



From the Archives...



Monza – April 25th to 27th, 2008

Just two weeks after racing at Barcelona, I was back on a transatlantic airliner again, this time bound for Milan, Italy and a round of the 1-Hour CER races taking place at Monza, as a support race to the Monza 1000 kilometres, held on Sunday, 27th April.



I reached Linate airport and got a taxi to the track on Thursday. Note to anyone going to Italy: Do not take the first taxi driver's offer; I did and found out afterwards that I'd been ripped off right royally! I also discovered that, although the quoted exchange rate for the \$/Euro is some 1 to 1.58 at the moment, in reality the change shops at the airport only give you a net

1.10. Talk about a rip off!

I've always loved the "Autodromo Monza"; It's not a very demanding track, being really a flat out blind with only three major bends, plus three chicanes, the new one at turn one being particularly nasty, bending back at over 90 degrees before allowing you to enter Curva Grande but more on that later. I went to the book shop, bought a book on the Sauber-Mercedes C9 (a particular favorite and even better for being in a sale!) and then took another taxi to our hotel in Dessio, about 12 miles from the track and found a great Trattoria around the corner. One good meal later and I was soon asleep, to be woken no less than three times with various hotel guests entering my room, only to hastily back out with apologies when they found that there was already someone else in occupation! Third time, it was Philipp Brun, with whom I was sharing the room but it does make life interesting when the door opens and a lady pushing a suitcase attempts to enter.... Let's not go into both of our surprises!



So Friday morning it was back to the track for signing on and first practice at 11. George bade me go first, which was a change from our usual schedule and so I got changed, squirmed into the RSR, belted up and off we went. There were some forty-six cars entered for our race, which made for a crowded pit lane but we were soon let out and I got going.

From pit lane, you accelerate hard, whilst staying over to the right of the track. (This is to stop anyone from veering over into the left, racing line.) The first chicane, as I've said, is pretty horrible, a narrow, tight right-hander, immediately followed by a mirror image left-hander, which takes you into "Curva Grande", a long, blind exit right-hander that everything just takes flat out. By the time Curva Grande ends, you are in fifth gear and traveling fast down a short straight and up to the second chicane. It's brake hard here, staying on the right and select second gear as you turn into the 90 left and then it's a quick right-hander and the track goes straight and then come the Lesmos; These are two right hand turns, the first of which appears to be a bit tighter than the second. Whatever, you can go to the fifty meter board before braking and turning in and then it's a short straight before Lesmo Two. Out of this corner and the track goes straight, then turns gently to the left and plunges downhill, underneath a bridge that carries the old banking (more on this later) and then goes equally sharply uphill to the third chicane, the "Ascari Variant". This is more or less a semi-roundabout that goes left, curves to the right and then it's a left again onto the last part of the back straight; here, you get up into fifth gear before leaving your braking as late as possible and then turning right into "Parabolica".



As it's name suggests, "Parabolica" is a big, semi circular bend that leads onto the pit straight. It can be taken in fourth gear but more conservative souls (like me!) prefer it in third. I suppose my attitude to "Parabolica" is not helped by being reminded by my friend Mauro Borella that: "This where Jochen Rindt was killed" and: "Von Trips went off here and killed himself and fifteen spectators!" Hmm...

Once you've navigated "Parabolica", it's foot hard down, change up through the gears and hurtle down the long pit straight until it's time to brake hard at the 150 meter board for the first chicane again.

The RSR felt good; Brunn Racing's "lads" (Heiko and Dimitri) had tightened up the rollbars just about as firmly as possible and the firmer the suspension, the better the car seems to handle; certainly there's not much body roll left now!

After me, Philipp climbed in and did a quick lap, in order to set a bogey time of 2.09 in the red RSR; (in



his own car, Philipp did a 2.04)! George practiced in the afternoon, with Philipp Brunn leading him around to show him the lines.



After our track time was done, several of us, led by Mauro as he lives in Milan and this is his home track, walked over to the old banking and some of us tried to run up it; It is so steep as to be almost unclimbable but Zak managed it; I tried to walk up but gave up the attempt. George tried to cycle up it but it wasn't possible!

I can't really explain it but Monza has the most incredible atmosphere; it's something to do with the way that the trees reach almost to the track and the old, now silent and crumbling banking, certainly weaves it's spell on you. It's also probably got something to do with the history of the place. All the 'Greats' came here; Ascari, Villorresi, Nuvolari, Campari, Borzacchini and then, postwar, Farina, Moss, Hawthorn, Brooks, Hill, Clark and right up to the present with Senna, Schumacher, Prost, Hill and now Hamilton, Raikonnen, Massa etc; Great place.

Friday night, the team, now having grown to eight people, went out to eat. Oh dear! April 25th in Italy is Independence Day and most restaurants (and there are not a lot of those in Dessio!) were closed. Our choice boiled down to a huge restaurant, easily capable of holding two hundred people, with many people standing outside, waiting to get in, down to a small Pizzeria just down the road. This was found by the expedient Mauro, taking me as passenger in his 1981 930 turbo, hurtling around Dessio's back streets looking for somewhere to eat until we found the pizzeria. Strewth! Does that Turbo have some grunt, shall buy one.



I can highly recommend the Pizzeria. Turned out that the Pizza maker was the Champion of Europe! How lucky can you be and so, except for Heiko, who insisted on eating his usual half a cow, we dined on excellent pizza, washed down with beer and then made our way back to the hotel.



Saturday was race day and, as our party had now grown yet again to nine people and we only had one car between us, it took Philipp two trips to get us all into the paddock. Qualifying was at 11.20 and George went out first and I did the second part. All went well and, after lunch, we got back into our romper suits and prepared for the race; This was not until 4.30 so there was a goodly amount of hanging around with everyone

getting somewhat nervous, all except the mechanics, Dimitri and Heiko, who worked constantly, readying our two cars for the off.

When the lights changed, George made a great start and was swiftly up with our principal rival, Gilles Boyer. George got the RSR up alongside the RS 3.0 (with RSR engine!) of Boyer on several occasions but thought that discretion was the better part of valor and did not make the pass!



After thirty minutes, George came in, I climbed in and now it was my turn. I spent the first lap getting accustomed to the track conditions and then put my foot down but, almost immediately, third gear jumped out of mesh. Cursing, I stuck it back in but it did it again and so I decided to use just fourth and fifth, which seemed to be o.k. I tried second just once but that also banged out and I didn't use that again either.



Of course, I lost a lot of ground trying to sort the gears out but made the most of it and, seeing how many cars were already beached in various gravel traps or, like one poor M1 Procar, lodged in the wall at the first Lesmo, thought it was worth while to finish. By this time, the track was very greasy, with two cars having blown their engines and spread oil along the approach to the second chicane and "Parabolica". At the end, we were seventh in class, twentieth overall of the forty-five starters so I suppose not too bad, all things considered but we still need to go faster! Philipp

covered himself in glory by coming third in class; This is an excellent result as we were up against five (one was a non-starter) of those bloody BMW M1s, which have some 100 extra horsepower more than us, for the same weight. D'oh!

So it's thanks to George, yet again, for letting me share the driving chores of good old 9065, the highest placed customer RSR ever at Le Mans (fifth overall in 1975 with John Fitzpatrick and David Hobbs).

Spa in Belgium is next in two weeks, another of my favorite tracks. Mauro Borella is co-driving this time as George has a family occasion that he can't miss; I've already told Mauro that if it's raining, he gets to do the whole race! He's something of a Jackie Ickx in the wet and I'm not!





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