



One for the road

By [Maurice Hamilton](#) February 6, 2013

Go to a Formula One car launch these days, and you're branded on arrival. Coloured wristbands determine whether you're Corporate or Media. One wristband is for those with money, or the potential to generate it, and the other goes to those who haven't a bean but can affect the lives of those who have. Whether that's in a positive or negative way can be the substance of a PR person's worst nightmare.

The media relations men and women wearing smiles and smart suits shouldn't worry because car launches are generally positive affairs. The journalists and broadcasters are happy to see each other after the winter break and the teams are bursting with fresh-faced confidence. I've yet to hear a driver/designer/team principal stand up at a launch and say the car before them is the biggest pile of crap they've ever produced.

Well, maybe with one exception. Having stepped into the ailing Honda concern at the end of 2007 and been presented with a dog of a car, Ross Brawn politely talked more about 2009 than the coming season - and with good cause, as it turned out. You had the impression he'd prefer to discuss the merits of the maggot as fishing bait rather than the collection of parts someone, in a moment of enthusiasm, referred to as a racing car.

Mind you, I've even been to launches where the car was hardly mentioned at all. That, as you might guess, could only happen in Ireland.





On Wednesday February 25, 1981, a bunch of us flew to Dublin to see the unveiling of a black March 811 to be driven in F1 by Derek Daly. The Irish connection was cemented - if that's the right word - by sponsorship from Guinness, the car being unveiled in the famous St James's Gate brewery, within staggering distance of the city centre.

Word soon got out and any Sean, Seamus or Harry worth his salt knew that a function inside the hallowed premises would involve the need to sample the sponsor's product. Tough, I know, but sometimes you have to do these things from the goodness of your heart.

I can recall to this day walking into the reception room and seeing the bar completely black with pints of Guinness; massed ranks of the stuff, poured and ready. I thought I'd died and gone to Heaven. And half of Dublin clearly seemed to think the same.

The expression 'And the drink was flying' took on new meaning as the lads distributed pints around the room with noticeably accomplished speed. One 'journalist' proudly showed me his pen - no notebook, mind, just a pen. If another had said he'd heard about the occasion through his mother, who walked the greyhound belonging to the sports editor of the Sunday Post, I wouldn't have been in the least surprised.





The place was buzzing, so much so that the hapless organizers of the launch struggled to persuade guests to leave the bar and view the car, waiting just beyond a glazed partition barely 10 meters away. I did get to see Daly smiling nervously as the audience eventually spilled - and that is the right word in every sense - into the room. One man, draining what was clearly not his first pint, confided in me: "That's a fine car young Declan Daly has there, so it is." Then he returned next door with what I thought was indecent haste.

Perhaps wisely, March had chosen not to put us up for the night, preferring to book the small British contingent onto the last flight home. I recall sadly downing a final pint of Guinness (yes, it really does taste different in Ireland) in the airport bar only to discover to our delight there was actually a little refreshment hatch - serving you-know-what - right by the departure gate. Well, it would have been rude not to.

The only other memory I have of The Best Feckin Car Launch in the Whole Feckin World is one of our number falling down the steps of the Aer Lingus 737 just after we had landed at Heathrow. Quite a shocking display, I thought. Some of us didn't know who we were, never mind where we were. That's what happens when you don't have wristbands at a car launch.

Maurice Hamilton writes for ESPN F1 in the build-up to each Grand Prix.