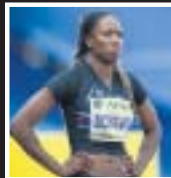


INSIDE TODAY

Historic day as Kent begin £8.2 million redevelopment of St Lawrence



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ONE-RACE DEAL: Ben Collins, aka The Stig (right), will race for Motorbase Performance in his British Touring Car Championship debut next weekend

TEAM STIG DEEP TO SIGN COLLINS

Kent-based Motorbase Performance add the man behind the Top Gear mask for Brands Hatch finale

By TOM HOWARD

SOME say he's a CIA experiment that went wrong, but all we know is Top Gear's The Stig will race for a Kent team at Brands Hatch next weekend.

Ben Collins, the man behind the famous white helmet on the popular BBC television show, has agreed to join Wrotham-based Motorbase Performance for the final round of the British Touring Car Championship (BTCC) at the West Kingsdown circuit.

The 36-year-old was sensationally revealed as The Stig following a legal case regarding the launch of his autobiography in August. He has subsequently been sacked from the show after seven years in the white suit.

Apart from performing alongside Jeremy Clarkson, Richard Hammond and James May, Collins has continued his career as a professional racing driver and is vastly

experienced in both single-seater and sportscar disciplines. During his 15-year racing career he has competed in Formula 3, the Le Mans Series and NASCAR.

However, next Sunday will be his first taste of the rough and tumble world of the BTCC when he gets behind the wheel of Motorbase's Airwaves BMW. Interest in the race meeting, which is down to a four-way title fight, is almost certain to be at fever pitch with a crowd of 60,000 expected, and Collins admits there will be extra pressure on him to do well.

He told Kent on Sunday: "I'm expecting a rough ride. It's a great championship with lots of history and the drivers are not afraid to bump into each other. It's a four-way title fight so it's going to be interesting.

"There will be pressure on me, but there is pressure on every racing driver all the time.

"This year I have been racing sportscars and proved I have the ability with a couple of race wins, so I'm in good shape."

Collins is no stranger to Motorbase as he was close to agreeing a deal to drive for them at the start of this season, and has since

admitted he would be interested in joining the championship and Motorbase permanently for 2011.

He said: "David [Bartrum, team owner] and the guys at Motorbase are a great bunch to work with. They would certainly be an option for next year, they're not fighting for the overall title this year, but they are a really good team. The touring car schedule does fit around my hopes to race at Le Mans, too."

Bartrum is delighted to have Collins on board alongside regular drivers Mat Jackson and Steven Kane, and says they will treat him like any other driver when he joins them as part of a three-pronged attack for the independent team title next Sunday.

He said: "As far as we're concerned he is not The Stig, he is just Ben Collins, another driver. I'm pleased we have been able to get him in the car. We wanted to tie up a full deal with him after he tested with us last year for the whole season, but unfortunately we were unable to.

"This will be the first time we use the third car and Ben will be thrown right in the deep end."

Ledley not the only King who can't train all week

THE severity of Simon King's ankle injury means the Gillingham defender is unlikely to manage a full week's training for the rest of his career, writes David Pritchard.

The 27-year-old has been on the sidelines for 14 months after rupturing ligaments in a pre-season friendly at Bromley.

After several setbacks he now finally appears to be closing in on a recovery and is looking to join in full training by the end of this month.

The centre-back is delighted to be making progress, but admitted the nature of the injury means he will never be 100 per cent, similar to Tottenham and England's Ledley King, whose knee problems prevent him from training regularly.

King said: "It might be a case of train Monday, take it easy Tuesday and a day off on Wednesday. That's to be discussed with the gaffer, but as long as I'm fit for Saturdays that's the main thing.

"A few people have mentioned Ledley King, but I don't think it's as bad as that, and hopefully I should be able to get a good couple of days under my belt during the week.

"Unfortunately I did injure a part of my ankle which is never going to be 100 per cent healed. It's about man management now, a case of being professional and making sure I enhance my chances of playing for a few more years."

The time out of the game has forced King to reassess his approach to the game and he is keen to make sure others learn from his problems, which were exacerbated by playing on while injured.

He said: "When I see people getting ankle injuries now I try to drum into them they've got to do their work to make sure it's strong again. Before with knocks I used to think 'strap me up and give me a few painkillers' but you have to realise you've got to do your work inside the gym."



Picture: ADY KERRY

SLOW PROCESS: Simon King is close to recovering from his 14-month injury hell