

# INSIGHT: CIRCUIT DESIGN

## TAKING MOTORSPORT TO THE STREETS... OF



# NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

Move aside Tilke, there is a new track designer emerging



BTCC parade: Cars in Newcastle in 2005

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**W**hen it comes to circuit designers these days, you might think that Hermann Tilke is the go-to man when it comes to designing Formula One tracks. He redeveloped the Nürburgring, and has since designed circuits in Malaysia, China, Turkey, Texas, Bahrain and Singapore. But, as far as we're aware, he's never been recognised by the Royal Institute of British Architects for designing a

street circuit around the roads of Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

Ollie Currie has. An architectural assistant with Newcastle firm Alston Murphy Associates and occasional club rally competitor in a Peugeot 106, Currie recently reached the final of the RIBA's Forgotten Spaces competition, which asked architects to promote a 'forgotten' piece of land in the North East of England. His entry was a race circuit of sorts through the streets of Newcastle. "The competition was about finding new ways to use forgotten spaces, such as underpasses, flyovers and the like," said Currie. "We were given a tight brief to fit, and as part of that we had to prove the viability of our concept. I worked through a few ideas, and then thought I could combine my two passions by coming up with a race circuit or rally stage concept."

The forgotten space highlighted by

Currie's design was the old town walls of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Once an essential part of the city's defences, the walls had become obsolete by the 19th century. These days, very little of the walls remain, and their significance to the city has been lost. "Once I'd decided to treat the walls as my forgotten space, I was thinking of various options to link the remaining bits up and highlight the route," says Currie. "We thought of an open bus tour, but then I realised I could design a race circuit of sorts to link them up. The circuit essentially traced the route of the old city walls. I was doing my design around the time Vodafone launched its concept of a London Grand Prix circuit, so it all coincided pretty nicely."

The eagle-eyed among you will spot that Currie's circuit isn't, technically, a circuit at all – the start and finish are in different places. And it's unlikely to

function even as a rally stage or street circuit because Currie was more concerned with tracing a route to follow the walls than developing a circuit with FIA-pleasing levels of runoff. But before Tilke gets too smug, he's never designed a circuit that can be illuminated by electric cars before.

Yes, you heard that right. A key part of Currie's design was for the circuit to run for electric vehicles – making it more sustainable and ecologically friendly. The twist is that Currie wants those cars to be fitted with a magnetic generator. When those cars drive over lights embedded in the road, they would pulse electricity to the lights, sending a beam of light up into the air. It would illuminate the circuit and the path of the old city walls, serving as both art and motorsport.

"It's a bit of a twist to help promote the idea," says Currie. "It turns a race circuit into something different and

could help generate energy and it would also promote tourism."

Currie admits that he hasn't been able to resist doing a lap of his circuit. "I did think about how well the circuit would drive when I designed it," he says. "It's great fun, and when I tried it you could get stuck into it – apart from one bit I couldn't do as part of the circuit because the road was a one-way street..."

Currie's idea didn't win the Forgotten Spaces competition, but it has given him the taste for circuit design. While his immediate motorsport future will be centred around running his 106 on club events this year, he admitted he dreams of a future in circuit design. "It's something I really enjoyed doing. I've grown up as more of a rally person, but I'd love to do a bit of circuit design in the future."

Hermann Tilke, you have been warned... ■