

**P**entti Airikkala was in Scotland last month. He is one of my all time heroes. Ever since I first saw a gunmetal grey Chevette being fired through the forests like a terrain hugging missile, I have been a fan. And the man is still as big as the memory.

He has also got some pretty radical ideas about stage rallying. Like most of us he's concerned about the direction of the sport and the ever spiralling costs — upwards that is. But unlike most of us, he has a simple, easy and cheap solution. In fact, it's so simple, I'm surprised I didn't think of it first!

If Pentti was Chief Executive of the RAC MSA (now there's a thought), the first thing he would do is implement a new tyre rule for stage rallying. Currently forest tyres have a variety of tread patterns with the tread gap between blocks around 10 mm or 11 mm. Pentti's proposal is that the tread gap should be reduced to a maximum of 5 mm. Any pattern or compound you like, the limit is the gap between the treads.

The introduction of that simple rule would instantly control power outputs, reduce costs and lessen damage to forest roads. It would also be easily policed. With less grip available, there wouldn't be the same need for huge power outputs. Pentti reckons that 180/200 bhp would be about right for these smoother tyres. Engines would require less tuning and maintenance and they would be more reliable.

Tyre bills would also be reduced as the rubber wouldn't be ripped to bits by excessive power outputs and they wouldn't go off as quickly either.

Another big saving would be in damage to forest roads. Imagine what the roads would be like after the passage of a current 100 car rally with 300 plus bhp four-wheel drive jobs at the front, some pretty powerful two-wheel drive outfits in the middle and the poor sods at the back who think they have stumbled across a Young Farmers Club ploughing match as opposed to a car rally. Now imagine the same event if the cars have less power and are using smoother tyres.

There are additional advantages. With less damage to roads, the roads themselves could be used two or three times per event. That would make events more compact, it would also make them more attractive to TV and to sponsors. The TV crews wouldn't have to tear about the country to get ahead of the cars and sponsors would find it a much more attractive and cost-effective proposition to provide guest and spectator facilities within the forest.

Pentti also takes his idea a stage further. A more


compact event would also be more conducive to the use of pace notes. Despite Britain's lead in the motor sports industry we still lag behind in terms of motor rally development. Crews would be allowed to recce the route beforehand, either making their own notes or using those supplied by organisers. This could even be done in the morning with the rally proper starting after that — all on the same day, because of the compact nature of the competition.

He reckons that pace notes are the way forward, even at club level, for it makes the sport safer. It's also good experience for ambitious drivers who want to progress and do international events. Just don't ask him about the pace note event in Uruguay which he did with a Turkish co-driver who knew less English than he did. Apparently after some convoluted discussions they settled on a numbered system with 'one' for fast open bend increasing to 'nine' for severe hairpin. It didn't take long for Pentti to discover that the guy couldn't count beyond five and wasn't sure of his left from his right. According to Pentti, "There was a 50% chance of getting the direction wrong never mind the severity of the bend!"

And there is one other advantage. The introduction of smoother tyres would place more emphasis on driver skill. i.e. bigger balls versus bank balance. Pentti was joking (I think) when he said the ideal rally driver "had a right foot size 12 — and a hat size of two", for he now runs a highly-successful race and rally school.

In fact, race car drivers are amongst his most regular intake of pupils. Apparently a lot of team managers are sending their youngsters (and not so youngsters) to Pentti to learn left foot braking, and that includes a number of Touring Car stars.

When someone of Pentti's skill and experience comes up with such a radical but effective solution, it has to be taken seriously.

I think its a wonderful idea. Pentti for  Prime Minister.

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**And Finally**  
**FIVE**

