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# £1M MONDEO

Words Dan Williamson  
Photos Chris Wallbank

The most expensive BTCC car ever built is, as you'd expect, completely bonkers!





**W**hen Ford sets out to win, winning big is the only option. The original GT40 was Uncle Henry's revenge against Ferrari. The Sierra Cosworth came about because Capris were being trounced by Rovers. And as for the Mondeo Super Touring, it was the Blue Oval's budget-busting way to blow away every rival in the BTCC (British Touring Car Championship) – a task it managed so easily that the 2000 crown was won by halfway through the season.

But success for the Mondeo didn't come without heaps of failures. Indeed, after years of dismay, it wasn't until late in 1999 that Team Mondeo – run by Prodrive on behalf of Ford – started to scalp the opposition.

The car on these pages was an integral part of that process. Chassis 004 was the final Mondeo Zetec constructed by Prodrive for the 1999 season, and driven by Anthony Reid during the latter half of the year. Its main achievements

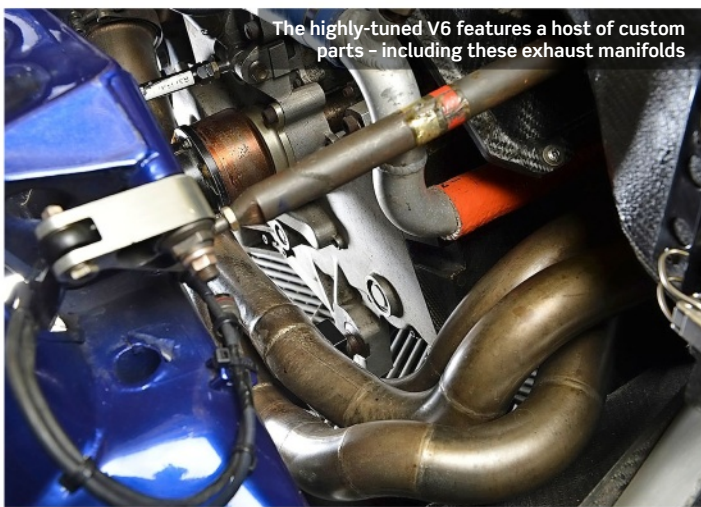




Prodrive-built 2.0-litre V6 is a 300bhp work of art!



The highly-tuned V6 features a host of custom parts - including these exhaust manifolds



Extinguisher system and battery are mounted as low and as centrally as possible





## TECH SPEC BTCC MONDEO

## ENGINE

Ford/Mazda KL 1998cc, 24-valve, alloy-block V6 built by Prodrive with completely custom-made alloy cylinder heads and internals, six throttle bodies with carbon fibre inlet, Pectel engine management, custom exhaust manifolds, dry sump

## POWER

305bhp-plus @ 8500rpm

## TRANSMISSION

Xtrac six-speed sequential gearbox with triple-plate carbon fibre clutch, Xtrac viscous/mechanical differential, custom-made driveshafts and mounts

## BRAKES

Water-cooled AP Racing six-pot front calipers and 380mm ventilated discs; four-piston rear calipers with 280mm discs, driver-adjustable bias pedal box

## SUSPENSION

Koni/Prodrive hand-built coilover remote dampers, custom-made suspension arms, uprights and mounts, adjustable anti-roll bars front and rear

## WHEELS AND TYRES

OZ magnesium 9x19in wheels with Dunlop 210/650/19 tyres

## EXTERIOR

Steel production line-modified Mondeo Zetec five-door bodyshell rebuilt by Prodrive with custom front wings, alloy inner wings, fixed polycarbonate/Isoclima windows, carbon fibre front splitter and rear wing

## OVERALL WEIGHT

975kg without driver

## INTERIOR

Centre/left-mounted Sparco Circuit 2 race seat, Sparco harness, Mondeo half-dashboard, Pi instrument display, Sparco steering wheel, carbon fibre panels, integral roll cage, driver's air blower ducting mounted under dashboard

## THANKS

Ben Chaplin (mechanic), Penny and Luke for the graphics, Steve Stripe (engineering), Vinny Reeves (engine/mechanical)

were battling through Snetterton's night race, and picking up a third place at Silverstone in the last race of 1999.

Not bad, but this particular Mondeo was also used by Prodrive to develop parts for the all-conquering 2000 BTCC weapons, being put into testing duties over winter with some of the fanciest hand-built goodies ever seen on a tin-top racecar.

## IT'S IN YOUR HEAD

We're talking about cylinder heads that were said to cost more than Formula One parts. Underfloor aerodynamics using a flat-bottomed fuel tank. An engine mounted so low and far back into the bulkhead that the custom-made driveshafts ran through the vee of the V6 – itself a scarcely-recognisable unit based on the Ford Probe's Mazda-sourced powerplant, reduced from 2500cc to two litres for BTCC eligibility, and overwhelmingly reworked by Prodrive in minute detail.

Team Mondeo was the epitome of no-compromise, no-excuses, cheque-book motorsport. Changes were made without a second thought, and each mega-budget racecar was

easily expendable.

Which explains why, after its usefulness was over, this million-pound Mondeo was discarded, and sold on to the privateer circuit-racing fraternity.

Alex Schooledge is the car's current custodian, having purchased the machine five years ago from a well-intentioned former keeper. "It was owned by a guy who bought it directly from Prodrive," he recalls. "He kept it as something to look at more than to race, so it had been sitting around for ten years in an open barn. I was looking for a project, so I made him an offer."

To most of us, deciding to buy a retired, bona fide touring car would be an astronomical gamble. And to Alex... Well, it was no different. Despite spending half his working life restoring motorsport machines (alongside his dad and a crew of mechanics, known as Outpace Racing), nothing prepared him for the complexity of rebuilding a full-on BTCC legend.

He groans, "It took three times longer than I expected because it had got into a bad state and I didn't realise how much work would be involved."

Bodywork repairs

"It was the epitome of no-compromise motorsport"





“This particular car was used by Prodrive to develop parts for the all-conquering 2000 cars”



presented the biggest problems, due partly to minor battle scars, but mainly owing to rust. Yes, this is essentially a low-mileage Mondeo hatchback plucked from the production lines 15 years ago, but that's where the similarity ends.

Rumour has it that Ford selected 100 shells from the Genk factory, chopped, changed and slimmed down the steelwork, then continued assembly at Prodrive's Banbury headquarters.

The inner wings were replaced by curved 2mm alloy sheets, the

chassis rails were strengthened, and the roof was temporarily removed to install a beautifully intricate roll cage.

In the quest for ultimate weight reduction, no primers were used prior to painting – there was just one glossy coat, and

zero protection. Which explains why Alex found a whole load of corrosion beneath the decals.

He says, “I thought it just needed a respray, but it was easier to replace than repair. The original stickers had to be scraped off because they'd been on so long, and we stripped it down to a bare shell.

“It would take a day and a half to make standard doors fit (their height is okay but you'd never get one to close where the rear quarters are beefed up), so we cut and shut new door skins.”

#### BACK TOGETHER AGAIN

Fortunately, the hand-made steel front wings (they're massively flared over 19in magnesium wheels, allowing plenty of steering lock) were fine after a bit of prep work, and are backed up by a spare pair in case of future incidents. The plastic front and rear bumpers are new Mk2 Mondeo parts, their insides hacked away for lightness.

Rather than risk future rot, Alex opted for a bare-metal respray comprising several coats of primer, two blue, two yellow, with lacquer on top. Half a day was then spent



Massive 380mm brakes means this Mondeo stops... instantly!





Looking good sat up on its air jacks



## BUDGET? WHAT BUDGET?

Team Mondeo was rumoured to be the most expensive saloon car racing setup of all time, with figures of £8,000,000 to £12,000,000 reckoned to run the 2000 season alone.

Even the 1999 team was budgeted at £4,000,000 to £5,000,000, with each car costing £850,000-plus to build, plus at least two of everything as spares. For example, the ultratruck Koni/Prodrive dampers were roughly £6,000 each, and there were three sets per car per track; instead of changing settings they'd swap the dampers completely. Similarly, the six-speed Xtrac transmission has different gear clusters for each race circuit, which simply unbolt

from the main case – all tested and timed to perfection.

As for the engine, it's only just recognisable as the Mazda-sourced Ford Probe 2.5 V6 on which it's based. Bits were chopped off, many were welded up, and plenty were completely remanufactured; 40 individual parts were welded to the heads alone. Chances are, even the allegedly production-spec cylinder block was little more than similar to look at. But there's no denying it worked.

When Prodrive took over Team Mondeo for the 1999 and 2000 seasons, Ford was keen to develop cars under one roof – until then, it was a combination of West Surrey

Racing, Reynard and Cosworth. By the end of the first year, the Mondeo had scooped its first win, but the following season was an onslaught.

The existing team of Alain Menu and Anthony Reid was joined by Rickard Rydell, who finished the BTCC championship in first, second and third spots respectively. Between them they won 11 of the 24 races, and scooped the manufacturer's crown for Ford.

Major rule changes meant there was no Team Mondeo for 2001, but most of the cars live on – either as polished museum pieces or hard-charging combatants in the Super Touring Car Trophy.

PSP IMAGES



Anthony Reid piloted this very car during the 1999 BTCC season





Check out the beautiful (some may say unnecessary) carbon trim panels



designing an exact replica of the 1999 livery. The polycarbonate windows were refreshed, with the front and rear 'screens made from Isoclima, which doesn't steam up. The finishing touches were those dramatic super touring wings, now reinforced and recovered with new carbon fibre.

**COMPLETE PACKAGE**

Mechanically the Mondeo was complete, albeit not race-ready. The recently-rebuilt (hugely expensive) engine sealed the deal for Alex, featuring 2000-spec upgrades (682 of 806 components were reputedly modified or changed by Prodrive from the previous Cosworth setup), along with a host of as-new spares.

Alex says, "The suspension, discs, wheel bearings and pads were all too far gone to be reused, so we had everything replaced or reconditioned. You have to go for the same spec – you can't take the gamble in case something else is wrong. All the suspension was hand-made to specific tolerances by Prodrive, but they've moved on so much that all the records and



"The recently rebuilt engine sealed the deal for Alex"



**OWNER SPEC**

ALEX SCHOOLEGGE  
 Age 31  
 Job Property developer  
 First Ford Focus  
 Favourite Ford Escort Cosworth



Mondeo's rear wheels feature covers to improve airflow



diagrams are gone. "The dampers are very trick; in 1999 they were a major step ahead. Rebuilding them was too much for my normal company, but I managed to track down a Prodrive engineer from the BTCC days, and he still had all the spec sheets for the dampers, with special seals and bearings."

**TRY BEFORE YOU BUY**

Alex had already tested the Mondeo before buying – raised on its internal air jacks, he could blast through every gear – but it's fair to say he couldn't prepare for the thrill of finally getting this monster back onto tarmac. To date there have been only a couple of test sessions, but hot-lapping Silverstone was enough to tell Alex what's in store.

"I wouldn't say it's hard to drive, but it is different," he grins. "You can't compare with a road car. The driver is centred to the middle, and you sit by the B-pillars for weight distribution. There's no power steering (the rack comes through the bulkhead and up to the column), no brake servo, and very little pedal travel. Any slight movement of the accelerator



Now that's a comprehensive cage!

and you're revving very highly – imagine a motorbike.

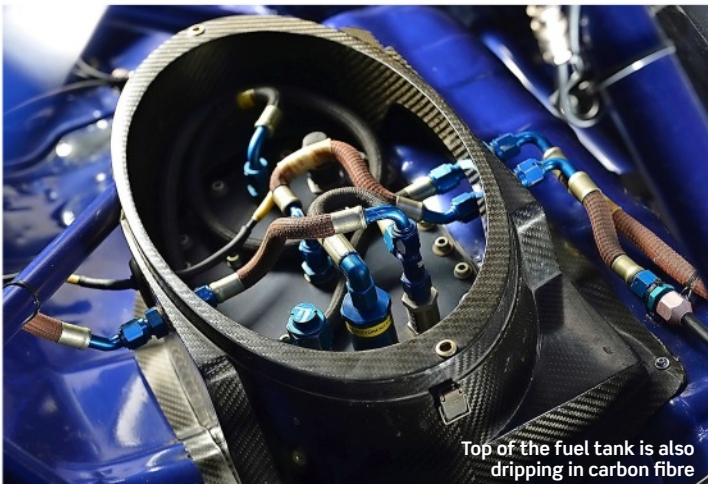
"You need to give 90 per cent-plus or you will struggle. You've no torque, it's all top end, so you can't drop any revs. Power is 6000rpm to 8500rpm – a novice can't give that in every gear."

Ideally, Alex would enlist the

expertise of a top-flight BTCC pilot to wring this Mondeo's neck throughout the Super Touring Car Trophy, and he reckons it would easily score a top-five position in every race. The biggest drawback is cost, along with racing drivers' determination to treat mega-buck machinery like dodgems when a

chequered flag is in sight...

Alex admits, "I'd prefer it to stay in one piece, so I don't know if we'll race it or put it away and polish it." Even so, he's determined to get this legendary car out on track at Ford Fair. But he'll not be there to win. On no, he'll be there to win big. 🏆



Top of the fuel tank is also dripping in carbon fibre



Like everything else on this car, the pedal box is the best money could buy