

his wrist. "You swear that we are going to go slow?" "Slow" confirms Allan with an innocent smile.

This is frighten-the-Grand-Prix-driver-time. Edwards rockets off in a blast of race-car noise, the V6 barking off the hillside, the right foot hard into the torque curve. He is not driving slowly. The Escort draws up. Senna pulls off his helmet. His face is red, his hair plastered down.

"Bloody hell . . . That's very powerful, eh? My God. It's really . . ." Senna searches for a superlative. "It's very, very powerful. He stays more in the air than on the ground!" Then comes the checklist. "I tell you, it feels like it has a lot of grip. It's funny. When the car is on the ground it has a lot of bite. And you are able to use even more of the power than in the Sierra. Because when he was sideways around the bends and going wide, he would go on the power and the front would come back. Impressive. But he said he was going to take it easy. I wouldn't go with him if he said, right, now we try . . ."

The two men swap seats. This will be the test for Senna. Big power and all-wheel grip demand commitment. If he has been pussyfooting he will have to stop

now or be found out. Push has turned to shove. The run is quick and very aggressive. Ayrton and Allan talk in the cockpit when the engine is cut.

Edwards: "On tight bends if you drift off and get the power back in you come straight back on."

Senna: "I realise."

Edwards: "That was excellent, though. A few days in a car like this on better forestry, and you would be equalling the National Championship leaders in no time. No two ways about it . . . He's sweating, look . . ."

Senna: "Good. Hard. My arms are stretched out, and it is very powerful and with the front wheels driving you have to hold it. And once we went wrong and I was frightened to hold it and he gave me a hand and we got it back . . ."

Edwards: "I grabbed the wheel! But keep the power in. The thing will climb back onto the road like a tractor if you keep the power in . . ."

There is a Metro 6R4 to be tried – but you get the impression the Ayrton Senna will tame the Escort again before the day is out. Edwards enjoyed riding with Ayrton. "I was amazed to see a driver adapt so quickly to forestry driving. I'm not the best of passengers at any time and I was very reluctant to go back in there: I don't mind when it's somebody else's car, but in my own car I don't like it. But he's been up there a few times which I haven't, and he knows the terrain and where the bumps are."

"He impressed me. He's here to learn. In a matter of hours he would be a national class forest driver and I would say after a week in a car he would be taking on the World class drivers. Because he's got the experience and he knows what it's all about."

The white Metro flies: there's an instant rhythm there, a conciseness to the lines and the attack. "At the start it was different because it is softer than the other cars, especially the Escort which I drove last. So it was a bit loose to start with. Being soft it moved around too much for me."

"It took me halfway through the stage to understand the drivability of the car. On the way back I start to try harder. Allan's Escort changes direction much better, it puts you more where you want to be. It's just too stiff, like he said. And the Metro is powerful – but I drove the Escort just before and that is so powerful, I didn't feel it so much. The Escort is huge power."

After another Metro-run, Senna is shuffling through his thoughts. There is a line of small blisters across his palms. Why didn't he bring his driving gloves. "Because I thought it would be like road cars . . ." he shakes his head. "The thing is, in a racing car, you know exactly each corner, because you do that, I don't know, one hundred times a day in testing. You know precisely how bumpy it is, where you make the line, and you have to be that precise. You know the run-off area, and you have more . . . more feeling of all the things. Here, it's much more natural. Because you have to improvise all the time. You have to have a lot of judgement. There is no room for error. Otherwise you go off the road."

"In the racing car you have the kerb. If you slide a little bit in the middle of the corner, you go over the kerb or over the grass as the last thing. Here, no. You don't have the choice."

Can Senna compare the satisfaction of the perfect Formula One lap and the perfect charge through a forest stage? His answer is a surprise. "It's difficult because here there is much more excitement, I think. It's much more exciting here than in a Formula One car. Because here you don't have the top, top speed, but you have a tremendous acceleration. In the Escort, unbelievable acceleration – and it's rough."

"It's a much more instant emotion than it is in a Formula One car. In a Formula One car you go-go-go-go-go-go! and then you come down. Here you go to a peak and come down, go to a peak and come down. It's a different approach."

There are more runs. In the Escort and the Sierra. Senna's last try in the Cosworth is wonderful. He takes the final left-hander in three jolts of oversteer, running the car up the shale piled on the track edge to straighten his exit. The engine note doesn't waver, the hands pummeling the steering wheel. He looked like a rally driver: a brave rally driver. Martin Roberts, Harry Hockly's mechanic, is watching high on the outside of

Welsh Forest Rally School stage was nothing if not authentic. Bottom: That is Senna sideways in Phil Collins' Sierra Cosworth. He is using an unfamiliar helmet to enable coach Collins to shout instructions through the intercom

