



react like a racing car.

At the end of the run Senna seems intrigued. "Mmm, I almost went off at the first corner. So it is ... surprising. Because I really went into the first corner like a normal car. It was stupid. Because you have to push it." His sentences shorten – is Senna enjoying this? "Before the corner you have to commit. Now I understand why you have to use opposite lock and use the traction a bit – to keep the car really biting on the ground. If you try to just go round, you don't go round. You just go straight on."

Ayrton Senna, clamped tight in the Kevlar bucket seat, is no longer a disinterested spectator: there are new challenges to be tackled here. "So Phil gave me a few tips and some ideas and let me know where there is an easy corner or a difficult corner. Learning. It's much more difficult than you expect to do it properly. You have to have a lot of knowledge of the technical things – and a lot of confidence. And without the knowledge you cannot have the confidence."

"It's very difficult. It makes you give even more credit to rally drivers. Who do it the way that they do. Like they go the first time in a forest and they do it. So, I tell you, it's not for me. No. Just for today. Just for fun – and that's it."

Collins has been listening. "But the first stage of anybody's rallying is a non-stop fright. But as you get the confidence to know what the car will do and the way that it will grip, and a normal rally would be on a bit better, less rutted, less bumpy track and that would make it easier."

"And you have to put a lot of effort in here" – Senna grips his forearm – "to really keep it together, like when you hit some bumps in the middle of the corner. The steering wheel is fighting, and suddenly the steering wheel starts to go away. So I realise that, halfway through, and I start to put a lot of pressure here – and if you don't do that for sure you lose it at the corner. Suddenly the steering wheel will go away from you."

Senna wants another run with Collins alongside. Then he will try the other cars, moving from small to large, simple to complex. There's Harry Hockly's CCC Vauxhall Nova Sport, tiny and tight and neat: in fact, this is Hockly's number two car, based 20 miles down the road at his Newtown, Powys headquarters. After the 1300cc, front-drive Nova, Senna will try Callum Guy's Volkswagen Junior Rally Team Golf GTi, a glorious hunk of David Sutton Motorsport-prepared Group A hardware, polished and preened by two fastidious mechanics.

Next will come Allan Edwards' fearsome home-built four-wheel drive Ford Escort, powered by 3.4 litres of four-cam Ford-Cosworth GA V6. Edwards, from Kington, Herefordshire – close to Phil Collins' Pontrilas base – will sit in his car and coach Senna. To close with, Senna will move from 4wd Escort to 4wd MG Metro 6R4 in bog-standard 250bhp Clubman specification. As a man who has never been to Wales before – "where are we?" he asked at one point. "Tell me how far we are from Oulton Park and then I will have some idea" – never seen a forest rally stage before, Senna has an especially daunting task today.

But so far he's making light work of it. He and Collins are back after run two, discussing his progress against the background drone of an engine cooling fan swishing like a helicopter rotor. "I told you, I have too weak a heart for big emotions!" says Senna. "That was good!" "The boy's getting the feel for it now" confirms Collins. "It's just about the time for him to get into somebody else's car ... That was very good."

"Phil gave me a lot of help, a lot of small things. But it's still very, very hard to judge. I don't have enough capability to judge exactly what I am doing, and what I should be doing. Sometimes I feel that I'm going to lose it – and then sometimes there's a big margin. And then you overdo one place because you don't pay enough attention, the steering goes a bit light and then ..."

Collins has been thinking. "The other big difference that I noticed, initially, was that Ayrton is picking tarmac lines. He's going in wide – and this is the first thing that he has to get out of his mind. He must go in tighter because it's so loose on the outside. That's a common mistake, but now we've got him to come in early, he's gaining confidence. The boy's getting very good."

Mechanic Martin Roberts helps Senna into the Nova.