

Unigate

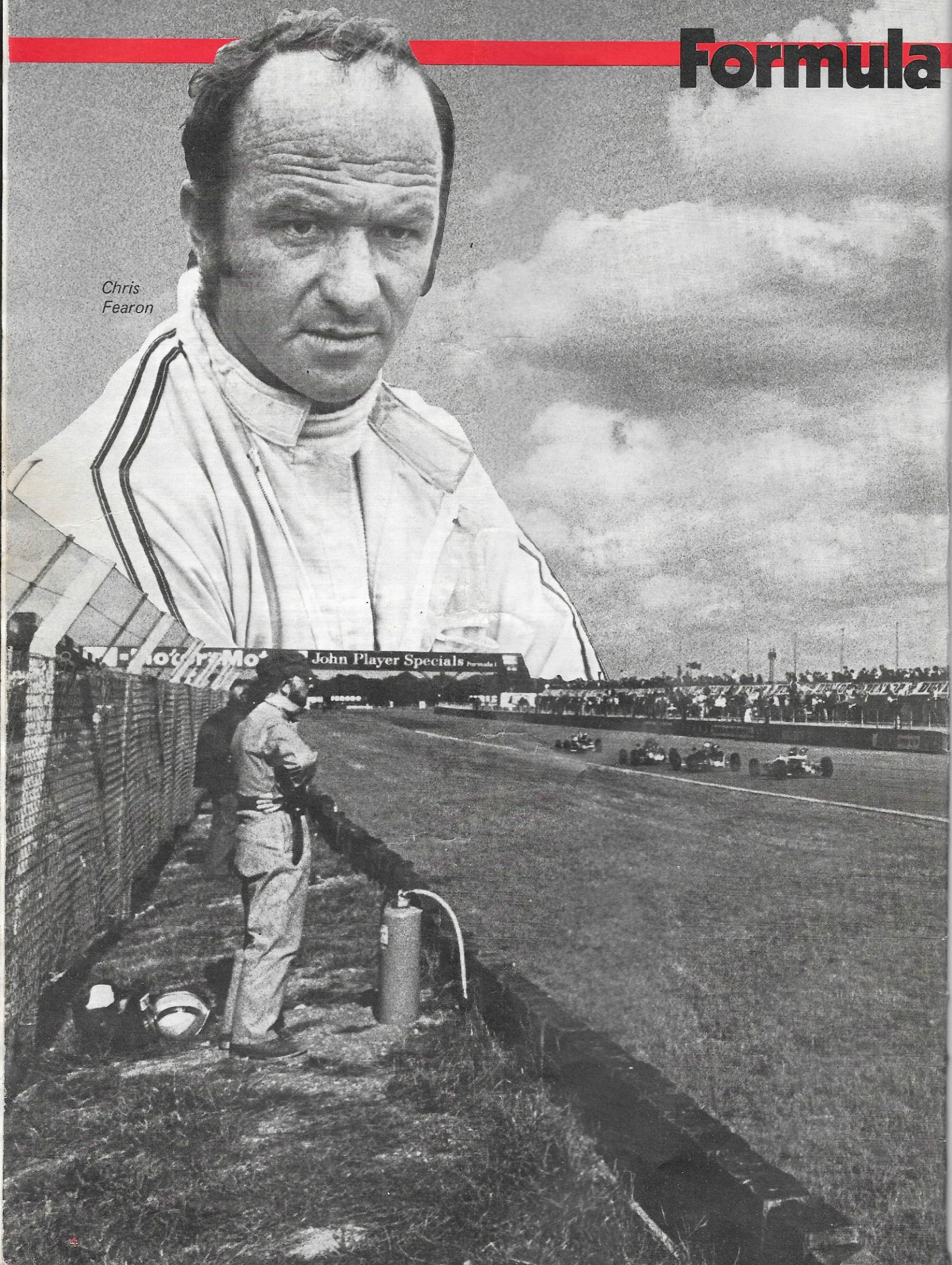
group review

Autumn 1974



Formula

Chris Fearon



Ford

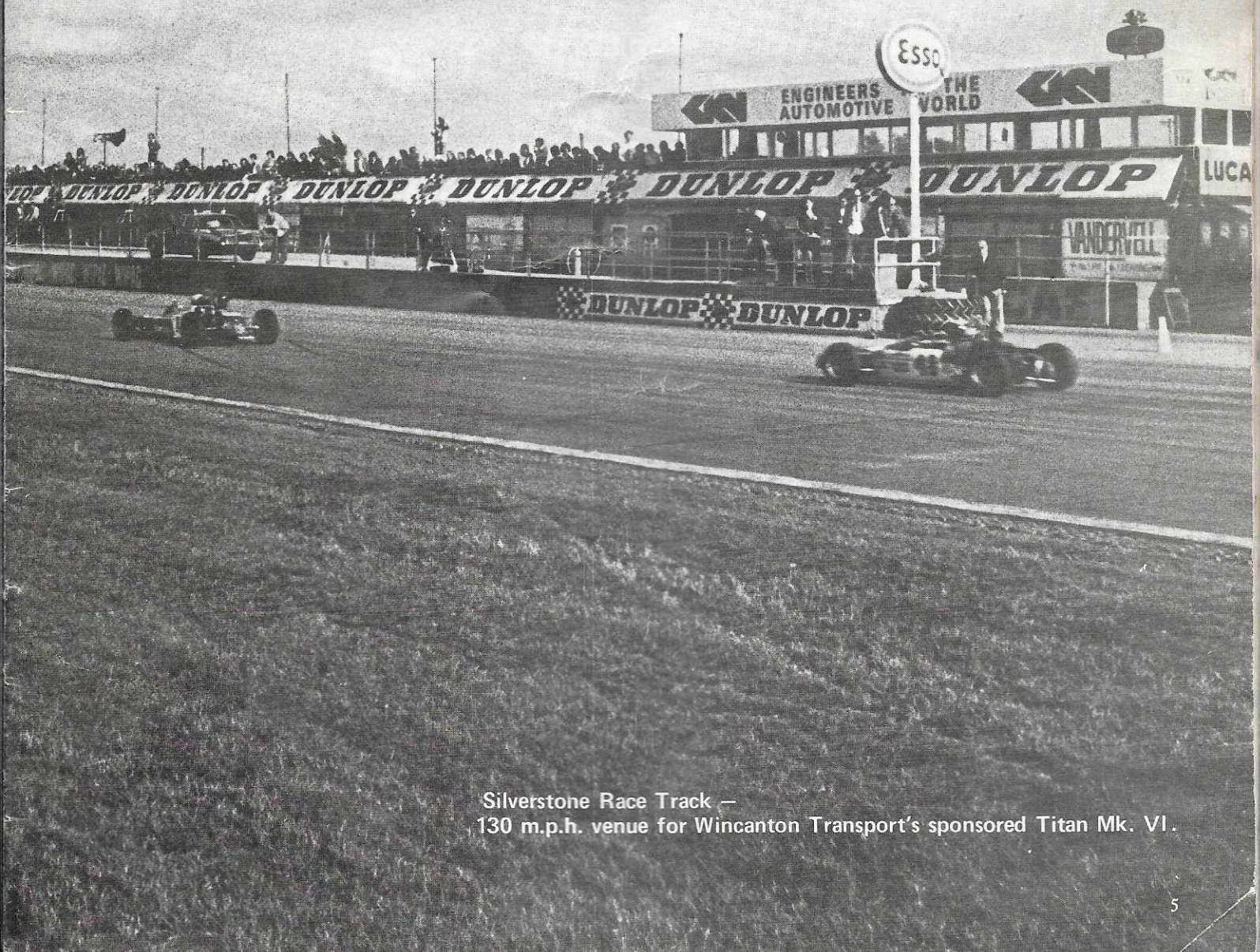


The 140m.p.h. Flying 'W'

Wincanton Transport, the rapidly growing subsidiary of Unigate's Transport and Engineering Division, has entered Formula Ford motor racing with an expenses-sponsorship of a privately owned Titan Mark 6 racing car.

The car, owned and driven by Wincanton Transport employee **Chris Fearon**, a grade A mechanic with Bulk Liquids Division, is painted in the Wincanton colours of orange and blue and sports the flying "W" on both sides of the bonnet.

Chris, a 32-year-old ex-Royal Navy engineer mechanic, joined the company six years ago and previously made a name for himself in Autocross. After winning the national Autocross championships at Woburn Abbey in 1969, he set his heart on Formula car racing and sold his Anglia saloon to buy a secondhand Formula Ford car, but, because of its age and uncompetitiveness, he decided to sell that one too and build his own.



Silverstone Race Track —
130 m.p.h. venue for Wincanton Transport's sponsored Titan Mk. VI.

Formula Ford

He did, early in 1972. But this year, faced with shortage of money, rapidly escalating costs and the prospect of missing some three out of four events as a result, he was on the verge of abandoning the whole idea.

At this point Wincanton Transport managing director Ted Wall, when told of his plight, discussed the situation with colleagues and decided to offer Chris a sponsorship and guarantee enough money to meet everyday expenses.

Within a week, the car had taken to the tracks with a marked improvement in speed and performance. "No," says Chris. "It wasn't the paint that was used! It was just that the anxieties of smashing the thing up or burning a piston out during a 'burst' on the straight had suddenly been lifted from my shoulders.

"It's psychological, really. When you know that you have to meet every single repair or overhaul bill — and that there isn't really enough money in the kitty even to keep the thing on the track for the rest of the season — you tend to be over-cautious. That isn't the way to set about winning."

A modest smash-up could cost between £200 and £500 to repair, even for a do-it-yourself driver, like Chris. "Most of the successful cars have some sort of sponsorship behind them," he told us. "Knowing that you have a big outfit behind you means a tremendous lot."

The car, hand-built from an assortment of authentic spare parts and overhauled body panels, took Chris a whole winter to put together. Powered by a 1600cc cross-flow Cortina standard engine, and capable of a top speed exceeding 140 m.p.h., it is worth £1,600 — but it didn't cost Chris as much as that.

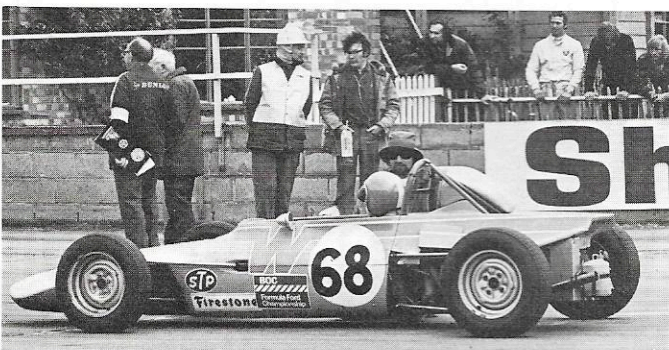
Unable to raise the sort of money needed to buy the car of his dreams, Chris approached the manufacturers at St. Neot's, Huntingdonshire, asking if he could buy a chassis and "absolutely any spare or damaged parts they had available."

The firm, interested in Chris Fearon's enterprise and enthusiasm — and not a little curious as to what sort of a hybrid might develop from the idea — readily agreed. The result, to their surprise and satisfaction, was a Formula Ford Titan mark 6 that even on close inspection appeared to be a brand-new production model.

Bent panels, scrapped suspensions, almost anything that the firm had no use for has been beaten out or coaxed into top condition by Chris — at an overall cost of only £500.

Since, then he has scrapped the original engine and fitted another, continually modifying and tuning it (within the Formula Ford specifications) until he is confident that he gets peak performance.

Petrol consumption on the track runs at about 14 m.p.g. on top octane racing fuel and the tyres — standard production Torino's from Firestone — last about 3,000 miles. They get so hot during a race that gravel and dust adhere to them on the return to the pits.



Chris Fearon discusses the track with Wincanton Transport managing director Ted Wall. Dennis Miers (right) listens. After this event Chris was taken to Northampton General Hospital with an injured arm - he spun on the track at 100mph and withdrew from the event. But the next week he was back in the seat again, little the worse for his experience.

Not a poor man's sport

Ted Wall told Unigate Group Review "We had been looking around for an angle to stimulate employee interest and attract publicity for the company when Bulk Liquids Division general manager, Dennis Miers, mentioned Chris Fearon's car and what sort of spectator-sport events he took part in. Realising the potential and the benefit we would get from sponsorship we decided to back him.

"We had been considering something similar, but wanted to avoid the "John Player Special" type Formula racing because of the astronomical costs involved. But the project had to be impressive enough to carry the Wincanton name and project the image well. Chris and his Titan fill the bill absolutely perfectly — we couldn't have made a better decision".

Chris, who travels to all events with close friend and ex-Titan engineer Bill Edwards as track mechanic and brother-in-law GPO telephone engineer Brian Brazier as timekeeper, now spends about £35 on each race meeting. "Two years ago it worked out nearer £12" says Chris. "Then last year it doubled — and this year, well ... I hesitate to think what would have happened. If we didn't do all our own work on the car the cost would put me off the tracks completely. It isn't a poor man's sport although it costs only a fraction of what it costs other drivers in the traditional 'formula' events."

Now, thanks to do-it-yourself driver Chris Fearon and his team — and Wincanton Transport's sponsorship — the orange and blue bullet can be seen most weekends on the leading midlands circuits.

We'd like to wish them all good luck.