

A year in the life of a Formula One modeller

By way of introduction, I am a veterinary surgeon with a family (Ros my wife and twelve years old twin boys, Philip and Thomas). My other passion being modelling of Formula One cars in 1/12 scale. Taking life seriously, I thought I would describe 2006 in the light of my hobby. 2006 was a typical year reflecting similar events in the years before and hopefully after.

In January, I completed one Brabham BT44 model which had started life as a BT44B Tamiya kit in early 2005. I super-detailed the monocoques of three such models and in the autumn of 2005 concentrated work on one of them. This was the one belonging to Gordon Murray who designed the car back in 1974/5. Gordon had requested that the 1975 BT44B model was converted into that of the previous year, the BT44. I listed four pages of changes made to each chassis and delivered the final product to Gordon himself in January. He was thrilled with it and it was a delightful privilege to spend some time with him in his home. All work on the further two monocoques ceased as we embarked upon a six month extension program at home.

During February, I spent a day with Tyrrell 006 owned by a very successful American racer in the TGP series. The kind and generous custodians of this car allowed me to examine 006 having removed all bodywork for continued research and data gathering. After an exhausting day's work, this would enable me to produce 1/12 scale drawings for a future model project.

With our house extension well underway, I came into contact with a former Lotus Indianapolis 500 mechanic who now works from his garden workshop in Berkshire producing anything in aluminium for current historic race car projects. 1970's Ferrari rearwings are the greatest challenge, but March chassis, Formula Renault and Williams front wings are common requests. I spent many a happy half-day with 'Chalkie' who helped me with my own aluminium-based project and taught me how to finish the item to gleaming perfection. His kindness and generosity is typical amongst the F1 racing fraternity of the 1960's and 1970's. He had contacted me at work one day, looking for help with his poorly cat, having been directed my way by a his friend Phil, an F1 contact in the US. The same Phil had been helping me with data acquisition for a number of F1 cars over the years, most recently with a Shadow DN5, the first batch of data I had requested, arriving at this time. I could now start to draw-up plans for a 1/12 scale model but came across various inconsistencies, so back went a request for further details.

In March, I visited one of Emerson Fittipaldi's former McLaren mechanics Kerry, for whom I had super-detailed a McLaren M23 a couple of years earlier. I collected this precious model and took it along with others to Model Sport 2006 show, held each March in Telford. There, I had a great day with likeminded, seriously good modellers from whom one seeks inspiration and hopefully something of my enthusiasm rubs off on others.

By April, our new kitchen had nearly been completed, which meant the narrow old kitchen with its extension was being worked-on to become my future modelling workshop. I began to collect together a variety of readily available tiles to construct a nearly black tiled-floor intersected by a chequered line towards the office-end and a line of mini-bricks towards the other end, the latter representing the start/finish line at Indianapolis. I then contacted a tile artist who could translate my designs on to 10x10cm tiles to place in the floor and walls at strategic points. We worked together to generate twelve F1 tiles, eight national flags and two Bible verse (John 3v16 and Romans 10v9) tiles, the latter to remind myself and others of my Christian faith and provide a talking point.

During the year, I began to write reviews for SMI relating to several pre-war Mercedes and Auto Union 1/18 scale models I have. This provided a welcome literary stimulation concerning little-known motorsport subjects exquisitely modelled by CMC, whilst I was still unable to return to actually building my own models. Additionally, at various times throughout the year I worked on finalised data for a series of decals for a range of 1/12 scale Tyrrell F1 cars I hope to build in future years. A thread that ran throughout the year was ongoing discussions with Beaulieu National Motor Museum regarding a display of some 1/12 scale F1 models. These discussions started in summer 2005 and are still ongoing, hoping to come to fruition during the summer of 2007.

In June, I went to the Festival of Speed at Goodwood with one of my sons, Philip who attended for the first time. Continuing another spin-off of my 1/12 model hobby, was seeking relevant F1 folk and acquiring their autographs. This year I was looking for Jo Ramirez (ex McLaren amongst others). I called in at McLaren on the Friday and learnt he wasn't there that weekend and so left the subjects to be autographed safely at home. As it happened, on the Saturday, I caught sight of Jo striding across the F1 paddock and so made a bee-line for him and struck-up a conversation. He was most gracious and we arranged to meet again at the Revival event to meet and get the items signed. Whilst at the Festival, I met an historic Ferrari engineer who was actually reconstructing a Sharknose Ferrari on the south coast. We had much to talk about as I had already drawn-up plans for the car in 1/12 based on modifications of the Chris Rea car, also having made the spaceframe in aluminium, steel and brass. We arranged to meet up with his re-creation in August and there in Waterlooville I studied, measured and refined my own attempts at this most evocative of Ferrari racecars. One day, my own 1/12 Sharknose will be completed I hope.

Whilst at the Festival of Speed, I was going to see a 1969 Matra MS80 as advertised which never in fact made the event. So I made special effort to examine the 1968 Matra MS10 and couldn't chat with the mechanics as I spoke little French and they spoke hardly any English. Having converted a Matra MS11 model into an MS10 some years ago, I decided to speak in an International language....photographs. I showed them photos of my MS10 and at once animated mechanics called over 'Bruno' the English speaking French owner of this MS10. Bruno and I chatted for some time and I expressed my desire to see an MS80 and wondered if he knew of its whereabouts. It

turned out he had one back in France and invited me over to see it. Over the next few weeks we e-mailed and telephoned in order for me to visit the Matra Espace museum in Romorantin. I keyed in the address on my Sat Nav and began an adventure into central France a little way south of Orleans and spent an afternoon with MS80/01 and Bruno's MS10. Next day, I visited a small Matra Sports engineering firm and spent the day with MS11/01 and MS80/03. After this fantastic trip, I returned to England with the blessing of having had precious access to these wonderful cars.

Back at home I set to work on fitting-out the old kitchen transposing it into my workshop, named MRO F1 Engineering. A second batch of data arrived concerning the Shadow DN5 and the drawings were now revised and finalised. Work on the two remaining chassis began again in December with a BT44 and a BT44B due to be completed during 2007. After this I hope to take-up the part revised monocoque of Lotus 49 R1, winner at Jarama 1968 in time for the Model Sport 2008 show at Telford, whilst taking a BT44 monocoque to the show this year. So ended a busy year in F1 of sorts. More of the same is already happening in 2007, however this account concerns only one year in the life of a vet!

MRO F1 ENGINEERING

Copyright