

GRAVEL TRAP

The dark at the end of the tunnel

Innovation. Motorsport. Not always happy bedfellows, especially where rulemakers are concerned, but also sometimes when engineers are concerned. Get something good and you will have to hide it to preserve the unfair advantage. Think '40zog J-dampers' (see page 32) or the Laurel Hill tunnel for example (see SCE 2 next month). Stuff like this is truly fascinating yet its owners refuse to even admit its existence. All this gets the brain churning and makes me wonder if it is possible to keep anything secret in this industry any more. If it is, what else is out there that we haven't noticed?

Of course, some things you hear are taken with a pinch of salt. Many had difficulties with the concept of using HFC R404A and CO₂ to inflate tyres (V17N12), for example, some deriding it as bullshit, while others admitting 'off the record' that the gas works but they are not certain why. Whatever the truth is, the FIA have seen fit to ban the mix in Formula 1, despite it being a low-cost technology and truly innovative. The question must be asked, why then did they ban it? Because it was new? Because it was innovative? Isn't the point of Formula 1 to be the pinnacle of motorsport technology? Well, it's not going to be for long if they keep banning all the good bits.

In the new 2009 regulations sits a sleeping giant that is sure to cause trouble in the months to come - the novel technologies rule. Any new system, procedure or technology not specifically covered by these regulations, but which is deemed permissible

by the FIA Formula 1 Technical Department, will be admitted until the end of the championship during which it is introduced. Following this, the Formula 1 Commission will be asked to review the technology concerned and, if they feel it adds no value to Formula 1 in general, it will be specifically prohibited. Any team whose technology is prohibited in this way will then be required to publish full technical details of the relevant system or procedure.

So does this mean teams are now actively discouraged from looking for innovative ideas? And how does something add to the value of Formula 1 in general? Or do teams run the gauntlet of being allowed to use it and then lose it to the whole world, in which case I can't see that sitting too well with the car manufacturers.

It also brings us back to the issue of what is the point of Formula 1 if innovation is effectively outlawed? Why should Williams, Toyota, Renault and the rest spend millions on developing cars when anything novel or interesting is likely to be outlawed and then made public. You may as well stick everyone in a GP2 Dallara and be done with it.

At [Formula Student](#) this year Claude Rouelle was overheard saying that FSAE is the best form of motorsport in the world as the students are free to innovate, engineer and design. He might just be right.

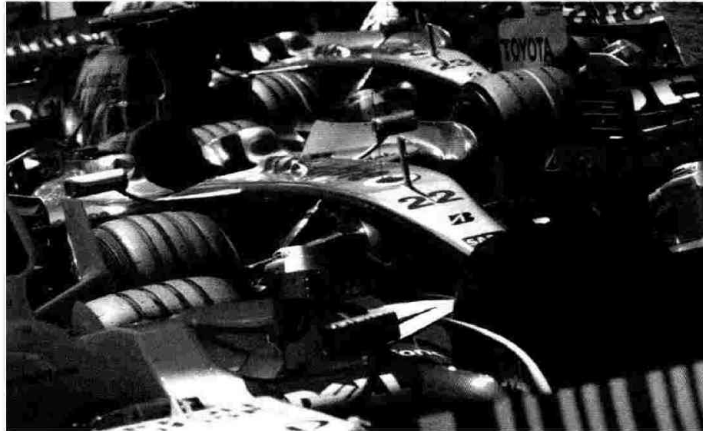
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