



# MPH

Autosport GP editor **Mark Hughes** on...

## DEREK DALY'S CHAMPION'S PYRAMID, AND HOW F1'S CURRENT CROP MEASURES UP

**DEREK DALY** will tell you he did it all wrong as a driver once he'd got to F1. He'll rationalise how he didn't build on his basic talent, didn't a) acknowledge his weaknesses and b) turn them into strengths, weaknesses that included mental, communication and technical skills. Trying to reassemble himself in the wake of the near-fatal Big One at Michigan's Champ Car race in 1984 led him down a path of discovery that had two parts: the first was the slow realisation that he no longer had the raw desire to compete with the necessary intensity. This led him to media work where he came to wonder why it was some drivers seemed to have better access to their potential than others.

It's from this that his 'Champion's Pyramid' concept began to form, which led to him establishing his driver coaching business. There, he saw directly the personality diversities of aspiring racers and how each needed their coaching tailored to their strengths and weaknesses. Daly has now published a book, *Race to Win*, that details the concept, fleshing it out with case studies of F1 and Champ Car drivers as well as anecdotes from his own career.

### IT'S ALL ABOUT FINDING YOUR GROOVE

At the bottom of Daly's pyramid, 'talent identification' is about recognising what type of talent you were born with and therefore how you generate your speed, whether by what he terms instinct/reflex, feel or a combination of both. This, he says, will determine the most appropriate working methods for a driver. It's all about finding your groove, locking onto it and moulding things around you that allow you to continue locking onto it. Unless you do that you won't have full access to your potential.

Technical, communication, mental and physical skills follow, with the top of the pyramid being all about desire and commitment. Get all those right, Daly contends, and you'll be the best driver you possibly can be. To get the best from any driver they need to be in the sort of environment that allows them to flourish – but this environment varies between individuals. They need differing levels of support in different areas. They also need to recognise that their chances of success will be enhanced if they take on the full implications of motor racing being a team sport.

Even in F1, Daly believes not all drivers have a complete pyramid. You can win grands prix, maybe even a world championship in the right circumstances, without a fully formed pyramid. But you won't be as good as you could be, and you'll probably not achieve lasting, consistent success.

Fernando Alonso he cites as someone with a complete pyramid, while Kimi Raikkonen is as an example of success despite not having a good pyramid. Talking with Daly of some of the other current crop is fascinating...

Lewis Hamilton: "Has all the attributes of the champion's pyramid but his technical abilities won't be fully developed. Sustained greatness will be tied to how technically accurate he can be during official sessions on GP weekends and may be more important as his race cars move through rapid development stages over a season. Has proven he has the mental skills to block out worldly distractions. His current aggressive style (while entertaining) needs to be tempered to become more technically sharp." This latter point is a reference to how it's easy for the naturally gifted to drive around technical problems and thereby lose out overall.

Felipe Massa: "Appears more of an instinct/reflex driver.

Daly en route to the '77 British F3 title; the next year he was in F1



## "EVEN IN FORMULA 1, DALY BELIEVES NOT ALL DRIVERS HAVE A COMPLETE PYRAMID"

His pyramid is 'soft' in the mental skills area. Strong mental skills can be learned. He would have benefited greatly if his coach/manager had addressed his emotional needs and mental make-up before he made it to F1. Now he's there, he's expected to have access to mental capacity to help him remain focused but just doing the job uses enormous amounts of mental capacity. When he runs out of capacity, he flies off the road. Getting a driver to admit he needs to develop his mental skills is extremely difficult. This could well limit Massa's potential sustained greatness."

### HE'S THE POLISH NIGEL MANSELL

Heikki Kovalainen: "Great drivers can put themselves in a position to be successful. He needs to do more of this. If I was his manager, I'd remind him to concentrate on the process, not the result. Then, the good result would be a by-product of the right process. He might want to be world champion this year and therefore tries too hard, whereas if his expectations were lowered, he could develop his pyramid to be superb in two years."

Robert Kubica: "He's the Polish Nigel Mansell because of his mental resolve. He is technically accurate and will only get better. He drives the team hard but has a Senna-type of respect from them. How he casually dealt with his Montreal

accident endeared him to his team. He might have the most complete champion's pyramid of any F1 driver on the grid today."

Nico Rosberg: "I question whether he's technically accurate enough to develop a car. His speed is not in question. When

Frank fired Damon Hill I suspected he didn't understand the value of the technically astute driver, which Damon was. Michael Schumacher proved the most valuable data stream is still accurate driver feedback and it appears Frank has not had this for a while. When drivers are at the front of the grid one week and the back the next, it usually indicates they didn't really know why they were at the front in the first place. It's easy to know why you are slow, the real magic is knowing why you are fast... then reproducing that form."

Jenson Button: "When David Richards led this team, they looked like potential world-beaters and Jenson appeared to have the momentum to propel him to greatness. The team then faltered. Jenson will have lost the Hamilton/Kubica type of hunger/drive and sometimes it's hard to get that back. Ross Brawn will have to oversee the building of a fast new car and the rebuilding of the fast 'old(er)' driver."

Mark Webber: "I see Mark as a driver who's taken himself out of a position to be successful too often. This has been reflected in both his choice of teams and incidents on track. He appears to have the principles of success a little backwards whereby he concentrates on the result, not the process. When this happens the soft touch that is so necessary for accurate technical feedback gets blurred, which makes you try harder which accelerates the cycle." ❧