

CIRCUIT IMPRESSIONS

Two Tigas and a Ralt:

a menagerie at home on Goodwood

LIFE is unfair. At short notice the amiable Tim Schenken, now a respectable retired racing driver, rang up and invited us to join a test day devoted to the Tiga products produced by the concern Schenken runs with another former racer, Howden Ganley. As an aside he mentioned that the Ralt RT3-Toyota that Tiga ran for Italian Daniele Albertin in the British series would also be present. As a mid-season switch to the RT3 from a March chassis gave Sweden's Stefan Johansson the prestigious Vandervell-backed British title this year, we thought it would be worth driving. Particularly as we have experienced Renault and Triumph Dolomite power in Formula 3 chassis, but never, until this offer, the most successful units. These are prepared by the Pedrazzani brothers' Italian Novamotor company on a 1.6 litre Toyota twin cam base.

Unfairly the Ralt stole the show in our memories, but first a little more about the host's products that were on hand.

From the embryo ranks of Formula Ford there was Tim Lee Davey's Tiga (pronounced *tiger* according to Schenken). A 1979 car driven with great success by James Weaver in that season, it had been updated to this year's specification and used with great vigour to contest the 1980 Dunlop Star of Tomorrow Championship, and attract the BBC's attention for a programme in the Esther Rantzen series.

To be fair to the myriad makers of FF cars in this country, we don't test individual examples as there's always a new top chassis 'round the corner'. The company's best way of achieving sales is by consistent success in the countless Championship rounds held all over the country. From Tiga's viewpoint it was interesting to hear that, even when James Weaver very nearly won the most prestigious series in FF — Townsend Thoresen — Tiga still did not sell many cars in the UK category. You have to win and fill in some of the supporting front places before the FF fashion will swing your way.

As a general progress note — it's been seven years since the writer has driven one of the tubular-frame 1600 Fords — it is worth saying that a competitive car like the Tiga feels a lot more rigid in construction than the front-runners used to feel. According to ex-Unipart F3 and F1 driver Tiff Needell — an expert on the category in the seventies — this dates back to the Crossle 25F of 1974, which had a much stronger spaceframe than had previously been thought necessary. Items like square tube, more frequent use of bracing in the engine bay, and rollover hoop areas account for much of this improvement in feel and lap times over the years.

Naturally the price has caught up with the times too. When Schenken made his name in British FF of the late sixties "a complete car cost about £1,000; now you're lucky to get a new engine for that!" The Tiga FF will cost £5,250 as



THE TIGA FF driven in 1979 by James Weaver, but since updated and run by Tim Lee Davey.

a rolling chassis in 1981 and will probably continue to sell better overseas (particularly the USA) than it does in Britain.

Though rather overshadowed by the rows over Formula 1 and the rather confusing 1982 onward international Group C regulations, sports car racing at grass roots level has revived considerably in Britain in recent seasons.

The cause is a formula entitled Sports 2000 which began in the 1977 seasons. In both 1977 and 1978, Lolas with the broad, upturned boat, body style of the old 2-litre-FVC design (the T490 and T492 when equipped with a 2-litre Cortina motor and complying with Sports 2000 regulations) dominated the championship. Toward the end of 1978 former F3, FF and FF2000 Champion Ian Taylor borrowed a car and won a Sports 2000 race easily.

Since then neither he nor Tiga have had to look at the back end of Lolas anymore, Taylor winning the 1979 and 1980 Championships, Tigas finishing first, second and third in the 1980 series. Runner-up was the talented James Weaver in the company's SC79 similar design of 1979. Lack of finance forcing Weaver into this category rather than F3.

The Tiga we tried, Taylor's SC80 Championship car backed by Queensgate Securities, demonstrated the kind of 135 m.p.h. machine that results from regulations designed to provide a taste of sports car racing at an affordable cost. There is a simple monocoque chassis with tubular frame for the dry-sumped Sam Nelson version of the Cortina engine (yielding around 130 b.h.p. and capable of 7,000 r.p.m. reliably). Further rearwards is a four speed Hewland gearbox, without limited slip differential, in the transaxle.

Naturally there are four wheel disc brakes: the type are not restricted, but with only 480 kg/1,058 lbs to stop, these do not have to be massive. Maximum wheel width (Compomotive alloy on 'ours') will be 8 in rear and 6 in front, with slicks and wets as specified by regulations and supplied by Dunlop: a silencer is also mandatory these days, just as it is on the majority of 1981 British racing formulae. A straightforward wishbone suspension layout is used with steel-cased shock

absorbers within coil springs.

We were allowed a few laps in the rain while on slick tyres: it probably says all there is to say about the Tiga SC80-Nelson that the experience caused no worries at all. The chassis is so easy to balance, via the 11 in. diameter leather-rimmed steering wheel, that any front or rear wheel slide can be caught as it develops, not reacted to in panic that an accident may occur.

This was a stark contrast to the Tiga I drove in 1978 in similar greasy conditions. That twitched all over the place and was a general handful compared to the rival Lola of the period assessed at the same time and track.

I asked how they had managed to improve the car. We received a reply to the effect that it was the result of having more competitive drivers feeding back better information, rather than a drastic loss of weight, though some aerodynamic changes to help straightline speed were described. Now they have got it right there seems to be little complacency. Sales manager Ian Taylor told us of a number of 1981 modifications adding, "our car will cost £8,750 in 1981. I would allow £1,600 for an engine and between £400 and £600 a race as a realistic running cost." Against that I have seen an unsubstantiated claim for a novice completing 15 Sports 2000 races for £2,500 using a Lola worth comfortably under £5,000 complete, but nobody could pretend that was for a regular front runner.

Memories of 2000? As ever, a competitive car in this category is perhaps one of the easiest types to drive quickly on early acquaintance. Efficient brakes, handling and a comfortable cockpit allow the newcomer to gain confidence quickly. This SC80 reached 6,800 r.p.m. on what pass for straights at Goodwood very rapidly, displaying notably good acceleration in the gears once 5500 r.p.m. had been attained. At the top end the car was faster than I remember those of two seasons or so ago, and even more fun.

That's the point of this formula. You can compete against some really good men and possibly clamber into more advanced sports cars as a result (there are four long races with a £1,000 prize fund apiece in the UK this year), or just enjoy some of the overseas rounds. They have Zolder, Spa, Zandvoort and some other



ANOTHER TIGA — this time the SC80 car which Ian Taylor campaigned so successfully last year to win the Sports 2000 Championship.

interesting forays planned in a separate European series, according to Taylor. Potentially you could do 12 British events and five European ones.

Incidentally, it is a sign of the emergence of Sports 2000 as a worthwhile category, that March are now offering a £9,250 design for the category.

I saved the best 'til last, by which time it was raining properly and Schenken's concern was reflected by fitment of a proper set of wets to the £12,500 Ralt. The covers were the compulsory Goodyear G54s (likely to stay in use despite the company's withdrawal) on magnesium cast 8 in. fronts and 10 in. rear wheels.

Squeezed into the high-sided monocoque, I was immediately reminded that this was a different class of car, a proper international racer that makes demands of its driver and will prepare the sufficiently talented for Formula 1. Cocooned by the monocoque's clasp, plus that of six-point safety belts, and vestigial glassfibre seat, I gazed happily at the contents of the matt black metal fascia. A 12,000 r.p.m. tachometer — only half of those r.p.m. needed on these strangled 165 b.h.p. 2-litres — is flanked by the traditional combined minor Smiths dials for oil and fuel pressure, water and oil temperature. Below, a simple sub-panel carried the switches and knobs that operate ignition, the safety red rear light and fuel pump.

The view ahead is a little limited by the high, delicate screen, but I can see the rocker arm inboard suspension and the aerodynamically fared arms to that suspension. The Ralt was built to comply with the 1980 ban on skirts for outside F1 formulae. Thus the suspension is placed out of the air stream wherever possible, and where it is not, streamlining is inevitable. At the back the coil springs and Bilstein dampers (Koni optional) are, "mounted entirely in unit with the gearbox to give clean air flow from venturi," in the words of Ralt's promptly-posted description (I never did get anything from Tiga's sales manager, despite two requests!) and I was pleased to note that a cockpit-adjustable facility for the front roll bar was included on the Ralt 1981 specification. This might be a race-winning feature. If the driver could stay on the track in worsening conditions, and slacken off the bar, and fend off the homicidal maniacs around him in the spray!

To the right, falling as an extension of your arm and operating faster than many light switches, a gearlever to control the five-speed Hewland Mk9 gearbox at the rear. The change pattern is the normal race one of isolating first on its own, closest to the driver, and providing the top four

ratios in a conventional H like that of a normal roadgoing four speed gearbox. At Goodwood first can be forgotten after the exhilarating sprint away from the pits. Moving away from those corrugated Goodwood monuments to the fifties, often loosely referred to as pits, involved all the actions of a proper formula car. No air starter, but a prompt response when the cockpit knob was pushed. Watch the mechanical flickering of the rev-counter: pull the gear lever back into first, assisted by the mechanics pushing the rear wheels round to aid selection at a standstill. A slight grating and first goes home, the clutch fitted to engage drive only with more than 3000 r.p.m. recorded, otherwise "the wick goes out", in Weaver's advisory words. James drove the car at the televised last meeting of 1980 at Thruxton and managed a sixth with it at Thruxton (Albertin's best result was a third at Silverstone), so I took particular note when Weaver said "the Ralt gives me confidence straight away. It's particularly good on faster corners, especially that quick flat right here, Madgwick. On slower corners I found it hard to get to grips with, but it still does a good job and makes you feel at home from word go".

I did seven laps in increasing rainfall and enjoyed every one at a faster (though still modest) pace. It is impossible for a newcomer to over-emphasise the feeling of immense security that this stiffly constructed and narrow (for maximum ground effect) monocoque provides. You are worried by nothing, save doing the job of getting round the track a bit faster, in my case, or out-thinking the opposition in the case of a competitive driver. For no good reason I recalled the late Peter Reyson's remark about his Shadow GP car being as nice as a Packard compared to its predecessor. In engine and chassis this Ralt felt how a Lotus built to Mercedes standards would in road terms.

I was surprised by the outright speed. The £4,500 Toyota engine did not rev like that of a Renault, but changing at 5800 r.p.m. brought one very swiftly to an estimated 138 m.p.h. as it headed to the St. Mary's S, and on the Lavant straight. My brain told me that the Toyota provided a much more useable stream of torque than would be found in the rival engines. The motor actually pulls quite well between 4000 and 5800 r.p.m., but is mainly confined to the 5200-5800 r.p.m. band in competition. My heart told me that sitting in this single seater with its decisive brakes, leisurely breakaway, and superb steering was a tremendous privilege. It was hard

to stop grinning, though the knowledge that this is a serious racing car for drivers a decade or more junior soon wiped some of the smile from my face.

A very good car, but for the sake of host Tim Schenken I hope the F3 Tiga his company were constructing in Reading as I tested this Ralt substitute is a better chassis! Tim was typically cautious about that project, but I gather it is definitely on, and will join the list of categories Tiga will contest — which now extend to Can Am in the USA with a distinctive 'Tri-hull' machine announced late in 1980.

Founded in 1976 and nearly abandoned in that year too, after the inevitable disappointments and back-breaking work schedule of founding a small racing car concern Tiga moved to their present Caversham premises in the Reading suburbs in 1977. That 5000 sq. ft. was inhabited by Fittipaldi racing team at one time, but their ill-fortune did not transfer itself to Schenken and Ganley. Now up to 35 staff and looking for new premises, Tiga look to be solidly founded on their sports car success in Britain and more diverse success overseas. Tragically they also showed real pace in Formula 2 with the promising Hans Berger, but he was killed by a crash-fence catchpole at Zandvoort in 1980 and the team had not built another F2 at press time.

Ralt are more firmly wedded to small production runs in Formula 3, Atlantic and Super Vee. James Ogier at the Weybridge-based concern's former Brabham premises, where former Brabham designer Ron Tauranac is still firmly in charge of Ralt design, reported to MOTOR SPORT that the works are, "choc-a-block. After March helped us win the British F3 championship and a second win in the European Vee Championship — plus the strong market in F/Atlantic at present — we expect to have made 35 cars in 1980. Now we ask F3 customers to wait until April or May 1981 if they want one of our cars".

Ralt do not plan to make more than 45-50 cars a year. There are also two very strong British interests in their plans for 1981: the man who swept all before him in FF2000, Richard Trott, will be trying for more international recognition in a Ralt RT3. Then two more British drivers — Geoff Lees as a definite selection and Nigel Mansell as unconfirmed team-mate — will be fielding the technically interesting RH6 Ralt-Honda V6 in Formula 2.

Nice to see that a section of British light engineering is flourishing, even if it is all run by colonials! — J.W.



THE RALT RT3-Toyota that Tiga ran for Daniele Albertin last year, and which gave J.W. an enjoyable (if damp) seven laps of Goodwood.