

# The Chill of the Chase

Hunting down rivals on a dry track is one thing, but how about overtaking them going sideways on ice? Nigel Greensall is our man in the long johns...



## ICE RACING

The club racing scene in the UK generally stretches from March to October, leaving the winter months free for car prep and development, or perhaps a bout of thumb twiddling... Some UK championships do lay on winter race series, which is fine if you happen to run that particular car and can afford to ship it off to sunnier climes. Yet there are alternatives for those wanting to keep their driving skills sharp during the dreary winter months without it costing them a packet.

As some of you may have spotted in Issue 4 of *TrackDriver*, I am a huge fan of the Funcup championship. It provides fabulously close racing at affordable prices, combined with a wonderful atmosphere and spirit. Over the years I have cajoled many drivers into experiencing Funcup first-hand, and without exception all have come away feeling excited by the racing and seeing a benefit in their car control and race craft. And there is a way to have Funcup fun in the winter – race on ice. Held primarily in northern Italy from November until February, Funcup on Ice races have been inspired by the famous Andros Trophy series; drivers get to experience the same sort of thrills and skills required to race at frantic pace on studded tyres on ice, but at a fraction the cost of competing in the Andros.

The Funcup on Ice series is for basically standard Funcup race cars – the only modifications are studded tyres and replacing the front valance with a tubular bumper. The format of the weekend I attended – held in Livigno near the Italian-Swiss border – comprised practice sessions on Saturday afternoon followed on Sunday by qualifying and two races.

It is a two-driver event, each race being 30 minutes long with a pitstop for a driver change – it might sound like a long way to go for two half-hour races, but bear with me. What became immediately apparent was the physical effort and concentration required to drive on ice; I'd say at least double what's required when circuit racing. So while a 30-minute race shared by two drivers sounds short, the state of the drivers when they climbed out at the end of their stint proved that was more than enough! Typically the venues are frozen lakes at good quality ski resorts, thus providing the ideal opportunity for the whole family (a sneaky dangled carrot, one could say), or a group of friends, to enjoy ski-ing and a bit of après ski as well as some racing. An





added bonus to our event was the fact that the venue was also hosting the regional Ice Race Championship for full-blown rally cars. This gave us the chance to watch local superstars in action behind the wheels of rally icons such as Mitsubishi Evos and Impreza Turbos; there was even a magnificent Lancia Delta Integrale kicking up rooster tails of snow. The locals informed me that it's possible to hire one of these rally cars if you fancy

competing in one of the regional rounds, but that's for another time...

Drifting on a safe but slippery surface is a fun thing to do. It's also a great route to gaining confidence in car control, although you do have to get used to watching where you're going through the side windows... Despite that little caveat, the characteristics of the car in this environment are similar to what you're accustomed to. The biggest difference is that you can hold

much, much longer slides while battling for position, with the real chance of gaining position rather than losing time as you would on tarmac: it adds another dimension and level of excitement to the racing. The slides aren't due to a total lack of grip – in fact, the studded tyres provide a tremendous amount of traction in the snow. No, there's not as much grip as there is on a dry track, yet there is more than on a typical wet one. And



those tyres are good communicators, too, a useful trait for building up your confidence in keeping tight control of the drifts. That said, the traction and grip afforded by the tyres is more variable than you'd get on a circuit, primarily because the surface conditions change each lap, as does the racing line.

Just imagine the pandemonium wreaked when a dry circuit is rained on part-way through the race, or there's oil or gravel kicked onto the optimum line: you have to reassess your lap in part or whole. Which is in essence what racing on snow and ice is like, only more extreme. One lap there's grippy ice, the following circulation it has turned into a puddle; next time through somebody has been offline and dumped a substantial layer of fresh snow on it.

And you'd think a frozen lake was flat, like a sheet of ice. But no... The organisers pile up snow – which then freezes – here and there to add some surface variation, while the cars themselves dig troughs and ruts. So it's very bumpy. Snow is piled up around the track perimeter, too, to serve as nature's own Armco. But at least the width of the track is very generous, making it possible to overtake even when the cars involved are facing 90deg to their direction of forward travel.

It all makes for some intriguing adaptations of traditional racing practice. For instance, you sometimes find there's more grip on the outside of the corner than there is at the apex. And that it is possible to use the three-foot snow banks lining the track to correct slides and get back on the power – you do need to be a little careful with that, though, as it's easy to get marooned on top of the banks.

Another consideration when racing on the white stuff is visibility – the car ahead really does throw large amounts of it at the windscreen, some of which makes its way into the cabin through the fresh air vents! Which is probably the ideal moment to mention this ice racing lark can be a touch chilly. As with any ski resort in the height of the season, evening temperatures dip well

