

WELSH RAREBIT

Ayrtton Senna has just jumped out of Phil Collins' Brooklyn Motorsport Ford Sierra RS Cosworth. Collins has jaggedly ripped through a 1.5-mile forest stage, jabbed at the handbrake, hauled the white-and-blue wedge around and yumped and slithered his way back. Ayrtton Senna has never seen a rally car before, let alone sat in one.

Senna seems agitated, perhaps even confused, as he tugs off his lime-yellow helmet, pushes a hand through his hair. "Too quick for me" he shouts. "He's a nut-case!" Collins looks up, unflustered in his grey sweater and old, battered corduroy cap. His accent is softly-Hereford, his speech slower and more considered than Senna's rapid-fire explanation. "It's a pity it's so rough out there or I could really scare the little bastard Of course, the problem is he's about to get his revenge." Ayrtton Senna, John Player Special Grand Prix driver, the fastest man in Formula One, was about to try forest rallying for the first time.

And what was it Senna said over dinner last night, when he put down his fork halfway through his plate of beef stroganoff? In that cold tone which adds a dulling emphasis to his steady words, he spelled out what he thought of rallying. "I know nothing about rallying. I've seen the pictures in magazines, sometimes watched it on television. And I deliberately haven't listened to anyone about rally driving. I want to find out for myself."

In the Sierra, Senna sits behind the big steering wheel. He's wearing his black JPS driving suit, Adidas shoes, that sharply-coloured Bell helmet: he looks like Ayrtton Senna, Grand Prix driver, no surprises. Yet today, he's halfway up a Welsh mountain, with soggy clouds slapping around the peaks below, a grey sky washing out the daylight. As yet, he doesn't know quite why he's here.

But he respects Phil Collins. "The funny thing is you don't know which way you are going" says Ayrtton as

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he's strapped in the four-point harness. "It's so rough the car is going *bang!-bang!-bang!* And I keep thinking 'next time we're not going to do it' For a first experience my heart kept together."

"I was gentle with him, really" deadpans Collins. "Now" says Senna, with a grin, getting down to business, "I must learn the gearbox". Collins runs through a brief pre-flight. "First is there" says Senna, hand on the gearlever, "second, OK, third, fourth and fifth". "I don't think we'll need fifth too much" interrupts Collins. "I only got up to third". "Third, maximum, OK": Senna doublechecks.

"And that" - Collins laughs, pointing at the final slot on the gate - "is for when we're reversing back out of those trees" Senna doesn't rise to the joke. "Hmmm, OK. A couple of times the steering wheel jumped out of your hands." "You let it, sometimes" says Collins. "Let it sort itself out - it got itself into trouble." "Once I didn't think you let it", Senna's winding Collins up now, "I think it did it itself! Once we hit a big bump in the middle of the corner and the steering wheel just shook and I thought 'oh Christ'" "It was all totally under control" says Collins. "I just had my eyes shut most of the way."

A couple of switches are flipped. The Cosworth grunts and stumbles into life. Senna finds first and trundles away. He pushes on the throttle. The turbo-four's note shivers, then harshens. Ayrtton Senna is a rally driver.

Alongside Senna, through the intercom, Collins mentions that he needs to use the car next weekend: that's his way of calming Senna. The first turn is an easy, downhill right. The Sierra goes in wide and late - and understeers off embarrassingly slowly. "I thought, yeah, this bloke really listens to everything I'm going to say" grinned Collins afterwards. For Ayrtton Senna, however, that tiny mistake was a lesson learned. This Sierra, like all rally cars on loose surfaces, doesn't

