

The next two-litre revolution?

It's been two decades since the Super Touring code was adopted across the world. Now the prime movers in TCR are planning another tin-top hegemony. By **MARCUS SIMMONS**



14

Should the concept work as its originators intend, TCR will have the biggest impact on touring car racing worldwide since the 1990s days of Super Touring. It's easy to draw parallels too: Super Touring was for two-litre machinery pushing out approximately 300bhp; TCR will be for two-litre cars (albeit turbocharged) developing around the same power.

The biggest difference between the two is that, while Super Touring was aimed at manufacturers, TCR's focus is on tuners and teams, albeit with blessing from the car makers – much like the hugely successful GT3 category.

Grand Prix support slots in Malaysia, China and Singapore are the headline-makers from the TCR International Series' 12-round calendar for its inaugural season. And, although it hasn't been announced yet, a deal to take the World Touring Car Championship's place as the historic Macau Guia race is known to be a formality.

While these are great feathers in the cap for WSC Ltd, the TCR organiser led by former WTCC promoter Marcello Lotti, such events are a slight paradox for a concept that was intended to build



Lotti and Sonenscher are working hand in hand to build TCR

a new pyramid for touring car racing. Rather than progress methodically from the pyramid's base, the races at Sepang, Shanghai, Marina Bay and Macau have provided a golden peak before the rest of it's been built.

The use of the word 'concept' is intended as, apart from the SEAT Leon Racer that is the basis for the Spanish make's revived Eurocup, no TCR car has yet been seen in the flesh. Not only that, but in the time taken to write this article the name changed from TC3 to TCR. (This is in the wake of the FIA's separate

new touring car pyramid, formalised last week, being for TCN-1 and TCN-2, with WTCC cars being TC1. The name change thereby avoids confusion).

But listen to the talk, and there could be some very exciting developments ahead. So far, TCR has made small progress in its pyramid-building, with a regional series being started in Asia in 2015 and a national one in Portugal. For 2016, AUTOSPORT sources have suggested that the number of regional and national series for TCR could be approaching double

“There's a need for a low-cost and simple category that has a worldwide relevance”

David Sonenscher, Motorsport Asia

figures – if that's the case, we have several announcements to expect in the coming months.

Motorsport Asia, which will promote the Asian series alongside its GT3-based championship, has been crucial in the legitimising of TCR. Firstly, MA has a long history of running Formula 1 support race such as the Asian Porsche Carrera Cup and Formula BMW series. As well as running the Asian TCR series, MA will therefore be instrumental in the operations of TCR International when it joins Bernie Ecclestone's circus for its eastern rounds.

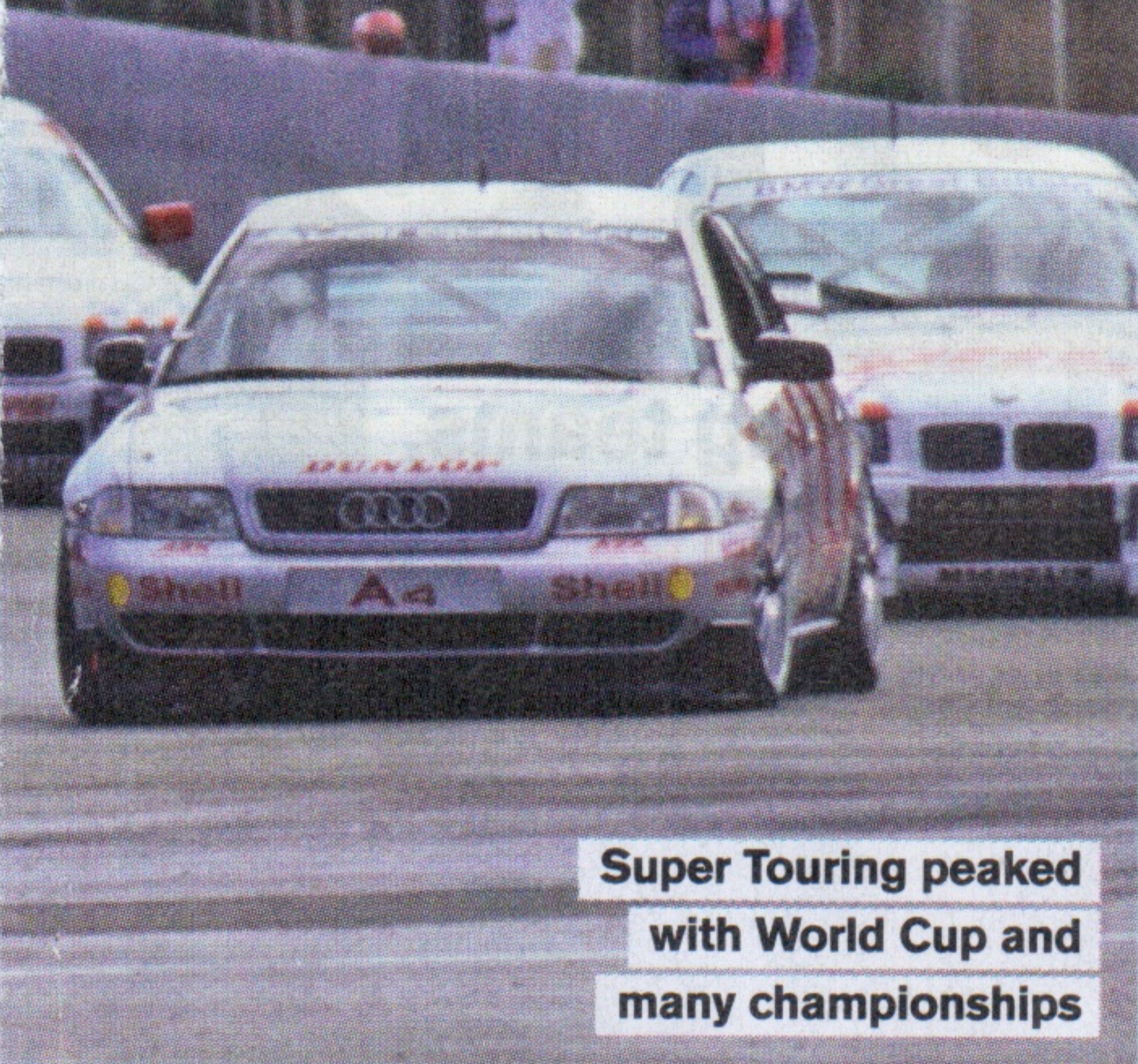
“It was very much the plan from the initial stages to put grand prix supports on,” says MA boss and ex-racer David Sonenscher. “We do look at supporting more than the Asian GPs, but it just so happens that we ended up with all the F1

LAT

Sonenscher's Asian GT is a popular part of Macau bill



Super Touring peaked with World Cup and many championships



Lotti was the brains behind success of WTCC

races being in Asia. Obviously what I bring to the table is my experience and contacts in Asia – I've been working in that market for 20 years, so I guess that helps when we're looking at the global strategy.

"It helps that we've done the F1 programme for a long time with Formula BMW and Carrera Cup, so we know the system and they know us. Marcello has a good relationship with Mr Ecclestone, and obviously we fit in comfortably. My company has a long experience working in that environment – it makes putting it together that much simpler."

Sonenscher also not only has a long relationship with the Macau organisers – initially with the Formula Asia 2000 single-seater category, via Formula BMW and latterly with his GT series being the foundation for the ever-growing GT Cup race – but he also put together the event at the new international-standard Buriram circuit in Thailand. Here, TCR International will race alongside TCR Asia (which otherwise has an entirely separate calendar) and GT Asia on a Motorsport Asia bill.

Away from Asia, TCR has replaced WTCC at Austria's scenic Salzburgring, and there are further

European races at Valencia, Algarve and Monza. The calendar is completed by a visit to Sochi in Russia and a South American double-header comprising the former Argentinian GP venue in Buenos Aires and the brand-new Chilean track of Codegua.

On the national and regional side, Sonenscher is convinced that TCR ticks all of the right boxes not only for Asia but also for the many areas around the world that are struggling to get viable touring car series up and running.

"WTCC is a great championship, but it's very manufacturer-based and very big budgets," he says. "I

found from my Asian Touring Car series that I stopped a few years ago that we just couldn't keep up with the costs. We needed something and it's the same for national championships in a lot of places – there's a need for a low-cost and simple category that has a worldwide relevance.

"Young drivers can come in and race the same type of car from national to regional and then international, and then could maybe go to WTCC after getting their grounding here. What's the difference from doing Formula 4, Formula 3 and GP2 before going to F1?"

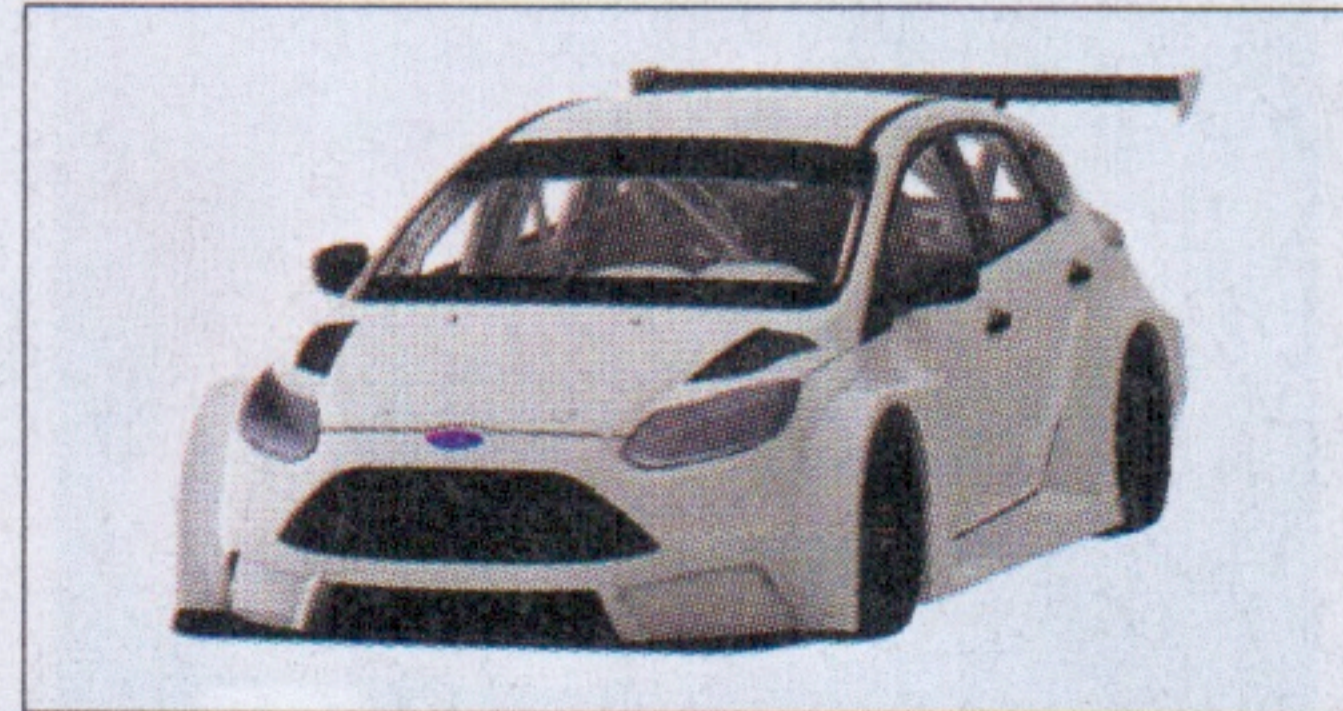
But with only three months to go until the opening double-header at Sepang, things are still very... conceptual. Even so, Lotti's TCR International has 20 of its 24 entry slots filled, and Sonenscher's Asian series has 21 sign-ups. "You'll see things move very fast from this point forward," Sonenscher predicts. "I've never had the kind of interest from competitors that I've got in this. The Balance of Performance stops crazy spending, and it will be very much down to the drivers and teams to do a good job without major development. It's great for touring car racing as a whole." ❧

TCR CALENDAR

DATE	LOCATION
March 29	Sepang (MAL)
April 12	Shanghai (PRC)
May 3	Valencia (E)
May 10	Algarve (P)
May 24	Monza (I)
May 31	Salzburgring (A)
June 21	Sochi (RUS)
July 26	Buenos Aires (RA)
August 9	Codegua (RCH)
September 20	Singapore (SGP)
October 25	Buriram (T)
November 22	Macau (PRC)*

* to be confirmed

ON THE GRID?



Ford

Onyx Race Engineering, which ran Focuses in the WTCC as Arena, is developing a TCR Focus.



Honda

Leading Swedish team West Coast Racing will enter Civics built by factory Honda WTCC team JAS.



Mercedes

Talks with the marque's motorsport house AMG are well advanced for 2016, say TCR officials.



Opel

The Astra OPC is expected on the grid by TCR's organisation.



SEAT

Italian squad Target Competition expands from the SEAT Leon Eurocup to run the Leon Racer in TCR. Extra examples of this model could tide the series over until other makes are enticed in.



Volkswagen

Long-time WTCC loyalist Franz Engstler's team switches codes to run a trio of Golf GTIs.