



Speed thrills: PH Blog

[Dan Trent](#) posted on Wednesday, December 03, 2014 in [PH Blog](#)

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As a journo loses his job over a speeding offence what hope for future representation of fast cars?



Last week fellow motoring hack Owen Mildenhall was convicted of dangerous driving by a court in Inverness after hitting 127mph in a Porsche 911 on the A96. Going by the reaction in the local media the aggravating factors of being from south of the border, a sideline as a racing driver and driving a yellow Porsche were of far greater significance than the fact it was just shy of 1am but, however you cut it,

Owen was never going to leave with his licence in his hands. And as a result has lost his job.



Don't go beyond second gear now...

As you might expect the rights and wrongs have not escaped PH attention and a vigorous debate is chugging along already - [join it here](#) should you wish.

This discussion has inevitably spread among those of us in the business too, 'there but for the grace of' little comfort given the wider implications. Implications that extend to both the consumers and producers of media concerning the enjoyment of fast cars.

Outside of his friends and colleagues I realise there's unlikely to be much sympathy for Owen's situation - motoring hack gets busted in a Porsche press car, boohoo and all that. Clearly we all have to operate within the law and driving in such a way that it endangers others cannot be condoned.



A speed limit about to be left behind, yesterday

But as fast cars get ever faster and the chasm between their area of competence and legal limit on the road gets ever wider how do we convey in words, pictures or video a sincere sense of the excitement in driving them? How, as an owner, can you really expect to get any enjoyment out of a car that, like the Porsche Cayman GTS we had in the other day, will hit 85mph in second gear?

Obviously I only know that because I worked it out from the gear ratios published on the spec sheet... But is that really the way we want our cars assessed? While a degree of artifice can be achieved with talented photographers, sharply edited footage and a creative turn of phrase there is still no substitute for a properly crossed-up, fully-lit cornering shot.

The obvious response is to say 'save it for the track' and, for sure, if you're going to go the whole Harris and do fourth-gear sideways stuff in an F12 it's the only practical and sensible solution. But if fast cars are only tested, filmed and photographed at maximum attack on a circuit does it not just feed the fantasy and ignore the reality of what they're like on the public road, the environment in which most of us will experience them?



Save it for the track? Fine in principle...

Maybe there's something we can learn from our two-wheeled brethren. After all, they've long since contended with machines whose abilities far, far outstrip the legal limit on any public road, a certain island in the Irish Sea excepted. True, on a bike you're as much exposed to the very real physical peril as you are isolated from it by modern cars. But there must be a trick to enjoying a machine that can double or even treble posted limits in the blink of an eye without necessarily doing so at every given opportunity. Bikers, we need your help.

It's that or writing about nothing more powerful than an MX-5. And even as a Mazda fanboy I'm not about to advocate that.

Dan

[Source: [Press And Journal](#)]



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gforceg 03 Dec 2014

Maybe the pendulum has swung as far as it can and we'll see a return to lighter smaller more agile and less grippy performance cars being attractive to those who can afford them. Maybe not.

I do think the arms race should have run its course by now.

mrclav 03 Dec 2014

Sorry but I have to disagree with your last point. Human beings by nature will always attempt to improve on previous efforts no matter what the situation or product. If we applied your thinking to computing, mobile phones, the internet, medical products etc, we'd all be a LOT worse off than we are.

zeppelin101 03 Dec 2014

gforceg said:

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It's not all down to the manufacturers though. If one OEM releases a new version of an engine which has the same performance as the old one and another OEM releases one that has another 10/20 whatever hp more than the old one (and thus more than the other OEM) then there is a significant wedge of people who would go and buy the one with more performance, assuming it isn't going to cost them a vast amount more.

It's a pretty nasty cycle, the only way to break it would be for everyone to agree a cap as the Japanese did throughout the 90s. Even the German top speed cap is falling by the way side now. Trying to get a large group of manufacturers to agree anything is like herding cats. Having been loosely on the sidelines of the recent negotiations around new drive cycles for the global market between OEMs and certain markets, it's alarming how difficult it is to get anyone to agree on anything.

Captain Muppet 03 Dec 2014

gforceg said:

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Given the limited success of the GT86 I think willy waving is still more popular than fun. Shame.

gforceg 03 Dec 2014

mrclav said:

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I appreciate your argument but the examples you give are useful. Clearly 800bhp in a road car isn't (very often!).

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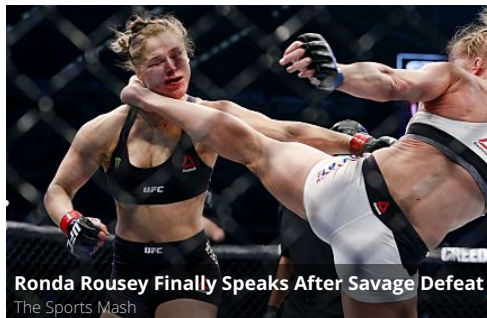
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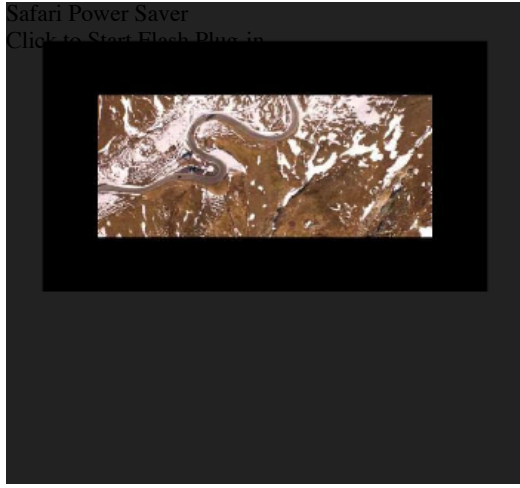
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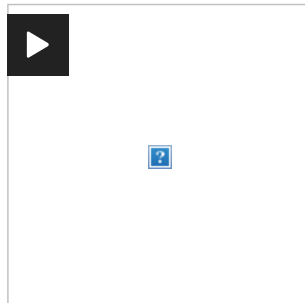
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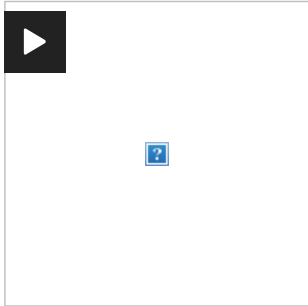
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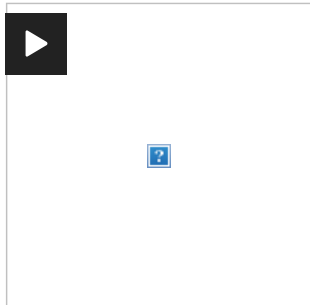
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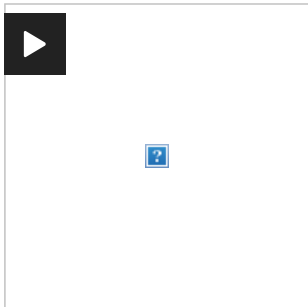
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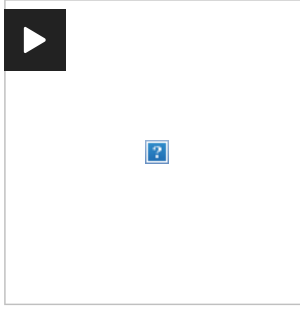
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PH races the new MX-5

Dan Trent posted on Thursday, September 10, 2015 in [Japanese cars](#)

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New MX-5 makes its motorsport debut at Tsukuba Circuit with PH at the wheel, national TV support and an F1 driver on the team



The air in the Tsukuba paddock is heavy, hot and humid. A Japanese man is working his best Bruce Dickinson impression at the front of a band of committed shredders, tearing through a set packed with appalling rock cliches up to and including the inevitable slap bass solo. It's truly terrible. But, like many things in Japan, carried off such with such earnest commitment it's really rather endearing.



When we say it's the car's first race it literally is

The Mazda stall is another example. It's all about 'love for rotary' and defining the brand by its emotional link to an engine that no longer features in any of its vehicles. You can even buy a soft-toy Wankel motor for your child. Can you imagine a Porsche merchandise push celebrating how good air-cooled engines were? No, of course you can't.

I was [here last year](#) for the 25th running of the four-hour MX-5 endurance race, held every year the Roadster (as it is here) has been on sale. I'm not the first Brit to do it either - checking back through the race programme I see a certain C Harris took part in the 2000 event! Last year was a biggie though, given it was also the debut of the new NDMX-5, project leader [Nobuhiro Yamamoto](#) leading the field round the track in it just hours after a simultaneous unveiling across the globe.



L-R: PH's man, Peter Lyon, Katayama and Izumi-san

Take a bow

Now we'll be racing it, this being the motorsport debut of the new MX-5. Alas it's not the full [Global Cup race car](#), based rather on the entry-level 1.5-litre stripped, caged and running about 20mm lower than standard on control Bridgestone RE11 tyres. All the cars are identical and absolutely factory fresh.

Our main sponsor is state broadcaster NHK's Samurai Wheels English language car show, presented by Australian journalist Peter Lyon, former F1 driver [Ukyo Katayama](#) and American-Japanese model Sarah Hannon. Note to PHTV producers - James is a nice lad and everything but we need to talk co-hosts...

As we prepare the car Peter and pal/crew chief Anton consider our plan of attack. The new engine is 20 per cent more efficient than the 2.0 in the NC we drove last year but the fuel quota has been slashed by 25 per cent. Katayama's presence on the team is a boost, even if his status means a one-minute handicap. Given he famously wrestled a Toyota GT-One back under control after a [200mph blowout](#) in the dying stages of the 1999 Le Mans 24-hour (handing the victory to BMW) he's clearly faced bigger challenges though! Fourth driver Izumi-san, meanwhile, is a bit of a Tsukuba hand and very quick.



Full broadcast TV crew following progress; no pressure!

Easy does it

Anton's number crunching says if we can maintain an indicated fuel consumption of 5.6 or better (I don't bother to ask how this is measured, turns out a bit of a blunder...) we'll get to the end. A conservative driving style and pace in the 1min 15sec region should see us with a decent result.

Trouble is the qualifying pace has people in the low 11s, Katayama's 12.1 putting us 17th on the grid. Racing is racing and there are clearly some quick boys and girls out there. The latter are a particular worry, considering many of them are serious hands with JGTC and Le Mans experience and, conservatively, weigh as much as 25kg less than your not especially powerfully built correspondent. Hm.

My heroics in the opening stint of last year's race mean I'm once again given the start and first run, the pressure very much on not to cock it up given the scrutiny of national telly support and an F1 driver on the team.

Six practice laps aren't really enough to get used to a new car but instantly it feels lighter and more agile, the 1.5 sweet and revvy if not especially powerful. Smoothness and intelligent use of revs and gearing are going to be needed to maintain both pace and fuel targets. The butterflies are well and truly kicking in as I line up for the parade lap and rolling start, Anton's calming voice on the headpiece my guide to how we're doing.



Gran Turismo made real, complete with dozy opponents

Mark your targets

I get off to a good start, bagging a few places in the first turn melee while managing to keep my nose (mostly) clean as the pack spreads out. Driving standards vary considerably, cautious braking points and wide entries into the tighter corners by many making for rich pickings. Inevitably by the time I make it into the top 10 things are tougher though, the blue car of the consistently quick Engine team giving me a good old dice.

His dab of the brakes before the committed final sweeper is his weak spot though. On Peter's advice I'm just lifting at about 70 metres, taking a deep breath and holding the inside line, tyres howling as the inside kerb appears. The technique bags me a couple of car lengths per lap, lining me up for an easy pass into turn one.



Fluffed driver change costs vital time

Through all this Anton's asking me about fuel. The display shows 5.7 and as my times settle to the mid 14s and low 15s it seems to be improving to 5.4, then 5.2. We're going faster than expected and using less fuel? I start getting more aggressive on the throttle, using a few more revs and generally having fun. Out of the tight corners you can get on the power really early; it's enough to have the car rotating into a lovely little four-wheel drift on the exit and the increase in speed is noticeable.

Fumbling with the belts at the handover to Katayama costs us dearly though and then I get the really bad news from Anton. Japanese fuel consumption is measured in km per litre. And where I thought I was being clever and using less I've actually burned through more, ruining his projections for the rest of the race. There's a tense atmosphere as he tells Katayama he has to slow and save fuel. "I can't believe I've just told a Formula 1 driver he has to slow down to the 17s," he says darkly.



Well, mainly dozy - this one took a bit of work

Down in one

Previously elated I'm now horrified as we slip down to the back of the pack from the fifth I'd held at handover. Anton and the team look desperately at the screens and work the calculators. I decide I'd best keep out of their way.

As the race goes on we claw our way back to where we started in 17th place and the fuel use is in the 5.4 region. Still not good enough but, once again, Peter proves himself ultra consistent and claws us to second place and back on our fuel target before handing back to Katayama. My early glory hunting has cost us dear though and he's unable to attack those ahead, all of whom seem able to lap in the 13s and 14s. My glumness deepens.



"I only used this much fuel ... honest"

At least the swap to Izumi goes smoothly. Then a gift. Safety car! A good number of rivals are held in the pit lane as it gathers up the field, Izumi is able to cruise round for a few slow laps saving fuel and we're gifted 11th place with enough in hand for him to really go for it in the final half hour. We've got our quick driver, enough in the tank for him to attack and rivals ahead low on fuel. Game back on!

Three laps to go and things are getting tense. Izumi says his tyres are shot, he's in the 13s but many up ahead have their hotshoes in the driving seat. But then start paying for their pace - the #55 car that's been pumping in low 11s for half a dozen laps is suddenly in the 28s and tumbling down the order. Another car comes to a halt by the pit wall out of fuel. Izumi crosses the line in 10th and the Samurai Wheels pit erupts. By the time he gets to the grid the news is better still - eighth! We pose for pictures with a P8 number board then, hang on, now we're seventh!



Sunset and things all of a sudden go very PlayStation

Everyone is suitably chuffed, not least Anton who crunched the numbers and had the plan. He does, however, admit that had we not fluffed that handover from me to Katayama we'd be a minute further up the road and possibly even on the podium. But it's a fabulous result all the same and as the cicadas chirp in the evening heat and teams ritualistically wipe down the cars as a gesture of gratitude to Mazda the team is all smiles.

The car has been great too. The lack of weight over the NC is the most noticeable thing and with a bit less ride height it feels a lot more agile and fun, if still quite soft. That Global Cup car should be quite a step up. Wonder if we can bag a place at the Laguna Seca round?

Opening laps vid [here](#).



Epilogue

Turns out the celebrations were a little premature - in a rather harsh interpretation of the passing under yellows rule Izumi got a one-lap penalty for overtaking a slow-moving car spluttering along on the remains of its fuel in the final run to the flag. The yellows were being waved for another - one of six - that had ground to a halt by the pit wall. The two cars he was battling to the line were also penalised, the Samurai Wheels/PistonHeads car eventually being classified 9th. Such is racing!







Photos: Yasushi Onishi/Dan

[Sources: [LeMansLegend](#), via YouTube; [ESPN](#), [Mazda Global](#)]

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