



a short story

If the shoe fits

70's Roadsport competitor James Nairn takes a nostalgic look back at the 1970's.

Generally I don't go clothes shopping on my own, my daughter and long suffering accomplice both recoil in horror at the thought of my purchasing disasters and confused understanding of colour co-ordination.

But how far wrong can you go with a pair of black lace up shoes especially when they are called 'Drivers' and have an imprint of a steering wheel on the sole, in the spirit of Tuff Wayfinder animal tracks. But they also seemed strangely familiar in other ways, and sneaking them into the house to avoid the usual embarrassing inquisition, there, right at the back of the wardrobe, almost as far as the land where the lions and witches live, were my first racing shoes. Westover's by Edward Lewis.

Brought in 1973 these shoes were magic in the literal sense, defying the laws of physics by being larger inside than out, enabling me to fit my 6' 4" frame into a Lotus 61 Formula Ford belonging to Jim Russell. I was still too young to realise that the unassuming shoe maker who happily listened enthusiastically to my tales of ineptitude and under achievement was actually an accomplished touring car racer.

Whilst at art college I was sent to the London studios of the designer who created the Pirelli calendars, for a research project into dynamic curves and the female form, but instead made the ultimate personal sacrifice to visit Les Leston's Finchley Road shop where I was stitched up in my first race suit possessing the colour and flexibility of reconstituted cardboard.

“The most aggravating thing about the younger generation is that I no longer belong to it.”

– John Dryden 1631 – 1700

Racewear choice was limited in the days when the primary use for Han's were to hold a beer glass and a packet of crisps. Obviously the suit didn't fit, with the bottom of the legs not quite reaching my ankles. It was also a two piece with the tail of the top half permanently hanging out accentuating the effect of a delinquent schoolboy.

My first race car was a Diamond white Escort Mexico supplied from the forecourt of my local Ford dealer, without decals for £1000.00. The following week whilst I enjoyed a couple of pints of Greene King IPA in Sawston village pub Alley Bars fitted a roll hoop, a set of Britax belts were clipped into place and a month later I was lining up for my first race.

Racing wheel to wheel with a Moskvovich around a soaking wet Brands Hatch I knew instinctively the big time was just around the corner and following the lead set by James Hunt I decided that red overalls were the secret to ultimate success. After soaking mine in a bucket of red dye for a week I almost

certainly destroyed their fire projection properties but gained cuffs and zip with a delicate pale pink hue, and most surprisingly, absolutely no significant performance advantage.

Drawn by the powers of marketing like a novice to a gravel trap, my second race suit came from F1 racewear, made to measure and supplied by mail order in tasteful royal blue with white cuffs, yet again the ankles struggled to reach my feet and yet again despite the branding, Grand Prix stardom mysteriously passed me by.

With growth not being confined to just the sport but also my physical stature, my latest race suit is very different from its predecessors. The fabric is soft, flexible and very comfortable, it is without a doubt beautifully made and following a theme, does not fit. Over compensating with the measurements following years of disappointment this one is made from sufficient fabric to create a new big top for Billy Smart's flea circus.

And so at last to the moral of this story: if you are thinking of ordering a new set of HSCC overalls, don't ask me to measure your inside leg.