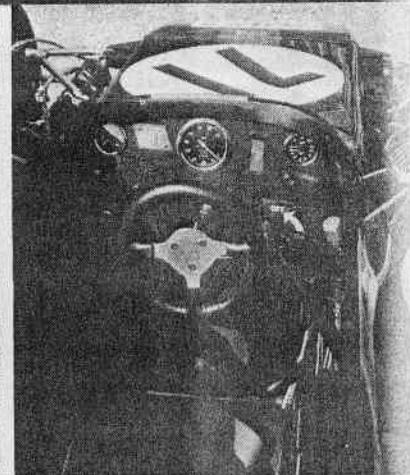
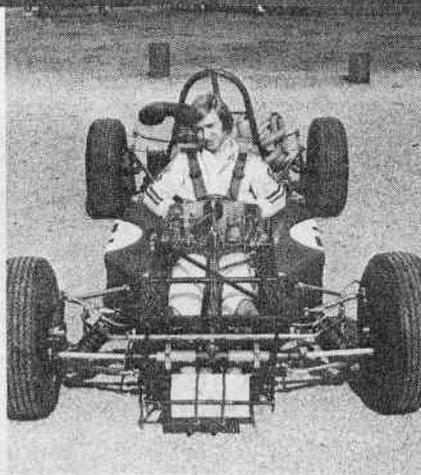


# FORMULA FORD RAY

MARK COLE TRACK TESTS  
STEPHEN SOUTH'S WINNER



**ONE IMPOLITE GENTLEMAN** recently wrote to the motor racing weeklies referring to Formula Ford as Formula Fairy. He reckoned that the up-and-coming Formula Ford drivers strutted round the paddock like fairies, pretending they were superstars shortly before throwing their cars into the circuit scenery. It may be true in some cases, but certainly not in Stephen South's.

Stephen South is 1973's big FF find—aged 21, a former British kart champion from Harrow, he has worked his way to second place in the important Wella for Men Championship. I recently tried his car at Silverstone. The car? Another of the season's 'finds'—the Ray. Built in London's Clapham by Bert Ray, it is typical of the sort of product that has put Britain firmly in the lead of the racing car constructor's world league.

Bert has been involved in motor sport ever since he left school—a spell at Brabham included—and now he runs his own fabrications and race car building business. The Ray is now two years old, and Stephen's Ray FF 73 is the latest type, privately

entered but smiled on by Ray Race.

In the seven years Formula Ford has been going with its 1600 Cortina power, basic design has changed little. The Ray has the mandatory spaceframe chassis and narrow 5½ steel (Spitfire) rims with 'road' tyres, but Bert has incorporated a few ideas of his own—such as inboard disc brakes at the rear, and side-mounted radiators for better weight-distribution. Bodywork is neat with a small wedge nose, while high cockpit sides have avoided needing a clear screen. When you buy a Ray, it's ready-to-run—you choose engine and gearbox (probably the Hewland Mk 8). Stephen chose a Rowland power plant, giving around 110 bhp with a 6600 rpm rev limit. The Rowland uses an FI-type intake scoop to the single Weber carburettor.

Like the man who built the car, Stephen is a perfectionist—the car is completely immaculate, gleaming and very attractive with its black and gold bodywork. For one of the first times in living memory, it was a perfect summer's afternoon at Silverstone and I was given dire warnings that the car was being raced the following day in another Wella round.

Surprisingly—because Stephen is slim and I'm the opposite—the cockpit was just right for me, the stubby gearlever close to hand on the right and the broad pedals very well sited. The engine starts easily and runs up to 6600 without any strain or vibration—selecting first easily I gracefully cruised out of the pits and on to the wide open spaces of the Club circuit. Formula Ford single-seaters used to be oversteering cars—now things are pretty neutral. In the Ray's case this is certainly so, and I began to think I wasn't going fast enough as I couldn't even get the tail out for the first few laps on the dreaded Firestone Torinos. Cope is a third-gear corner—you drop from top with a confident dab on the brakes and the Ray is stable and very much on rails as I power through in third at around 5500 rpm. Up the kerb on the outside, grab fourth and then we're going up over the hill to Maggotts, the flat left-hander. Flat means 6000 rpm in top with just a slight lift as you hit the apex, because in 300 yards' time you're braking hard for the second-gear slow Becketts hairpin. There's no way anyone or anything can get round Becketts fast,

so just using enough power to steer the car, I sideslip through the hairpin and on to the long Club Straight. Third, fourth and by the time I hit the 200-yard marker board for Woodcote half a mile later there's 6400 rpm showing, all of 120 mph. Woodcote is faster than it looks, a third-gear corner with a hidden apex that puts the car at a very strange angle to the Pits straight, but again there is little drama and with a bootful of throttle one can just break the back end into line and you're off into another lap.

All very smooth and responsive when you're out there by yourself, but with a pack of similar-powered FFs snapping round your wheels things must be pretty different . . . rather Stephen than me!

At present there are only three Ray 73s—Trevor Morgan, brother of Dave, has another quick one—as Bert has concentrated on development this year. But next season he's selling the FF 74—all-in price ready-to-run starts around £2050 depending on your engine choice. Ray Race is at 65 North Street, London SW4 (01-720 6976).