

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION DRIVEDATA

Discerning kitcar enthusiasts like nice things, leather trim, big engine, nice alloys, how about an onboard camera?

With trackdays being such a popular 'hobby' for many people, as the movement has grown in recent years it's seen a great many trackday 'specials' appear.

By that I mean the days of completely un-modified vehicles arriving for a day's fun are virtually over. Even the most subtle 'sleeper' is almost definitely going to feature a hot cam, upgraded brakes or some other bit of trick kit.

The performance aftermarket has had a field day satisfying an almost insatiable desire for bolt-on goodies.

One of the latest areas to see an increase in interest is onboard cameras. It's only natural that trackday-fiends want to capture their best laps for posterity, while the more serious use them like race teams, as a driver improvement tool, rather than just a 'build my ego' vid.

Race cams are seriously cool these days. Sad thing is, many sell inferior systems, and that's a potentially expensive pain in the derriere. You see, trackday operators, ever vigilant



Bullet cam being fixed in place.

of ambulance chasing insurance claimants, have outlawed nasty taped camcorders, more used to filming the best bits of your summer holiday in Tenerife, as too many have been nailed onto rollbars and ended up bouncing through some unwitting driver's windscreen or air intake.

Added to the fact picture quality, or lack of it. We've all seen them. Grainy, bouncy films of circuit fun, that give the impression that the car has

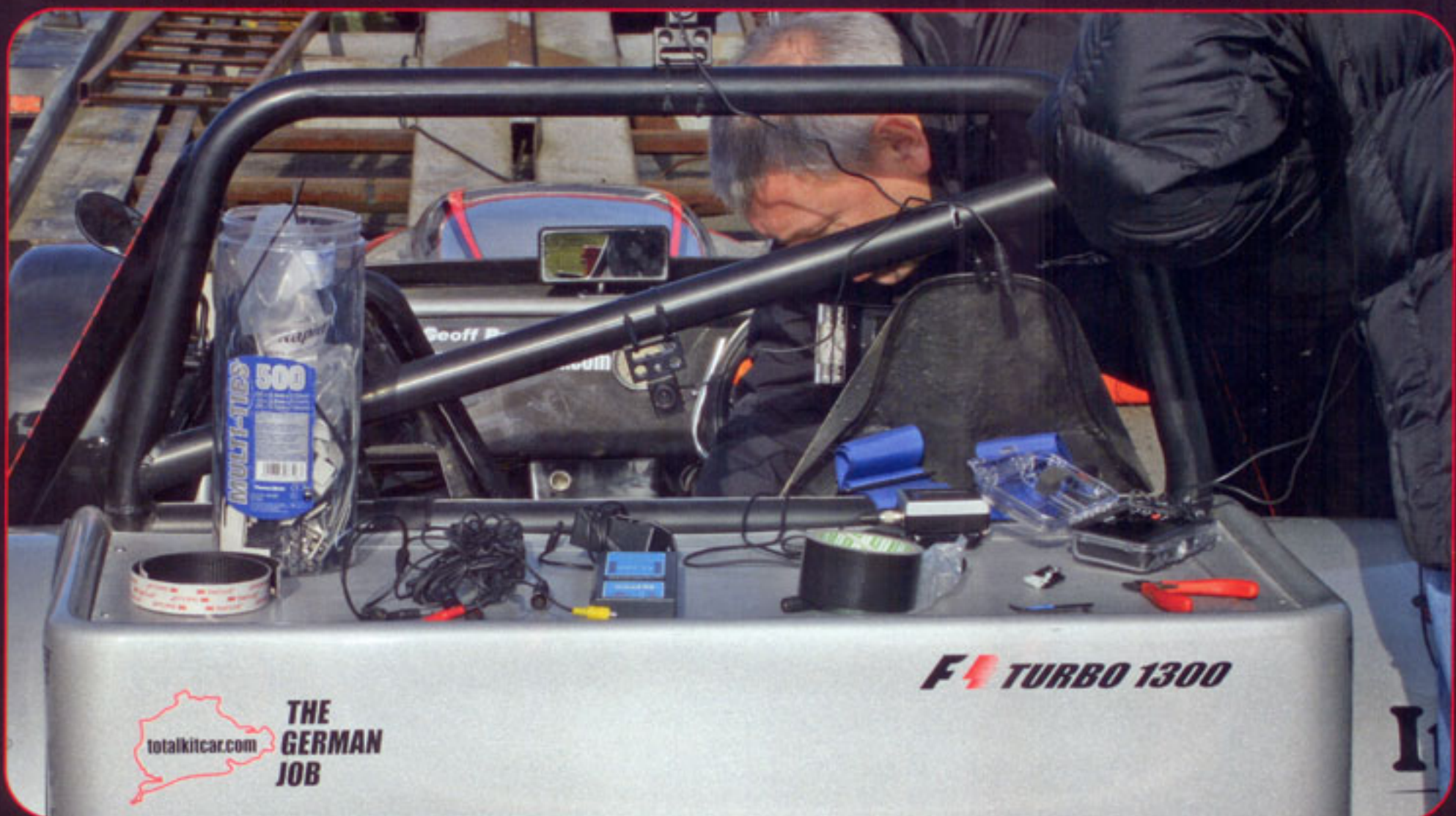


Here it is in situ.

square wheels. Rubbish footage like that is no good to anyone, and doesn't impress in the slightest.

A solution to all this is the products of a company called Drivedata, run by John Chambers, who design, make and sell top quality action camera solutions at an affordable price.

Indeed, Drivedata could just as easily have been a candidate for our 'Made in England' series, as the brains and much of the engineering is



John Chambers busy fixing his Drivedata kit to Duncan's car.



created right here on these shores.

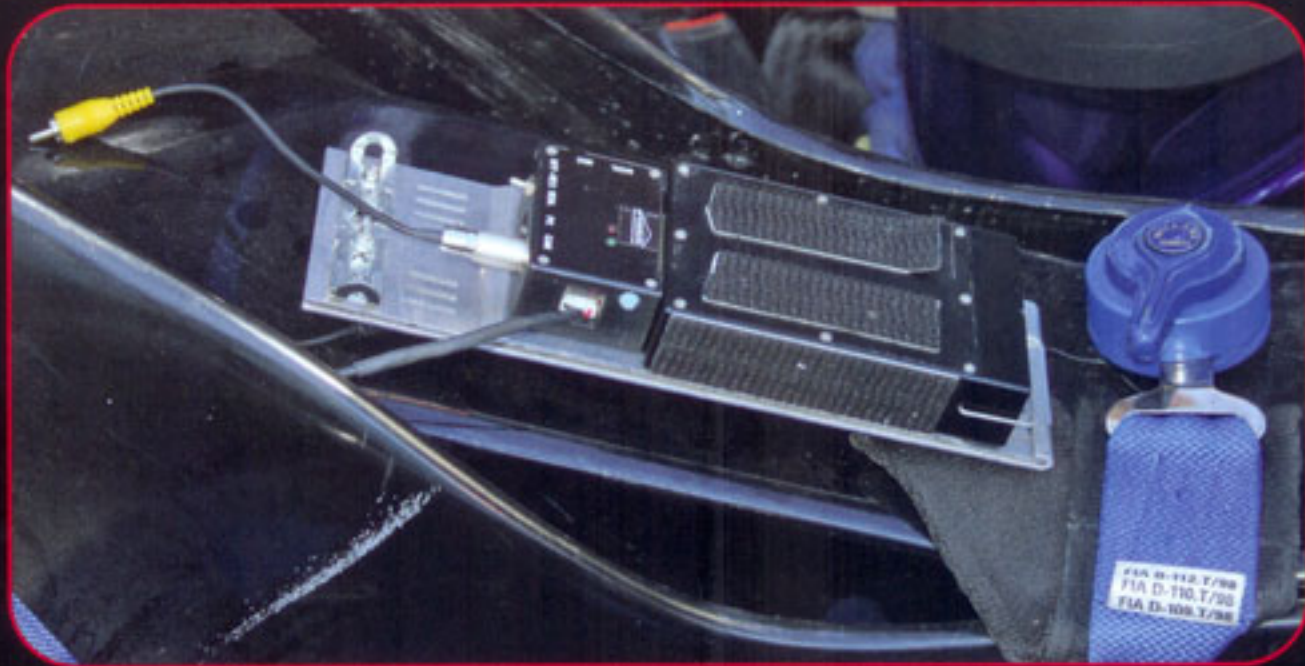
John's background is in the IT field, where he worked for some 15-years, and his hobbies included motorsport, photography, video cameras and computers (do you see where I'm going with this?). He also raced for many years in a variety of championships, including the Uniroyal Prodsaloons series, and successfully, too.

By the early noughties, John was becoming bored of IT and decided to turn his hobbies into a business, something he'd been preparing for in his spare time for a couple of years anyway, and Drivedata became a limited company in 2003.

He went to various Japanese trade shows, studied the in-car video market and unveiled a couple of products targeted primarily at professional motorsport teams.

Using a professional Sony-chipped solidstate video cameras, several customers found the results useful for enhancing driver technique etc.

John continued to upgrade his product, refining the hardware into firstly, a camcorder and then today's style miniature camera, ending up with a reliable, quality product that people want to buy. John points out that a lot



of trial and error has gone into making Drivedata stuff the smallest, most reliable and best quality onboard camera that money can buy.

When it comes to buying such a system be it for professional or hobbyist use, there are several key factors to bear in mind about the elements involved.

The camera itself must be able to produce good footage, while mounting it properly and effectively is of paramount importance, while the recorder part must be sophisticated and rugged enough to produce quality results while withstanding extremes

of temperature and knocks.

As John says: "Anyone can produce a black box, it's the quality of the internals that's important".

It's also worth stressing that serious motorsport professionals use Drivedata's equipment. Three current F1 teams are customers, and when you're at that rarefield level you don't settle for second-best, they want stuff to work, not be heavy and not take up too much space. They all use the cameras for testing purposes and are pleased with results, although to be fair, John would only find out if they WEREN'T happy!



This camera is set-up to 'watch' the front suspension.



Duncan ready for some lappery.

Moving down from F1, Andy Priaux's BMW WTCC team, are customer's as are several ALMS teams.

Drivedata's systems cost between £500-£1500 and if you are still thinking about going to an out-of-town electrical superstore and adjusting a handheld camera, then don't do it. They save data to the hardware rather than a separate memory card, and they always 'crash' when used in-car as they don't like vibrations or being bashed about, while trying to create a mounting system to satisfy race scrutineers and/or trackday organisers is nigh on impossible.

Spending some time with John Chambers, he is a very modest man (too modest I'd say) and he understates the sheer quality of his products, which work beautifully, as we discovered when we tried them out on Duncan Cowper's latest DAX Rush MC at Brands Hatch one sunny day last October.

John did the full monty on Dunc's



Live-link footage of Duncan in action.

car, displaying just what is possible. He fitted four cameras to the Rush, plus the black box (the whole lot weighed just 800gm!) with forward and rear facing cameras, one aimed at the front suspension and another in the footwell, giving the ultimate 'driver on the pedals' coverage.

What's more, he didn't just stick the footage on a DVD-R for watching later, he set up a superb live-link to a wide-screen TV in our pit garage. Truly impressive stuff, of broadcast quality, which funnily enough is another service Drivedata offer race series organisers and the like.

Everyone who gathered in pit garage 23 that day came away incredibly impressed, highlighting

exactly the true professional benefits that a team manager could gain from the system, enabling him to perhaps gee up a slower team-mate by literally showing him where the hotshoe is shaving tenths off lap times, while of course, as a general driver monitoring device it is invaluable.

In addition to the obvious automotive uses, Drivedata equipment is used in marine, extreme sports and law enforcement applications, but really the overall potential is huge and limitless.

I watch closely as John fits the camera set-up onto Duncan's car, and to be honest the hardest part seems to be getting the bullet-cam angled correctly and it looks like a job that the average proficient person can do. Mind you, for the serial trackday-goer, the system can be hard-wired easily into the car's loom.

I feel that the Drivedata onboard camera set-up has an obvious attraction for kitcar enthusiasts, many thousands of whom like to spend appropriately on their cars, thinking nothing of big bucks for a whole raft of niceties. At just £500 for the entry-level camera, I imagine there'll be quite a few of our readers eagerly beating a path to Drivedata's door-or indeed, website.

Additionally, I can see the scenario where kitcar manufacturers could offer Drivedata equipment as a part of their kit packages.



John Chambers (left) at work while 'Spot' of Harness Engineering (left) and Life Racing's Mark Colby watch Duncan's first run footage.

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