

NATIONAL

ALL THE NATIONAL & CLUB RACE, RALLY AND HISTORIC NEWS.
PLUS FULL RESULTS ROUND-UP

KEVIN
TURNER
NATIONAL
EDITOR

kevin.turner@haymarket.com

CONSIDERING THE number of championships we already have in this country, the launch of a new series might not seem like a very good idea, particularly given the doom and gloom of the economic slowdown.

But it's difficult not to warm to a concept that aims to use powerful, low-grip single-seaters, and most teams and drivers agree. It's also easy to believe that the sport doesn't do enough to raise its profile below Formula 1 and that it could attract more spectators.

The two crunch points will be getting the drivers to actually sign up, and making sure the public do watch.

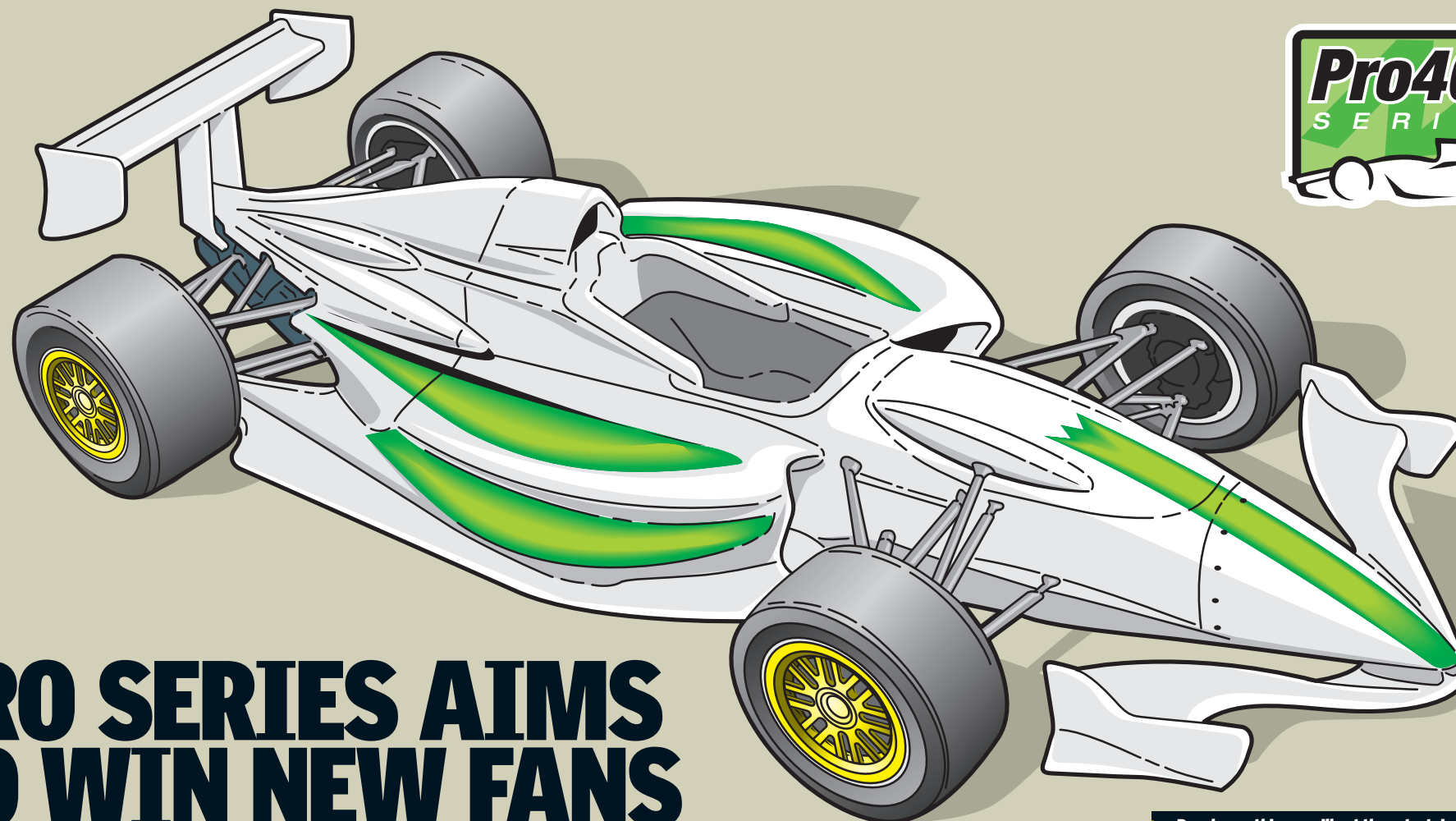
The increasing cost of F3 may help the first problem, as it gets harder and harder for drivers to step up from the lower formulae. The number of drivers that give up on single-seaters to go GT racing, such as Jeremy Metcalfe, Michael Meadows and James Sutton, shows that they are prepared to consider other options. There is no doubt that there are enough good drivers out there.

But attracting drivers is one thing, getting spectators through the gates—regularly—is quite another. The jury is still out on just how big the pool of motorsport fans is in this country, and Pro Series will be jostling for space with a national racing scene that is too busy.

What may make the initiative work is the backing already in place. If that can be used to promote the series properly, there is a chance that the attendance targets—modest by BTCC standards but well above club levels—could be reached.

It's easy to be cynical about any new series these days, but the right people seem to be in place with the right funding. If an initiative like this is ever going to work in Britain, this is surely its best chance.

EXTRA CONTACT DETAILS
EDITORIAL ASSISTANT—Ben Anderson
ben.anderson@haymarket.com



PRO SERIES AIMS TO WIN NEW FANS

A NEW NATIONAL single-seater series using powerful, low-downforce machines is being prepared for next year.

The Pro 400 Series is aimed at young drivers who are unable to progress up the traditional career ladder due to a lack of funds. The emphasis will be on entertainment, with the 415bhp Delta Motorsport-built cars running at single-day meetings at circuits around the UK.

The initiative is the brainchild of a number of experienced motorsport figures, headed by former racer and driver manager Nigel Rees. Engine builder Dick Langford, who will prepare the 3.5-litre V6 powerplants for the series, is on the technical team, while former Classic Sports Car Club chairman Sarah Hutchison is involved in race meeting organisation. Races will run under the auspices of the British Automobile Racing Club.

Lap times are expected to be marginally quicker than current Formula 3, but the aim is to keep costs down so that drivers

can do a season for £220,000. Ultimately, the target is to use ticket sales and sponsorship to pay the drivers so that Pro Series can become fully professional.

Although organisers are keen to distance themselves from the defunct Challenge Initiative, mooted earlier in the decade (Autosport, August 11, 2005), there are similarities. The car, for example, has its roots in a Reynard Champ Car, though the design itself is by Delta, which produced cars for the Grand Prix Masters series. There are also Challenge Initiative parallels in the area of promotion, but there are key financial and organisational differences.

CONCEPT AND AIMS

Many high-level single-seater series struggle to create good racing due to the aerodynamic turbulence caused by cars producing high levels of downforce. Pro Series aims to combat this, prompting greater spectator interest that, it is hoped, can then be used to pay the drivers a wage.

Rees said: "We don't want to generate

massive amounts of downforce. We want to create the premier British single-seater series. The emphasis is on entertainment.

"We also want drivers to earn a good living from racing and to develop a celebrity status. It's not a ladder. I don't want drivers to see it as an F3 alternative."

The format of the meetings (see panel, right) is also designed with spectators in mind. Instead of qualifying, a heats system from karting will be used.

Drivers will be randomly allocated two grid positions for the two heats that add up to the total grid plus one, so a driver who starts on pole for heat one will start at the back for heat two. Each competitor will have a mix of front-and-back or two-mid-grid positions for the heats throughout the season to ensure fairness.

Points will be awarded for finishing positions in the heats, which will then determine grid positions for the final.

Organisers hope that the concept will attract an average of 4300 spectators in the first year, 6300 in the second and

REPORTS FROM

p98 THRUXTON BRITISH GT

p100 BRANDS HATCH HSCC

p103 OULTON PARK MSVR

p104 ANGLESEY CSCC

p105 KNOCKHILL SMRC

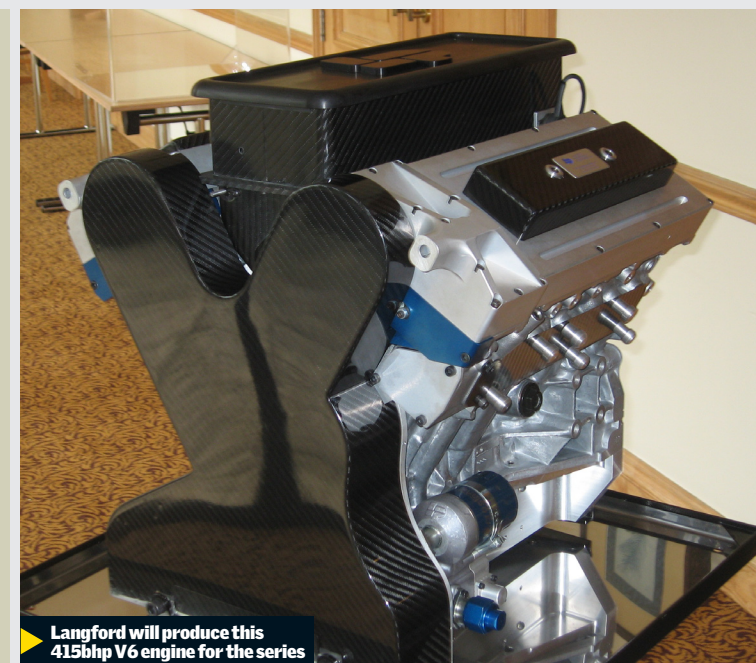
p107 LYDDEN BARC

p109 PEMBREY BRSCC

p109 KIRKISTOWN 500MRCI



ENDURO EVENT AND NEW CLASS FOR NIPPON CHALLENGE, p95



Langford will produce this 415bhp V6 engine for the series

target is attainable.

"I tried to raise an F3 budget and it's not easy," he said. "There are a lot of drivers like myself. As soon as there are a couple of good drivers there I don't think they'll have any trouble getting 16."

WHAT DO TEAMSTHINK?

Consultation with teams, largely from F3 and FRenault, has already begun. Support so far has been encouraging.

Experienced F3 team boss Trevor Powell, who attended a Pro Series meeting last month, said: "Nigel Rees has the backing to actually make it happen—he just wants to see a commitment from some teams and drivers."

Powell also believes the series could become a launchpad to other categories, even though that is not the aim. "In reality, three quarters of the current British F3 field isn't going to go beyond F3, so some very good drivers could do this," he said.

"Teams higher up the ladder would be foolish not to rate whoever wins this series if their opposition is that strong, so it could still help the careers of the top drivers."

Scorpio FRenault team boss John Pettitt also believes there is a place for Pro Series: "Many career drivers who hit a funding barrier don't want to quit the single-seater route and this will be a good way for them to continue," he said.

"It's a solid proposal, but motorsport is a very cynical world so Nigel will have a difficult job getting it off the ground."

If 16 drivers can be attracted to the concept by the beginning of September, the first cars will begin testing in December. The challenge then will be to sell the Pro Series to the public.

TECHSPEC

COST	£141,000 (with engine)
ENGINE	3.5-litre, 415bhp Langford V6
GEARBOX	6-speed paddleshift
FUEL	Bioethanol
WINGS	No incidence-adjustment. Gurney flaps used to obtain basic balance
CHASSIS	Carbonfibre monocoque

RACE WEEKEND FORMAT

- 1 x 50MIN TESTING SESSION
- NO QUALIFYING
- 2 x 20MIN HEATS
- 1 x 30MIN FINAL
- FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT
- FIVE SUPPORT RACES
- TO VISIT MOST GB CIRCUITS