

Don't crash, don't die.....

... are the words echoing through rookie racer **Kevin Leaper's** head. He's never raced and never rallied, ever, but when a reader offered him the chance to co-pilot his Lotus Seven at Sebring he was there in an instant

PHOTOGRAPHY: JOHN BROOKS; MICHELLE HAYES



Sebring 12-hour Vintage Enduro race

Sebring Raceway, Florida, US 14/3/03



Barron (left) and Leaper talk tall race stories into the night

Don't crash. Don't die. Those were the words echoing through my head as I stood in the pit lane at Sebring, US. I was about to have my first taste of classic car racing in a borrowed Lotus Seven series III.

I waited for Andrew Barron, my co-driver and owner of the Lotus to enter the pits for the driver change. A Corvette passed me at full chat, turning the ground to jelly with infrasound and the most glorious V8 banshee wail. As my knees knocked, I felt like either the luckiest, or unluckiest, man alive. My senses were too far into overload to work out which.

To focus my mind I tried to work out whether visiting the toilet four times in 10 minutes was normal, or whether I'd developed some terrible

bladder disease. Before I could decide Jamie Brooks, our pit man and race mechanic, gave the command to don crash helmet and zip up my race suit.

Andrew had radioed into the pits to say he was finishing his practice stint next lap and now it was my turn. All day I'd been giving it the full Tom Cruise by swanning around with my race suit unzipped and the arms tied around my midriff. With the call to get fully toggled up I lost the cool guy image and turned into Tom Fool.

As I struggled to get my arms into the race suit they'd only slide along the sleeve a couple of inches before becoming trapped in a cloth booby trap. The kind of thing that happens when you try to put on your trousers when they're twisted and still have