall and as he put it, still pleased with the marriage of Seat and Evans.

While we were yacking the mechanics were trying to get the wheels off the car in order to get underneath and change the clutch. All was not going smoothly. The sheared wheel nuts had to be knocked round with a hammer and centre punch. No go. Frantic mechanics were lining up welding kit and drills as alternatives. On the passenger side the mechanics managed to drill through the wheel around the offending nut just as Gwyndaf was getting into the car. The guys on the other side managed to remove a lot of metal filings but couldn't get enough of the metal off to remove the wheel over the sheared nut.

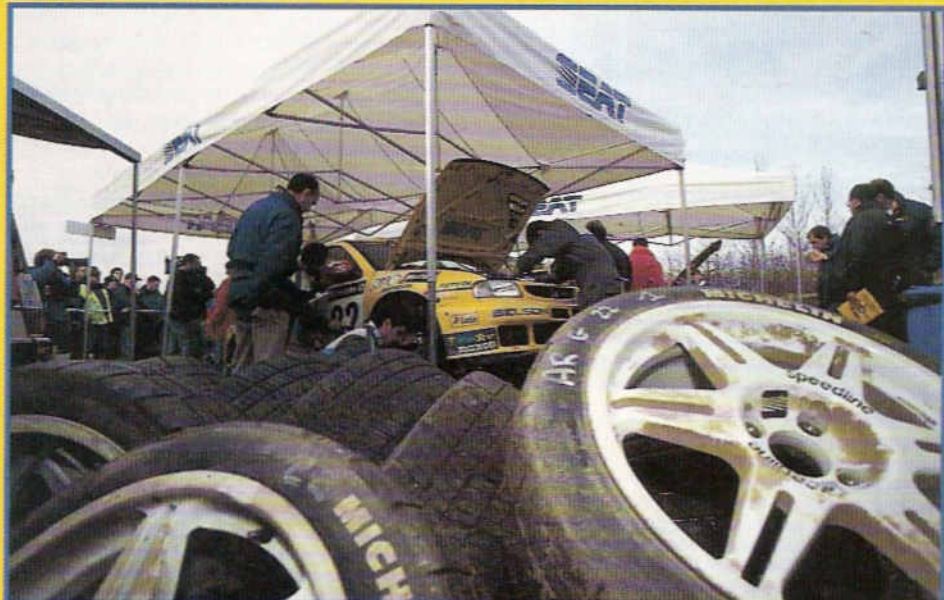
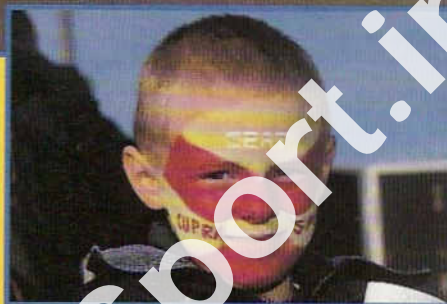
CHAOS THEORY

This is where the choice of Evo One or Evo Two comes into play. On an Evo One car they could have dropped the strut and removed the wheel, strut and hub in one go. The design of the Evo Two meant the bolt holding the bottom of the strut

◀ We checked in with the team at the Silverstone Superspecial. This was to be the most popular of the spectator stages, with both cars completing two laps side-by-side before crossing the line. To the spectators this looked like a race but Gwyndaf reckoned that he couldn't see the other guy, in fact he wasn't even looking for him. Gwyndaf beat Robbie Head in the Maxi Mégane by one second. Martin Rowe in the other Mégane took a different approach to SS8. Martin spent his time: "Split between watching the other guy and listening to pace notes. I found it difficult to do both."

GOOD START

Gwyndaf reflected on his first full day behind the wheel of an Ibiza, the longest he had spent with the car. The overall performance of the engine was good and the only niggle was a brake pedal that hit the floor on some of the tarmac stages. The gravel brakes, Gwyndaf reckoned, were not really man enough for the job. "Other than that,

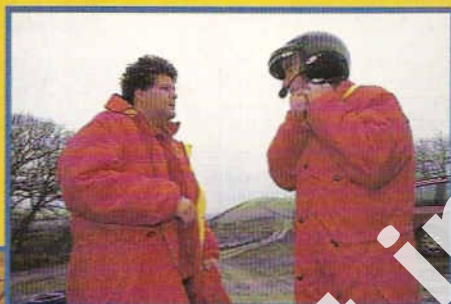
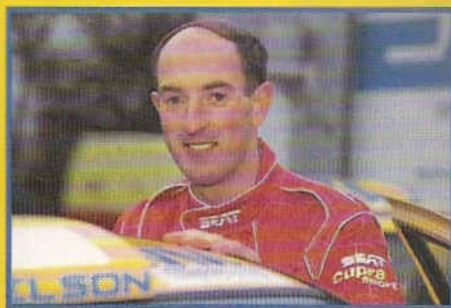


in place cannot be reached without removing the wheel. As it was, Gwyndaf and Howard had to leave the services with fresh rubber on three corners, and a rather sad one on the driver's front.

If you understand Chaos theory you might appreciate the chain of events which led to their predicament. If they had not been given an Evo Two car they could have changed the wheel and struts in one and still had enough time to replace the clutch. If they hadn't decided on the tactic of switching tyres on the road section the wheel nuts might not have sheared in the first place. Which would have enabled the mechanics to get to the dodgy clutch. Alternatively, if the clutch had lasted to the next service Gwyndaf might have won Formula 2. If, if, if. You could look at the possibilities in any number of combinations but you can't change what actually happened. The fact was, the clutch could not be changed at the Dolgellau service area and that was why Gwyndaf's RAC ended in the middle of SS17.

Gwyndaf ended up going in to SS16 with a slow puncture on the one tyre they couldn't change, a clutch which was starting to slip and unsure whether or not he had picked up a penalty for late servicing. On special stage 17 the Ibiza put itself out of its misery by finally detonating the

plenty to be upbeat about. I expected him to be gutted and offered the opinion that, despite a bad finish it was still an amazing debut. "I think that we just have to look at the positive side of all of this, we have to go forward, a few weeks ago I wasn't doing the RAC Rally, I ended up being entered by Seat Sport in the Evolution 2. It's been



incredible. I had three hours in it before the event and we are swapping seconds with the fastest that I've been in Britain for five years, so I think that it looks good for me and Seat."

Naturally Gwyndaf was impressed with the professionalism of the team comparing them favourably with Prodrive despite the day's problems. "Yeah I've thoroughly

enjoyed working with them and I can't wait for next year and that stems from the bottom to the top. There are some things that we can fine tune for the car for Britain next year, like the handbrake, but I can't wait."

Howard Davies concurred: "When you go out with a mechanical failure it is really not your fault and you can do nothing about it. There is no point getting all depressed (try telling that to Richard Burns!) and what have you, it is just one of those things. There is nothing that we could have done differently, we started to have a problem and we told them (the team) but we didn't have the time to change it.

"The rally has been really positive. It has been a fantastic test, we've had a lot of mileage in the car; it is fantastic to do the 17 or 18 stages that we have done and go straight into the British championship next year. We know where we can make the car better, we know the characteristics of the car.

"Deep down the result was never going to be that important. In fairness we haven't had a stage where we've said that's the best crack we could have had. To come from a car which has been built around you for five years to go to a completely different make of car and not even know where the switches are, to get in there and to be competitive, to beat Mark Higgins to beat the Renaults. I mean, hats off to Alister McRae; he is slightly in a class of his own. But, ooohhh, those boys (indicating Alister's service area in the next cow shed) will have to go, next year we will have them.

"It is a great basis to start on for next year, we really feel that we can win in this car and up until now it has been an unknown quantity. Now we know this is the kit like, it is good. I'm now going to get something to eat, my second favourite thing ha ha ha." With banana in hand Howard and Gwyndaf ducked in the motorhome, no doubt to plan their assault on next year's British Rally Championship. ■

clutch. Game over. This left me in a minor predicament how to you approach the 1996 British Rally Champion, a man that the people of Wales treat with the same reverence that is given to visiting heads of state and world class rugby players, when he has just retired from the RAC Rally? Obviously he is going to be a bit down and may not feel like talking to an annoying journalist who was been getting in his way at every opportunity for the past four days.

I needn't have worried. If I didn't know better, I would have thought he had won the event, but then scratch the surface and there was



● By the end of their RAC, (during SS17) Gwyndaf and Howard had confirmed the potential of the Ibiza Evo Two Kit Car and the pair of them can't wait to get cracking with next year's British Championship