

# Teen rally plan will 'breed champions'

## British ace Wilson gives his support to new initiative

By Will Brown

**Matthew Wilson believes the Motor Sports Association's decision to allow drivers from as young as 14 to contest single venue rallies from next season will accelerate the development of future British rally champions.**

Wilson, currently ninth in the world championship standings, broke onto the global stage as an 18-year-old in 2006 but learned his trade in circuit racing, firstly in the T Cars championship for drivers aged 14-16, before moving into Formula Renault where he was team-mate to Lewis Hamilton at Manor Motorsport in 2003.

"There was nothing I could do rallying wise until I was 16 and even then that was only co-driving," Wilson said. "Had this opportunity been around when I was starting out it would definitely have altered my thought process about what direction to take. It's only sensible it's being allowed

because racing allows it. The fact so many Formula One drivers started in karting when they were very young means there's no doubt that it will help bring on more rally drivers if they can start earlier."

MN revealed last year (May 2) that the MSA was considering plans to allow under-17s to enter rallies from the start of this year.

Although the Motor Sports Council agreed in principle to the proposals presented by the governing body's Rallies Committee in September 2007, the council requested several changes be made to the wording of the regulations, which ultimately delayed their introduction.

The MSC has now approved the revised plans, meaning that

**Cars must be less than 1.2 litres**



the new rules will come into effect from January 1, 2009.

A major bone of contention had been the requirement for venues to be "free of trees and other hazards" before they could be approved to host junior rallies. Because defining what constituted a hazard proved troublesome, the new rules mean event organisers must instead submit stage diagrams to the MSA for subsequent inspection three months prior to the event.

Tristan Dodd, organiser of the Formula 1000 Rally Club, which promotes entry level rallying, has been campaigning for years to allow junior rally championships to take place within Britain.

He said: "We've had all the other aspects of the organisation waiting in the wings for a long time. We've got people who



MN on junior plan in Dec '05



MSA mullied idea in May '07

want to organise events, clubs that are willing to hold them at places like Three Sisters, and John Hough from Rallyschool.co.uk has allowed the use of his venues. National drivers like Steve Perez are getting on board the project too. It's just taken a long time.

"The MSA's decision means we can take a big step towards holding a junior championship."

Drivers must be a minimum of 14 years in height and be at least

14 years old. They will be permitted to compete in the junior category until December 31 in the year of their 17th birthday. They must be co-driven by a Child Protection Accredited adult with a valid MSA competition licence over the age of 21 and not a parent or guardian.

Eligible cars will have a limited capacity of 1200cc, with a standard engine and transmission.

Fiesta Sporting Trophy UK competitor Alick Kerr, 19,

graduated to rallying via karting and junior rallycross.

He said: "It's definitely a great idea; I would have gone for it had it been around when I was young. When I was 14 I had the chance to take part in the [now defunct] Ford Rallye Academy. While it didn't last very long, I learnt a lot, even if it wasn't really rallying."