

Faster but not as exciting

The other day I figured I would dive into my collection of rally video's and watch some classic rally footage. I was very surprised to see the difference in driving style from 1997 to today's WRC cars. In 1997 the likes of Colin McRae, Carlos Sainz and Didier Auriol were pitching their cars violently into hard braking drifts, shaking the cars side to side entering a corner. After snapping the car fully sideways, they held a steep drift angle through to the corner's exit where the car would pull straight and rocket down the stage to the next glorious corner.

So I figured I'd look at some even older rally videos. Funny thing, the older the video, the more entertaining the driving style was. Many say the 70's were the greatest years in rallying, as fans were treated to a true feat of driving skill as Vatanen, Mikola, Munari, Blomquist, Wilson and Pond danced their Escorts, Lancia's and Fiat Abarths through the stages with absolute precision, commitment and fearlessness. These cars would never be seen straight on stage. Under acceleration, braking and cornering, these cars had two prominently large rooster tails of dirt

being ejected for the rear tires as they danced through the forests.

Not only were these cars visually appealing, but they also sounded glorious. Twin bank side draft Weber carburetors at full song on a Cosworth 1800.....there's nothing like it. True enough modern rallycars emit vicious crackling backfires as the throttle is lifted, which does sound cool, but the quiet turbo engines have nothing on a highly strained normally aspirated versions.

So why are the million dollar WRC cars of today so much more boring to watch than their equivalents 30, or even 3 years ago? Grip! Today's cars have 3 fully active differentials that make the car stay as straight as possible, therefore producing the most grip and speed. Today's top WRC drivers can pick a racing line through even the most slippery gravel road, making the sport



look more like racing than rallying. The only real sideways action can only be seen when a driver makes a mistake. This is all to make driving easier for the drivers and make the cars as fast as possible. Subaru and Mitsubishi even make active center diffs in road going STi's and Evo's

Cars built in the 70's had no electronics and only mechanical rear LSD's. These cars were a lot more of a hand full and specific skills had to be induced to get the most speed out of the car. That meant a car that seemed to the untrained eye to be recklessly out of control, were in reality the driver was getting the most from the cars abilities. Thus being much more interesting to watch.

Ironically in the WRC, it is the slower Super 1600 cars that are more pleasing to watch, in my and many others opinion. Even though they have only 200bhp and are FWD, the effort needed to make these cars fast is clearly seen by the spectator and applauded. The FIA has noticed this and is now considering making the center diffs in WRC cars mechanical, to make the cars slide more, and keep rallying's trademark in the motorsport world. A sideways car, were the driver need to look out the door window to see were he is going.

By Budd Stanley

