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Ferrari Challenge

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One hot summer day during the classic Formula One season 1973 Ronnie Peterson managed to finally score his maiden victory in the premium class of motorsport.

If he was a little bit lucky this Sunday afternoon at Paul Ricard it actually made up for a lot of bad luck, not least in the previous Grand Prix at Ronnie's home track Anderstorp in Sweden. Ronnie's success in Formula One was the catalyst for a Swedish Grand Prix and the race was held for the first time in 1973 at the grandly-named Scandinavian Raceway.

Ronnie did not disappoint his fans in qualifying, taking pole in his Lotus. For 70 laps it looked like this was going to be a one-two for Team Lotus with Peterson first and world champion Emerson Fittipaldi second. However disaster struck when Fittipaldi retired with gearbox failure. Meanwhile, Denny Hulme was quickly closing the gap on the lead, Peterson having major trouble with tire wear and fighting to stay on the track.

On the 79th and penultimate lap Hulme was able to pass the local hero to snatch victory, the New Zealander's decision to run harder tires on his McLaren-Ford having paid off. Peterson was second. That was as close as any Swede came to winning on home soil.

Nevertheless in the French Grand Prix 1973 Ronnie did everything right and everytime when I am returning to Paul Ricard I cant help thinking about how happy and relieved Ronnie must have been that sunny afternoon 1973.

A truly classic Formula 1 Circuit

The complete course was used for Formula One races until 1990.

After the start and finish straight comes the S de la Verriere, which used to be taken flat out but nowadays you have to brake and change down to third gear. The Virage de l'Ecole is reached at high speed and the constructors have provided a chicane. The following right hand twist leads to the Mistral Straight after a typical winding section where much higher speeds are attained. This straight is given its name because when the Mistral wind is blowing 6th gear can be held somewhat longer since maximum revs will be reached with the assistance of the following wind!!!

Brakes have to be applied for the Courbe the Signes when using the complete circuit, otherwise it can be taken flat out. Sand blown on the track by the Mistral is a sometimes an incalculable enemy. The situation can change from one minute from the next. For this reason, too, the safety zones to the right and left are no luxury. The following double right hand bends are very treacherous since they get tighter towards the end. The sun shines full in the face of the driver here during the late afternoon and the edge of the track is barely visible.

The following left hand hairpin, l'Epingle, looks a little easier than it is. After this hairpin comes the excellent Virage de la Tour which can not be taken along the ideal line owing to the following right hand hairpin. The inside line must be rigidly followed. Speed perhaps 160 km/h.

The pits on this course are quite unique, occupying several levels like a multi-storey car-park.

MY RECORD AT RICARD

I have raced at Ricard many times with both good and bad results. 1995 we where quick in the Ferrari 348 Le Mans but retired, in 1996 it was time for the brand new Ferrari 355 GT3 but once again a DNF when the gearbox failed in the last of the three hours.

1998 I managed to put another version of the 355 on pole and finished the race in third place after a dogfight with a bunch of Porsches.

This year will be my first outing in Ferrari Challenge despite that this is the third year the series run here, amazingly I have managed to be injured both in 2006 and 2007 at the time of the French race.

