

WELSH RAREBIT

Harry Hockly's seat is bolted to the floor, close up against the wheel. Senna fits, just. There's no intercom, so Senna pays close attention to Roberts' briefing. Flick the fuel-pumps on, press the start button. And what is Senna saying? "I would like to try all the cars, and then can I try my two favourites again at the end?" Ayrton Senna is getting into rallying.

As the Nova pulls off, Phil Collins is talking about Ayrton Senna. "Well, you can see the talent of the guy within two-and-a-half miles. He made a right balls of the first corner, but you could feel the embarrassment coming down the intercom. Straight away he said 'I'm so sorry' and he realised it's no good driving this car slowly, you've got to get to grips with it. And he started throwing it a bit."

"By the time we did the second run the guy was driving with a lot of confidence. Apart from having the handbrake button pushed in on the handbrake" – the Sierra has a fly-off handbrake fitted – "and I could feel the full frustration bit of 'what-is-this?' I had to explain three times 'don't forget the handbrake button'. And I got him to be much smoother with the throttle. He was tending to be on or off. Because the concept with any tarmac event is that you are either on the throttle or on the brakes – there's no halfway. With this job, you're controlling the car on the throttle."

The Nova has returned and Ayrton is putting the car in perspective. It has a limited-slip differential fitted to tie down the front end. "You're always fighting. Even when you are on the straight. The steering wheel is twitching and the back of the car is moving around. Is not so powerful. So in some ways is easier to drive. Is slower reaction to the throttle than the Sierra. The Sierra is nervous – when you touch it, it goes away. So here is easier."

"But you have a much better front here than in the Sierra. Here, you can position the front end where you want, and the rear is the loose bit. The Sierra is a more equal car – and if you don't use the power you start understeering. This is a much more positive-front car."

Roberts explains that Hockly left-foot-brakes: "You keep the power on and brake with the left foot." Senna looks bemused, and slides his left foot tentatively over the centre pedal. Something else has worried him. The violent assault the underside of the car gets from the loose shale surface. "But, I tell you, for somebody that hasn't done this before it's a bad feeling. Like you are destroying the car, you understand? When you drive you just hear *bang!-boff!-crash!* To start with, until you get used to the idea that it's OK, the car is built to take this, you are thinking 'oh my God – it's going to break and I'm going to screw this and that'"

Senna walks over to the Golf. Roberts takes stock. "He's one gear too high, and, with this car, because he hasn't quite got it committed, the car is drifting over to the outside where you don't want to be. But, coming back, was getting better and better. But, as he says, the pedals are so close together to suit Harry and the brake pedal is so hard for Harry – there's no feel to it – and Ayrton can't get used to that. And his feet were getting mixed up." Roberts grins. "Good for a first time, though."

Each time Senna gets in a new car, his driving looks more natural, less forced. His corner lines have gone from racetrack to rally-stage, his throttle foot is now used to balance the car, dig for grip. There's less rev-drop as the 170bhp Golf scurries through the stage, Senna's entry to the yump is more confident. The noise is harder, more consistent, hanging on in for longer. He's started to go for it.

"Good fun! With the power steering the Golf is easier for you." Ayrton Senna has just broken sweat. "You have more control. The steering never tried to go away from me. A bit more power than the Nova, not as much as the Cosworth – it's more in the middle."

"A bit understeering when you turn, which is the opposite of the Nova. You have more confidence in here. It's more even. It's a bit softer on the bumps than the others. Maybe it's not going to be very fast, but it's easier to drive, more comfortable, so you feel more confident. Can I have another go?" A good car to learn in, then: and, at 26, Ayrton Senna would be eligible for a place in the Volkswagen Junior Rally Team were it to expand its horizons and take in Brazil as well as England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

He's delayed on his return run. There is an explana-



tion. "I went over a big rock and the car flew in the air. So, on the way back we stopped and moved the rock." Senna sees the concern on the Volkswagen people's faces. "Ahh" he laughs, "why, did you think I crashed?" There's more to come in the Golf. "It's an easy one. For a beginner like me it's easier to get more confidence. Now, after a few runs, it begins to look like it does not have enough power. But that's normal. Like in Formula One when you don't test for a couple of weeks, when you jump in the car it's big power. After half an hour everything is easy. For a beginner, though, this car is easier than the other two."

Allan Edwards is going to show Ayrton his wonderful Escort 4wd. Edwards looks like a farmer in his old Barbour jacket. "We're on tarmac suspension, having just come back from Epynt" he explains: Ayrton knows nothing of the Epynt ranges. He's being snapped into the co-driver's seat – and Phil Price, designer of Edwards' neat four-wheel drive system, just mentions casually that the car has 460bhp.

"Four-hundred-and-sixty?" Senna looks perturbed. "Are you sure you want me to sit here? Eh? My God. Four-hundred-and-sixty?" He looks at Allan and grabs

Top: getting into the Golf swing with Callum Guy's Volkswagen Junior Rally Team Group A GTi. Above: reflecting. . . . Left: sharing a joke with Allan Edwards (facing camera), and Phil Collins, and (top) apparently bemused by MG Metro 6R4