



HUMBLE PYE

# MARCUS PYE

## “RAY IS PAINFULLY MODEST IN A BUSINESS RIFE WITH BLUSTER”

**UNDERDOGS APPEAL** to my competitive nature, always have, thus the chance to laud an outstanding effort by the Ray marque in Formula Ford's inaugural Duratec year is a pleasure in a business so often dominated by spending power over natural ability.

Bert Ray has seemingly been in racing for ever—he gained his grounding running complicated Formula 2 McLaren M4As for Graham Warner's Chequered Flag team in the late 1960s—indeed, if there were a lifetime achievement award for perseverance in FFord, there could be no other inductee.

A graduate of the university of hard knocks, the avuncular Ray's strong and superbly engineered cars have always excelled in bush leagues, yet drivers with big backing trudged to Norfolk and what was perceived to be the safe option at Van Diemen. Even when Ralph Firman's equipe bred the occasional dog.

This season, however, Bert's eponymous cars have shone like never before in FFord's premiership. And won the hotly-contested Castle Combe FF1600 championship with Matt Rivett in a nine-year-old design.

The first year of any new formula often proves problematical, but is an important opportunity for a determined company to rewrite the formbook. Ray drivers Peter Dempsey, Nick Tandy and Adriano Buzaid have all won UK Duratec rounds in 2006.

It was not until a fortnight ago at Thruxton, when Norwegian Christian Ebbesvik won, that past master Van Diemen got its first '06 victory. That speaks volumes for the quality of the Mygale and Ray onslaughts.

Ray earned his reputation as Crossle's agent in London, servicing and repairing the fine Northern Ireland-built cars designed by John Crossle and Leslie Drysdale (later of Mondiale) in that racing hotbed of North Street, Clapham.

He branched into chassis manufacture in

1973, building a feisty little wedge-shaped car with side radiators. I recall seeing the intensely promising Richard Morgan—then with flowing Jesus Christ Superstar hair and straggly beard—racing a development chassis on an early visit to Thruxton. They even went into F3 together, but a useful car/driver combo was torpedoed by woeful funding.

Later FF1600 cars made a habit of carrying off the late-lamented BRSCC Champion of Brands titles with the likes of Andy Ackerley, Chris Creswell and Karl Jones driving and the factory had moved to the circuit's doorstep in West Kingsdown.

Now based in Croydon, the omnipresent family marque has undergone metamorphoses, but the underlying principles of sound engineering, fine craftsmanship and, above all, personal integrity remain.

If Bert is guilty of anything over three decades and more it's his inability to shout about his success. Painfully modest and self-deprecating in a business rife with bullshit and bluster (and eager listeners), PR has never been his strong suit. Which is why it's great to see his cars do the talking, in skilled hands.

His tutelage has rubbed off on nephew Tony Sinclair, who served his apprenticeship at Clapham as a teenager, won a Pre-'74 FF1600 crown (in a Ray), and went on to design and race the superb series of Jade sports racers. Currently laid up in an Italian hospital following a ghastly shunt at Monza, he's another of the intuitive engineers that this sport badly needs.



Dempsey (front) and Buzaid have won five races for Ray this year