

This man's brain your formula for

Mind guru shifts gear on thinking



Steve Waddingham

IT IS a scene played out on TV dozens of times a year. Sleek Formula One cars piloted by dashing young men around exotic locations with legendary names: Monaco, Interlagos, Magny-Cours, Brands Hatch.

But look again. That's not Lewis Hamilton out there, steering his Mercedes McLaren F1 racer around the track at 300km/h.

No, it's Hamilton's brain. Billions of neurons firing down uncountable pathways, the world's most sophisticated racing machinery being controlled by the universe's most complex computer.

Welcome to the world of Dr Kerry Spackman, "typical Kiwi bloke", applied mathematician, neuroscientist and mind guru to sporting superstars and to Hollywood's A-list.

And now he's out to change your brain.

Dr Spackman is in Australia to promote his new book, *The Winner's Bible: Rewire Your Brain For Permanent Change*, which distils his extraordinary, personal journey through science and the human mind.

It began in Auckland, where the applied mathematics graduate helped to develop breakthrough electronic equipment for measuring precise per-

formance values of cars, and took in the luckiest of breaks when he travelled to the US to pitch it to Ford executives.

"I had run out of money by that stage; we had spent it all on developing the equipment, which cost about \$1 million," Dr Spackman recalls. "Then (British racing legend) Sir Jackie Stewart arrived to test cars in front of 100 senior Ford executives.

"When he found out our equipment was in one of the cars, he told me he had made a mistake during a test and asked me to tell him what it was.

"I pulled up the telemetry and told him 'on turn one of lap three you did this instead of that'. He turned to the executives and said 'whatever it costs, you have to buy this'.

"It was the turning point of my life."

“There is still a lot of snake oil being peddled, and a lot of it is the same old stuff repackaged”

From working as a consultant with Ford, Dr Spackman moved into training test drivers.

"I went to RAF Farnborough to see what they did with jet pilots and to NASA to look at astronaut training.

"At one stage Ford hired an abandoned nuclear bomber base in the US and we worked out of the alert facility, a small underground city where people were supposed to wait out the years after a nuclear war."

Now more fascinated by the workings of the drivers' brains than the mechanics of the cars, Dr Spackman headed into motorsport with Stewart GP, Jaguar and then McLaren – pausing only to rattle off a PhD in neuroscience.

Word of his work with F1 drivers, including rising British star Hamilton, quickly spread and Spackman began to build a client list that ranged from New Zealand's rugby All Blacks to world champion athletes and Hollywood celebrities.

Eventually he was charging up to \$10,000 a day to teach the rich and famous his science-based self-help recipe for success – in simplistic terms, concentrating on changing the way the brain works rather than trying to tell it how to behave.

"The human brain is an extraordinary instrument," Dr Spackman notes.

"It has been said that a bumblebee has as much computing power as a mainframe computer, so think about scaling that up hundreds, thousands of times to the human level.

"It cost Honda hundreds of mil-

lions of dollars to develop ASIMO, a walking robot that could achieve something as simple as balancing – something that a toddler can do effortlessly.

"I looked at self-help books and realised that what people were missing was that the brain is not a single organ. It has all these different modules, all with different agendas and all talking different languages.

"Those self-help books were almost all a series of rules to change your life.

"The problem was that the books didn't tell you how to achieve the rules.

"For instance, if you make a list of rules to beat Roger Federer at Wimbledon, the first rule would be: hit it where he isn't.

"That's a brilliant rule. Do that and you will win every time.

"The problem is that you and I don't have the tools to achieve it.

"You aren't going to be a Test cricketer and I'm never going to be heavyweight champion of the world. I just don't have the physiology for it.

"The difference between wanting something and knowing how to achieve it is huge."

And that's a subject which makes Dr Spackman rather cross.

"A lot of self-help books are nonsense, written to make money from people out there who are really hurting," he says.

"Sometimes those books are not just neutral, they are actually harmful.

"People try everything and it doesn't work, so they stop trying."

INQUIRING MIND: Dr Kerry Spackman