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C.J. Risak

'Prix' challenge: Power vs. finesse

POWER. Not the ultimate goal in auto racing. But it can be a pivotal ally. The goal is to win. More power results in more speed. More speed means a faster car. And the fastest car will quite often streak to victory. Quite often. But not always. Sunday's Detroit Grand Prix will allow a good look at power vs. finesse. It may be the last look Detroit gets with these factors as such opposites.

TURBO AND FORD Cosworth — these are the two powerplants used to propel the sleek Formula One autos. The Cosworth engine has been in use for 15 years, and has dominated the Grand Prix racing scene much of that time.

Turbo, however, have emerged as the engine of the future. Because, in simplest terms, a turbo engine can provide more power.

A lot more. The V-8 Cosworth engine now in use cranks out, at top, 540 horsepower (hp). A four-cylinder turbo engine is capable of 700 hp.

That's an incredible power advantage. But, even though now a majority of the Formula One teams race turbos, the powerful engine has not dominated.

Why? There are many reasons. Turbos have been around since the '40s, but Renault is credited with its recent development. Still, the Renault team has been working and refining the engine for eight years and reliability problems remain. And a car can't win if it doesn't finish.

Reliability may be the No. 1 reason Keke Rosberg won the World Drivers' title last year in a Cosworth-powered Williams. Rosberg didn't win a race, but placed high enough in his races to outpoint his turbo competitors.

RELIABILITY ISN'T as big a problem for turbos as it was, according to Wally McCoy, general manager of Livonia's McLaren Motors. McLaren and Williams are the two major Formula One racing teams using Cosworth engines.

"Ferrari is the most reliable (of the turbos)," McCoy said. "Renault and BMW have a certain amount of trouble, and the others have degrees of problems."

"But, yeah, they are getting better." Still, the Cosworth cars have tough, especially on light, city-street courses — like Detroit's. And McCoy thinks it's because of tires.

"People look at the turbo vs. Cosworth, but they don't realize there's a tire war going on between Michelin and Goodyear," he said. "Rosberg's win at Monaco (May 15) was entirely because of his choice of tires."

What Rosberg did was use Goodyear tires suited for a dry track, even though the circuit through the streets of Monte Carlo was wet. The track dried after a few laps and Rosberg had a big advantage over the turbo cars.

THE COSWORTH powerplant is lighter than the turbo package and more fuel efficient. That means the turbos must carry a heavier load. And a heavier car wears out tires more rapidly.

So does a course with an abundance of light turns. So far this season, there have been two Grand Prix races on city streets: at Monaco, where Rosberg reigned, and at Long Beach, in which McLaren got its only victory of the season with John Watson finishing first.

Turbos have won the other Grand Prix events, with Renault's Alain Prost winning the Belgian and French races, Nelson Piquet capturing the Brazilian in his Brabham-BMW and Patrick Tambay driving his Ferrari to triumph at San Marino. All three courses are more wide open, with longer straightaways suited to the faster turbos.

"What can be expected in Detroit this weekend? There are so many variables, it's hard to predict," said McCoy.

INDEED IT IS. One of those variables is the course itself, which has been altered. Last year, Watson won in his McLaren at an average speed of 78.5 miles per hour. This year's course is rumored to be much faster, with some of the lighter turns absent. And faster favors turbos.

Weather, too, could have an effect. And don't forget the tire war McCoy mentioned.

Certainly, fans will see two different races over the weekend: the qualifying laps and the race itself. The swift turbos should dominate the qualifying. They have at every race this season.

But if there is a Cosworth within the first three rows, beware. The tight turns could take a toll on the turbos on race day.

HOW MUCH turbo-powered engines will dominate Formula One racing remains a question because of rules changes for next year. The minimum weight is being lowered and pit stops for fuel will be disallowed.

That means the less efficient turbos will have to cut their horsepower to save fuel and weight. Still, McCoy figures that soon all Formula One teams will race turbos. McLaren already has a Porsche-turbo powerplant on order. It could arrive by year's end.

"They'll probably be more development on the turbos," McCoy said. "They'll have to cut back to a lower horsepower level."

"(The changes) will take away some of the turbo's advantage. It'll even things out." But that's next year. At this year's Detroit Grand Prix, it'll be power vs. finesse.



Members of the Detroit Rugby Club battle for possession (ball at far right) during a scrum — a rugby term calling for players to huddle in a crablike position.

Scrum people

These rugby players enjoy contact sport

By Tom Henderson
staff writer

The rugby player lateraled the ball an instant before the jarring tackle, which could be heard and almost felt across the field. The player slumped to the ground and lay motionless while the play continued down field. After 20 seconds, the player began to writhe, rolled over, slammed the ground in pain and frustration, tried to rise, fell. Action was halted and the player was carried off the field to an ovation from both teams.

Seconds later play resumed with fierce hitting, crisp lateralizing, and hell-bent-for-the-goal-line sweeps. The hitting was particularly strong, with bodies colliding without let up as the non-stop action shifted back and forth across the field at Levy Middle School in Southfield.

Though the play was polished and the contact savage, none of the men were hurt. That's because the men were there as spectators or officials. All the tackling and impressive play was carried on by what in times past has been referred to as the weaker sex.

The players may be women, but this isn't a kitchen, bub. It's not a laundry room, either. It's the field of battle, and battle it out they do. If you don't play heads up, somebody is liable to hand you yours on a platter.

JENNIE REDNER, a 1978 graduate of West Bloomfield High, where she was "an all-around jock" in softball, basketball and volleyball, is the head of the U.S. Women's Rugby Association. She lives in Bloomfield Hills and, in case the

myth of the dumb jock lives on, let it be known she is an engineer in Novi.

She plays for the Detroit Women's Rugby Club, which plays its home games at Levy in its spring and fall seasons. Recently, the Detroit club hosted the Michigan State club, for whom Redner toiled before graduating in 1980, and the Lakeshore club from Chicago. Despite the ferocity of the game and the way the women play it, the three teams went at it in consecutive, round-robin fashion. MSU and Detroit tied, 0-0, in the opener; Lakeshore zipped past Detroit in game two, 12-0; and MSU nipped Lakeshore, 12-6, in game No. 3.

"I got into it at State," explained Redner after the first game. "I ran into a friend at the bookstore who told me the rugby team was having trouble. I didn't know it then, but everyone who tries out makes it. I showed up and was hooked."

"I had a van and was adopted as team driver. I took the whole team everywhere in my van for three years."

Rugby is something of a cross between soccer and football, like what kids call tackle keepaway, with the object to move a swollen, football-like ball across the goal line. Despite the solid hitting, Redner and Janna Richards, a player who serves as publicity director, too, insist it is almost safe.

"I've only seen two broken bones since I've been on the team — a hand and a nose, nothing major," said Richards, who works in the accounting department of a Detroit film processing lab.

"It's less dangerous than football," said Redner, who, as head of the U.S. association, oversees a sport with 250 women's teams nationwide. "There's no shoulder pads, which can

cause injuries, and no helmets. So you don't get any suicide moves."

Nevertheless, the action in the fast-paced game can be described as kamikaze. There are 15 players a side, with two 30-minute halves and running time. Players wear shorts, rugby shirts and no protective equipment.

"The only injuries they might have to worry about are the ones they'll get in the third half," joked Richards, third half referring to the beer blast that traditionally follows rugby matches of the male or female variety. "One of us will sacrifice our house. I sacrificed mine last year and it's still in a shambles."

RUGBY IS colorful and fun to watch. The scrum is of interest. Though the players insist there is some organization to a scrum and a method to what appears as madness, chaos is mostly what it looks like.

After stoppages in play, half of each team forms a bunched-up mass as tightly packed as it can get, arms wrapped around shoulders and backs. In the middle of this mass, hidden from view, two scrummers will vie for the ball, which is tossed into the scrum.

After the ball is rolled in, the scrum moves crablike across the field, lurching one way and then another until the ball, somehow, works itself free. When it does, the players who have been following the scrum scoop it up and race toward the goal line.

Equally as colorful is the terminology for the sidelines plays, when the ball is tossed in by one team after the other has knocked it out of bounds.



MINDY BALCHERS/staff photographer

Southfield High runner Glen Williams helped the Blue Jays win the Oakland County championship last week as he was first in the 300-meter low hurdles and second in the 100 high hurdles. See Pages 2 and 5-C.

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