

CLASSIC DRIVER

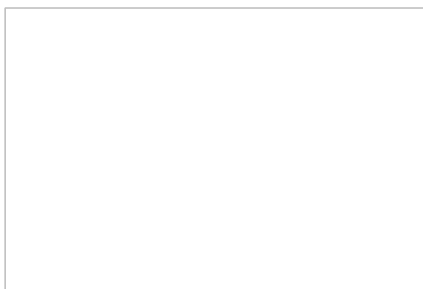
Racing with Team Maranello Concessionaires 2003



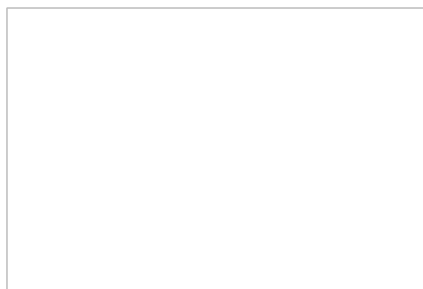
For those jaded with modern racing and harking back to times long past, and aye, I have joined you in wishing things were as if in a 1960s time warp - help is at hand. The 2003 FIA GT Championship is turning out to be a stormer and while competition at the very front has been a little one-sided with the Scuderia Italia Ferrari 550 taking all before it, slightly further down the field in N-GT there is a battle royal between Porsche and Ferrari privateers, the leading team of which is run by Veloqx Motorsport under the historic name of 'Team Maranello Concessionaires'. We were invited to spend some time with them recently at Donington Park, home to the UK round of the series.

The idea is that Ferrari Corse Clienti supply ready-made, out of the box 360 N/GT race cars for privateers to run in sports car championships around the world. Much as it did forty years ago with the 250 SWB, GTO, and 250LM. The privateers can therefore concentrate on set-up, preparation and driver selection - without investing even more time and money in developing the car from scratch, as has happened with the CARE/Prodrive 550 Maranellos. Needless to say with outfits as professional as Veloqx, who had run 360s in the UK championship in 2002 - as well as a couple of FIA events, the cars will be completely pulled apart and built to their usual specification taking into account tyre supplier, as well as incorporating their own tweaks - such as Hewland gearboxes replacing the usual Maranello items.

In 2003 prior to Donington Veloqx had entered a pair of 360s in every race, resulting in a one point lead in the Team Championship and drivers Davies/Mullen lying second overall in class, just three points behind the JMB Racing Ferrari pairing of de Simone/Bertolini. It being their 'home' event the Brackley based team decided to enter a third car, to be driven by none other than 2003 Le Mans 24 Hour Winner (and 'Bentley Boy') Guy Smith, paired with with 2002 Veloqx driver, Andrew Kirkaldy. In the tradition of their 1960's namesakes TMC has chosen from the best single seater drivers around - no rent-a-drives here, or sponsorship related signings. Colonel Ronnie Hoare, the 1960s team owner would no doubt have approved.



Donington saw a three car team - this is the Smith/Kirkaldy entry



Andrew Kirkaldy prepares for qualifying

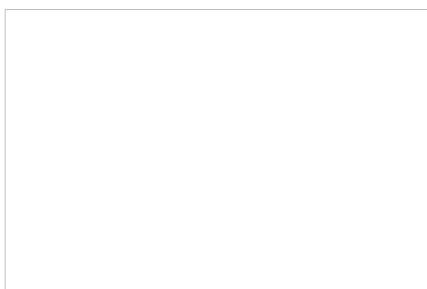
Guided by John Newman, TMC's Commercial Director, we were able to follow their progress from qualifying to race - as well as soaking up the atmosphere of a 2003 FIA GT Round. Friday is very much a day for set-up, tyre choice and fuel consumption testing prior to qualifying on Saturday and the serious business on Sunday. As the race is only three hours long the fuel/tyre consumption issue does become important - an extra stop can make all the difference, particularly as the points position is so close in both driver's and team's championships. The cars are set up and then sent out, brought back in again, checked and flagged on to either go for a time or just test a new component; or simply gain data for the race. Obviously as a UK based company (and one that successfully competed in the 2002 race) TMC know the circuit and its vagaries well - such as high brake-pad wear.

The GT cars like the 550 Maranello, Lister Storm and Chrysler Viper GTS-R are seriously fast machinery, but not so much quicker than the N-GTs, so you don't really get the impression of 'them and us'. TMC's main rivals are the JMB Ferrari 360 entries as well as a rapidly improving Freisinger Motorsport Porsche 996 GT3-RS team that was to prove a thorn in their side all weekend. Driven by Stephane Ortelli and Marc Lieb this car, its team mate and similar Porsches from the EMKA and RWS teams were really on the pace in the race, although Veloqx were delighted with car 89, driven by Kelvin Burt and Darren Turner, claiming pole position in class in Saturday's final qualifying session.

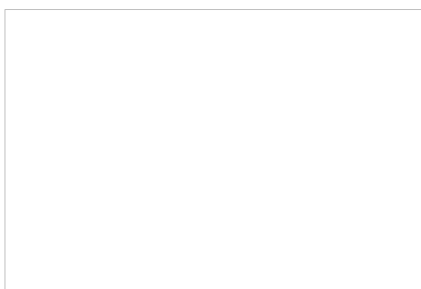


As part of the "LG Super Racing Weekend", and covered in depth on Eurosport satellite TV, the FIA GT Championship shared billing with a round of the revitalised European Touring Car Championship, which ran two back-to-back 13 lap races. Walking round the paddock was a multi-national experience as not only were there big trucks from Ferrari, Porsche and the other GT teams but also works BMW, Seat and, most impressively, Autodelta Alfa Romeo. The days of the long six hour grinds are gone, the GT race is three hours (125 laps at Donington) so it is a much more concentrated form of racing than in the past – and much closer for it. You can easily keep tabs on who is where and see on-track overtaking moves that relate to real-time changes in race position. It's very exciting stuff and even more so with a team to follow.

Race day saw an overcast sky, but dry conditions prevailed. Veloqx had the two regular cars on the grid (the third starting from the pit-lane – a result of last-minute adjustments), immaculately presented as usual, and when the lights turned to green they all managed to avoid an opening lap that saw considerable action amongst the front runners. In GT the 550 Maranello opposition destroyed itself to leave Bobbi/Biagi very much in control again, while in N-GT the Porsches clearly had a performance advantage on this circuit that gave them a grip on the race that the pursuing Ferraris could not break – though valiantly did they try.



Dunlop is an important partner of the team - technicians seen here examining tyres during practice



The business end - Ferrari V8

First Team Maranello casualty was the number 89, pole-sitting, car retiring with a broken gear linkage. Watching from their new-for-Donington covered pit lane control centre, the team is worried about the remaining two cars, Sure enough the problem re-appears with car 80, but it's late in the race and although not serious enough for a retirement it's also another unscheduled stop, and when number 88 comes in (at undiminished speed – I was in the pits at the time) on three wheels the team has another setback. Meanwhile the Porsches drone on, not without their own problems for the pace-setting EMKA version of Tim Sugden and Emmanuel Collard drops out with driveshaft failure leaving the Freisinger Team to scoop class honours.

As the flag drops the Team feel frustrated with their setbacks but fifth and sixth in class gives them useful points and actually gain the lead in the driver's championship (by one point!) despite surrendering their Team advantage.

Five rounds down, it's the halfway point in the Championship and things are very much in the balance. TMC are looking forward to the 24 Hour round at Spa where they expect their organisational skills (plus the bonus of a Le Mans winner on board) will come to the fore.

Try and find the time to see one of the remaining races, I know that you'll enjoy yourself. This was what it was like with the original Team Maranello Concessionaires against other Ferrari clients like Filipinetti and Ecurie Francorchamps. Different cars and drivers perhaps, but a similarly well organised and financed operation, running very good drivers - and entering the most wonderful cars.

The remaining rounds of the 2003 FIA GT Championship Calendar are -

- **SWEDEN** Anderstorp 7 September
- **GERMANY** Oschersleben 21 September
- **PORTUGAL** Estoril 5 October

- **ITALY** Monza 19 October

For information about Team Maranello Concessionaires visit www.veloqxtmc.com.

STOP PRESS....to see how the team fared at Spa [CLICK HERE](#).

Text/Photos - Steve Wakefield



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