

Clarke Pulling Team revisits 2005:

She's smokin'

As season starts go, the 2005 kick-off couldn't have been much better for Peter Clarke's two alcohol-burning super stock tractors. At the indoor SuperPull held in Rotterdam in March, the tractors achieved a 'one-and-two' finish, beating top US machine Silver Bullet along the way. But as with any other motorsport activity, there's only one way to go when you're at the top. And high hopes and aspirations for more silverware were dashed at the first outdoor round of the Eurocup series held in France, in June, where a pair of spectacular engine failures brought the team firmly back down to earth with an explosive bang.

With the tractor pulling season now over and the machines undergoing winter maintenance, it's time to look back on the 2005 season with one of Europe's top teams – the outfit owned and run by Buckinghamshire dairy farmer Peter Clarke

Fever's unexpected bearing failure. But undeterred, they set about rebuilding both tractors for the next European round in Holland, some six weeks later. The Dutch round was to be more mechanically successful for both tractors. Even so, podium finishes evaded the team and with it, enough points to claw back at a championship win. A Dutch-built John Deere safely took two wins out of two.

"We were just pleased that both engines stayed together," says Mr Clarke. "The first couple of runs are critical to ensure things settle back into place, although we do pull the sumps off and check the cranks and bearing shells as a precaution after every event."

This meticulous policy, however, failed to stop a second engine failure on Red Alert. At The Great Eccleston Show, near Blackpool, the team was fine-tuning a smaller capacity but higher revving and previously raced engine to replace the terminally damaged 10-litre motor when trouble struck again and the team had to return to the workshop. As part of the



Red Fever, a space-framed Case IH MX285, was hand-built in the Clarke workshops during 2003. The 3,500hp machine has started to add trophies to the team's extensive collection.

"Well, we had enjoyed a very reliable run through many seasons with just a few niggles here and there, so I guess it was our turn," says a philosophical Peter Clarke. First failure was a snapped crankshaft, which happened when team-mate Geoff Ashcroft, aboard Red Alert, was four-fifths of the way along the track in the finale. Mr Clarke was back in the pits warming up Red Fever, hoping to leapfrog his team-mate's third-place finish. "I saw a big flash fire and thought: He's split the sump open with crank pressure and created a fire," Mr Clarke says. "I had no idea the block had disintegrated. Then when I followed on, Red Fever suffered a con-rod bearing failure, which resulted in a hole in the block as the con-rod came out. It's fair to say that we've had better weekends," comments Mr Clarke. Despite third and fifth places at the event, the team was puzzled to understand Red



Volvo artic is the team's mobile home on weekend jaunts into Europe. It offers living space for four and room enough for two tractors.



Unpacked and ready to race. The closed pit area is where final tweaks and checks are made before heading to the track.

A crankshaft failure resulted in this under-bonnet explosion. Photo: Henry de Graaf



fault-finding process, more oil clearance was given to the big-end bearings and a change of lube oil was implemented, to Kendall Racing Green 15W-40.

Round three took place in Denmark – without drama, but without podium finishes either – which saw team focus transfer to the European Championships being staged in the UK, ahead of the final round of the Eurocup series. With two fast, solid runs in the qualifying rounds and no sign of any problems, the team made it through to the finale with both of its

TEAM SHEET CLARKE PULLING TEAM

Base: Windbush Farm, Tingewick, Buckinghamshire

Tractors: Red Alert (Magnum 7250), Red Fever (MX285) team members

Engine: Six-cyl, 10-litre, two-valves per cylinder, overhead camshaft

Induction system: Triple turbochargers, wastegate controlled, charge cooling with fuel

Power output: Estimated at a total of 3,500hp @ 6,500rpm

Fuel system: Triple injector, methanol system – 25 litres in 10 seconds

Ignition: Spark-type, breakerless ignition using Crane & MSD systems

Clutch: Red Alert – 11in, five-plate; Red Fever – 13in, four-plate

Transmission: Red Alert – four-speed mechanical gearbox; Red Fever – three-speed mechanical gearbox

Rear axle: Red Alert – modified IH original; Red Fever – Rockwell with outboard planetaries

Tyres: 30.5 R32 Firestone Puller

Team members: Peter Clarke, Geoff Ashcroft and Ian Thomas

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Despite its older-style Magnum metalwork, Red Alert shares engine technology with Red Fever. It turns 3,500hp out of its 10-litre IH motor at a lofty 6,500rpm.



the bonnet and the tractor's headlights were blown out of the front grill. Fortunately the tractor carried enough forward speed to just roll past the 100m mark and thus qualify for the finale. "Luckily it proved to be nothing more serious than a backfire, though it could have damaged the tractor's turbos and blown pipes off again," Mr Clarke says.

Red Fever also made a good run, and qualified for the final.

tractors. But gremlins reappeared in the pull-off final, as both tractors backfired, causing the high-pressure turbo pipes to detach from the intake manifold.

The team had it all to play for in the final Eurocup round, held in Bettborn, Luxembourg, during September. Red Alert was first onto the track and, with the sledge properly set for competition, the tractor made an impressive start. But 15m before the finish, a loud bang came from under

But in the end, none matched the grip, speed and balance of Red Alert, taking a comfortable victory with a lead of over 3m on the nearest rival. It was enough to lift the Clarke team from fifth up to second overall in the Eurocup series. Red Fever finished a respectable fourth. Last up, the team moved on to Arnhem, Holland, in November, where it finished the season how it started – with first and second podium positions. An excellent way to complete the 2005 campaign.