

WELSH RAREBIT

the bend. Roberts looks pleased. "He's found his commitment, hasn't he? That one was really impressive. And I thought he was supposed to be a prima donna. . . ."

"The only problem is I don't want to stop. I want to carry on" says Senna, out of the car, helmet off, pondering the day. "He's a good boy" glows Collins. "There's a big difference now. He's a lot smoother now. Bloody good. He drove it very well, no question about it. He's really got the feel of it – he can feel the car. You can sense that he knows what the car is going to do after, say, the jump. He's got the feel for it – you can keep an entry for him on the RAC. . . ."

"It was good" says Senna, shaking hands. "Thank you all very much. I enjoyed it much more than I thought I would – and I always bear in mind that you needed the cars next week!"

Time to go. The cars move down the stage, the service vans pack up and head off. In a café at the entrance to the stage, over soup and a cream-cake, Ayrton Senna attempts to rationalise rallying. He looks happy, relaxed, a thousand miles away from the niggles of Formula One. A day out. "It was something very different. You have to be very rough with the car and I never did that before. You just tend not to do it. You see and you back off."

Would he, for example, like to drive a Sierra Cosworth on the Lombard-RAC Rally? He pauses, looks out of the window at a pine-covered hillside. "I wouldn't do it. No. Because the dangers are there as you don't have the experience and you don't have the knowledge. The dangers are too big. To make a mistake and crash. I don't think it's worth taking the risk." What about the challenge of forest rallying at night on the RAC? A shrug. "Heh-heh. No way."

Would he like to try rallying when he retires from Formula One? Another pause, a thoughtful look. "I don't think so. Because it is in the learning process where you take the biggest risks. Where you get

the best day. That's why I say I didn't expect it to be so interesting.

"There is so much to say. Plenty of excitement to think about. The next step would be to try" – he fumbles for the phrase – "two or three of these works cars, in a place which is a bit wider, less bumpy, so you can go faster, and use more of the potential of the car. More speed. So you can go faster. . . ."

Senna leans back on his chair and grins. Phil Collins and his crew walk in. "We're off now, Ayrton. Been super to meet you, good luck in the Grands Prix." "No, thank you for all your help – it was a great experience for me. Thank you again." The two men shake hands. Just as he walks off, Collins turns around. "Oh, and Ayrton, I'll be on the 'phone next week about my test drive in your JPS, OK?"

Ayrton Senna smiles. "OK, Phil, no problem. We just have to fit a passenger seat, that's all. . . ."

*Allan Edwards' fearsome
homegrown 4wd Escort, with
460bhp's worth of Cosworth GAA
power, certainly commanded the
JPS Lotus team leader's respect.
Amount of physical abuse
sustained by cars surprised Senna.
Here (below) Harry Hockly's
Vauxhall Nova takes a pounding*



"To go rallying the risk is far, far too high. And I have taken enough risks in Formula One to be where I am": Ayrton Senna

caught by situations and make mistakes. Therefore the risk is far, far too high. And I have taken enough risks in Formula One to be where I am.

"But maybe to drive in an open place, you have a track where if you make a mistake you just go off then, yes, try more. Try harder to find the limit. I would probably enjoy that. But just for myself, just to try, like we did today. To learn more."

So what will Ayrton Senna remember of today? "I think, overall, it has been much more exciting than I expected. Much more involving. It has involved me much more than I thought. I didn't feel the time going by. It went so fast because I was finding out, and learning more and going harder and harder. Having some moments . . . it was very exciting. Feeling the car in the air and then bottoming. Something I have never experienced before in a road car. In a road car you go easy, eh?"

Ayrton Senna's thumbnail definition of pressure is when the car is perfect and he, for whatever reason, doesn't get the best out of it: that is pressure. In Formula One it is going too early on his final set of qualifying tyres in the JPS Lotus 98T and ruining his shot at pole. Today, although low-key, produced a different kind of tension.

"Those people there, with the cars, they were curious to see what was going to happen. As much as I was. I felt that everybody was curious to see where I was going to go off the road, and, you know, what was going to happen. That was the fun. Because it was so unknown. Everything was so new there was a big questionmark on what was going to be the progression of things. That feeling was the excitement. Ninety-nine percent of those people thought I was going to stick it in the trees."

And there's more. "Apart from the races that I did, testing or anything, this was probably the best day I ever had in England." Or even in Wales. "Believe me or not. Outside of the races that I did. For fun, this was