Shell Eco Marathon UK

The Shell Eco Marathon seems to be largely overlooked by the motorsport community, by pretty much everyone, well apart from Shell obviously. Yet it is a real opportunity, not for making money, but for discovering that untapped seam of talent. There were 51 cars at this years event, from seven countries, all European, mostly from Schools and Colleges.

Fuel usage (or the lack of it) rather than speed is what the event is all about, simply go as far as you can on as little fuel as possible.

Honda are one of very few have realised this potential and have got behind a schools initiative, but where are the rest of the big car companies? If you look at the amount of serious organisations involved with Formula SAE you wonder why they have not picked up on this 'junior' competition. Motorsport once again failed to promote itself and missed an opportunity.

The event did gain some hefty media coverage thanks to the participation of the works Ferrari drivers, photographs of the two drivers appeared in publications around the world but very little was written about the event itself.

Dr. Steve Cousins, Caterham 2R project leader, said: "This project is an experiment to investigate how a light-weight car can participate in the Eco-marathon without major technical amendments. As far as we know, no previous entries have been driven to the event before, but the Caterham 2R will certainly be arriving at Rockingham on its own four wheels. We hope to learn a great deal about the potential for increased fuel efficiency in road legal cars that we can put to valuable use in the future." The Caterham 2R is powered by a standard MG Rover 1598cc K-series engine, modified only to incorporate the fuel measurement flask required for the competition. The 115bhp engine is capable of propelling the road-going Caterham Seven to 60mph in 6.2 seconds and to a top speed of 122mph. 'Caterham 2R' (record-breaker and research), is based on a Caterham Seven, one of the most extreme road-going sportscars on sale and recent holder of startling performance records*. The programme has backing from Motorsport Development UK under its EEMS (Energy Efficient Motorsport) initiative that has enabled some limited modifications to be made to the donor vehicle.

Ferrari's Rubens Barrichello at the wheel of the Shell Eco car, media scrum surrounds.

The only Scottish entry at the event was the flying Scotstown, of note is wooden bodywork cladding a lightweight spaceframe.

One of the most interesting entries came from Warriner team plus, the unusual looking vehicle is propelled by a fan mounted in a hamster cage at the rear of the car. It may sound like Heath - Robinson has met Mad Max but it seems to work.

The Warriner fan car recorded speeds of up to 35mph, though was not very fuel efficient. The idea for a fan driven car came from the minds of ten key stage 3 & 4 school children.

Children are usually the drivers of these streamlined specials. The interiors are very cramped indeed, drivers sealed in by the cars bodywork. Engines are wrapped to retain heat and improve fuel efficiency - note the small glass fuel tank.