

# RallySport

Not a test car: this very Evo 2 Ibiza Kit Car should have won this year's Scottish Rally and Sharp, the lucky sod, got to drive it. Gwyndaf Evans was on hand to demonstrate the car's full ability just in case Martin didn't quite investigate that extensive dynamic envelope in its entirety...

**WARNING!**  
**UNCUT**  
INCLUDES MATERIAL TOO  
EXPLICIT FOR TV BROADCAST

**DRIVE**



Photography: John Colley



# uncovered





Mark Wood, middle pic, is a Seat Cupra Sport team mechanic... and one brave bloke; Mark agreed to sit next to CCC during test drive

The Roger Clark RallySprint track at Silverstone, three days after the Scottish Rally. Sweat beads trickled down my brow as the crash helmet was lifted off. I'd just clambered from behind the wheel of the very Seat Ibiza Evo 2 Kit Car which Gwyndaf, Evans would have driven to victory in Scotland, had a cruel engine misfire on the final stage not forced him into second place.

"That was just fantastic!" opined a rally wag as he walked over to where I stood next to the Evo 2 in my racing pyjamas. There was more than a hint of cynicism lying heavy in his words. I quickly turned the conversation to the subject of accounting which, according to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* is, in the verbal sense, the 'process or art of keeping and verifying accounts.'

"Ah yes, accounting," countered my colleague, now a successful businessman: "You do it because you've got to make somebody happy. I remember when I was setting up my business, I had to constantly remind my accountant that what I wanted to know was good news. I kept having to



say; 'Don't tell me about the depressing stuff: give me a happy account.'"

But, hold on - what were we doing talking about number-crunching just after I'd driven an Evo 2 Seat Ibiza Kit Car, the first journo and only the second non-team person to do so? We should have been discussing high rpm grunt, traction out of hairpins, flying abilities and levels of stability in long corners. But we were talking about accounts.

In truth, the account we were talking about was this one. How the hell I was going to write that I

had just thrashed Gwyndaf's Seat within very yards of its life. At least I could console myself that it had been yards, rather than inches.

Gary Savage, the Seat Cupra Sport boss, had trusted me with his precious car: Steve Black, its preparation boss, had already intimated that Gwyndaf's tarmac testing schedule for Ulster and the Manx would be stuffed if he didn't get that ex-Scottish engine for his testing. And Gwyndaf was just four paltry points behind Martin Rowe in the British Championship... my kneecaps do a pretty good job at the moment; there was no way you'd find me anywhere near buzzing that motor.

So I didn't buzz the motor. Still suffering from its Scottish misfire, that Heini Mader-prepared Seat twin-cam never got a chance to take too deep a breath with my right foot controlling it.

However, as the photographic evidence at 'JT's jump' proves, I wasn't driving that slowly. My drive was certainly enough to give me an idea of just how much of a mega-machine Gwyndaf's Evo 2 really is... and I can still bend my legs.

## Master class

Before my drive, I'd already got a feeling for how good the Ibiza Evo 2 is, having sat next to Mr Evans in the car around the RallySprint track. This turned out to be a particularly entertaining episode, containing a bonus I shall not forget for a long time. Whenever that Gwyndaf grin comes out, you just know there's a bit of fun behind it. This was one of those times.

Straight off, Gwyndaf blasted out on to the track, left-footing the brakes to get them up to temperature. It was purely by chance that this was just after a journo colleague shot past the track entry point in one of Seat's Super Six Ibizas. The two Seat rally cars were the only ones on the track. I looked at Gwyndaf; he looked at me, the grin was already there; the words didn't need saying... we had two RallySprint track options - the outside, or the inside. My bonny journo mate (well, he was a mate until I wrote this!) dived his Super Six Seat into the inner track. Guess which one we took...

## HAIL THE PACE

Next year, the Mobil 1 British Rally Championship will follow the lead of the World series and time all rally cars to tenths of a second. As the pace of the competition in this year's Scottish Rally proved conclusively, this is a wise decision. In fact, the title could rest on it...

Drivers were on their own pace notes in the Scottish forests. Derek Ringer's been about. He co-drove winner Martin Rowe and co-drove Colin to his World title in '95. So Derek knows what's quick and what's not. After the Scottish, Derek's opinion of the pace was, "This is bloody quick!" Jarmo Kytölehto knows the British forests well, too. His opinion of the pace? "Incredible!"

In '91 Gwyndaf Evans was 90% set for a Group N World Rally Championship assault. When it all went pear-shaped at the last minute, that had absolutely nothing to do with Gwyndaf. Severe disappointment understates his feelings at that time; had the drive happened Gwyndaf is pretty confident he'd be mixing it with the likes of Colin and Tommi today... and there's no way Gwyndaf is going to let himself be disappointed big-style again. But, given the chink of an opportunity of a World programme today, the Welshman has admitted he would 'grab it for sure; no question about it!'

Gwyndaf freely admits that drivers on the top line of the World Rally Championship have the jump start on him because of event experience but, "I honestly believe that the way that we're going now in the British Championship, the pace won't have to change much. Y'know, I'll have to just do the same in a World Rally Car... if I did the same performance in a World Rally Car as we were doing at the weekend on the Scottish Rally, we would be there or thereabouts (on a World rally), I'm sure. Or, if you like, put Richard Burns in a Formula 2 car in the British Championship and, with all due respect to him - and I have a lot of respect for him - I think he would still be swapping seconds with us."

Gwyndaf explains what he's going to do to parts of Sharp's anatomy if the car doesn't come back in one piece





ibiza  
uncovered



Second evolution of the Ibiza Kit Car proved to have a particularly well-sorted chassis – even when its wheels aren't connected to the ground. Body attrition is from Scottish Rally – car came straight from Scotland to the CCC test at the Silverstone RallySprint track

Poor bugger, you could almost hear that second word going through his head Fast Show-style as he saw mirrors-full of Evo 2 and Gwyndaf. It was just a bit of fun though, and we soon left the man to get on with learning how a (not slow) Super Six Ibiza feels to drive. As he took the Super Six to the shorter RallySprint track option, in the Evo 2 out on the main circuits everything was now at working temperature, Gwyndaf putting it on the plateau where it starts to work as it should. Immediately, it was obvious that here was one very stable Kit Car, with a front-drive chassis capable of control precision the like of which blesses very few others.

Coming out of the tarmac-to-gravel sweeping right up at the Paddock end, the controlled messages coming back from the Evo 2's rear end were as explicit and almost as much to the point as its driver is when explaining a car dynamic to an engineer at a test session.

Barrelling on down, aiming right to avoid the yumpette before the hairpin right, a somewhat less than controlled message came full-screen: we were flat-chat towards the kink-left round the little jump. Suddenly, right-to-left, our 'screen became full-green with Super Six Ibiza. *'Whee... bump,'* it went gently into the bank. In a mere nanosecond Gwyndaf's mind went from *'change-trajectory-from-right-round-jump-to-left-over-jump'* to *'keep-full-right; avoid-stopped-green-car.'*

It had been such a gentle bump that the Super Six Ibiza's bodywork wasn't damaged at all and a quick glance confirmed that neither were the occupants. No need to stop. Grin now gone, Gwyndaf's head moved slightly forwards as he sent the Evo 2 into attack mode. Apart from the map-induced intermittent engine misfire, it was obvious that the Evo 2's 2-litre Kit engine had



good grunt combined with unusual flexibility. But again the message was coming through loud and clear from the Seat's chassis. Although it easily 'twitched' round the nadgery bits of the RallySprint track, it also displayed commendable stability over the faster and the bumpier bits.

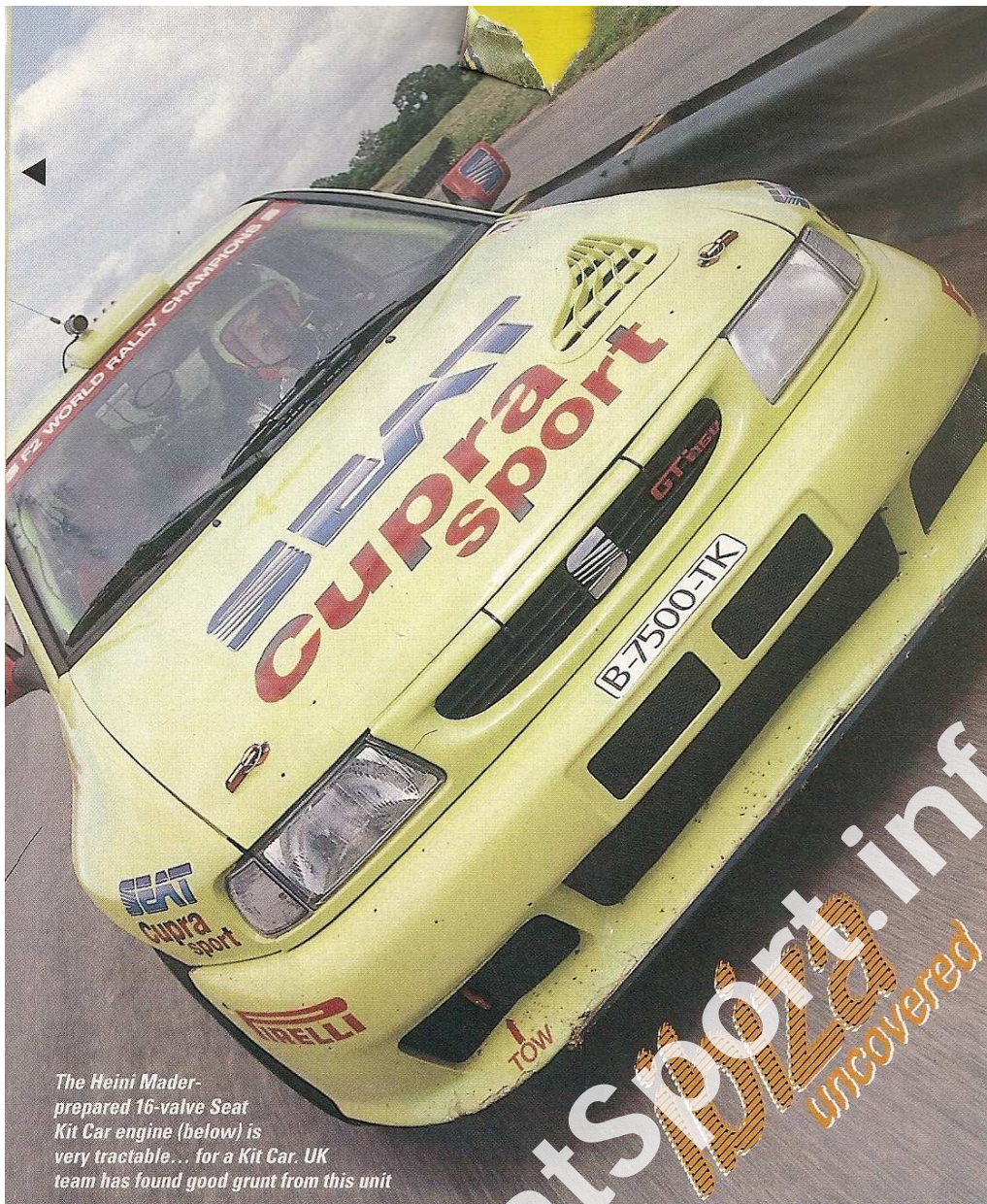
Coming to a halt after the run, I wondered whether Gwyndaf agreed with me that the Evo 2's chassis felt to be at least up with the best of the Formula 2 Kit Cars; if not *the* best. With Gwyndaf behind the wheel, the car seemed to be particularly stable, a fact he confirmed: "It is stable. It's the strength of the car; the way the chassis has been constructed." Gwyndaf paused. "But I won't answer the first question!"

### Mark. My word!

In Mark Wood, Seat Cupra Sport has an extremely brave technician. For it was Mark the mechanic who had agreed to ride shotgun to CCC during our on-track assessment of the Evo 2 Ibiza Kit Car. When Mark couldn't be bothered to adjust the side straps of the six-point harness to reach across his powerful frame, he was still completely unaware of my utter determination to bring Gwyndaf's car back intact and fully functional. A brave man indeed.

A quick run through the back-for-up sequential gearchange and its flickering digital position indicator, then it was ignition on, and time to press the starter button. Firing first hit, the





# WELSH

Seat Sport team manager Jaime Puig rates Gwyndaf Evans very highly indeed. Not only is Gwyndaf quick, his ability to communicate straight talk with rally engineers help make his rally car development talents legend. Mechanics speak in awe of his ability to suss out that one damper click setting just isn't right, immediately after adjustment on the road section before the stage. And after his testing years with Ford, there's not a lot Evans doesn't know about active diffs and four-wheel-drive.

Puig doesn't need anyone to tell him that this Welsh driver is a crucial component in helping the comparatively small Seat team towards both a third successive World 2-Litre Cup and getting its new World Rally Car up to the pace of the best.

Evans and Marc Duez will do the large part of the early development driving, aimed at honing the Seat WRC to competitiveness. Additionally, Evans will be aiding Seat Sport's World 2-Litre Cup effort from behind the wheel of an Ibiza Kit Car on the Finland Rally, at least.

"But I would also like to see him win

The Heini Mader-prepared 16-valve Seat Kit Car engine (below) is very tractable... for a Kit Car. UK team has found good grunt from this unit

16-valve settled into a smooth idle. A lap to familiarise myself with the gearchange, steering and brakes; then a spot of car-to-car snappery then pedal to the... er, about 7000rpm. First snick up, I used the clutch then, realising that was

superfluous, the next clutchless upchanges became easy so quickly you'd think I'd just driven to the track in a car with a sequential dog 'box. The gear cut would help on my rare full-throttle upchanges. And I wouldn't be hampered by the 10



sec to 15 sec delay before the upchange gear cut comes in again...

Going down the 'box was a different matter though. It took a while before I was confident of catching a lower gear without a tad of help from the clutch. And then, even when I had the confidence, it took a bit more time for me to realise just how hard you've got to slam that lever forwards to get it in the gear. I simply hadn't sussed the amount of effort which goes into those firm little hand-palm whacks Gwyndaf uses when changing down. Although not super-close, the ratios are in much closer proximity than most Europeans prefer when engaging in intercourse of the verbal variety.

Today's top Kit Car engines can run well above 9000rpm, and the competitive ones produce their power peaks not that far from there. The Seat engine is no exception, but it also impressed me, in particular, with its low-rpm tractability. There are no worries applying wide throttle angles above a comparatively low 4000rpm; and power delivery is commendably clean and constant.

On dialling good grunt out of the Seat 16-valve, however, the awesome nature of that grunt shows immediately at the steering wheel. Not that anything untoward happens, just that the fat figures of urge being forced through the two front wheels onto gravel or slippery tarmac give notice of their scale sufficient to concentrate this mind wonderfully. I already had immense respect for Gwyndaf Evans' abilities. After a few tentative prods into the power band he uses most of the time, my respect is tinged with awe.

From my ride with Evans, I knew the chassis was good. But with such an impressively flexible and powerful engine inside it, it needs to be.



## WRC FOR RAC?

the British Championship," explained Puig. So, depending on how Seat is doing in the British Championship and the World 2-Litre Cup, Gwyndaf could also be available for Sanremo and Australia. After the Acropolis Rally, Seat led Peugeot in the 2-Litre Cup by four points. The French team's only other planned outing this year is in Sanremo, which might well be the last rally for the works Peugeot Sport 306 Maxi tarmac racers, although there was a press-time rumour that they may appear in Finland, too. After the Scottish Rally, as the British Championship went to the final two tarmac rounds of the series, Seat had a 4.5 point lead over Renault, with Gwyndaf four points behind Martin Rowe. Incidentally, Neil Wearden in his Super 1600 Group A Honda was still an amazing third overall in the Mobil 1 series after the Scottish race.

If things pan out positively for the Spanish team, two Seat WRCS are planned to debut in Finland, driven by Seat Sport regular drivers Oriol Gomez and Harri Rovanperä. With Gwyndaf in one Ibiza Kit Car, the second will be driven by Finn, Toni Gardemeister.

Seat Sport's intention was that its WRC would contest all four remaining rounds of the 1998 World Rally Championship, with the possible exception of Indonesia. Now that the

situation in Indonesia has forced that rally to be cancelled, we can expect to check out the latest Seat rally cars in Finland, Sanremo, Australia and the RAC Rally. The principle is that Gomez and Rovanperä will drive the WRCS. In principle...

Although Seat Sport President Vincente Aguilera considers that he already has good drivers on board for next year's full World Rally Championship with the Seat WRC, at that car's launch he did admit that the team is actively looking for other drivers as well.

The 1999 World Rally Championship promises two teams, with new WRCS at the start of the Monte Carlo Rally in addition to the existing four manufacturers. Later in the year, Peugeot will come on stream with its 206 WRC. More and more World seats will become available, yet the cotte of drivers with the right combination of supreme talent and experience remains finite. Some great



opportunities are being created.

Gwyndaf knows that he's driving better than he ever has before and has always said he wants a full WRC programme. Gary Savage, Head of Seat Cupra Sport in UK, reckons Gwyndaf deserves a chance to demonstrate his ability on the world stage.

After Gwyndaf has had the opportunity to put some testing miles into the Seat WRC, just imagine how he could go in one in this year's RAC. But let's just hope that Seat has sewn up the 2-Litre title by then.

Sure, I did actually have a bit of a go, but I'm no Gwyndaf, so what I think is largely 'Cor Blimey' irrelevance. What I can tell you honestly about this top-level works Kit Car, though, is that it's actually easy and quirk-free to drive slowly. And that's more important than it sounds, especially on the road sections, where it would be a doddle to drive.

That quality, not shared by some other rally cars I could mention, probably derives from its

all-round abilities. The tubular handbrake lever is U-bent towards the driver's hand, making it a natural control device in the hairpins. Thumping in the power out of the hairpin is not an on/off affair. There's progression and controllability in abundance – and steering-influenced cylinder-cut traction control, too; but this driver was far too busy pulling the handbrake to think about hitting the traction control button mounted on the steering wheel spoke.

Cupra Sport mechanics have nothing but praise for the legendary car-sussing abilities of their number one driver. Development has seen Seat Sport Chief Engineer Benoit Bagur's exceptional basic concept of the Evo 2 Ibiza chassis mixed into a useful cocktail with Öhlin's technology and Gwyndaf's nous, resulting in a supreme Kit Car chassis energised by a competitively powerful, yet remarkably tractable, powerplant.

When it's not misfiring, that is. ■

## PLAN AHEAD

Put any one of the Brit Champ drivers in a pukka works World Rally Car in an event in the UK forests and ask yourself, would you miss the spectacle? That's exactly the question Seat UK's marketing manager, Gary Savage, asked himself. He could see no option, Seat UK just had to have a Seat WRC for Gwyndaf to use in the British forests.

But such a car cannot compete in the British Championship today and anyway, how would you feel if you were running a turbo four-wheel-drive rally car in the Mintex Championship and a works WRC came and stuffed you – even if it wasn't registered for Championship points? Sure there would be publicity, but it would be negative publicity. Manufacturers with WRCS would need to weigh that up.

At the end of this year, Ford and Subaru will have done two World Rally Championship seasons with WRCS, Toyota one-and-a-half; and the Group A Mitsubishi technology is

certainly not off the pace either. At the end of this year the World Rally Championship will have welcomed the Seat WRC to its fold, and will be looking forward to arrivals of the Skoda WRC, the Peugeot WRC, the Hyundai WRC and the Nissan WRC.

With modern Kit Cars, the Mobil 1 British Rally Championship today is stunningly competitive and fast. It is the pinnacle national series and it deserves to stay so. And to do that, it needs to retain its current, very strong manufacturer support.

But today's top Kit Cars are approaching the cost of good four-wheel-drive turbo cars. It is now that the Championship should be looking very closely indeed at enabling four-wheel-drive turbo rally cars to compete again.

Gwyndaf Evans agrees. "While I was initially sceptical about Formula 2, it's proved to be 100% right. But I virtually say now that next year it requires WRC. It's ready... and there's got to be two divisions because,

unfortunately for Formula 2, it's become so expensive. It's so close to WRC costs you might as well run WRCS, because there are seven or eight manufacturers already with a WRC, even if it's only in test and development. But there's still room there for Formula 2."

In aiding manufacturers to come to the World rally party, the World Rally Car regulations have massively increased the fertility of top rally cars with four-wheel-drive and turbochargers. As more and more WRCS appear, by definition specialist suppliers will concentrate on developing components for rally cars of that configuration. Teams running Kit Cars will either need to increase funding significantly or switch to WRCS. And many will still wish to contest a national rally series.

And if that doesn't happen in Britain, it will happen for sure in a national rally championship elsewhere...