BOX OF TRICKS

WORDS Simon Thorpe
PHOTOS Joe Clifford

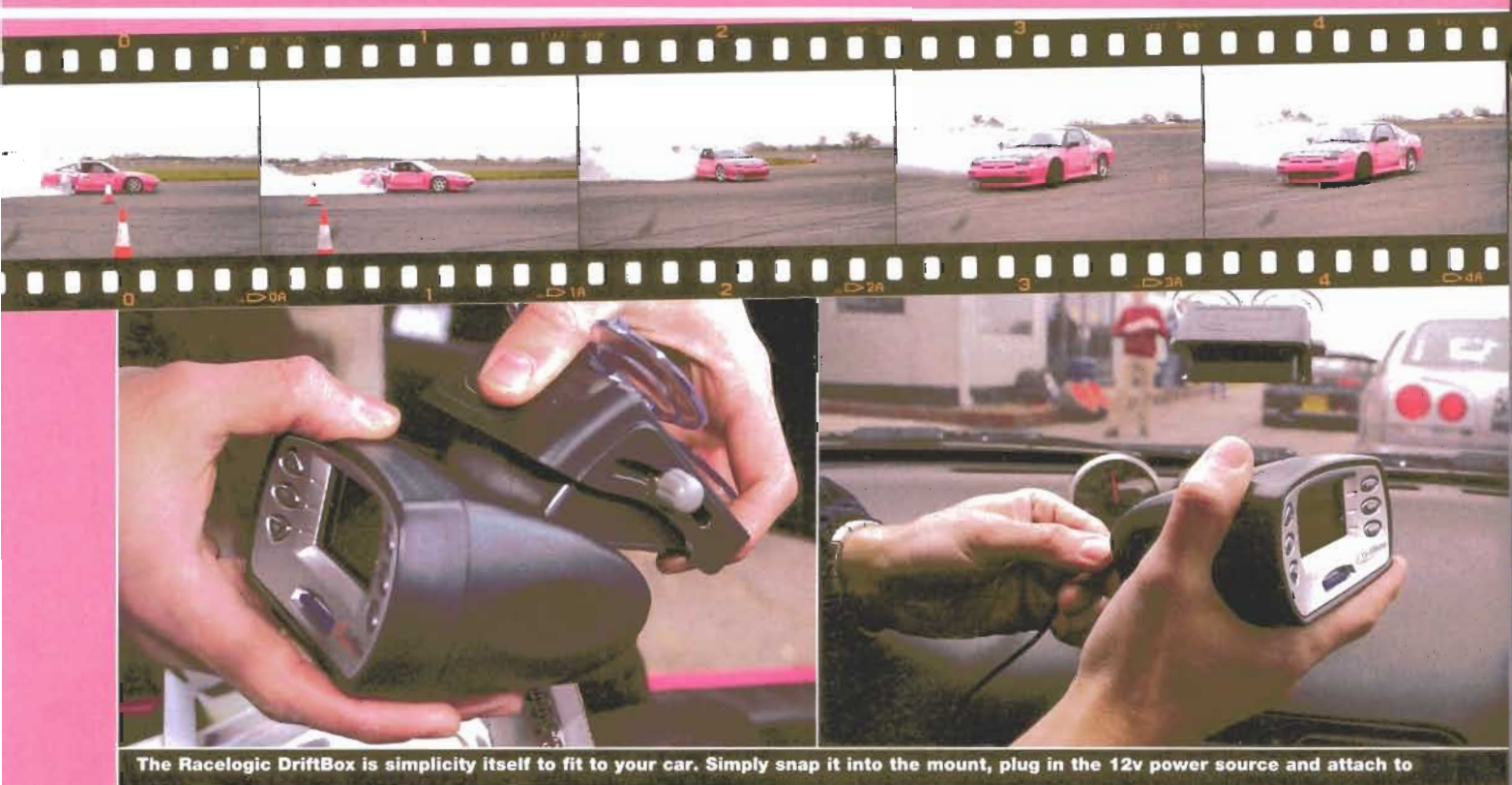
From official and enthusiast standpoints, Racelogic's DriftBox is probably the most important new release for the drift scene.

"On da rack lad, sixty-four degrees!" repeated Julian Smith during last year after he had been testing some new technology for Buckingham-based Racelogic. He was referring to the amount of angle he had achieved mid-drift around some of the bends at Silverstone circuit.

Racelogic is an expert in electronic systems for the car industry, most famously for its aftermarket traction control unit which many people have fitted to their road cars with much success (see feature in issue ten). Since 2001 the company has produced a high-end timing equipment product called the VBox which measures many vehicle performance parameters using sensitive GPS receivers and accelerometers.

With the increase in activity in the European drift scene, and combined with ongoing work with the Japanese D1 Corporation, Racelogic decided to develop an affordable solution for drifters wanting conclusive numerical evidence of their skills. This has resulted in the launch of DriftBox, a dash-mounted gizmo which also uses GPS data and accelerometers, albeit with fewer functions than the VBox, but more than enough for every driver to accurately quantify their drifts.

To officially launch the DriftBox, Joe and I were invited to a demo day at Silverstone where I was allowed to take my own car out on track to test this new piece of kit. After arriving we met up with Phil Morrison and Julian Smith, Racelogic's demonstration drivers. Regular D1 competitor Ben Barry was also there driving his E36 BMW M3. Within minutes a Racelogic technician had plugged the DriftBox into my 12v lighter socket, stuck it to the glass on my windscreen and inserted the small



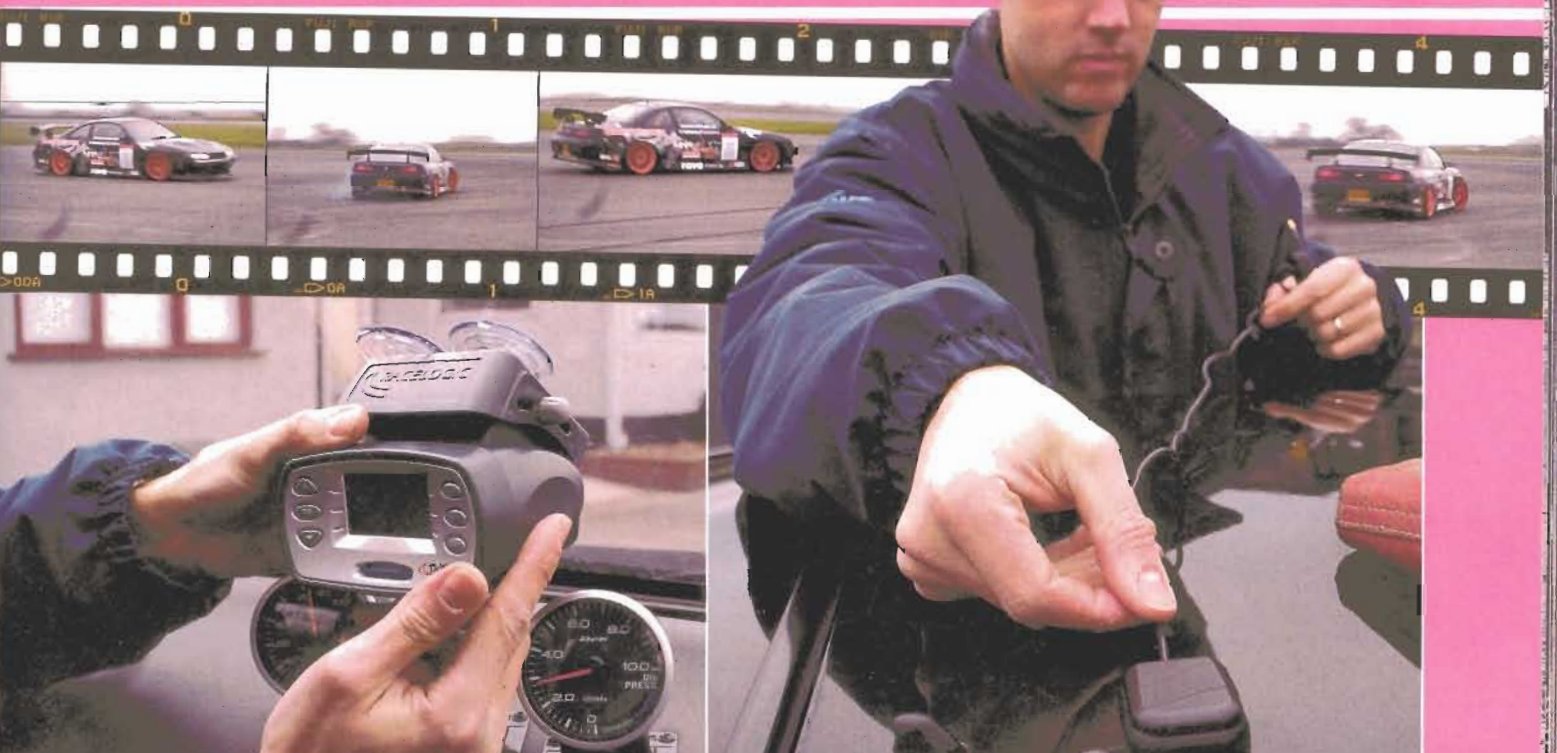
The Racelogic DriftBox is simplicity itself to fit to your car. Simply snap it into the mount, plug in the 12v power source and attach to

memory card. I was ready to run – setting it up really is that simple.

How does it work? It gathers data from the GPS receiver and other electronic wizardry such as a yaw sensor, similar to the one the Mitsubishi uses for its active yaw control on Lancer Evos. Ten times a second this information is logged and displayed on the DriftBox's LCD screen. Other values such as latitude, longitude, height, yaw rate and time are recorded simultaneously but most important for us drifters are speed and angle. A large constant display of drift angle is shown in the centre of the screen with smaller speed and peak angles shown slightly smaller on the left and right respectively. There's no need for constant resetting as the electronics are clever enough to know when each run starts by monitoring your movements. As soon as you travel fast enough it begins recording until you come to a complete stop. Each run is then stored onto the removable MMC/SD card which allows you to later analyse the data using comprehensive PC software (also supplied with DriftBox).

I threw a pair of part-worn tyres on the S13, Joe strapped himself into the passenger seat, and off we went for a few laps. Racelogic was using the same format as the DriftUK days which I quickly became familiar with. A big, second gear handbrake into the first corner led into a left/right flick through the cones and out for a wide right-handed drift. At the end we could just look across to the DriftBox and see that my biggest angle achieved through all the bends was around 30-40°. Phil and Julian were scoring about 10° higher than me, and it was obvious from watching them drive that they were going for some extreme angles.

Returning to the warmth of the Portacabin we



the windscreen in the desired position. To benefit from extra accuracy, the external aerial needs to be mounted on to the vehicle's roof

GPS-based data-logging service also allows DriftBox to figure speed and lap times and standing starts

downloaded the data on to my laptop to have a look. Simple and easy to use, the software allowed me to overlap runs to see if I was making progress through the day. It was also useful to see what speeds were being maintained through each corner. A small map in the lower right corner of the screen also displays the path the car took during each run, with crosshairs detailing the exact point on the map which corresponds to the exact point on the graph.

As a GPS-based data-logging device, DriftBox has a number of other functions which make it an ideal piece of equipment for everybody, not just those with rear-wheel drive cars. It can be used to measure current speed and lap times, plus has a performance mode which records acceleration times from rest, in-gear acceleration times, and braking times.

The DriftBox great fun to play with but has a more serious application. I asked Phil Morrison what he thought of it: "It's great for practice. I can go for several runs, changing my technique, and then return to the graphs to see which one gave me the best angle." It is also an excellent tool for judging in competition, which is why the organisers of the D1 Grand Prix Series have specified that each competitor must use a DriftBox. Why? Racelogic says it can fit a radio device to each device, allowing transmission of data from the track to the judging panel – real time angles in front of the judges! Now that would put to rest the moaning competitors who never understand why they don't go through to the next round.

The most amazing aspect of this equipment, however, is the price. At £465 it is well within the budget of any serious drifter and will provide an invaluable tool in building your repertoire of drift techniques.

CONTACT: Racelogic (01280 823803 or www.driftbox.com)