

Rob Austin from Rob Austin Racing interview

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EXCLUSIVE:

We managed to catch up with the BTCC's "*King of Cool*", & future film star Rob Austin, to get more details about his A4 NGTC (Next Generation Touring Car) and how things have progressed since entering the BTCC in 2011.



Two A4's were ordered in rear wheel drive format as a "package" from GPR motorsport. The plan was to run the two cars and entry into the BTCC as a business from the start, but things didn't go according to plan- especially when the second car was only delivered in the middle of the 2011 season.

NGTC regulations mean that the cars all use the same front & rear subframe & suspension assemblies, (in an attempt to keep costs low for the teams and ensure a fairly level "playing field" was used by all competitors)

Next Generation Touring Car (NGTC), featuring the use of some common components such as electronics, brakes, gearboxes and suspension:



2-litre turbocharged production-based 4-cylinder petrol engine, producing approx. 300bhp with a 7,000 rev limit, running 1bar of boost and No restrictor.

- 6-speed sequential semi-automatic gearbox

- Minimum length of 4.4m
- Standardised width of 1875mm
- 2, 3, 4 or 5 door – providing they share the same basic silhouette and dimensions as the 4/5 door saloon version
- Fully adjustable subframe-mounted front & rear suspension
- Larger wheels/tyres
- Common major components to be utilised; such as ECU, gearbox, brakes, hubs, steering rack, fuel tank and etc.



- Integrated front aerodynamics to incorporate radiators, cooling ducts and partial flat-floor to a given design parameter/dimension. Specified rear wing profile and size. Each car to be wind-tunnel tested to achieve similar aero equality
- Increased driver safety

So how does that affect the Rob Austin Racing A4's?

Engine

The engine is based on the Audi BHZ 2.0 TFSI unit, as used in the Audi S3, within the 2.0 litre regulations. Don't expect to be able to just throw a chip into the ECU or



change the engine management system- internals such as rods and pistons have been updated. Engine management is provided by Pectel- initially the units were tuned/ set up by Lehmann (well known for their work on Audi Sport competition engines in the past)- but their knowledge is predominantly with BOSCH systems and full potential was not being realised- Rob is now having the engines cared for by Tommy Fields (Fields motorsports), who has experience with the Pectel management system and is UK based. There have been- and still are- some issues (Rob's now on his third engine)- mainly relating to the exhaust manifold (among other things), which is where some of the problems have been with regards reliability this season.



The cars are rear wheel drive, utilising an Xtrac 6 speed sequential-shift gearbox with AP Racing carbon clutch. When asked why rear wheel drive was chosen as opposed to front wheel drive (regulations allow either- no quattro after Audi dominated the seven world championships back in the late 90's with the system), Rob explained that

A. the cars were sold as a package with rear wheel drive, and

B. you don't see Formula 1 cars running front wheel drive- if front wheel drive was better, F1 would be running it.... (!)



Suspension & brakes are the same for all cars competing: Full front sub-frame incorporating suspension, brakes (AP Racing specified package & pedal-box), transmission and engine location that attaches to specified roll cage locations, rear sub-frame that attaches to specified roll cage locations and multi-adjustable double wishbone suspension with coil-over dampers.

The Bodyshell is similar to that of an A4 (with the same body profile) , but with weight reduction where possible. Some specifications, for example, only indicate that the boot floor needs to be the same thickness of that on the cars available from the factory that you can buy in the dealership- in this case a galvanised steel floor (supplied with the cars when purchased) was replaced with an aluminium one. The width for all cars is equalised at 1875mm (hence the wheel arch extensions you can see on the rear of the cars)



Specified front aerodynamic device incorporating flat floor, apertures for radiator, brake cooling ducts, intercooler and side exits, rear wing profile. & base vehicle must be freely on sale in the UK through the manufacturer's normal dealer network. 2011 was very much a steep learning curve- trying to battle with the car- particularly in terms of balance and power delivery. The "whole package" wasn't as expected, and a lot of the planned budget for 2012 was spent resolving issues that weren't anticipated.

When delivered, the cars were approximately 150kg over weight- over 90kg of unnecessary weight was lost throughout the season, and a full stripdown was done over winter, resolving in the team managing to lose even more; the aforementioned boot floor was modified, roll



cage and driver position were all modified to enable Rob and the team to manage to balance the corner weights of the car better than before; front and rear subframes were relocated to ensure they ran true with each other- this ensured that the car handled a lot better than when first supplied. The potential is there- Rob knows that it's a "top ten car"- (average stats so far this season are 8th with a podium finish in third) proof of this was seen on one of the qualifying laps using old tyres, just before lady luck and her cousin reliability kicked in. More development time is needed, and more importantly funding in the way of sponsorship- as mentioned previously, most of this was swallowed up trying to put the cars right from when they were delivered- something not envisaged when the order was signed for the 2 cars. Rob and the team missed out on Knockhill, deciding to spend the money it would have cost to get there and take part on further development.



Times are tight, and businesses don't have the money to spend on promotional activities and marketing like they used to. You would think that obtaining sponsorship for a top flight, well televised motor series wouldn't be too much of a problem- especially when the brand is all over a prestigious marque such as Audi (as opposed to, say, MG)- but racing is an expensive sport.

The Difference between an independent team, such as Rob's, and a factory team is huge. A Factory team is allocated a budget- if you compare this to Audi UK's domination of the BTCC in the late 90's, for 2 cars they had at least twenty full time staff. This included receptionist, mechanics, team principle, drivers, PR, catering- the whole works. With Rob, they have to do it all, AND try to secure sponsorship (that pays!) -it's himself, his wife and two full time mechanics (plus anyone else that helps).



To this end, Rob has taken a novel approach to helping fund the cars next appearance at Rockingham, throwing it out to the fans. They have the opportunity to purchase a sponsorship area on the car's roof of approximately 10cm x 5 cm with their photo on for just £35. How unique is it to have your own little piece of sponsorship on a BTCC Audi for "so little" money? (This is even pitching straight into small companies that wouldn't have even contemplated this sort of thing previously)- and also those that do take part are entered into a draw for the full VIP package at Rockingham. This "push" has been all over facebook and twitter for the last couple of days since it was launched, with approximately 300 places available- Rob's hoping to fill 200 places to assist with the car's funding.



And we'll be one of them. (For less than the cost of a night out!)

The question is, will you?

Thanks go to Rob's current sponsors:

Absolute Control - www.absolutecontrol.co.uk

R-Tech Welding - www.r-techwelding.co.uk

Duo PLC- <http://www.duoplac.com>

YOU CAN BE A SPONSOR:- <http://www.robaustin.com/get-your-picture-on-robs-car/>

Thanks to the following for Photographs:

Rob Austin Racing- www.robaustin.com

Jakob Ebrey - <http://jakobebrey.com>

Mark Wania - <http://www.lguess.com/>

Phil Laughton – P JL Photography <http://www.phillaughtonphotography.co.uk>

Next Event:Rockingham- 22 & 23 September tickets:- <http://www.btcc.net>

To follow Rob & the team in the BTCC, see here:

www.robaustin.com

<https://twitter.com/RobAustinRacing>

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Rob-Austin-Racing/300548846320?ref=ts>

more photos to be added soon- check for updates.

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