

THE BELIEVERS

Cynics may question the validity of mind training, but there are others who will not only vouch for its effectiveness, but are also keen to pass on the message to potential winners of the future



Linda Keen is a professional psychotherapist and Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) coach, and is a passionate motorsport enthusiast. For the last 12 years she has been coaching race and rally drivers in the science of using their minds in motorsport. In this issue she cites examples of those who have benefitted from the mechanics of mind mastery

Photos: LAT Photographic & Sutton-Images

In the last two issues we had a look at the mental side of motor racing, the need for speed and for pleasure, available by accessing the 'zone'. We also discovered that the unconscious mind — likened by Sigmund Freud to the part of an iceberg of which we are unaware because it lies beneath the water — is the part responsible for the automatic piloting of our behaviour. Just like a computer, the 'programs' that our previous learning has written to the unconscious mind, will form our life, good or bad.

We also examined how consciously and unconsciously, we model other people, such as our parents and others who have been significant in our lives while we are growing up. Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) offers an active technique; a way to model people we admire and aspire to emulate. Through NLP's Behavioural Modelling we had a brief look at the patterns of triple world champion Sebastian Vettel and how he operates.

It's also true that most people never entertain the idea of a coach for mind training. Most folk think they are operating fine on a day-to-day basis... But are they? Research shows that 95% of people's thoughts are automatic, but often very negative, limited and self-defeating. They are using between one and five per cent of their brainpower, running on automatic pilot in exactly the same way as an airliner crosses the Atlantic. Once set, there's little intervention from the pilot.

In some cases the automatic pilot is working very well. If you're making money, have good relationships, do what you enjoy and you're reasonably happy, why change anything? If you are happy and content, then you wouldn't. Most of us, though, will endure some major challenges in our lives and we have no choice but to deal with them. But what if you already knew what to do in advance of those challenges? What if you had the mental resilience and a set of coping mechanisms already in place to deal with the speed bumps of life? As a racing driver, what if you knew exactly how to switch into another mode of thinking at will, before the all-important qualifying or race?

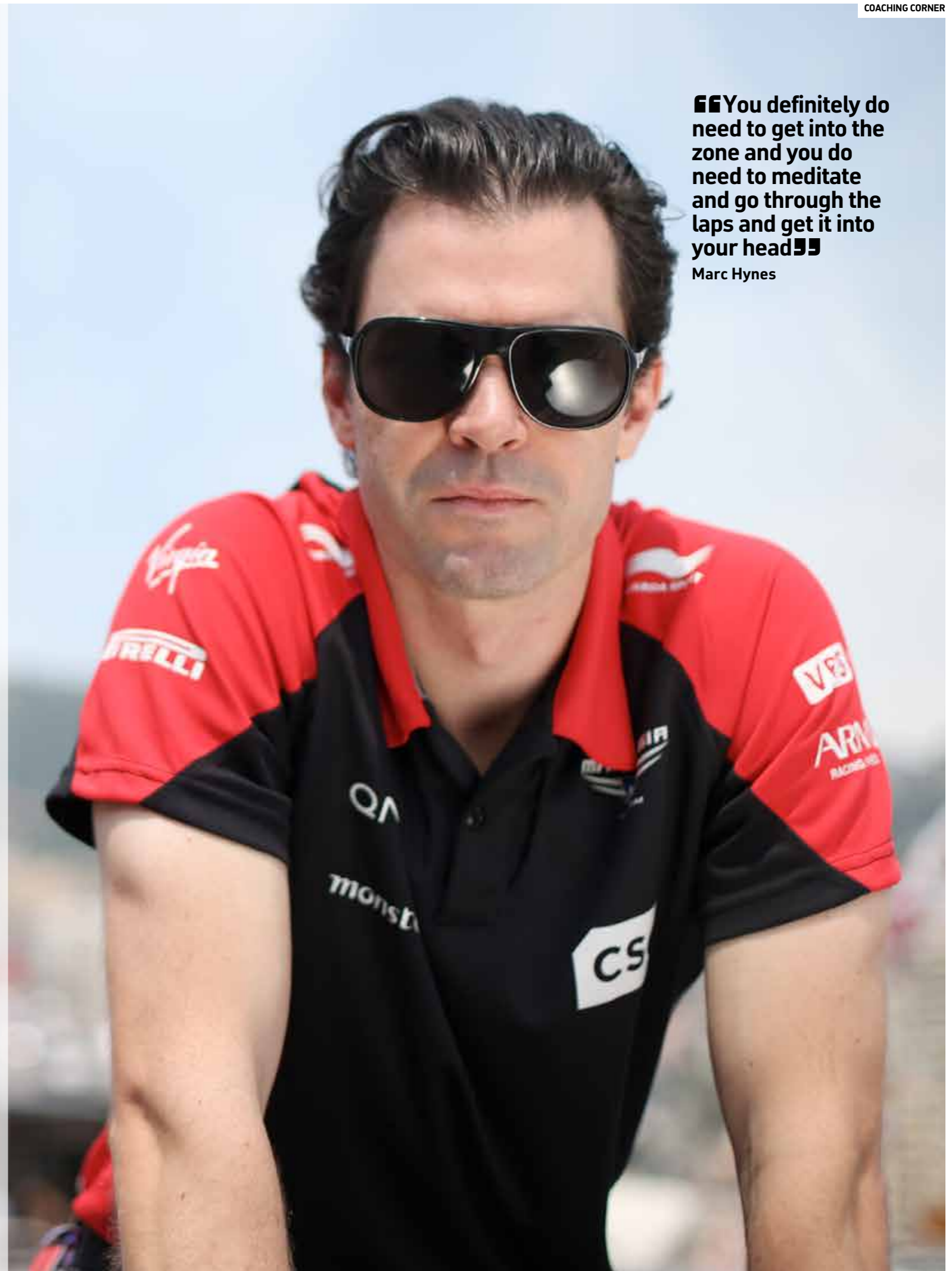
There is no one size fits all. Each person comes with their own unique background, and not everyone has the same capacity for learning or understanding. There's no question that the more accepting and less analytical a person is, the easier the material will be assimilated. In this issue, we talk to three racing drivers who have worked with me. They relate in their own words what mind coaching has done for them.

Marc Hynes

Last year, 34-year old Marc Hynes, Marussia F1's Head of Driver Development, attended an introductory course and initially he was pretty sceptical. "I certainly believed when I was coming up the ranks that if you want to be a top sportsman how could anyone else tell me, as a racing driver, how I should be thinking?"

"The thing that changed my mind was Ollie Jarvis. He went to someone for coaching. He is very talented, very quick, but struggled with his qualifying laps. He went along to this mind coach and it definitely sorted him out. That changed my mind on the subject."

Hynes had already built himself a formidable reputation by winning the 1999 British Formula 3 Championship, beating Jenson Button to the title. And if Jenson went onto bigger and better things — and the F1 World Championship in 2009 — Hynes also ended up in Formula 1, but not behind the wheel. In 2008, he was



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Marc Hynes

taken on to coach young drivers at John Booth's Manor Motorsport, with whom he had taken his Formula 3 title. One of his first assignments was to coach a certain Lewis Hamilton and later, Paul Di Resta.

As a former driver, Hynes knows exactly what is expected of the youngsters he's coaching. "The key for any sportsman," he says, "and particularly racing drivers, is the on-demand performance. It's about performing under pressure, and while many are capable of a good performance on the odd day, it's the need to produce that lap when it's needed which makes the difference between a champion and a good driver.

"I didn't realise it, but I was already doing some of the stuff Linda Keen was talking about. I didn't particularly understand why, but it worked for me and took me to the right place. Things like the focusing, the pictures that you try to conjure up in your head that gets you in the right spot to produce the lap at the right time, or to handle the nerves and the pressure. A lot of what she said was quite similar to the advice I had been offering the young drivers. It was just delivered in a more philosophical and scientific fashion.

"I always thought the difference between the winners and the losers was the mental strength. I believe you've either got it or you haven't, but the course certainly opened up my mind to the fact that there is help out there – and you don't necessarily have to have sat in a racing

car and done a lap yourself to get the mind straight. I think that's another important thing I've taken away from it. You can always keep learning and you shouldn't shut out help."

Hynes is also in favour of routine for young drivers and found that made a huge difference to how well he did in the junior formulae. He recalls the things he definitely didn't do, such as memory management – reminding yourself when you have done well. "You definitely do need to get in the zone and you do need to meditate and go through the laps and get it in your head. It needs to be pre-programmed and I think that's another thing I didn't realise. I knew I had a routine but I didn't realise quite what it was doing to my head."

Hynes' only real reservation these days is about messing with something that already works. "If I was still racing, I'd be frightened to death of having anything new in my head when it's working already. But," he adds, "maybe now that I'm not racing so seriously anymore, this would be the right time to try. When there isn't the pressure there used to be, that would be quite interesting."



Marrussia's Head of Driver Development, Marc Hynes (above, on right) is now a strong advocate of mind training



John O'Hara (above) thinks many drivers overlook mind training as a route to even better performances

John O'Hara

John O'Hara was a perfect example of a young man who soaked up the techniques and applied them. Like many Irish drivers, O'Hara started racing in the budget Formula Vee category before taking the Irish Formula Opel Championship in 2001, the same year he went on to win the coveted Leinster Trophy. He was then 22 years old.

The annual Leinster Trophy has been won by some of the sport's elite drivers over the years – including F1 World

Champions Ayrton Senna (1982) and Mika Hakkinen (1988) – so he was already in excellent company. He went on to be Formula Ireland Champion in 2003 before racing in Formula 3 Asia. Now aged 33, he runs a massive team operation as Deputy Managing Director of KC Motor Group in the Philippines with drivers in Formula Pilota, Formula 3, Formula Nippon and the Super Trofeo Lamborghini series. Plans this year extend to running three cars in the new Asian Le Mans series.

O'Hara is a big believer in mind coaching. "I feel it's an area which a lot of drivers overlook. There are so many who are very fast and score so many pole positions but they lose races because of their head. And then I see opposite cases, where guys are a bit smarter, maybe they don't have as much natural speed and they qualify a little bit further back, but they get to the front by being smart, by maybe reading the situation better than these guys that don't use the head. I feel it's an area in which younger drivers need to work a lot more.

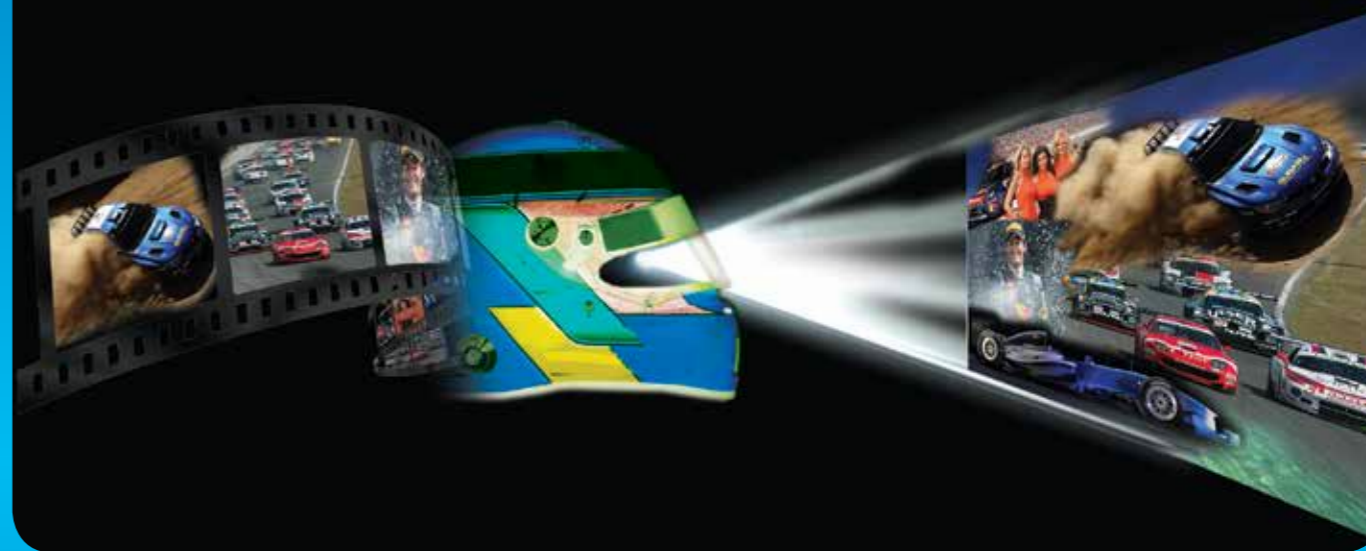
"My own experiences with the training in 2001 made me aware of that whole element, whereas before it wasn't something I'd thought about. The most important aspect was that it made me aware of the power of the mind and how it can be manipulated for whatever situation you're in, and how it can help or hinder you. It's something I've thought about a lot since, and it's come back to me more probably in the last four or five years, working with young drivers. It's not something that happens overnight. It's something they need to practice. I think the visualisation gets better with practice..."

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very little money, but he's very smart and uses every other element possible to make up for it. He sits on the ground in the briefing room with his eyes closed, in a racing driver position, visualising his way around the circuit. It's something he does regularly. If you can't be on the track practicing, visualising the race is as close as you can get and it works for him because he's been fast. He's won three races and he was second in the championship.

"Watching Dan do this brought me back to what I learnt with you all those years ago. A lot of guys would be closed off to that; it wouldn't even be an option. They'd just think 'he's an idiot...' so I can imagine it's a problem convincing people that this has merit, but it definitely has."



A big believer in the power of the mind, O'Hara (in the middle) with his young driver protégé, Dan Wells, realises the idea can be a hard sell to drivers who are already doing well



Jonathan Fildes

Garage owner, precision stunt and racing driver, Jonathan Fildes is another to have undertaken a course in mind training. Now 38, he has been a multiple champion in many categories, but he now talks about use of the mind in everyday situations as if it's second nature. "It's one of those things that just happens and now I do it all unconsciously. You see Autosport talking about Vettel doing all this now, silly things like visualising the lap. We were doing it years ago, and it's true. The one that really sunk in, though, was the trick where we put our fingers together and imagined we were a steel bar. At the time you're concentrating so hard on that one area and it demonstrates how powerful the mind is. I've used that technique at work,

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Jonathan Fildes

Jonathan Fildes (above) uses mind training both in his racing and his various day jobs, including camera car driving (right) directing the energy into my body to move heavy vehicles on my own."

For the last five years, Jonathan has raced very successfully in the UK's Historic endurance events, sharing Ulsterman Jackie Cochrane's Sunbeam Tiger. "It's the hardest car I've ever driven, but at Donington I've gone as quick on dry tyres in the rain as everybody else was on wets. That's down to concentrating. Immediately, I'm focused 100% on what this car is doing. Before I did any mind management, I'd be grand for one or two laps but I couldn't concentrate the whole way through. You're either a driver or you're not, but what I found with mind management is it gets me there quicker. Even if you've had a car crash on the way or your best friend's mother has died or whatever, it's being

able to put everything else to one side and concentrate 100% on what you're doing then. That's where I notice it works, being able to do it at will."

Fildes has since forged a successful career as a precision and stunt driver and has appeared in countless action films, including *Red 2* starring Catherine Zeta-Jones and Bruce Willis, and the kind of expensive adverts favoured by car manufacturers such as Mercedes and VW. "There's a Skoda commercial where we're going through a forest in Prague at 70mph. That may sound easy but while I'm driving, I have earphones on and the arm operator's talking, the director's talking, the camera operator's talking and there's a radio in the car as well that the director will be using to talk to the other people. So I have to switch off to all that; I just have to hear the arm operator and I have to talk to him as I'm driving to look out for the obstacles that are in the way.

"We were in Monaco last year and going as hard as we could during the filming of *Cadillac ATS versus The World*. Going through the tunnel I had to call it to keep the arm level otherwise we could have ended up hitting the top of the tunnel, and then when we were braking down into the chicane, if the arm wasn't straight there or if I'm off-line, it would catch the boom as well.

"I know I wouldn't have done any of that, or built my garage business, if I hadn't done that course," he concludes. "Despite the obstacles, I focussed on what I wanted, and made the decision."

