

Wacky Racers

Car 2004

Motor racing is dangerous. It says so, right there on the ticket. But if you feel that those life-lovin' safety weenies are ruining mainstream motor sport, there are still plenty of ways to spice up your spectating.

1. Add ice. The Trophee Andros is the world's premier **ice racing** series. **The racing:** It comprises 12 rounds over six weekends during the winter, on tight, snaky circuits in various French ski resort villages. The grand final (in February) is staged on a purpose-built track inside Paris' Stade de France football stadium.

The racers: Iceman of the moment is seven-time Andros champ and sometime BTCC star Yvan Muller, driving a Kia Rio hatch. Former F1 champ Alain Prost was lured from retirement to drive a Toyota Corolla. Muller's 'Kia' is typical of the breed; spaceframe chassis, mid-mounted (Audi) V6 of around 350bhp, four-wheel drive, four-wheel steering, chainsaw-compound studded tyres and 950kg kerb weight.

The risk: Hypothermia (the racing's at night, 2800 metres up). Falling down. Getting your feet perforated in the pits.

2. Add alligators. **Swamp-buggy racing** has been a freak feature of Florida, USA since the early 1940s.

The racing: Generally held on a single weekend in January, March and October in and around Naples, Florida, the birthplace of swamp buggy racing. Racing involves two or more buggies lapping a submerged track. Being America, of course they have a "world championship" (sponsored by Budweiser), which no other nation attends.

The racers: Names like <White Trash>, <Swamp Witch>, <Hi-Tech Redneck>, <Gunky McMann> and <Rusty Bilger> should give you an idea – and the latter two are the names of drivers. Basic class is for four-cylinder Jeeps, then it's straight into the home-built, big-wheeled buggies with four-, six- and eight-cylinder engines and two- or four-wheel drive. The real swamp monsters are the two-wheel drive Pro Modifieds: blown, big-block Chev V8s with up to 1000bhp, propelling what looks like the bastard offspring of a speedboat, fighter plane and Top Fuel drag car.

The risk: Drowning. Pneumonia. Malaria. Alligators. Inbreeding.

3. Add verticality. In rallying, Scandinavians seem to be able to do all they need with 300bhp. Give them 600bhp, and they flip out. It's called **Formula Off-Road** and it was invented in Iceland.

The racing: A five-round championship in Iceland from May to September. It's best described as a distant, drunken cousin to Trials,

albeit held in a variety of stone quarries and lunar-like landscapes. Cars tackle sections of the course one at a time, against the clock. Deep, stagnant ponds often form part of the course; ever see a car opposite-locking on water? See it here.

The racers: Two main classes, being production-based 4WDs, and the full-house Specials. The 500kg, 600bhp spaceframe Specials use nitrous-injected V8s and ridiculous bucket-tyres to tackle near-vertical climbs on shale surfaces. Or not. Heroes include Sigurdur Jonsson ('Toshiba Troll'), Rafn Arnar Gudjonsson ('Red Prince' Jeep Special) and Haraldur Petursson (Ssangyong Musso Special).

The risk: Gravel rash, while standing still. Having a Formula Off-Road car land on your head. Alcoholic poisoning.

4. Add more engines. **Tractor Pulling** was invented in the US greenbelt states in the 1950s, but it's now huge in countries like Denmark, Germany, Holland and gradually, the UK as well.

The racing: It's all about trying to drag a mechanical sled as far as possible. A sliding weight on the sled generates greater drag the farther it is pulled, so only a handful of tractors will complete the (timed) 100 metre course. A lightning start is essential, to gain momentum while the sled is at its lightest. Some tractor pulls are hosted indoors.

The racers: Like the idea of an 8.4 litre, supercharged Keith Black Hemi V8 drag racing engine, punching out around 2,500bhp (and consuming 13 litres of methanol every 100 yards)? Yeah? Then how about four of them – or five, or six? Top-shelf tractor pulling has classes for 2.5, 3.5, 4.5 and 5.4 tons; some tractors compete across two classes, with special 'yokes' to sling extra engines over the chassis. Gas-turbine transport-helicopter engines are also very successful (if you use enough of 'em).

The risk: Runaway 4.5-ton tractors. Hearing damage. Moustaches. Being seen by someone you know.

5. Subtract traction. Drag racing's obviously dull and predictable, so go and get a grip on **Sand Drag Racing**.

The racing: Same as regular drag racing – cars duelling down a dead-straight strip, although in sand racing it's only 300ft long (versus a quarter-mile, or 1320ft). Soft, hard, smooth, rutted, hastily-repaired or unrepaired tracks are all a part of the sport, so you can keep your FIA Court of Appeal, sonny. The sport's biggest in the US, where at least two governing bodies stage championships.

The racers. Closely based on its sealed-surface cousin; picture a Top Fueller with a VW Touareg's ground clearance, and you're getting the idea of the Type 1 rails, which are currently clocking 2.4-second, 140mph

passes. Type 2 caters to modified four-wheel drives, and Type 3's for bikes, trikes and snowmobiles.

The risk. Great, choking roostertails of sand. Wheelying, out-of-control cars. Sinking feet and leaden legs as you (vainly) try to run to safety.