WORDS AND IMAGES: STEVE ALLEN

I AM A LEGEND...

When I first saw photos of the EZ-Power Lancia Stratos when Pete arrived back from Nuremberg, I said: "I don't care how long it takes, I want one!" You see this era of rally cars from the 1970s and early 1980s had perhaps the most character of any ever seen, and were the most innovative, powerful and interesting to watch in action. They paved the way for what became Group B and have always been a favourite of mine. The Stratos really started this, as it was the first car ever designed from scratch for this kind of rigorous competition. The iconic names behind the project were Lancia team manager Cesare Fiorio, British racer/engineer Mike Parkes and legendary factory rally driver Sandro Munari.

Lancia started to produce the 500 cars required for entry into Group 4 in 1973 and the Stratos was finally homologated ready for the 1974 World Rally Championship. The car was powered by another legend, the Ferrari Dino V6 engine that was 'officially' phased out by Ferrari in 1974. In a stroke of genius 500 engines among the last built were ordered by Lancia. The road version was also powered by the Dino 2.4 L V6 engine but in a much lower state of tune, giving the road car a 0-60 mph time of just under five seconds. It had an impressive top speed for the '70s of 144 mph, but the rally version I hasten to add was tuned to produce up to three times the horsepower and went considerably faster!

ITALIAN FAIR HITS THE UK

The great news is that www.rcracinguk.com (a subsidiary of Much More Racing) have decided to distribute the Italian company's products here in the UK. EZ-Power's range also includes another legend, the group B Lancia Delta HF and the Lancia 037, so if you're a fan of Italian rally cars look no further. Although R/C rally cars are not normally raced here at local clubs there is quite a large scene going on in Europe, with regular meetings and big events taking place. It's not all about using high-end chassis and pro-spec components either, inexpensive touring car chassis tend to be used with a few mod's to offer a bit more ground clearance and to protect the driveline from dirt

QUICK SPEC

Manufacturer EZ-Power
Type 1/10th 4WD Rally Replica

Length 440 mm
Width 206 mm
Wheelbase 259 mm
Height 135 mm
Weight 1500 g

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and debris. Of course changing to rally style treaded tyres aids grip, and completes the look.

I was quite amused watching some of the videos online at events where they have a stage laid out and the drivers actually run after their car, following it through the stage while being timed! (Cool, I could lose some weight at the same time as racing ED!) It got me thinking why isn't the scene as big here? Possibly it's because like all niche forms of the hobby, if you don't know about it in the first place how could you ever get involved!

LANCIA FRENZY!

Looking at the box, it depicts both the Lancia Stratos and the other two Martini liveried cars that all look just as well detailed. Attention to detail is good as instead of a generic wheel tyre combination used on the whole range, each comes with the exact style of wheel used on the original car. Our review car also came with a set of optional pre-mounted drift tyres, so if you fancy getting really sideways, after a quick change you can take it drifting as well!

Now at first glance the plastic that everything is made from looks fairly soft. This can be both good and bad in the world of R/C. It's good in the fact it will take impacts and withstand more abuse over rougher surfaces. The bad side is that you must be careful that when performing maintenance or repairs, that any screws going into the plastic if over-tightened can easily strip the thread.

So let's start looking at the chassis, at first you'd think you were looking at a TC4, it has a very similar style layout and design. The placement of components is well balanced with the battery pack down one side and all the major electronics down the other. Looking at the suspension I was nicely surprised at how much geometry adjustment you get on what is for all intents and purpose, a budget touring car. Now this being more of a fun and leisure car than a true racer, I was very surprised to see droop screws on both front and rear arms. This is a feature that you would expect to see on a much more expensive car.

Below: *A true 'Rally Legend'... but one that anyone can own!*

HIGH SPEC SHOCKS ALL ROUND

The lower wishbones do not look sided (but are different front to rear). This is always a good design feature, as if you do break one then you don't have to buy and keep as many parts in your pit box. I do like how the rod ends have an open end so you can actually undo the ball studs without having to pop them off. This means you will cause less damage to them and in turn they will last much longer.

Another nice touch to see on a car of this type is turnbuckles are used rather than threaded rods or fixed length plastic linkages. This means you again can adjust settings like toe-in and camber quickly, accurately and easily. The arms themselves are held in time-old fashion by pins captured in pivot blocks which are made out of the same plastic as the chassis and felt very strong and should take a few hard impacts. My next pleasant surprise was to see very nicely designed CVD front drive shafts instead of the more usual dog bones and drive cup arrangements of similar cars. These will ensure that steering has a wider range of movement and power delivery to the front wheels is smooth and relatively drag free. Another very cool design feature is that rather than use normal hexes for the wheels, the Legend has hexes with replica discs moulded onto them and the rears have a wider offset to make the stance of the Stratos correct.

BEWARE STRIPPED THREADS

Looking at the steering assembly, this is where I came up against a tiny issue. The ball stud going into the front 'C' hubs and knuckles was very loose and on trying to firm up the hold the thread stripped. A simple fix of a thin coat of super thin CA glue on the screw and then screw it back in place saw the issue resolved and after it had set properly it was nice and tight again. This could have been down to me not knowing my strength and over tightening the screw. The final nice touch of the suspension and steering assembly is that the outer hinge pins have a flat on them half way down their length and are held in place with a grub screw rather than at the end. This means it's far easier to get them out in the need for a repair, and there's less components used in the construction.

" Moving onto the shocks shows that EZ-Power have gone for different spring rates front to rear and consulting the manual shows you how to initially set them up for either touring use or rallying which is a really nice touch"

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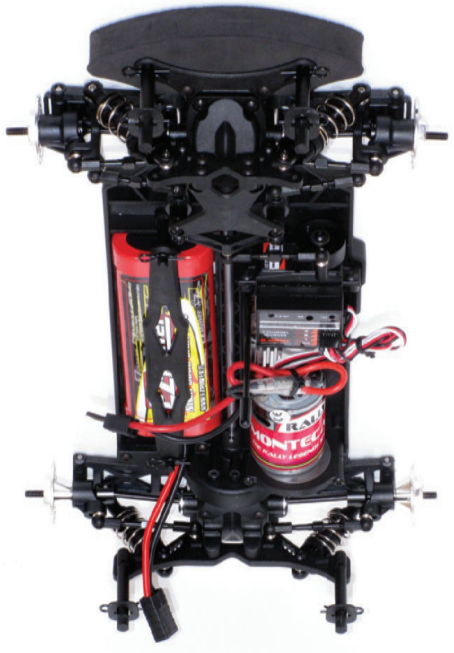
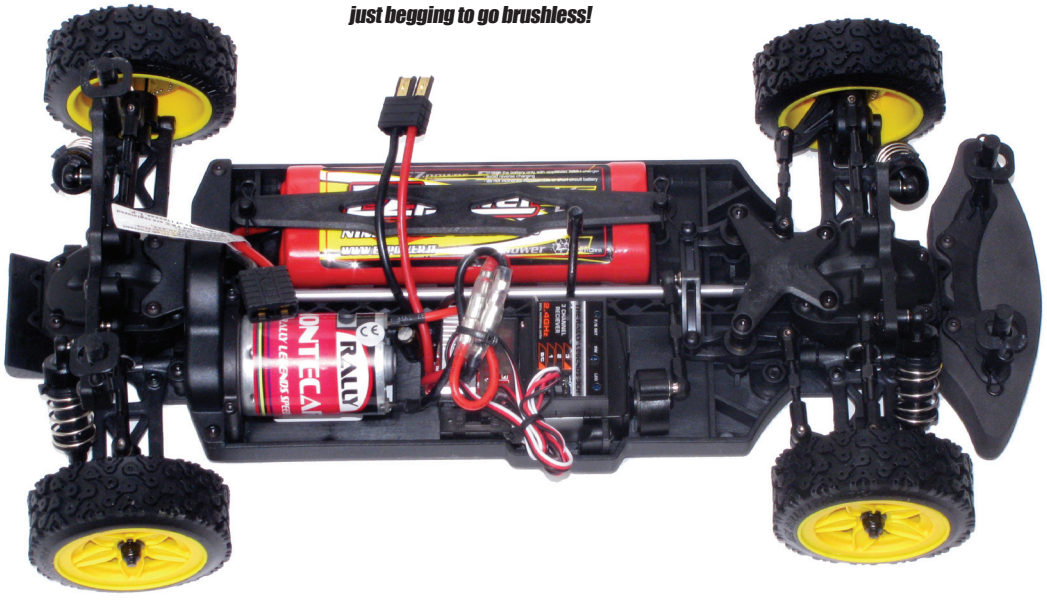
Below: *A traditional TC layout, cells to one side, electrics to the other*



Below: *Note the metal prop shaft... just begging to go brushless!*



nice touch. I really like how the lower ball studs were held to the arms in a very similar fashion as to the Xray touring car I reviewed several months back. It uses a long M3 grub screw into the arm and then a ball stud screws onto this. This means that in the event of a crash you wouldn't lose the screw! The plastic bodied shocks do feel fairly smooth out of the box, and I'm convinced that with a bit of work they could be made 'ultra smooth'. There isn't much play in the shaft, which means they have got the tolerances nice and close and this should mean they remain pretty leak free.

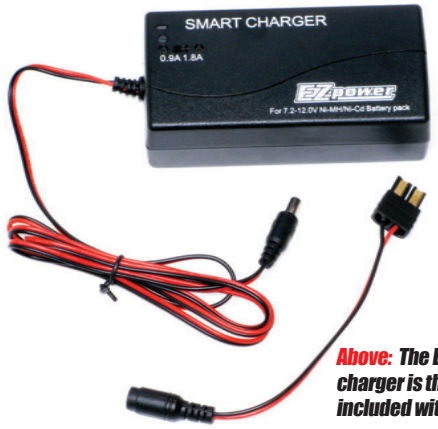
"I was gob-smacked to find really well made ball diff's rather than gear diff's! Now I'm happy to say that these spin on bearings and a quick glance through the manual shows that all of the drive train does too!"

DIGGING DEEPER

Removing eight screws gets you into the front diff housing, with the first four also releasing the bell-crank steering, which sadly uses four bushings rather than having bearings. They are an easily fitted option part and are a readily available size, so can be picked up nice and cheaply. There is also a full carbon top deck option if you feel the need to stiffen up the chassis even more. Saying this though, you do get some inherent flex as the chassis is constructed in three main pieces rather than just one (which in the event of a heavy crash could save you some money!).

Going back to the diff's, I was gob-smacked to find really well made ball diff's rather than gear diff's! Now I'm happy to say that these spin on bearings and a quick glance through the manual shows that all of the drive train does too! It's just the four bearings that I would suggest you fit into the steering.

The diff's use 12 x 3/32 balls in each diff and even coming out of the box felt really nice and smooth, again a real nice surprise for a budget



Above: *The EZ-Power smart charger is the best I've ever seen included with a RTR car*

car. The rear diff is a little bit harder to get into, with ten screws. This is because you have a spur gear cover, although there is one thing I must mention, there is a gaping hole in the bottom of the chassis allowing all the dirt and stones that want to get in an easy route. It's not even as if the spur gear is so large that it sits flush, there is well over 1 mm of clearance which could have been moulded into the rear chassis plate rather than allowing all the dirt in.

THERE IS A SOLUTION

If it was just a touring car then I wouldn't even bring it up, but I could see small stones so easily getting in there when messing about on gravel and dirt in its rally set-up. As a temporary solution I put a layer of black electrical tape over the hole. How long this will last I don't know, but I would rather do something to protect my precious internals, rather than it end in tears early in testing. Fitting a small Lexan plate may be a better option, and once the initial testing is complete, then I'm on the case!

Although the diff halves are plastic it's nice to see that they have used retaining rings to hold them together a bit more and should hold up quite well even to a future brushless conversion. This is where I came up against my only other issue with the car, the plastic drive cups used on each end of the main centre shaft are held on with a pin going through them, then a rubber 'O-ring' to stop them from falling out. This is a bit basic and I would have liked to have seen a pin with a larger retaining thread on one end, which can just be located into place and then lightly screwed in or even thread locked into place.

ALMOST RALLY TIME!

So it's nearly time to get out onto the dirt and tarmac and have some Italian inspired fun, but first let's have a look at the all-important supplied electrics. Now as seems to be the norm on most RTR cars of 2011 (regardless of price-point) the Stratos is supplied with a 2.4 GHz radio as standard. It does have features like EPA's and trims but also a neat ABS feature, something I've not seen on a budget radio before, although I don't expect it to be as adjustable as the ABS on my Pro 2.4 GHz system it's still a nice little touch. It also boasts two position third channel and dual rates for both steering and throttle. It also looks to have an impressive 15-model memory. The receiver is a fairly standard size and nothing overly different from any other receiver. Moving onto the ESC it's nice to actually get a piece of paper included with the cars that actually gives you some actual specifications.

So what are they? Well, input voltage is between 6-8.4 V with a 5 V 1 A internal BEC and a quite surprisingly low motor limit of 20 turns. It's also not equipped with LiPo low voltage protection, so a separate LiPo protect would be required for LiPo useage. It's not all bad as it does however have a Traxxas style plug on it, which is nice to see something different to the Tamiya/Molex style plug of old. It's a low loss connector and in testing has proved the best of the bunch for ease of use and conductivity.

Above: *The front bulkhead/diff casing/ shock tower (all three!) assembled*

Below: *And the ball-diff is revealed! Note the blue O-ring pin retainer on the out-drive*

The motor appears to

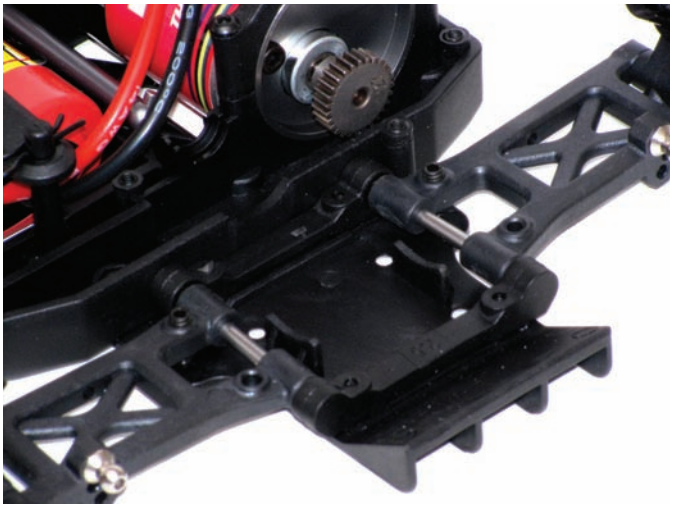
Left: *The ball diff's laid bare... smooth and easy to fine-tune*

Below: *Different rate springs are used front and rear... with further options possible*

"After a few cycles of the included pack I did the 'Pepsi' challenge. This inexpensive RTR charger looks to charge the packs quite well as I put it on my own pro spec charger (costing nearly as much as the car itself!) and it only managed to add 45 mAh extra to the pack's capacity"

Below: *Rear sub-assembly stripped, with spur gear and diff for all to see*

Below: *Hinge-pin retainers, droop screws and even a cool rear diffuser*

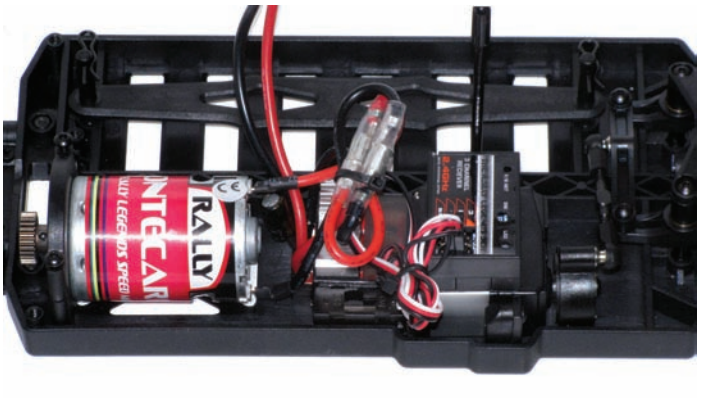


be a standard sealed can 540 sized 27 turn. While not the fastest kid on the block what it lacks in rpm it more than makes up for in good old torque. The supplied battery is a 3000 mAh NiMH stick pack and the charger is another one of the surprises the RTR package offers. It's not what you'd think you would get with an RTR, which is normally a wall 0.5 A item that seems to take an age to peak any pack plugged into it. Now what is included is actually a 'smart charger' that can be switched between 0.9 A and 1.8 A and will charge packs ranging from 7.2 V to 12 V. After a few cycles of the included pack I did the 'Pepsi' challenge. This inexpensive RTR charger looks to charge the packs quite well as I put it on my own pro spec charger (costing nearly as much as the car itself!) and it only managed to add 45 mAh extra to the pack's capacity.

GETTING DIRTY

So now we've looked at the car, let's take it out on some dirty gravel and see how it does. I picked up my now right-hand man James Moulds and headed out with a few battery packs and my camera to have a blast with it. We put the rally style tyres on first. Putting the first pack through it I limited the throttle travel to break in the motor's brushes and slowly

Below: *The ESC will handle down to 20t, the provided motor being 27t*



Above: Brass bushings are used on the steering assembly instead of bearings

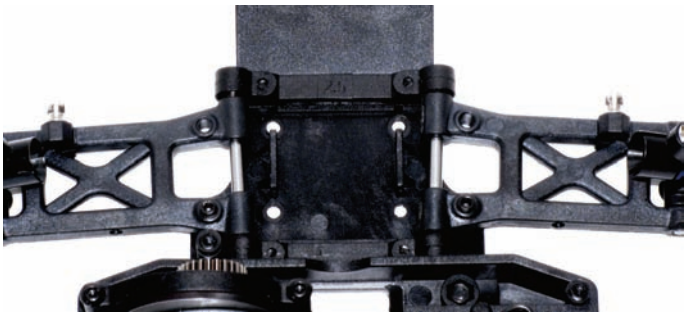
drove up and down the car park for a while (just to be nice to it and lull it into a false sense of security before giving it the beans).

With this done for about 10 minutes, I put in a fresh pack and turned up the throttle travel. Now it wasn't Ferrari fast, but I wouldn't say it was slow. It had a good pace for a stock motor, and would be plenty to get used to and have fun with. The rally block style tyres had a good amount of grip on tarmac but came into their own far more on a dirt/loose surface. They had just the right amount of grip but still able to get it sideways like a real rally car. It put a massive smile on my face and had me throwing it about to see if I could push it too hard and get it to grip roll.

Handing the remote over to James, I got out my camera and took a few photos of it on the gravely surface. The Rally Legend suddenly started to slow down, and we both thought it was the battery going prematurely flat. But upon closer inspection there was a stone jammed in between the battery and main drive shaft. Picking this out I put it back down and everything was good with the world again.

UPPING THE ANTE

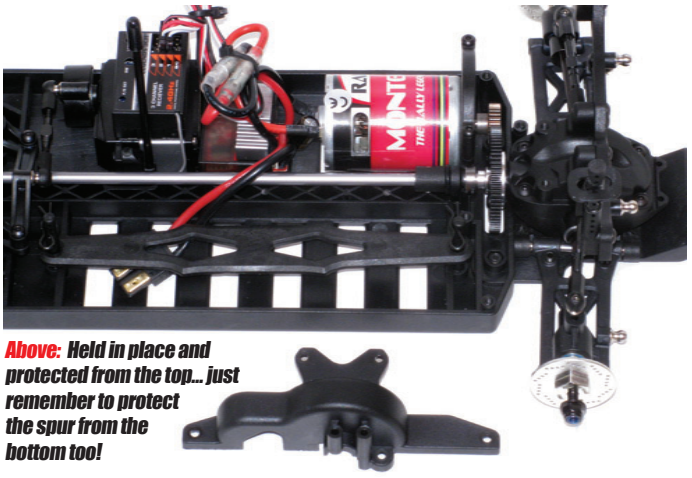
Now my nickname 'Speedy' is for a reason, I will be honest I get bored with stock set-ups very easily and I figured that the Rally Legend deserved a bit of brushless and LiPo action. Keeping with the budget theme I then fitted an inexpensive sensorless Ezrun 13t system and equipped the Lancia with a 5000 mAh 2S LiPo. I then decided to throw on the drift wheels and take it to the local supermarket car park. It did amazingly well in drifting-mode and to be honest, this is where it really came into its element. It would hold a sustained drift amazingly well for a car that was running unlocked diff's and still in rally set-up. With a bit of



Above: Simple and effective, the way all R/C construction should be!

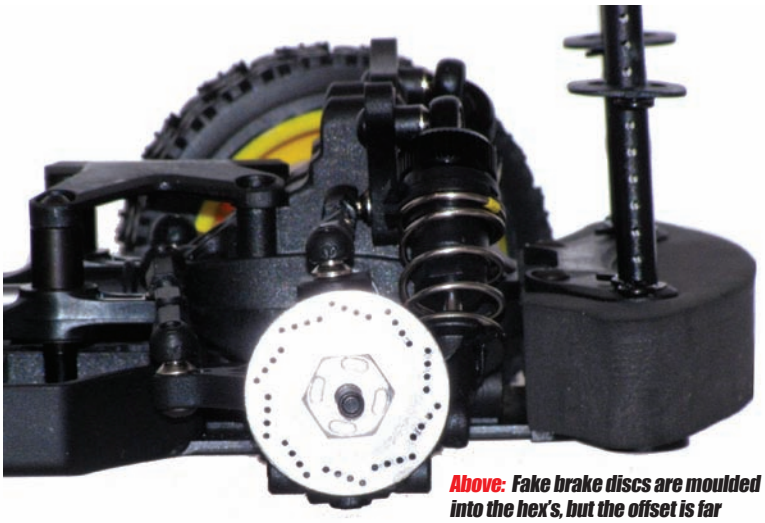
adjustment it was sliding around the car park almost as well as my own purpose built drift car.

The handling and grip of the tyres was just right for the smooth tarmac to get some nice long controlled drifting. I even had a hard time keeping hold of the transmitter as my girlfriend kept asking for a go. This was a bit of a shock to me as she isn't hugely into the R/C hobby, but she really enjoyed this. She actually enjoyed it so much that the Rally Legend has now become her favourite car in my collection, and something that we actually fight over who's going to drive it! Off road the extra power really helped the car stay in shape and aided point and squirt driving on the loose. Again stray stones and grit getting into the driveline made prolonged driving in these conditions difficult and regular checks to avoid getting a bound up were needed...



Above: Held in place and protected from the top... just remember to protect the spur from the bottom too!

EZ-POWER RALLY LEGENDS 1/10TH LANCIA STRATOS



Above: Fake brake discs are moulded into the hex's, but the offset is far wider at the rear

TECHNICAL SPEC

REQUIRED TO COMPLETE
8x AA cells for the transmitter

LIKES
Detailed, licensed Lancia body and wheels
The best RTR charger I've seen
2.4 GHz as standard (with ABS)
Drifts like a true 'Legend!'
Turnbuckles as standard

DISLIKES
Very open spur gear and driveline
Pin and O-ring retainers on prop
No LiPo cut out on ESC

"Don't confuse this with a purpose built off road buggy or truck, as it can't handle the ultra rough stuff, but then it's not actually designed for that! Take it for what it is and you can't go far wrong"

Above: CVD's as standard... good steering deflection combined with smooth delivery of power

The stock steering servo provided is another of the Legend's little surprises. It's not a bad little unit for an RTR. Specs are hard to come by but 3 kg is what EZ quoted for the torque rating. While this isn't high torque by any means, it is fine for this application. The transit speed of the servo is where I was impressed. It just feels quick and that's important when counter-steering around a corner in drift or on the loose in off road mode. Protecting the delicate plastic gears is a combined servo-saver and servo horn assembly. Its tension is just right, steering feels positive and responsive but it's still soft enough to do its job and 'give a little' in the event of a crash.

AM I A RALLY LEGEND?

So would I go out and buy one of these? Yes, because I'm a huge old school rally fan and I would happily buy one just for the great Lancia shells. The chassis (with a few minor set-up tweaks) is great on all smooth surfaces, and if adequately protected with a Lexan plate (or even just black electrical tape) used to safeguard the spur gear, it can be run on light gravel and dirt. Just make sure that it's within the scale of its 1/10th dimension. Don't confuse this with a purpose built off road buggy or truck, as it can't handle the ultra rough stuff, but then it's not actually designed for that! Take it for what it is and you can't go far wrong. It's a budget priced RTR 4WD touring car hybrid with a superb licensed shell, some really good design features (like ball diff's) and stock electrics that will get you started without breaking the bank.

For a collector of anything rally or iconic, the Stratos is perfect, it ticks so many boxes I've had to throw the sheet away! If you're a fan go for it, it's a great example of what this hobby excels at, letting you drive a car that we all dreamed of owning at some point in our lives... finally I am a true Rally Legend! **RRCi**