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Klaus Müller has a brilliant record as a negotiator at the highest level of Formula One sponsorship.

< by Falke, a German fashion company. Two years later he launched his own fashion company, Dos-Y-Dos. But he kept his links with motorsport, initially arranging a deal for Rifle jeans to sponsor Eddie Jordan's Formula Three team at Monaco in 1987. "We sponsored three cars in the race, Andrea Chiesa, Johnny Herbert and Didier Arsett. Johnny Herbert made third but Arsett won the race."

Amidst the celebrations after the Formula Three race on Saturday, Müller secured another, entirely unexpected, deal. Sitting on his chartered boat on Sunday morning he was approached by Ken Tyrrell's son Bob, who asked him whether the company would be interested in Formula One. Müller recalls: "We said, 'now? On Sunday morning? Why not?' So we discussed it and made another deal for about US\$300,000 and we got the air intakes on the Tyrrells for the race in the afternoon. We didn't have any stickers left so we went to Eddie Jordan and the Tyrrell mechanics took the stickers and copied the logo four times so they could make the adhesives to stick on the air intakes. We just managed it in time for the warm-up and then we got two championship points because Jonathan Palmer was fifth. That was a really nice weekend." It didn't please Rifle's owners, however, and Müller suspects he knows why: "I was so proud of what we did that I got a picture of Jonathan in the Tyrrell with a Rifle logo and put it all over the company. The owner was not very much amused because I think – and he never told me why – he thought that if something was being done at the Monaco Grand Prix it should be done by the owners and not the managing director."

Times have changed and the era of

doing informal last-minute deals is a distant memory and Müller says that his days as a team manager and then a sponsor have little relevance to modern day Formula One. "For me it was good because I could see how professional you had to be in those days. It was a look behind the curtain but not really an education for what I'm doing now."

Tinarista remains a small company, with six fulltime staff, but Müller has linked up with the world-renowned Heye Group to provide expertise in the sponsorship sector. Heye's main claim to fame is its partnership with McDonald's, which spawned the international tagline 'I'm Lovin' It'. "They are one of Germany's top advertising agencies with about 40 customers," says Müller. "They have built up McDonald's over 30 years. The 'I'm Lovin' It' campaign was taken in an internal competition between 13 leading agencies and they selected Heye to be the one to do the campaign."

He adds: "In my days with Rifle jeans I met the MDs of Heye and said I wanted to join forces with them as a sponsor specialist that could bring some added value to them, as a classic advertising business. For me a big advantage is I am part of a bigger infrastructure so whenever there is a discipline I don't want to fulfil myself, for instance the PR, media events or bookings, I can use them and they can use me for this segment of the business."

Tinarista's primary business is Formula One, or as Müller describes it: "It's my beach, it's my platform and it's what I like the best." But the company has diversified. Last year it was contracted to find sponsors for the Kawasaki MotoGP team. This year it is in the process of selling the naming rights for German football club Werder Bremen's

stadium and has recently added Grand Prix Masters to its portfolio.

Müller has also started working with Team Shosholoza, South Africa's entry to the America's Cup yachting series. It is a project he is particularly excited about and another example of his business-to-business method, as he says: "I've been approached by someone who is responsible for one of the main sponsors to bring in some other partners and I'm trying to do that on a business-to-business basis, with events like the 2010 World Cup in South Africa. Some of the companies might be interested in getting close to the decision-makers and so they could do worse than become partners with a national team like Team Shosholoza. It's a high-class sport, it's elite, which matches it with Formula One."

Formula One remains the pinnacle however and Müller cites the DTM as an example of a successful series that struggles to attract sponsors. He says: "You don't see a lot of different sponsors there. You can see that they are banks owned by the car manufacturers, or magazine titles. It looks as if some barter deals are going on. People would prefer to go to Formula One rather than something else." Tinarista has identified pan-European companies as its major targets and Müller would like to be involved in introducing more new companies into Formula One. "I would like to bring in new companies who have never done sponsorship in this field before because I can see there is a niche for someone like me rather than companies that have already invested."

But he says that generally Formula One is in a very healthy sponsorship position: "It is much easier now than in years before to get sponsorship in Formula One and it's still the most exclusive you can have worldwide. I remember at the Formula One Sponsorship Forum the former CEO of Telefonica, Juan Villalonga, saying that they wanted to be a member of the most distinctive club in the world and he was talking about Formula One. They started at Minardi and then increased their budgets and ended up at Renault, the world championship team. They had to grow and they learnt as they did it. If you put all your chips on the table the first time you can't avoid making mistakes and the mistakes would be too expensive. Starting small isn't a mistake, it's just that you should learn the rules and the outcome and what you can get back from it."

And he adds: "Sometimes people can't afford the size of budget required for Formula One nowadays but if they can just buy an entrance ticket to the club you can attract many more medium-sized companies. If you rely on one or two sectors it can be very damaging. But I am very optimistic. I am convinced that with a different approach you can always try to add value."

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