

RIGHT Chatting up Suzy Raganelli, Italy's sensational 1966 World Champion aboard her Tecno-Parilla. Ronnie had many hard-fought battles with 'La Suzy', who was a skilful and notoriously wily competitor.



Making the most of her weight advantage, she beat him often, and the two became firm friends. (Photo courtesy of Tommy Peterson Collection)

Germany, but failed to finish. However, he startled the kart racing community at Leidschendam, in the Netherlands, when he narrowly lost a duel with Italian ace Guido Sala for second place in the final, behind Dirk van Staalduinen. He did it again at the French venue at Villacoublay, near Paris, by outqualifying the entire field, but again registered a DNF. Here was international confirmation of an exceptional talent.

In August, Ronnie won all three heats to clinch the Class D Nordic championship at Ålmhult, Sweden, and he followed with the Swedish Class A title. From a total of 40 race starts in 1964, he won his class on 23 occasions, and scored seven second places.

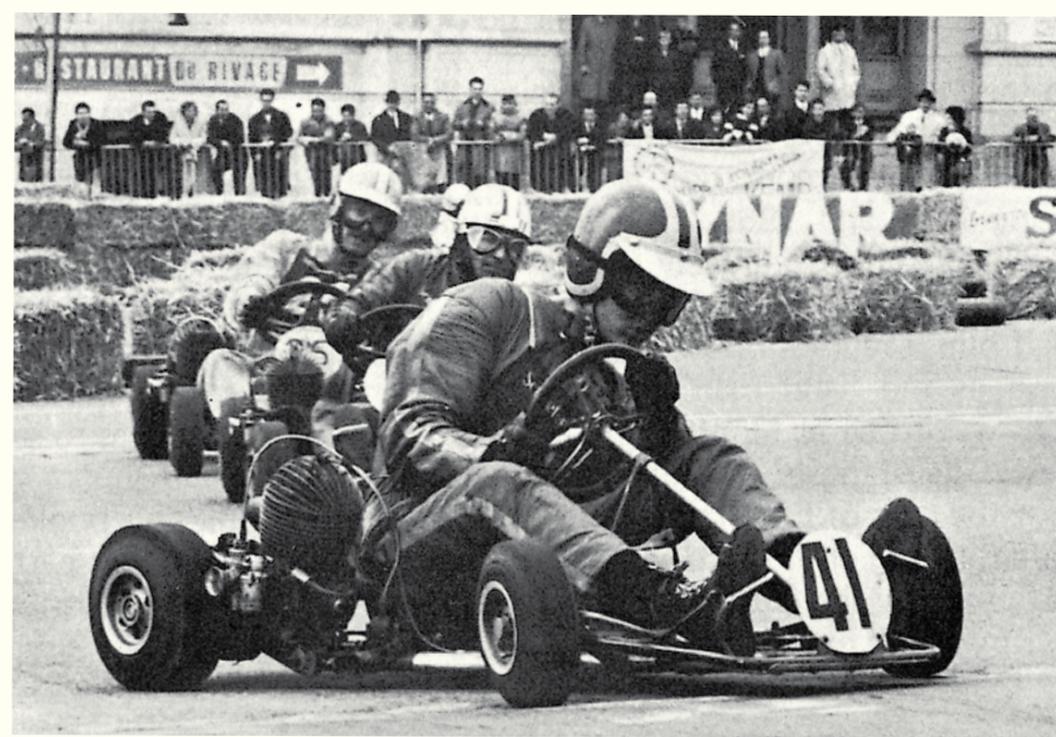
Ronnie quit his job as a Renault mechanic and started

work as a lift technician in Örebro, investing his wages and almost all his spare time in karting. He continued to win regularly in Sweden, but the Peterson family travelled all over Europe during the summer of 1965. Ronnie rewarded them with yet more success, racing new Robardie karts in three classes: A and C with Parilla motors, D with Bultaco.

He was again chosen to represent his homeland in the European Championship for Teams, held for the 100cc Class A karts over three events in Switzerland, Holland and France. On a track laid out in the main square in Vevey in April, Ronnie finished third in the final, behind Italians Oscar Constantini (BR-Parilla) and 19-year-old débutante Suzy Raganelli (BM-Parilla). Constantini had finished third in the inaugural World Championship the previous season, and among those beaten by Ronnie was the sport's first champion, Guido Sala. On the 'kartodrome' at Leidschendam in June, however, the Milanese former motorcycle racer qualified his Tecno fastest and dominated the final, pursued by a bevy of Belgians. Ronnie had a DNF and was classified 18th.

After a string of victories back home, Ronnie went to the second ever karting World Championship. The new sport had really taken off in Italy and, like the inaugural such meeting the previous year, the event was held on the 1000yd Pista d'Oro track in Rome – this time under steady rain. Each driver contested three heats to qualify on

RIGHT Ronnie leads double World Champion Guido Sala during the big Coupe Internationale invitation race in Monaco in June 1966. He won one of the heats but did not finish the event. The final was led all the way by Sala, but the Italian was later disqualified when his engine was found to be illegal, on five counts. The win was awarded to British driver Richard Newton. (Photo courtesy of Tommy Peterson Collection)



a points system for three finals. Ronnie's day was beset by mechanical problems, but he won a heat before failing to finish another. This meant that he had to finish in the first two in a 'recupero' race to qualify for the finals, which he did, with Staalduinen second. The two lined up at the back of the first final which, after Werner Ihle had spun away the lead, was won by Oscar Sala from Falco Graf and Guido Sala. Ihle won the second final, with Ronnie second and the defending champion again third. All Sala had to do to clinch back-to-back championships was to finish second to Ihle in the third final. Dutchman Toine Hezemans was classified third, and Ronnie 14th.

The finale of the European series was run the following weekend at Villacoublay. Ronnie qualified second fastest of 40 competitors, behind Guido Sala, but utterly dominated the event thereafter. He beat Sala into second place in all three heats they contested. When the new World Champion was stopped by oiled sparkplugs, Ronnie won the final as he liked, from Ihle and Mickey Allen. The result lifted the Swedish team into third place in the championship, behind Italy and Britain. It also lifted

Ronnie's morale because it proved what he had known all along – that he was as good as the best.

Two weeks later, back home at Malmö, he won the Nordic regional and Swedish national Class C championships. In Class D, he again landed the Nordic title, and was the runner-up in the Swedish event. The 1965 season had contributed a further 21 kart wins for Ronnie, from 32 starts.

By this time, however, his mind was on greater things. He was now 21, and wanted to move on from karting. Sven Andersson had designed a more modern Svebe single-seater, based closely on the spaceframe Brabham BT15. This was the most popular contemporary Formula 3 customer car, and one was taking Picko Troberg to that season's Swedish national title. Sven wanted Bengt to build the Svebe, and Ronnie to race it.

To get a competition licence allowing him to compete in Formula 3, Ronnie was sent with his father's diesel Mercedes-Benz road car to the racing school at the Karlskoga circuit. His tutor was 25-year-old Reine Wisell, himself an aspiring race driver. Wisell had had three

ABOVE Encouraged by his current girlfriend and brother Tommy, Ronnie prepares for his very first motor race, a non-championship Formula 3 event during the Bengtsforloppet meeting on the Dalslandring circuit in July 1966. The Svebe was a Brabham BT15 copy, liveried in the blue-and-yellow style of Sweden that Ronnie always used on his helmets. (Photo courtesy of Tommy Peterson Collection)