



HUMBLE PYE

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“ALL IT WOULD TAKE FOR 1-LITRE F3 TO FLY IS A RACE AT MONACO”

FROM SPINDLY 500cc motorcycle-engined cars built on simple ladder frames bridging Fiat Topolino suspension to the current bewinged carbon fibre machines, Formula 3 is the most diverse international single-seater racing category in the sport's long history.

But ask any historian which phase of its evolution provided the greatest racing and those privileged to have witnessed the races of 1964-70 still go dewy-eyed over the one-litre screamers. Peaky, high-revving Cosworth MAE engines, more power than grip and frantic slipstreaming as the F1 stars of tomorrow went head to head in huge packs. Bliss!

I saw the one-litre cars fleetingly, as a lad, on pilgrimages to British Grands Prix and International Trophy meetings at Silverstone. On one memorable trip, my kid brother and I were strapped to the passenger's seat of the Rochdale Olympic which my late godfather built and my father wheeled for a while.

Watching the likes of Derek Bell, Peter Gethin, Tony Lanfranchi, Charles Lucas, Mo Nunn, UK-based American Roy Pike, Alan Rollinson, Harry Stiller, Peter Westbury and Chris Williams – the continental Europeans rarely turned up without start money – slugging it out in exquisite little Brabham, Lotus, Merlyn and Titan chassis in '67 remains fresh in my mind.

Stiller retained his British title that season, but Australian Tim Schenken and Brazilians Emerson Fittipaldi and Carlos Pace emerged in subsequent years, all bound for GP racing.

While support for the cars as an historic racing class has remained sparse on these shores, it is picking up on the continent where the F3 1000cc Historique European Trophy (www.F3historique.com) has been active for several years.

Sunday's third annual BRDC Peter Hanson Trophy race at Brands Hatch demonstrated how good it can be, with a Tecno 69 and Brabham BT15 and BT21 models chasing a Chevron B17 home, the first three blanketed by half a second at the chequered flag.

Lancastrian Hanson, an ardent Chevron campaigner, would have been proud. As he would have been of the immaculate rebuild of his 1970 B17 (beautifully detailed by ex-Chevron and Maurer employee Brian Strickland, who bought its twisted remains in FB-spec in the USA) that I saw on my travels last month. It's for sale, with a B15 project, and should be out there racing...

Despite some excellent races, the strangulated 1600cc F3 which succeeded it never had a chance over a three season lifespan, but the adoption of 2-litre regulations in '74 – while painfully slow to take flight here – presaged a revival of full-blooded multi-marque competition which thrived until Ron Tauranac's brilliant Ralt RT3 was fully sorted by the end of 1980.

Its subsequent crushing domination was as great as Dallara's more than a decade later. But not since the days of the screamers was F3 as accessible to aspiring F1 drivers or privateers. Ironically, with Historic Formula Junior crammed to capacity, and obscure cars changing hands at silly money, all it would take for one-litre F3 to fly again is the promise of a race at Monaco in 2008 or 2010. Then, surely, raids on barns across Europe would unearth dozens of cars for restoration?



Packed grids and great racing defined the 1-litre F3 era between 1964 and '70. What chance a revival?



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