

Logistics department

As nearly 30 shiny race cars make their way round to the grid for the first of this weekend's three Dunlop MSA British Touring Car Championship races, their appearance and readiness to do battle is the result of a minutely-planned programme of preparation. While the outcome of the next 25 minutes or so is largely down to the driver ~ also, perhaps, a little luck ~ the logistics of getting him there involve numerous others.

To learn a little more, we went to Wrotham in Kent, just five miles down the road from Brands Hatch and home to Motorbase Performance, a team well-versed in running multiple race programmes in parallel. In the past, that has included a brace of touring cars and up to six drivers in the Porsche Carrera Cup GB. This year, in addition to the two Airwaves Racing NGTC Ford Focus of Mat Jackson and Aron Smith, there is the Addison Lee S2000 Focus for Liam Griffin (and a second car to join him once built), plus a crack at defending the British GT Championship with reigning Champion Michael Caine and new team-mate Ahmad Al-Harthy.

Leaving aside the GT team ~ they're in action at Rockingham this weekend ~ we decided to concentrate on the BTCC operation, in conversation with Team Manager Oly Collins, who started on the topic of running more than two cars:

"The logistics of a race team are always quite involved, much more than most people get to see ~ what the fans



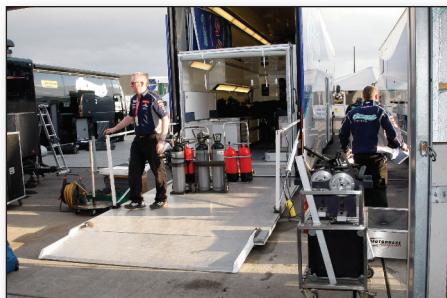
tend to see is the race cars, a group of people operating them in their various roles, and a couple of trucks. But there's a lot more involved than that!

"In general, running just two cars is quite a bit easier than running three or four. Most things motor sport are set up for two cars, trucks take two cars, garages take two carseven our ears can only really take two cars! So, to run three you are almost equipped to run four!"

Back at Motorbase HQ, there's a full-time staff of around 10, more when it's busy, whose roles vary depending on the workload. Their working hours vary but, as Collins explains: "Basically,

we all work to get the job done and I have to say the team we have are amazing. More often than not, it's a lot harder at the start of the year, because things are changing so much with new parts and developments with the cars ~ between January and April, there are a lot of weekends and late nights but, by May, it normally settles down a bit more."

Prep for the next race meeting starts on the Sunday night of the previous one, when a group of weary individuals arrive back, sometimes celebrating a successful weekend, sometimes downcast after things did not go so well. Collins continues: "Our main



DUNLOP MSA BRITISH TOURING CAR CHAMPIONSHIP 2013

FEATURE

truckie Jason, otherwise known as 'Grubby', is in control of most of the logistics ~ he looks after three trucks on the BTCC side, along with some help from the others when they are available. When we get back to the workshop, depending on the time, we unload the cars, tools and spare tyres (32 per car) among other bits and bobs.

"Reprep starts first thing Monday morning. Depending on the state of the cars after the race weekend, they may need to go down to our fabrication department for repair and respray ... or they may just have a mechanical reprep. This involves engine out each time, the engines are then bore-scoped by Mountune, the clutch is checked for wear, the gearbox internals checked and ratios changed ready for the next race meeting. The suspension is generally stripped



and checked over thoroughly, with various items crack-checked ~ most items are lifted, so will be replaced as necessary. The dampers are checked on our dyno and rebuilt ready for the next meeting.

"Grubby's job is to make sure the trucks are fully loaded with everything we need, from the race cars, all the spares, tools, oils and lubricants, even down to the Autoglym stock for keeping everything clean and shiny! And then we're on our way to shakedown to do systems checks on all the cars prior to heading to the race track."

The team will arrive for the next Championship round on

How many ...

race/qualifying/testing kms ~ 4500 to 5000 per car
litres of fuel for race cars ~ 5000 plus
tyres used ~ 240 per car (inc testing)
kms travelled to events ~ 5,100 per vehicle
hotel rooms booked ~ 160
hospitality guests ~ 700

... in a season? Yep!

PS ~ how many new grey hairs on Dave Bartrum's head ~ minus 20 (seems the fall-out exceeds the growth rate these days!)

Thursday afternoon, to start the set-up, which will take until Friday evening. The full-time workshop team more than doubles in number on the engineering and technical side with the addition of what are fondly known as 'weekend warriors', but there's also an influx of liveried team

personnel working on the equally important areas of hospitality, PR and general team presentation. By the time everyone is on board, there are more than 40 people supporting the three cars.

As Collins further explains: "The garages and hospitality are set up at the same time, but there is more than just the set-up being done, there's the trucks being cleaned and polished, cars being checked over and so forth, and the hospitality bus being readied for a hungry team on Saturday morning [*I can personally vouch for how good a Motorbase breakfast is!* ~ Ed]. So, Friday is a good long day."

Once the dramas of free practice, qualifying and racing are over, it is time to start the whole process again ... but in reverse. A final word from Collins: "Packing up is much faster ... with the incentive of going home! We finish the last race around 6pm and we would normally be away from the circuit by 8pm at the latest. It's always quicker packing up ... but not much fun: it's like my five-year-old packing away the toys, only the toys we play with are just much more expensive!"

Mark Wheeler *

* with lots of help from Nicki Hickman

