

# TOUR GUIDE

The FIA wants a set of national Touring Car regulations. **Andrew Charman** analyses the state of the sport today



**ABOVE** Crowd pleaser. A big field, a variety of cars and lots of action have made the BTCC a big hit with an equally big audience



**O**VER the weekend of June 8 2014, the currently uber-successful British Touring Car Championship (BTCC) hosted as a one-off guest support event the rapidly-growing Super Touring Car Series, a historic championship for cars that were the BTCC of two decades ago.

For the crowd of around 40,000, and a much larger audience watching the live TV coverage, the 26-car STCC field lined up on the Oulton Park grid provided a direct comparison with the 31-car BTCC field that would occupy the same space less than an hour later. The more knowledgeable could see a symmetry between two periods when the BTCC was at the pinnacle of success, but also several significant differences.

In the late 1990s the BTCC not only topped the British motorsport chart but was regarded as the 'top Tin Top' series worldwide. The Super Touring regulations, born in Britain, had spread throughout the globe, to Australia and America and many points inbetween. The blue-riband BTCC was dominated by international drivers racing for up to 10 manufacturers, who

spent ever mushrooming budgets to a degree that very soon after would cause the collapse of Super Touring not only in the UK but globally.

Two decades on the BTCC grid is even bigger, with a wider variety of cars. But by far the majority are private entries, the drivers are mostly British, the costs reputedly a tenth of what was spent in those final, manic days of Super Touring. And while still highly regarded around the globe, it is now a national series in a Touring Car environment that now has its own World Championship, of greater cost and complexity, and firmly aimed at manufacturers and international drivers.

In trying to understand Touring Cars of 2014 the first man to ask is one familiar to those British crowds. Because while Alan Gow has headed the BTCC for virtually all of its most successful years since the early 1990s, since 2010 he has also been president of the FIA's Touring Car Commission – a body that has charged itself with coming up with a series of national Touring Car regulations before the end of 2014. ►



Ebrey/BTCC



Gow sums up the global state of Touring Car racing in 2014 as "fractured". The days of trying to think that one rule fits all, as in Super Touring, are he contends long gone, with each major motorsport nation seemingly doing its own thing whether it be the BTCC in Britain, DTM in Germany, V8 Supercars in Australia, Pirelli World Series in the USA – the list goes on.

That fractured outlook will never be completely erased but it can be lessened, and the FIA's aim is basically to promote a little more regulation sharing between nations, to produce a 'ladder' in similar manner to how in single-seaters, F4 and F3 lead to GP2 and finally Formula One. Such regulation sharing would work for all: to give just one example, the poorer nations would provide a ready outlet to pass on the used cars from the series run by more wealthy nations.

First step in this programme was to make the FIA's World Touring Car Championship (WTCC) a distinct step above national series. Not so long ago the BTCC and other

national series ran to the same Super 2000 regulations as the WTCC, with the resultant mushrooming costs for those trying to compete in the national series.

So for 2014 the WTCC cars are more spectacular looking, the technical regulations freed up, the costs as a result raised to levels generally acceptable only to manufacturers. "A world championship of anything should be better or faster than a national championship," Gow says. He adds that by doing this a gap is naturally built: "Those regulations are not going to be used by national championships because they couldn't afford to use them."

Now the Commission is working on a two-tier set of regulations for national series. "One is for top end, and one for smaller, more basic cars," Gow says, providing a framework for nations to adopt if they desire to. "If you are say a Uzbekistan and you want to start a national touring car championship, what do you do? We need to have a few technical regulations that a

Uzbekistan, for example, can use."

He is keen to point out that the FIA won't be creating a new set of regulations, but instead endorsing existing programmes that it feels will work well on a wider basis. "What we are doing is an audit of the technical regulations of fairly healthy Touring Car series around the world and then we will sit down and say okay, these ▶



**LEFT** Two hats: Alan Gow has core Touring Car responsibilities at both a national and international level

Ebrey/BTCC



**ABOVE** Identity change: Adam Morgan's Mercedes A-Class is a prime example of the BTCC NGTC formula's flexibility – most of its components spent the 2013 season in a Toyota Avensis shell

Ebrey/BTCC

## WTCC – is it working, will it expand?

**THE** World Touring Car Championship is half a season in to its new era. As series boss Francois Ribeiro explained in Race Tech 163, the regulations are designed to produce faster, more spectacular, noisier cars, boasting carbon-fibre bodywork and race suspension, and to keep the WTCC a step above the various national series.

Asked to sum up that first half-season, Alan Gow admits that the series currently appears somewhat one-sided, with the cars of Citroën fighting amongst each other while the rest – principally the Honda works team, and the RML customer-built Chevrolets, with the Lada team following behind – try to keep up.

But Gow also believes that the French team's domination, founded on a major budget and many months of testing before joining the series, will not last. "The difference is that Citroën hit the ground running. It will take a bit of time but Honda will eventually close the gap and so will the RML Chevrolets."

He is also confident that the series will evolve and draw more manufacturers in. "As a world programme it's still a very cost-effective exercise, even though the cost of the cars has gone up, and the cost of running them.

"It is a double-edged sword – cost-effective for manufacturers but more difficult for privateers," he admits.

The answer to that could be a feeder series. Ribeiro has already expressed his desire for a development series along the lines that GP2 is to Formula One. He has also been quoted as considering using a 2-litre turbo engine as in the BTCC's NGTC formula, but Gow does not believe any second WTCC series would embody any national regulations such as those currently being evolved by the FIA.

### SPRINGBOARD SERIES

"The WTCC needs to do what they do in Australia which is to have a development series for older cars to run alongside half a dozen of the WTCC events, and to use this as a springboard for drivers into the championship.

"It would also give the WTCC entrants somewhere to sell their cars, because going forward selling WTCC cars on will be an issue as no national championship is going to run them."

Multiple BTCC champion Matt Neal agrees with the concept of a Euro-support series to the WTCC, though not necessarily with what cars

should be in it. While not a WTCC competitor, Neal has had extensive experience of the series in both its current and previous Super 2000 format through expert analyst duties with TV broadcaster (and series promoter) Eurosport.

"A support series that concentrated on the Euro rounds would work well, as it would attract the current SEAT and Renault Clio competitors," Neal says. He adds, however, that care would have to be taken to ensure that the support event did not outshine the main event.

He believes cost would be a major factor: "The cars would need to be lower spec than Super 2000, a bit like an updated Group N. An NGTC car would not be the best idea; they are not expensive to run but they are expensive to build."

For Neal the jury remains out on the WTCC's long-term prospects. "I hear that other manufacturers are looking at the series and it needs at least one, possibly two more, with the kind of resource Citroën has, to make it work, to evolve it. Currently it's not that difficult to get out of the first qualifying session into the final shootout – the series needs to be more edgy." **RT**



**ABOVE** Citroën leads the WTCC field at the Salzburgring, Austria. The French cars' inter-team battle currently dominates the action



**BELOW** Wide choice. The BTCC's NGTC regulations encourage a wide variety of body shapes that add to the appeal of the series



Andrew Charman

are the two we want to endorse."

It is very easy to assume that the BTCC's NGTC (Now Generation Touring Car) formula would be in pole position to be adopted as the first of those two regulation sets. In summary NGTC works around the basis of fitting specified components into a shell of the entrant's choice.

#### IS NOW THE ONE?

The NGTC car uses a 2-litre turbocharged engine. This can either be bought off the shelf as a complete package from BTCC organiser TOCA (built by Swindon Engines and branded the TOCA engine), or a team can build its own, but to very strict specifications mandated by TOCA.

Other specified components include a gearbox by Xtrac, clutch and pedal box by AP Racing. Titan Motorsport supplies the steering rack, powered by a motor sourced from DC Electronics. There is an ATL fuel tank, brakes and air jack supplied by AP Racing, electronics from Cosworth and dampers by Penske. Team Dynamics provides wheels, with colour the only option (the company is also a player in

WTCC and exclusive supplier in V8 Supercars). Subframes and suspension come from GPR Motorsport. This firm also maintains a parts supply in the paddock for these likely to be damaged items and thus removes the need for teams to carry their own costly inventories.

The result is a championship of immense variety and competition, but without spiralling costs. While building the cars is more expensive than originally planned – a legacy, Gow believes, of making the car 'bullet-proof' and strong to a level distinctly above what is required for one season's racing – they are much, much cheaper to run.

Gow claims as little as 10 per cent of the budgets required in the 1990s are needed today – some teams have run the same wheel bearings all season, and there have been examples of teams taking the spec components out of one shell and installing them in a completely different one for the following season. As reported in our news pages this month, Dave Bartrum of leading team Motorbase is planning to build a BMW 3 Series, using the componentry from one of his existing Ford Focus cars – an exploratory project with no serious cost implications.

Should a manufacturer decide to go all-out to win the BTCC, the only areas it could spend large amounts of money would be on driver salaries and according to Gow, "The size of its awning and such like. There's nothing they can spend to make the cars go quicker; it's good old-fashioned engineering and racing."

So surely such a set of regulations must be a strong contender for becoming FIA-endorsed? The FIA would gain cost and durability advantages, while the suppliers ▶

## BTCC NGTC spec parts

<b>Bodyshell</b>	2, 3, 4, 5-door car on sale in UK dealer network, 4.4m long
<b>Engine</b>	Own-built to strict TOCA spec or TOCA engine built by Swindon Engines
<b>Intercooler</b>	PWR
<b>Turbocharger</b>	Owen Developments
<b>Fuel tank</b>	ATL
<b>Gearbox</b>	Xtrac
<b>Clutch</b>	AP Racing
<b>Pedal box</b>	AP Racing
<b>Steering rack</b>	Titan Motorsport
<b>Steering motor</b>	DC Electronics
<b>Subframes</b>	GPR Motorsport
<b>Suspension</b>	GPR Motorsport
<b>Dampers</b>	Penske
<b>Brakes</b>	AP Racing
<b>Wheels</b>	Team Dynamics
<b>Air jack</b>	AP Racing
<b>Electronics</b>	Cosworth
<b>Fire extinguisher</b>	Lifeline



**BELOW** The NGTC regulations have brought an unprecedented number of manufacturer shapes into the BTCC, such as the MG 6 here in the hands of Marc Hynes

Ebrey/BTCC



and teams in the BTCC would gain potential places to sell more components, to move on used cars.

Gow, however, is keen to point out that NGTC is not necessarily the answer. "There's no agenda, and the BTCC is just one set of regulations we are looking at. For example there's a couple of sets of regulations in the USA, around the Pirelli World Series (see sidebar) that are working well.

"I don't decide," he maintains. "We have a Touring Car Commission that can look at sets of regulations across the globe and if

they find some that work and are available to the FIA, they may publish those."

#### **NO NEED TO ADOPT**

Gow also emphasises that once the regulations are finalised, which he wants to do in time for the FIA's World Council to endorse before the end of 2014, there will be no compulsion on the part of any national series to adopt them: "There may be series in 2016 run to these regulations but equally there might not – the two sets

of national Touring Car regulations will exist but whether any country wants to pick them up or not is entirely up to them."

Which of course is a useful get-out for the BTCC. Some might find it strange that a British series could decide not to adopt regulations decided upon in a commission headed by the same person that leads the series. But, should the FIA decide to go in a different direction to NGTC, it would be equally strange for the BTCC to abandon a formula that is clearly working so very well for it... **RT** ▶

## Alternative view 1

### V8 Supercars

#### **AUSTRALIA'S V8 Supercars**

Championship for very many years seemed to run to a simple formula unaffected by the world outside – the big Commodores of Holden versus the Falcons of Ford.

It survived Super Touring's attempt to break Australia, and was so healthy it even generated a supporting development series of older cars that could match the 30-plus grids of the main event. In 2008, however, the series realised it had to plan ahead, cut costs, improve safety and hopefully widen its appeal.

One of its two manufacturers pulling out could have had dire consequences. Indeed, some time after the launch of the series' 'Car of the Future' project Holden confirmed it would end production of road cars in Australia in 2017 – though the brand has since extended its participation in V8 Supercars.

The Car of the Future, or Next-Generation Supercar, was introduced for the 2013 season. It took many ideas from NASCAR's similarly-named project, most

notably a standard chassis specification which manufacturers added their own identities to. An immediate sign of success was the arrival of two badges in the 2013 series – a Nissan works team and a Mercedes-Benz privateer squad.

For 2014 the news was even better, with Volvo confirming an entry of a team of S60 models under its Polestar Racing banner. And while the Swedish brand has a successful competition history in Australian Touring Cars, V8 Supercars might not have seemed the obvious fit for a brand today renowned for its safety campaigns and most recently an innovative new range of small-capacity engines.

According to Volvo Cars Australia Marketing Manager Oliver Peagram, however, it was essential to find a way for the brand to rise above 60 or so rival car makers competing for one million new registrations in the continent. "You need to have audience relevance around your brand, as well as quality vehicles, and in Australia, Volvo has great market awareness for its SUV models but there is still opportunity for the brand in the Euro luxury sedan segment," he says.

Peagram sees V8 Supercars as the ideal environment to showcase the performance

credentials of the S60, pitching the angle of the first luxury car brand to enter the V8 Supercars Championship with a genuine factory-backed team. But he adds that the Next-Generation regulations have played a major part in that, and reflect changes in the Australian automotive environment.

"Where once it was all about Ford and Holden, those 60-odd car brands are all now fighting for a slice of the action, so you've got to stand out from the crowd," he says. "V8 Supercars is already one of the most watched sports in this country, and the Car of the Future regulations have certainly allowed us and other brands to enter, prevented it from becoming a two-horse race, and spiced up the Championship."

Volvo has already seen success in its new programme – a win in the non-championship round at the Melbourne F1 GP meeting, three pole positions and then victory in round 14 of the series, the Perth 400 in May.

With five manufacturers already represented and a series becoming increasingly attractive to others, V8 Supercars will clearly remain the face of Australian Touring Cars for some time yet. **RT**



**RIGHT** Big V8s are still the popular recipe in Australia but updated, cost-effective regulations have brought in new marques such as Volvo

Volvo





## Alternative view 2

### Pirelli World Challenge

**THOSE** who believe that the only American 'tin tops' are the machines of the all-embracing NASCAR, need to experience the Pirelli World Challenge, a championship that dates back to 1990 – when it employed similar regulations to European Group A. Succeeding Trans-Am as the premier series organised by the Sports Car Club of America (SCCA), the championship today runs as a support to the IndyCar series.

Today's Pirelli World Challenge offers five classes stretching across GT and Touring Car specifications. The grids are so well supported that generally the GT and Touring Car sections run as separate races.

Touring Car (TC) is open to two-seat roadsters, coupes, hatchbacks, saloons

and estates with 230 to 260 bhp, with naturally aspirated or forced induction engines both permitted.

Touring Car A-spec, new for 2014, evolves the TC class, adding more strict limits to the modifications allowed to keep costs down, and restricting power to around 200 bhp from basically stock engines. Eligible models range from the UK idea of a Touring Car, such as the Honda Civic or Ford Focus, to roadsters such as Mazda's MX-5.

Touring Car B-spec is even more limited, with only suspension modifications permitted, and is for effectively superminis



**BELOW** The Pirelli World Challenge classes encourage a wide variety of entries and the regulations are getting the attention of the FIA

Pirelli World Challenge

such as the Ford Fiesta, Fiat 500, Mini Cooper or Kia Rio. It provides a very cost-effective entry into Touring Car racing.

The wide-ranging regulations of the Pirelli World Challenge really do provide something for all. With the series firmly established and popular, it is no surprise that the FIA's Touring Car Commission is reputedly studying it closely. **RT**

## Alternative view 3

### DTM

**WHILE** a championship based in the industrial powerhouse of Europe, the Deutsche Tourenwagen Masters or DTM is in many ways as out on a limb, its own entity, as the Australian V8 Supercars series.

It was reborn in 2000 from the former Deutsche Tourenwagen Meisterschaft, which along with an FIA version, the International Touring Car Championship, had collapsed in 1996. The costs of running the cars, that were considered more complex than F1 machines, had spiralled out of control.

The post-2000 series was created with less-expensive regulations, but like its predecessor has remained bankrolled by Germany's car manufacturers. Initially it was Opel, Audi and Mercedes-Benz. Opel pulled out in 2007 and rumoured entries from Alfa Romeo and remarkably, MG-Rover did not happen, leaving Audi and Mercedes to provide half of the 20-car grid each. Since 2012 BMW has joined the series, winning it in its first season.

Today's DTM cars are rear-wheel-drive, with 470 bhp V8 engines, and in truth are prototypes, with road car body shapes

**BELOW** Makes battle: German manufacturers Audi, BMW and Mercedes-Benz are the three pillars of the DTM



over spaceframe chassis – many of the drivers describe the handling as closer to a single-seater race car. The drivers are a distinct mix of former F1 stars and those trying to earn an F1 chance through impressing in the DTM – for example when BMW pulled out of the WTCC its multiple champion, Andy Priaulx, was transferred less than successfully to the DTM squad.

The DTM has tried to break out of its German core audience several times – rounds were held for several seasons at Britain's Brands Hatch, for example. More recently it has embarked on a more significant expansion programme, signing an agreement with Japan's Super GT series to run to similar regulations, including replacing its V8

engines with 2-litre turbo units.

Efforts have also been made to unite with the Grand Touring division of NASCAR's Grand-Am series in the USA. This led to an agreement signed in March 2013 to launch an American version of the DTM, which is planned to run primarily as a support to NASCAR events and start between 2015 and 2016.

Many observers remain unconvinced that this series will happen. The presence of a US manufacturer is considered essential, and with most US brands already heavily involved in motorsport – whether it be NASCAR, the TUDOR United SportsCar Championship or the Pirelli World Challenge – there is so far no sign of any home interest in competing in a US DTM. **RT**

