



Nigel Greensall – How many cars and circuits in 2008? And Remembering Ronnie Peterson

Nigel Greensall is very much a one-off: there can't be another driver who has raced as many different cars, on as many different circuits, as he did during the 2008 season.

So a few facts to kick off this 2008 feature, just as we begin 2009. Nigel raced 15 different types of car during the year, on 19 circuits. He competed in a total of 56 races, at 30 race meetings, and had the pleasure of racing on 12 circuits in continental Europe, six (yes, just six) in the UK, and one in the Middle East. The variety of cars he competed in is simply staggering – everything from a Funcup VW to an ex-Schumacher, championship-winning, B194 Benetton. He did win in the B194, but, perhaps slightly oddly (to us), gained more pleasure from wheel to wheel racing in a Funcup Volkswagen.

Included within the 23 cars that Nigel raced in 2008, there were the GT3s...Ferrari, Lamborghini and Mustang (right); Group C Argo Chevrolet, Trans-Am Corvette, historic Sunbeam Tiger and Porsche RSR; and Radicals SR3, SR5 and SR8. And of course the Peugeot Silhouette in Belgian Touring Cars.



He raced at Spa-Francorchamps at five different race meetings, competed in five more at Zolder, and two each at Silverstone, Dijon and the Nurburgring – and displays such enthusiasm for racing (and life) that it was entirely appropriate that we caught up with him just before Christmas, to find out what really makes this fellow tick.

We need to go back quite a long way – to the Race of Champions, in 1973... and someone who played a very significant role in Nigel's subsequent career (although sadly, he never knew it).

"I saw Ronnie Peterson at that event, when I was just a kid. Ronnie was racing the JPS Lotus 72, and although he retired, it was a magic day for me. I'd been reading about the man and what a great sportsman he was: it was impossible not to be a fan of his. I subsequently followed every race in which he competed – in F1, F2, sportscars, BMWs, everything. He drove such a diverse collection of cars...."

But nothing like as many as Nigel Greensall races.

"In early 1975, I met Ronnie, at a special event at the Donington Park Museum. He signed a book for me, which I've still got, and he raced on the Scalextric track they'd set up in the museum."

We'll come back to Nigel and Scalextric tracks shortly. But who else features in Greensall's 'Hall of Fame'?

"Hans Stuck, James Weaver, Andy Wallace, Colin McRae, Marku Alen, Al Unser Jr., Dale Earnhardt Snr., Peter Brock, Allan McNish, Gilles Villeneuve, Mario Andretti – that's just about the complete list."

And his favourite race cars comprise an interesting group: the 312P and 512M Ferraris, the Porsche 917, the Ferrari 333SP and, a slightly unusual one (pair), the Dyson and Rafanelli Riley & Scott Mk IIIs – so you'd better explain the connections, Nigel.

"My brother Graham saw Pedro Rodriguez in the 917 at Brands Hatch in 1970, then he saw Ronnie in the 312P at the same event two years later. Ronnie in the 312P was just magic, and he drove the 512M as well of course – and years later, the 333SP became one of my favourite cars because it was like a later version of the 312P. And with its screaming V12 it was just perfect – and it competed against the heavy, thundering R&S with its bellowing V8...a wonderful sight on the Daytona banking."

Nigel can recount his Ronnie Peterson history, all those Marches he raced – three different F1 cars in one year (the 711, the 712X and the 712G) – and the fact that Ronnie was still racing the Lotus 72 in 1975, the car having won World Championships in 1970 and 1972. "And at the Silverstone 6 Hours in 1976, I saw Ronnie race the BMW turbo, all 800 bhp of it – that was the technology that they developed for the one and a half litre F1 cars."

This man knows his history, and he admits that "we're very privileged to be doing this" (race fabulous cars with wonderful people) – and with all that racing throughout 2008, he has to be more privileged than most.

But less than a week before we met for this interview, Nigel was in Sweden, and spent some very precious time with none other than Tommy Peterson, Ronnie's younger brother.

"My girlfriend Nikki arranged the trip. All she said was that it would be a surprise, but she needed a free weekend as near to my birthday as possible."

With his racing commitments carrying on well into November, and past his birthday, the chosen weekend eventually turned out to be December 13-14 – and Nigel and Nikki were off to the Ronnie Peterson Museum, at Orebro in Sweden, where Nikki had even arranged, in collaboration with curator Michael Olsson, for Nigel to meet, and race Scalextric cars with, Tommy Peterson.

"Tommy was an absolutely delightful guy," recounts Nigel. "Before we arrived I was quite nervous about meeting Michael and Tommy, but they're such lovely people... We spent half of Saturday afternoon racing the Scalextric cars – and we all had BMW M3s. I'm going to try and help them find Scalextric models of all of Ronnie's cars."

Tommy Peterson is on the left in the second image, below, with Michael Olsson on the right.



The Greensall / Scalextric connection actually goes back a long way, because "I won £500 as a kid, in a Scalextric competition, aged 16. I put that money towards a kart, our first one, which (my brother) Graham and I did a few races with.

"The cars at the Ronnie Peterson Museum do change quite regularly and currently include an F3 Tecno and a '75 JPS Lotus 72 that Ronnie raced, plus one of the karts his father designed and built, for Ronnie to race. There was also a tractor that Ronnie and Tommy used to drive on their uncle's farm.

"The museum used to be the town's cinema, so it was quite straightforward for them to show videos of Ronnie's racing exploits – and there are obviously masses of Ronnie's trophies on display. Oh, and the Scalextric track is laid out in the shape of the Karlskoga circuit.

"Nikki enjoyed the visit almost as much as I did. It's a very happy, enjoyable tribute to a wonderful and talented man, and it's easy to see how admired he was as a sportsman and a driver. I can highly recommend a visit."

www.ronniepeterson.se is obviously the Ronnie website, which links to the Museum site: they're both very, very good websites. Below, Ronnie Peterson leads Emerson Fittipaldi and Jackie Stewart, at Anderstorp in 1973.



The Nigel Greensall / Ronnie Peterson connection was reinforced in July of this year, when Nigel 'had a go' in a Lola T70 that Ronnie raced.

Former British GT racer Chris Beighton now owns the Lola. "Chris had asked me to race his Sunbeam Tiger with him the following weekend (July 19-20, at Snetterton), and was kind enough to let me have a few laps in the Lola (when we were testing the Tiger)."



Nigel and Chris won in that Tiger – one of four Greensall wins in 2008.

Last comments on Ronnie Peterson: "Ronnie was actually looking to do more endurance races, which makes you wonder whether he might have ended up racing the way Hans Stuck did after F1... the two of them actually had a competition between themselves at the Nurburgring, in their BMW CSLs – to see who could fly higher at the Flugplatz...there's a famous shot of Stuck that day, about three feet off the ground."

And the Nordschleife is one of Nigel's favourite circuits.

"I've done hundreds of laps round there – the first time was with Mike Roberts in his Radical and I ended up driving his motorhome back to the UK. We had a big, laminated map of the circuit and by talking our way round the lap and making notes, by the time we got to Calais I'd learnt the whole track."

“I’ve got a potential plan to do the whole VLN in ‘09: three guys want to do the VLN and the 24 Hours, and the team they drive for also runs Group 4 Escort Mk I rally cars, so maybe I’ll do some historic rallying too.”

Nigel’s remarks about sanitized circuits are very similar to a couple of those names he mentioned in his list of heroes.

“F1 is so safe that the driving standards have gone down. There has to be an element of being punished for making mistakes, but as cars and tracks get safer.... At the Nordschleife, you have to have the mentality that you can’t make mistakes.”

Give this man some fast corners and he’s happy – or even eight different track surfaces in one lap, as at the Colmarberg circuit in Luxembourg.

“It’s the Goodyear test track, and racing the Funcup VW there, I had probably the most fun I’ve had all year. It was a six hour race, and I was in the car for the last hour. The car was really good, but my co-driver was a little bit worried about the brakes. Anyway, I spent the last hour absolutely flat out: there are lots of twists and turns, some parts are only one car wide, and you’re trying to find maximum grip everywhere, without making a mistake on all those surface changes. But it teaches you so much about being on the limit while not making mistakes.”

This is Funcup action from the Nurburgring World Cup Finals in November, where Nigel (in #71) led one race and got up to second in the other.



“And in Funcup, you meet some fantastic people (co-driver Dirk de Groof with Nigel, above) – and the grid girls are the best! You’re racing against people with all levels of experience, from Alain Ferte down to novices, and it’s such a great sport. Racing wheel to wheel against Alain for an hour is just brilliant: it’s such a pure form of motorsport. You have to be millimetre perfect with your lines, and absolutely smooth, to maintain momentum.”

If that Funcup race (second place after the six hours) was Nigel’s most enjoyable event of the year, “my proudest moment was standing on the podium with Iain (Dockerill), after we won the BTCS race at Spa in July, in Iain’s Peugeot Silhouette. Such a well deserved success for Iain, Ivan and all their team.” From pole position, below - and in the second image, out he pops (with a little help from Ivan Dockerill) as Iain Dockerill prepares to take over.



Amazingly, a win in Dave Shelton’s B194 at Zolder, in the Euroboss race on June 1 wasn’t Nigel’s most spectacular race of the year. “Dave wanted to get the car out on display, because it is for sale, but the engine was out of hours. I did three practice laps, one qualifying lap, and spent half the race in fifth and sixth gears.” He still won and set fastest lap.



He also won at Le Mans, with Cameron Macdonald (left) in the latter's Radical SR8.



He's worked out that he's raced with 20 different co-drivers this year, and describes them all as "fantastic people. That's the great thing about racing (so much), all the great people you meet, from all walks of life".

Perhaps that's the secret of this man's distinctive niche in motorsport: racing with so many people, pleasing so many people, looking after so many people's lovely cars, while driving the things as fast as they will go. No wonder they ask him back. Here he is (right) at the Ascari track in Spain, during a tuition session in a Radical - and receiving the trophy (below) for one of two wins at the Radical Gulf Cup in Dubai in November.



Looking at Greensall's 2008 record, it's dotted with fastest laps – including the VdeV races at Magny-Cours in October, in Benton and Richard Bryan's Argo Chevy in the 8 hour Prototype race, and their new GT/Trans-Am Corvette in the GT 6 hour race (both pictured below).



"I hope 2009 will be even busier," he says, "because I want to do even more races than I've done this year. Look at the NASCAR boys: all their races, plus some do the Busch Series and trucks as well – fantastic."

