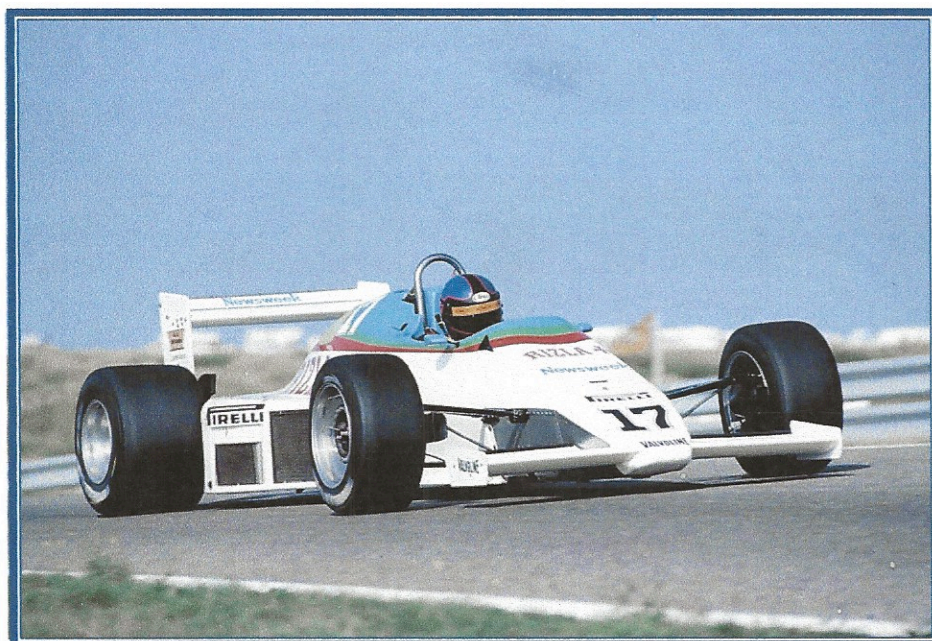


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DOSSIER

RAM 01-03

Alan Henry



Editor: Allen Brown

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RAM 01-03

The RAM 01 turned out to be a highly competent car, but its ability was completely disguised in 1983 by a combination of poor engines, completely wooden tyres and an inadequate development budget. Nelson Piquet tested it and reported that there was nothing basically wrong with it and so it proved years later, when chassis 01-03 dominated the 1997 FIA Thoroughbred Grand Prix championship in the hands of Bob Berridge.

This car, the third and last built, was Kenny Acheson's regular car for the latter half of the season.



Kenny Acheson in RAM 01-03 at Silverstone in 1983

DRIVERS

The only man to drive RAM 01-03 in a Grand Prix, Ulsterman **Kenny Acheson** was one of the most impressive young rising stars of the mid-1970s, having first made his name in Formula Ford before climbing the ladder through to F3 by the start of the following decade. His career progress suffered a brief setback when he broke a leg after tangling with Michele Alboreto during the 1981 Pau F2 international and his move into F1 with the RAM squad was seen as his final attempt to carve out a long-term single seater future. The uncompetitiveness of the RAM 01 ultimately stymied those efforts thanks and he would eventually drift away into the sports car racing demi-monde, eventually retiring from the sport after a huge 180mph shunt in a Lister GT in the 1996 Daytona 24-hours left him nursing an eye injury and massive bruising. His record includes the 1987 Japanese Sports Car championship and two wins in World Sports Car Championship events in 1989. He now lives in Bradford-upon-Avon, where he runs a successful toiletries company with his wife, Fiona.

The car was also driven in qualifying by Chilean journeyman driver **Eliseo Salazar**, who went on to compete at Le Mans, the Indy 500 and NASCAR before a crash ended his career in 2002, and 'Uncle' **Jacques Villeneuve**, whose career peaked when he won the 1983 Can-Am championship.

RESULTS SUMMARY

RAM 01-03 was on duty for 11 Grands Prix but qualified for just one, the South African GP at Kyalami in October 1983. He was slowest of all the cars in the race that completed a flying lap and finished 12th and last.

From 1991 onwards, the car was used in Historic Sports Car Club's series of races for historic F1 cars and then in Thoroughbred Grand Prix, the original name of the FIA Historic F1 Championship. Here the car received a decent engine and proper development and became a race winner, winning the 1997 title for Bob Berridge.

RAM RACING

John Macdonald, the co-founder of the RAM team with his longtime associate and business partner Mick Ralph, first became involved in F1 at the start of 1976 when he concluded a deal with Bernie Ecclestone to lease a couple of Cosworth-engined Brabham BT44Bs which had been made available by Bernie's decision to switch to Alfa Romeo power for his factory Brabham squad. The initial RAM driver line-up was for Belgian Patrick Neve and the Swiss driver Loris Kessel. It turned out to be a difficult season with Kessel quickly being dropped from the line-up only for him to respond by obtaining an injunction impounding the cars after practice for the German Grand Prix at the Nurburgring. Finally, after the reinstated Kessel had trailed around to finish right at the back on the Austrian GP grid, the legal unpleasantness flared up again and Macdonald found himself briefly arrested in the paddock at Zandvoort at the Swiss driver's instigation.

The Brabhams were duly returned to Ecclestone's custody and in 1977 RAM fielded a couple of March 761s which were variously driven by Boye Haje, Mikko Kozoworitsky and Andy Sutcliffe during the course of a season which proved to be even less spectacular than that which had gone before. In 1980 RAM decided to take a step backwards in a bid to regain credibility as a professional racing team which could prove itself worthy of a place in the F1 front line at some date in the future. The team decided to enter the British domestic Aurora AFX F1 championship using a couple of Williams FW07s which were driven by the Chilean Eliseo Salazar and Spain's Emilio de Villota, Salazar highlighting their efforts with a win in the BRDC Silverstone International Trophy race at the start of the year. Mid-way through the 1980 season it was decided by MacDonald and Ralph that they should try contesting the F1 championship once again and resumed their campaign from the British GP at Brands Hatch with a single FW07B driven by Rupert Keegan. The young son of British Air Ferries boss Mike Keegan, Rupert had previously contested the world championship driving for Hesketh in 1977 and Surtees in 1978, but competed in no Grands Prix in 1979. Now he contested seven races through to the end of 1980 at the wheel of the RAM/Penthouse Rizla Racing Williams and delivered only a best result of ninth place in the season-ending US GP at Watkins Glen. It was proof that you couldn't just climb aboard a state-of-the-art F1 car and win races unless both team and driver were blessed with great talent.

In 1981 RAM did a deal with March technical director Robin Herd for the development of what was hoped would turn out to be their own facsimile Williams FW07 derivative, but the car turned out to be something of a dud until a mid-season design revamp first by the former McLaren designer Gordon Coppuck and later by the respected young engineer Adrian Reynard – who would later continue to be a racing car manufacturer in his own right – helped things to take a turn for the better in the latter part of the season.

That theme was continued and developed in 1982 when, with sponsorship from Rothmans, the team signed the experienced Jochen Mass and retained young Brazilian Raul Boesel for their driving duties. Unfortunately the whole project began to unravel after a succession of poor track performances and Rothmans deputed David Richards, the founder of Prodrive whose organisation would go on to benefit from Rothmans sponsorship of its rally programme, to go down and try to sort the whole project out.

In the end, Richards sat down with Jochen Mass, whose South African connections had helped secure the Rothmans sponsorship in the first place. Rothmans' F1 programme was duly wound down and Mass switched to a drive with the Porsche works team which was planning to return to Group C racing with their new 956 and the Rothmans sponsorship followed him there. By the end of the 1982 season the RAM squad was back down at the bottom of the F1 ladder again and regrouping in an effort to make an enduring mark. As things transpired this was to be something of a forlorn hope.

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RAM's 1983 F1 car was built in-house so took the RAM name instead of March's name. However, some reference works do call the car a March 831. John Macdonald's team always did a tidy job, but the tempo of F1 competition was being dramatically ramped up in the early 1980s and one of the most expensive and costly developments was the FIA's decision to restrict ground effect aerodynamics by insisting on flat bottomed cars – without downforce-generating 'tunnels' on either side of the monocoque. For the drivers who competed for RAM life was aggravated by the fact that this was from the outset a one car team with no yardstick by which the unfortunate incumbent in the cockpit could compare himself.

This change in regulations was regarded as highly controversial at the time, adding an unwelcome twist to the already dramatic F1 inflationary spiral. Top teams such as Brabham and McLaren had to go back to the drawing board – in Brabham's case scrapping their planned car in toto in favour of the all-new BT52 which duly carried Nelson Piquet to the second of his three world championship titles – while the *raison d'être* behind McLaren developing a very small and compact twin-turbo V6 was largely diluted by this change in the rules.

Yet while the top teams were ultimately able to take such a blow on the chin and spend their way out of such a short-term setback, for smaller teams like RAM it added another dimension of aggravation when it came to juggling all the balls necessary to stay in business.

Of course, this was only one setback facing the RAM March squad. In fact, they were seriously handicapped by not only the aerodynamic restrictions but also structural and engine limitations. By 1983 Brabham, as previously mentioned, were poised to challenge for the world championship and this would start a run of turbo-powered titles for Ecclestone's team, plus Williams and McLaren, who would exert an armlock on the business of winning in F1 until 1989 when the turbos were banned in favour of a new, high-revving generation of naturally aspirated power units. In addition, any team which wanted to be considered really serious was, by 1983, moving towards chassis made out of carbon-fibre composite materials.

RAM had none of these theoretical advantages in their armoury. To conserve the very modest budget the RAM 01 chassis was constructed from aluminium alloy, and although there was an uprated, shorter stroke version of the Cosworth V8 at its disposal, the chassis configuration was essentially conventional to the point of conservatism with power transmitted by a straightforward Hewland gearbox and testing restricted in the extreme as RAM simply did not have any extra cash for such – albeit necessary – indulgences.

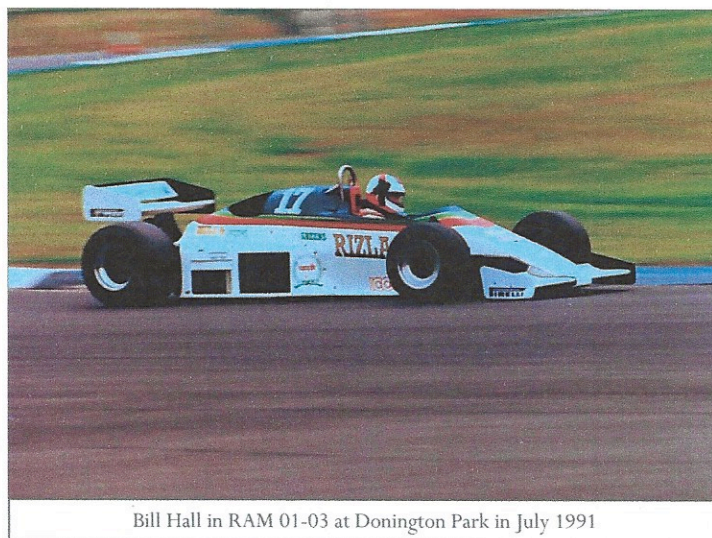
Significant success was never likely but results turned out to be as bad as it was possible to be. Only Eliseo Salazar at the first race in Brazil and Kenny Acheson in the final race of the season at Kyalami managed to qualify the cars for a race start and the remainder of the year was just a wash-out. However, just before the Monaco GP, RAM arranged for Nelson Piquet to test the car and he was quoted as saying 'there was nothing basically wrong with the chassis'. Acheson would briefly return to drive for RAM for three races in 1985, by which time the team was in its second year using Hart four-cylinder turbocharged engines, but although they were marginally more competitive compared with the other cars on the grid, Acheson retired in both the Austrian and Italian GPs and failed to qualify in Holland.

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Salazar started the season in chassis 01 and used the new car (03) at Paul Ricard, Imola and Monaco but failed to qualify every time. He crashed the car badly at Monaco and it was still being rebuilt in the paddock at Spa, the Chilean being forced into the ex-Schlesser 01-02. According to Autocourse, Salazar “wrote off the front left corner against the barrier at the exit of the chicane” on Thursday afternoon. This corresponds with the information in AH’s race-by-race notebooks at the time.

The team intended to miss the North American races but changed their minds in time for the Canadian GP at Montréal on 12 June. Salazar

had been replaced by Jacques Villeneuve, brother of the much missed Gilles, who had previously tried to qualify an Arrows two years earlier and uncle of his namesake, the future world champion. Although ‘Uncle’ Jacques was ahead of Ghinzani’s Osella again, the usual non-qualification was posted. The Canadian was never given another chance to start a GP and continued his career in Indy racing, winning at Road America in 1985.



Bill Hall in RAM 01-03 at Donington Park in July 1991

The next race, the ninth of the championship, was at Silverstone for the British GP. FISA allowed McDonald one last change of driver, and, after due consideration of almost everybody, he chose another F2 driver, Ulsterman Kenny Acheson. By the time Acheson climbed into the cockpit of RAM 01-03 for the first time at Silverstone the team was on the slippery slopes. The car had been modified with truncated sidepods and revised bodywork, but to no avail. He wound up 29th out of 29 runners, failing to qualify, a feat which he repeated at Hockenheim (27th of 29), Österreichring (29/29), Zandvoort (29/29), Monza (29/29) and Brands Hatch (27/29). Finally he squeezed onto the grid at Kyalami for the South African GP 24th out of 26 runners and ground round relentlessly to finish 12th, a depressing six laps behind Riccardo Patrese’s Brabham BT52.

“The frustrating thing is that the RAM 01 was not an unpleasant car to drive,” said Acheson in 2010, his disappointment at not being able to make more out of his sole fleeting F1 opportunity clearly rankling with him almost three decades later. “It’s not as if I was wrestling it from lock to lock, complaining that it suffered from snap oversteer, lurching into understeer, or whatever. To be honest it was quite nicely balanced. But it was just bog slow and wouldn’t get out of its own way, even by the standards of the other Cosworth-engined cars.”

He added: “It was not an episode in my racing career that I felt proud of. In every other category I had contested I had always done pretty well, more than holding my head up in competition, but I have no fond memories about my F1 career as such, apart from the basic satisfaction derived from the fact that I made it to the sport’s most senior category.”

Yet there were other quantifiable elements in the RAM 01 technical equation that may have been overlooked by some historians which go some way towards mitigating what may have seemed a truly awful performance taken as

RAM 01-03

a whole over the season. One was the fact that the RAM 01 was the only Cosworth runner in the field running on Pirelli rubber at a time when the Italian tyre maker was swinging towards developing harder compounds to accommodate the more powerful and demanding turbocharged cars. That meant that Acheson found it almost impossible to generate the sort of tyre temperatures which would have offered the RAM a chance of unlocking more of its potential, such as it was. The second key factor militating against any decent showings came in the form of gutless Cosworth engines which simply had no chance of squaring up to their like-for-like opposition, whatever the reasons.

"One of the problems for any racing driver coming into a new team, or formula, for the first time, is that you have no realistic reference point to work from," said Acheson. "And that is certainly the case in F1 than in any other category. I hadn't a clue what to expect, or indeed what I was expected to say, but it was crystal clear from the start was that I was around two seconds a lap slower than the other Cosworth cars which simply wasn't rational or reasonable.

"I don't know whether this was an installation issue or simply a question of the engine preparation companies not doing a good enough job, but when we got to Monza and Brands Hatch (for the European GP) Ron Dennis of McLaren agreed to loan us one of his engines and suddenly, from being two seconds away from the cut, I was only two-tenths of a second. That trend continued at Kyalami where I made it into the race thanks to a Cosworth engine loaned to RAM this time by the Williams squad."

For Acheson this was effectively the end of the F1 story. He had invested £50-60,000 of sponsorship that he had raised for his F1 odyssey, but had nothing to show for it although he freely confesses he was "a much better driver" when he tackled those three Grands Prix in the RAM-Hart two years later. By then, of course, it was too late. He was never totally sure whether John MacDonald and Mick Ralph ever truly had a great deal of confidence in him, but in fairness to them, he says that they tried their best while all the time attempting to keep their heads above water and the show on the road.

"But at the end of the day nobody remembers an also-ran F1 driver who scraped in at the back of the starting grid, even though I subsequently had some pretty good outings driving for various sports car teams including Mercedes and Jaguar. When people ask me about my involvement in motor racing I always rather self-consciously shy away from elaborating too much on my F1 efforts. I still feel regretful about how it all turned out to this day."

Interestingly, in charting the history of the RAM 01 one comes up against one of the most fascinating and tantalising dilemmas surrounding the historical verification of such vehicles. Going back to the 1950s and 60s discarded racing cars were simply that – old racing cars – junk to be discarded like the Lancia-Ferrari D50s which ended their days under a lean-to in the grounds of the Maranello factory. Yet they were important cars, representing a significant chapter in the evolution of Grand Prix machinery, so it was almost preordained that they, or their facsimiles, would rise from the ashes to take their position centre stage.

Autocourse says that RAM 01-03 was the Hart test car over the 83/84 winter, but this is not the case - as it would appear - this car was sold to Bobby Howlings (the dealer who ran AMCO, originally Alderley Motor Company) in November 1983. We are satisfied that this test car must have been RAM 01-01 which had been dismantled earlier in the season.

INTO HISTORIC RACING

Two RAM 01s – the two surviving cars being chassis 02 and 03 – appeared in AMCO adverts from 24 November 1983 until 28 March 1985 and both cars were said to be complete with Nicholson DFV's. From then until 19 September 1985 chassis 03 was advertised by Graham Storey in Birmingham. This seems to have been the car that got caught up in a legal dispute between Bobby Howlings and a company called John Bull Shipping. The dispute went on for some time but was eventually resolved out of court in the early months of 1987. Howlings wanted to buy the car back but his offer was beaten by David McLaughlin, much to Howlings' annoyance.

The car was still complete with its DFV and McLaughlin sold the engine before selling the chassis to Graham Eccles at the end of May 1987. According to McLaughlin, he only owned this car for a day, moving it on to Eccles in exchange for an ATS D6. Eccles in turn sold the car to hillclimber Roy Lane who rebuilt it and demonstrated it at Weston Speed Trials in October 1988. However, a year later the car was soon returned to 'the trade' as it was bought once again by Bobby Howlings and advertised by him through 1990. Howlings described the car as a March 831 in his adverts, the name March having slightly greater resonance than that of RAM, and described it as ex-Acheson when he sold it at the end of 1990 to Bill Hall.

Hall ran it at Donington Park in HSCC's Historic F1 race where OldRacingCars.com editor Allen Brown saw it and noted that it wore the chassis plate "RAM 03 03". Hall told Allen that it was ex-Lane car, bought from AMCO. Hall continued into 1993 with the RAM, taking sixth at Thruxton after losing a race-long battle with Ian Giles' Tyrrell 012. He did not turn up for the Brands Hatch race and the car's ownership passed to Matthew Mortlock for 1994. Mortlock had his last run in the RAM at Donington Park at the start of September, qualifying a magnificent eighth of the 28 cars that ran in practice, but retired with a lap to go. Before the Silverstone race just two weeks later, he sold the RAM to Bob Berridge who continued the car's fine run of form with a fifth place at the Northamptonshire circuit.

Berridge instigated a major development program on the RAM, recognising that it had potential that had never been revealed in period. It no longer had the disadvantages compared with its rivals of wooden tyres and low-spec engines and less experienced engineers. Berridge had one of the best budgets in the Thoroughbred Grand Prix (TGP) series and his team at Empress Racing quickly turned the car into a winner. After winning the non-championship race at Zandvoort in 1995, he won two championship events in 1996, at Anderstorp and the Nürburgring, and took pole position at Donington Park in September.

In 1997, the title was a fight between Ian Giles' Brabham BT49D, the only late Brabham then in private hands and on paper the most competitive car available, and Berridge's highly developed RAM 01. Giles won from Berridge at Silverstone and Monza at the start of the season but then hit mechanical problems, leaving the RAM driver to win at the Nürburgring, Zolder, Brno and Brands Hatch and dominate the TGP points table. Berridge then acquired a Williams FW08B and continued to win as he pleased in TGP over the next two years. The RAM was sold to Dave Mercer but he was unable to replicate Berridge's success, and was a midfield runner over the six seasons that he raced in TGP.

In 2008, Mercer sold the car to Peter Landan in Australia.

RESULTS

French GP Paul Ricard - 17 Apr 1983	Eliseo Salazar	Did not qualify
San Marino GP Imola - 1 May 1983	Eliseo Salazar	Did not qualify
Monaco GP Monte Carlo - 15 May 1983	Eliseo Salazar	Did not qualify
Canadian GP Montreal - 12 Jun 1983	Jacques Villeneuve Sr	Did not qualify
British GP Silverstone - 16 Jul 1983	Kenneth Acheson	Did not qualify
German GP Hockenheim - 7 Aug 1983	Kenneth Acheson	Did not qualify
Austrian GP Österreichring - 14 Aug 1983	Kenneth Acheson	Did not qualify
Dutch GP Zandvoort - 28 Aug 1983	Kenneth Acheson	Did not qualify
Italian GP Monza - 11 Sep 1983	Kenneth Acheson	Did not qualify
European GP Brands Hatch - 25 Sep 1983	Kenneth Acheson	Did not qualify
South African GP Kyalami - 15 Oct 1983	Kenneth Acheson	12

OWNERS

1. RAM Racing (Bicester, Oxfordshire) April to November 1983
2. Bobby Howlings (AMCO Racing, Alderley Edge, Cheshire) November 1983 to May 1985
3. Graham Storey (Birmingham) May 1985 - early 1987
4. David McLaughlin (Blackheath, London) early 1987 - May 1987
5. Graham Eccles (Bryn, near Wigan, Lancashire) May 1987 - late 1987
6. Roy Lane (Warwick) late 1987 - late 1989
7. Bobby Howlings (AMCO Racing, Alderley Edge, Cheshire) late 1989 - late 1990
8. Bill Hall (Sheffield, South Yorkshire) late 1990 - late 1993/early 1994
9. Matthew Mortlock (Cambridge) late 1993/early 1994 - September 1994
10. Bob Berridge (Oxford) September 1994 - 1998
11. David Mercer (Orpington, Kent) 1998 - 2008
12. Peter Landan (St Leonards, NSW, Australia) 2008 - 2010

STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICITY

ALLEN BROWN

Despite the unexpected number on its chassis plate and the red herring in 1984 Autocourse, it is possible to be very confident that RAM 01-03 is entirely authentic. RAM numbering was not very straightforward in their first season as a constructor, as they still had a very close relationship with March and their cars emerged with the numbers "01 01", "02 02" and "03 03". However, they were generally known in period as RAM 01s and that name has become accepted for posterity. Autocourse reported that chassis 01-03 had become the test car for the Hart turbo engine that would go into the RAM 02s but it is quite evident that the test car must have been 01-01.

Since leaving the factory, the car has a very clear ownership chain and although its many seasons of historic motor racing may have removed some of its originality, there can be no doubt about its identity.

SOURCES

A wide range of sources were used to construct this history but the following specific sources should be noted:

1. David McLaughlin (March 1987)
2. Autosport (6 Oct 1988 p13)
3. Steve Lydon (March 1991)
4. Graham Eccles (June 1991)
5. Autosport (6 May 1993 p87)
6. Roger Cowman (September 1994)
7. Kenny Acheson (November 2010)

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