

Trailblazer

Georg Plasa's wild BMW 134 Judd, built for the FIA European Championship, is one of 2011's most eagerly anticipated new hillclimb cars

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When the FIA opened the European Hillclimb Championship (EHC) up to ex-Formula 3000 cars under Article 277 of Appendix J, Osella used these 'free formula' regulations to create highly developed FA30 sportscar for group E2-SC. Competing parallel to the single-seaters of class E2-SS, it is currently the car to beat in the EHC.

Now, the vastly experienced German driver/engineer, Georg Plasa has built the first dedicated hillclimb car for the E2-SH group, the third subdivision of Category 2 as defined in Article 277.

The BMW 134 is the successor to his well-known E36 BMW M3. Like that car, the new machine is Judd-powered, this time by a 3.4-liter ex-LMP2 V8 with around 550bhp. A transaxle based around a Hewland TMT gearbox adds more rearward bias to the base car's 52/48 weight distribution, for faster getaways.

"Continental hillclimbs aren't as narrow as UK ones, but the length and wheelbase of the car is still important for tight corners," says Plasa, explaining his choice of base car. "On the E82 [1 Series Coupe] the wheelbase is around 2,660mm, not too short, which gives you better stability in the quick corners – 'Länge läuft', as we say in German. In fact, the wheelbase is only 40mm shorter than the E36, whereas the newer 3 Series – E46 or E92 – are far too long, both in terms of wheelbase and overall length. You can't take a hairpin [well enough] with those cars."

"In addition, we needed a current car, for marketing reasons. And I wanted to start from a clean sheet, not from a Super Tourer or by upgrading some other former race car to hillclimb-spec."

In a further departure from conventional wisdom, Plasa also decided to make the design and build



process public, publishing regular, detailed updates on a dedicated website (www.134judd.com). He also engaged the services of a team of young engineers and mechanics.

"I'm 51 years old now, and if [people of my generation] are not careful then all our experience will be lost, which makes no sense at all," he explains. "Many people have questioned my decision to go public. But I take the view that, even if you take one of these ideas and build it into a car, if you don't understand the reasons behind what you're doing, it won't help you anyway. And even though we are sportsmen, none of us will be a world champion, or earn lots of money from the sport. In the end it'll be up to a couple of photocells on a hillclimb track to decide who's the best."

A relationship with Schnitzer helped secure time in the BMW wind tunnel

Plasa, a former rally driver who runs a motorsport engineering consultancy and uses his own race car as PR for his business, has been hooked on hillclimbing since his early twenties. He says of the discipline's enduring appeal: "The car is always in 'qualifying conditions' – you don't have lots of laps to improve your time, you have to do it now. There's no-one else around, so if your car fails or you have an accident it's only you affected."

Having won the FIA European Hill Climb Cup and FIA Hillclimb Challenge in the past, this season will be his first in the full EHC. "It's the last step now, prior to Pikes Peak," he says.

Ironically, his status as a trailblazer in the E2-SH class might yet cost him any chance of the 2011 title. Entrants in each of the three Category 2 groups



CAD view of the wheel carrier and suspension



"IF [PEOPLE OF MY GENERATION] ARE NOT CAREFUL THEN ALL OUR EXPERIENCE WILL BE LOST"

GEORG PLASA, HILLCLIMB CAR BUILDER/DRIVER

Tech spec

BMW 134-JUDD GROUP E2-SH

WEIGHT: 780kg (regulation)

ENGINE: 3.4-liter Judd V8 , around 550bhp;
Tubi Style Inconel exhaust

ELECTRONICS: MoTeC

TRANSMISSION: Hewland TMT, Drexler driveshafts, MEGA-Line paddleshift

SUSPENSION: All-around double-wishbones, three-way adjustable KW Suspension dampers

BRAKES: Sicom carbon ceramic discs, unventilated; Conti Teves four-channel motorsport ABS

WHEELS/TIRES: One-piece BBS forged alloys, 10x18 (F), 10.5x18 (R)

AERODYNAMICS: Sealed underbody contributes to lift/drag ratio > 2:1, around 6,500N downforce @ 240km/h



Plasa took the 134 Judd to Franciacota, Italy in mid-March for its first test

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race only against cars from the same group; it is only at the season's end that the highest points scorer across the three groups is crowned European Champion. But to score full points at an event, there need to be at least five cars in your group – and Plasa is pessimistic about the expected level of competition in E2-SH.

"The idea was that even if sometimes we only scored half-points, we'd still be winning every time, whereas in the other groups they'd be taking points off each other," he says. "Maybe we'll be lucky at the end, but I don't think so currently." He is not helped by local ASNs making small changes to SH regulations, making cars ineligible for points in FIA events.

So it may turn out that the 134 is a year ahead of its time. On the plus side, Plasa can focus on reliability and performance in 2011, in the knowledge that the odd retirement is unlikely to prove decisive in the title chase. "More cars like this are expected," he reasons. "Being the first on the scene will always be an advantage." <

