

Huff gets some grunt

Time Attack is a growing part of the sport and the cars pack some punch, as WTCC ace Rob Huff found out.

By MARK GLENDENNING

It takes a fair bit to spook someone who makes their living going wheel to wheel with the likes of Gabriele Tarquini around Macau. But for World Touring Car Championship runner-up Rob Huff, a threefold step up in horsepower and the prospect of yanking on the handbrake at 120mph did the trick.

The works Chevrolet driver was invited to last year's Snetterton round of the Time Attack Championship, and also made an appearance in the European Drift Championship round

that forms part of the same bill.

Time Attack is a series built around the basic premise of taking the most ridiculously over-testosteroned cars that competitors can lay their hands on, and then seeing who can set the quickest lap. If you're familiar with the Need For Speed series of console games, you've got the idea.

Huff's front-wheel-drive WTCC Chevrolet Cruze is powered by a 1.6-litre engine that puts out about 310bhp, so the 987bhp Mitsubishi EVO VI that he was assigned for his



Time Attack debut represented a very different prospect.

"It was the scariest thing I have ever driven in my life," Huff says. "It was absolutely monumental."

The regulations are fairly open, with the only real restriction being on the type of tyres permitted.

"You're allowed to do pretty much anything with the car," Huff explains. "You're pretty free with the engine, the transmission – you can have a sequential gearbox and whatever clutch you like, and all the rest of it. But you have to be on road tyres. Everyone has the same tyre. It's run as a knockout, with a final at the end of the day. And there are some monstrous cars there."

Extreme tuning has been a flourishing corner of the motoring scene for decades, although the downside was that at many of the specialist events and shows the cars were static displays. Time Attack aimed to change that.

"You've effectively got all these massive tuning companies out there for turbo cars, mainly, and they do shows like the *Max Power* show where they show off what they can get out of the cars," Huff adds.

"For many years, it was just, 'It's got a thousand horsepower – you can look at it sitting there.' Time Attack basically took those cars and said, 'If you're going to build them, we want to see what they can do.'"

One of the hallmark's of Huff's WTCC campaign last year was his prowess over a single lap, and this was a trait that proved to be handy when he climbed into the EVO.

"The fact that you're on road tyres

means that it's like qualifying, especially in the Mitsubishi," he says.

"You get one lap, and then the tyres go off, because even in a straight line, in fifth gear when the thing is doing 160mph, it's trying to rip the tyres off the car."

The drifting component of Huff's weekend represented an equally formidable challenge.

"I can slide a car around; I've always been able to," he says. "What I hadn't taken into consideration was that they were expecting me to go into Coram at 120mph in fifth gear in a 480 horsepower Nissan, push the clutch, pull the handbrake, and let her have it."

"To me, drifting is, you go around the roundabout and give it a load of right foot, and it just steps the back out, which is how most people slide cars around. Not these boys. They go into the corner at 120mph, push the clutch, pull the handbrake and deal with it. It's a bit like riding a Superbike around Macau. It just doesn't make any sense whatsoever."

Despite his misgivings about the technique, Huff reckons that he escaped with his reputation intact.

"I think I did OK," he says. "I was lucky; I got what I think was considered the best car to do it in, which was the Sumo-powered Nissan Silvia."

"But I struggled with the whole handbrake thing, so I just hit Coram at 120mph and Scandi-flicked it and did it my way."

"I couldn't get my head around pushing the clutch and pulling the handbrake at 120mph. That Nissan was going to end up in a ball of snot if I'd tried to do that!" ❌



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TIME ATTACK EXPLAINED



Huff also sampled Nissan Silvia drifter

THE TIME ATTACK SERIES WAS CREATED

in 2005 to give a motorsport outlet to the vibrant after-market tuning scene. Although the headlines belong to the big-budget, high-end tuning companies, the series' broad class range caters for pretty much any car/driver combination that wants to show up.

There are two broad categories: Club Challenge and Pro. The former is geared towards the amateur enthusiast who has tweaked their own car, whether it be the one that they use for daily transport, or something they save for the tracks on weekends. There are five classes within the category (four-wheel drive, rear-wheel drive, front-wheel drive, N/A 3000cc and under, and N/A 3001cc and above), and entrants can only register for one class.

The Pro classes often include well-credentialed hired hands such as Rob Huff, and are geared towards higher-end machinery. Classes are broken down into Pro Tuner, Pro, Club Pro, Pro RWD and Prototype. All competitors from both categories are required to use Pirelli P-Zero treaded rubber.

Track time is held across four sessions, starting with 15 minutes of untimed warm-up, 20 minutes of timed practice, a 20 minute qualifying session and a 15 minute final. Points are awarded from first to 10th in qualifying (10 points for quickest down to one point for 10th), and to the top 10 in the final (100 points for first down to 10 for 10th, in increments of 10). Points are awarded to drivers rather than cars, meaning that a driver's title hopes are not damaged if he buys a new car during the season.



Huff escaped with reputation intact