

F1 The failed team that promised much

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13 FEBRUARY 2020

F1 2020

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From one classic Formula 1 contest to another?

A three-way title fight going all the way down to the wire, with the advantage swinging back and forth between very different protagonists as the end of one period of domination nears its end.

That's both the story of the first Formula 1 world championship, explored by Paul Fearnley in our 70th anniversary piece on page 32, and the hope we all have for the storyline of 2020. As Alex Kalinauckas outlines on p18, there have probably not been more reasons to expect a challenge to Mercedes since the start of the current turbo-hybrid-engine era in 2014.

Ferrari and Red Bull have both been candid about their failings, and the rules stability should allow them to address those without other distractions – at least until work on the long-awaited 2021 cars really gets going. Mercedes and Lewis Hamilton are already operating at such a high level that they will be tough to beat whatever Charles Leclerc and Max Verstappen have at their disposal, but what many fans want is to see them tested over a full campaign.

Another former dominator who is trying to get back on top is Jimmie Johnson. After two seasons in the wilderness the seven-time NASCAR Cup champion believes he has everything in place to go out on a high in his final season, as he tells Jack Benyon on p26.

Glorious – or, indeed inglorious – failures are often more interesting than success stories, and the rapid rise and fall of Onyx definitely falls into that category. Turn to p38 to hear Gary Watkins' account of, among other things, bazookas and cars on fire...

- We are now entering F1 launch season. Be sure to look out for our coverage of all the cars and testing in Barcelona on Autosport.com and in upcoming issues of the magazine.



Kevin Turner

Kevin Turner
Editor

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**NEXT WEEK
20 FEBRUARY**

Our analysis of the new cars as F1 2020 breaks cover for testing



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Motorsport Images/Etherington

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FIA SAYS 'NO SINGLE CAUSE' FOR HUBERT DEATH



FORMULA 2

The FIA has released a summary of its findings into Anthoine Hubert's fatal accident during the Formula 2 round at Spa last August, but it has faced criticism from Juan Manuel Correa – who sustained serious injuries in the same incident – for raising “more questions than it provides answers”.

Renault Formula 1 junior Hubert died at the age of 22 as a result of injuries sustained in the accident on the second lap of the Belgian Grand Prix-supporting F2 feature race, which also involved Correa, Giuliano Alesi and Ralph Boschung. Correa was left with life-threatening injuries and placed in an induced coma for more than two weeks after suffering from Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome. He later underwent a 17-hour surgery in October to address injuries on his right leg after opting against amputation.

The summary of the report released by the FIA focused on the movements of the four drivers across the 14.6-second accident sequence, triggered by Alesi going off-track following a loss of pressure in his right-rear Pirelli tyre at Eau Rouge.

After hitting Boschung while trying to avoid Alesi at a speed of 262km/h, Hubert's car was sent into the barrier at Raidillon at a force of 33.7g before rebounding back towards the circuit, with the left-hand side of his car facing directly into the path of the field.

Hubert's virtually stationary car was T-boned by Correa at 218km/h, resulting in respective forces of 81.8g and 65.1g. Hubert's car then accelerated to 105km/h before hitting the barrier for a second time.

The summary of the FIA's safety department's findings called the crash sequence “protracted and complex” and said it was not possible to

determine one cause of the accident.

“The dynamics of the car-to-car impact in terms of speed and trajectory were such that an extremely high level of energy was transferred and dissipated, translating into non-survivable trauma to Anthoine Hubert and very serious injuries to Juan Manuel Correa,” said the statement from the FIA.

“There was no single specific cause but multiple contributory factors giving rise to the severity of the accident were identified, following a detailed analysis of the various phases of the accident.

“The investigation found no evidence that any driver failed to react appropriately in response to the yellow flag signal or to the circumstances on track.”

The statement added that the reactions of the marshals, race control and the rescue services were “timely and good”. The race was red flagged 5.2 seconds after contact between the cars of Hubert and Correa, with the first medical evaluations taking place less than a minute later, after the services were deployed prior to Correa's car coming to rest. An extrication team was at the scene within two minutes of the initial incident.

The FIA's statement concluded: “Safety improvement is a continuous process, therefore conclusions drawn from this accident and others like it from around the world will be integrated into the ongoing work of the FIA to further develop motorsport safety.”

CORREA: LEGAL TEAM WILL PUSH FIA FURTHER

In a statement posted to his Instagram account following the publication of the FIA's findings, Correa raised concerns about how much detail the FIA had provided and what questions remained unanswered. The Ecuadorian-American also revealed he had not yet been given access to the full accident report by the FIA.

Hubert was lost over Spa weekend, while Correa (inset) sustained serious injuries in same crash



“Last Friday the FIA announced that they had concluded their investigation into the accident that took place on 31 August at Spa-Francorchamps and released a summary of their findings,” Correa wrote.

“The FIA’s Safety Department spent more than five months conducting this investigation, but for me, their summary raises more questions than it provides answers. In addition, I find it surprising that the full and complete accident report has not been made available, so that I might have a clearer understanding of the conclusions reached by the FIA.

“My friend and fellow driver lost his life, a family lost a loved one, and I suffered severe injuries. We cannot change the past, but perhaps all this pain and sacrifice can have some meaning if it serves to make our sport safer. As a result, I will continue to work with my legal team to obtain a copy of the full accident report. I hope to be in a position to comment further once the report has been made available to me, and when I have a clearer insight into the conclusions reached by the FIA and the safety improvements that it intends to bring about.”

Correa continues to undergo rehabilitation in the US.

LUKE SMITH



Toyota’s special GR Yaris begins testing in snow

WRC

The GR Yaris that Toyota will use in the 2021 World Rally Championship has begun testing, with long-term development driver Juho Hanninen at the wheel.

A video released by the Toyota Gazoo Racing World Rally Team on Friday reveals the hotly anticipated hot hatch being tested on heavy snow.

The GR Yaris road car – which the WRC challenger will be based on – came as something of a surprise to the car industry when it was revealed in January at the

Tokyo Auto Salon (above), with a 257bhp three-cylinder engine and four-wheel drive. Most road-going hot hatches are front-wheel drive.

The road car has been developed alongside the TGR rally squad, giving the team the chance to create a solid base car for what becomes its 2021 challenger. The car has exaggerated aerodynamic devices similar to its Yaris predecessor, and the rear wing looks similar to the current Yaris.

The GR Yaris road car is not a hybrid, although the WRC will move to hybrid power for 2022.

JACK BENYON

Leclerc kicks off 2020 tests on new-size tyres

FORMULA 1

Ferrari driver Charles Leclerc kicked off Formula 1’s 2020 track action by conducting an 18-inch-wheel Pirelli tyre test at Jerez last Saturday.

It was the first of 25 days of dedicated running for next year’s tyres, the testing of which will be shared across all 10 teams. After fog delayed the start to the day in Spain, two-time grand prix winner Leclerc completed 130 laps at the wheel of a modified SF90 mule car.

Ferrari declined to allow the tyre company to release any pictures of the car in action.

All teams have committed to building mule cars for the testing of the tyres. These will also be used during the post-season test in Abu Dhabi.

Teams will complete two days of dry running apiece, while F1’s ‘big three’ – Mercedes, Ferrari and Red Bull – will share five extra days of wet-tyre running between them. The next test is a Ferrari ‘wet’ run at Fiorano on 5 March.

ADAM COOPER



Nasr and Sette Camara to share Carlin IndyCar ride

INDYCAR SERIES

Ex-Sauber Formula 1 racer Felipe Nasr and McLaren test-and-development driver Sergio Sette Camara will share a Carlin car in this year's IndyCar Series.

Following two years with Sauber in 2015-16, Nasr headed to the IMSA SportsCar Championship in North America, winning the 2018 title. He tested an Arrow Schmidt Peterson Motorsports IndyCar at Mid-Ohio last July.

Nasr has a great history with Carlin, winning the 2011 British Formula 3 Championship and claiming third in the 2014 GP2 Series with the team.

Formula 2 ace Sette Camara (above), 21, was on Dale Coyne Racing's shortlist of potential replacements for Sebastien Bourdais for 2020, a ride that eventually went to Alex Palou. He visited a number of IndyCar factories at the same time as he was linked to a Hitech Grand Prix F2 seat, which has now been taken by Luca Ghiotto.

It has not yet been confirmed how Nasr and Sette Camara will divide up the 17-race season, although it is understood that neither driver has expressed any reservations about racing on ovals. They were both set to take part in IndyCar's Spring Training at Circuit of The Americas this week.

Nasr, who is set to remain in his IMSA seat this season, will encounter only one date clash between the two series: the Richmond IndyCar race and the IMSA 6 Hours of Watkins Glen on the final weekend of June.

The other two overlapping races between IMSA and IndyCar occur when they race at the same events

— Long Beach and Detroit — and Bourdais proved last April at Long Beach that it is possible to race in both events on the same weekend.

Carlin has also confirmed that Max Chilton will remain in its other Chevrolet-powered Dallara in the Indy 500 and at the 12 road and street-course races this season. The team is believed to be negotiating with Conor Daly to be Chilton's sub at the remaining ovals — a role he filled last year when Chilton elected to quit ovals.

Although Daly is competing for Ed Carpenter Racing in all the road/street course events and the Indy 500, he hands the car to team owner Ed Carpenter for the other ovals.

Sette Camara's news came days after Ghiotto's confirmation in F2 with Hitech, where he will partner Nikita Mazepin. The Italian had called time on his single-seater career after four years at GP2/F2 level and joined the R-Motorsport Aston Martin team for the GT World Challenge Europe. There are four clashes between F2 and GT, and it is unclear which discipline Ghiotto will prioritise. Fellow GP2/F2 veteran Jordan King has been linked with deputising in the Hitech seat.

● Bourdais has secured an IndyCar seat for four races to go alongside his IMSA programme. He will drive for AJ Foyt Racing at St Petersburg, Barber Motorsports Park, Long Beach and Portland in the #14 entry in which Tony Kanaan had already been confirmed for the oval races. Indy Lights graduate Dalton Kellett will contest the other eight races in the car.

DAVID MALSHER-LOPEZ

Ferrari eyeing new prototype

LE MANS 24 HOURS/WEC/IMSA

Ferrari is eyeing a return to the prototype ranks in the new LMDh category announced last month for the first time since the 333SP of the 1990s. But it has stated that it will only consider a programme if it can build its own chassis.

That puts it add odds with one of the key principles of LMDh, which will allow manufacturers to race the same car across the IMSA SportsCar Championship and the World Endurance Championship. The rules that come into force for the WEC in 2021-22 and IMSA in 2022 follow on from the current Daytona Prototype international regulations in North America by demanding that the cars are developed out of an LMP2 chassis.

Ferrari GT racing boss Antonello Coletta described the announcement of a common platform as “perfect for us” and “a good opportunity”. But he stressed that it was important for the marque to build what he called a “total Ferrari”. “We hope to [be able to] have a Ferrari chassis, this is a need,” he said. “It is important to have a direct line with our road cars — by definition we make a Ferrari.”

Coletta believes that Ferrari's wishes can be accommodated by the LMDh rules, more details of which are scheduled to be announced over the course of the IMSA/WEC double-header at Sebring in March. “We have spoken with all the partners from IMSA and the Automobile Club de l'Ouest [the WEC promoter], and the discussions are open,” he said. “At the moment I prefer not to speak a lot about this; we wait for Sebring where we hope to have the final rules.”

This isn't the first time Ferrari has talked about building a successor to the 333 SP (below), which made its debut in 1994 and raced on as late as 2003. Back in 2013, it hinted at its interest in building an LMP1 hybrid powered by an F1 engine.

GARY WATKINS



Button team's McLaren switch



GT WORLD CHALLENGE EUROPE

The sportscar team in which Jenson Button is a partner is switching from one manufacturer for which he raced in Formula 1 to another. Jenson Team Rocket RJN will field a McLaren 720S GT3 this year rather than last year's Honda NSX GT3 Evo.

The team will remain in what is now called the GT World Challenge Europe

Endurance Cup, again with a solo entry.

It has yet to put together its driver line-up, but is aiming to stay in the Silver Cup class or run in the pro-am ranks of the five-round series that incorporates the Spa 24 Hours.

Bob Neville, who runs the RJN team that ended a long-term relationship with Nissan at the end of 2018, said: "We weren't really in a position to continue with Honda and we were lucky enough to be able to strike

this deal. We're dead chuffed: the car looks lovely [in Brawn-inspired livery] and has undergone a huge amount of development."

Jenson Team Rocket RJN takes its name from the Rocket Motorsport karting squad run by Button's late father, John. Lewis Hamilton, Will Stevens, Oliver Rowland and James Calado, as well as Button, all drove for the team.

GARY WATKINS



Gamble gets United Ligier berth

EUROPEAN LE MANS SERIES

Tom Gamble, winner of the 2018 McLaren Autosport BRDC Award, will switch from GT3 racing to prototypes in 2020 with United Autosports.

The 18-year-old will contest the European Le Mans Series LMP3 class in the new Ligier JSP320, joining United stalwart Wayne Boyd and ex-Radical racer Rob Wheldon. United has described Gamble's position as "a developmental role, planned

to span multiple seasons".

Gamble moved across from British F3 to Blancpain GT action last year in a WRT Audi. Having sampled the previous-generation Ligier as part of the Award tests at Silverstone, he said he was confident that United could add to its ELMS LMP3 titles of 2016 and 2017.

"We have an amazing line-up for it so we have no excuses as to why we can't win the championship," said Gamble. "I've been in talks with the

team for a few years and it's great to now finally be able to say I'll be racing for them. They are such a professional outfit and I believe I could have an amazing future with them."

United is co-owned by Zak Brown, chief of the McLaren F1 team for which Gamble had an Award prize test. It will run former Bentley factory driver Duncan Tappy, Jim McGuire and Andrew Bentley in its other LMP3 entry in the ELMS.

JAMES NEWBOLD

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NASCAR legend Johnson wants a crack at Le Mans

LE MANS 24 HOURS

Seven-time NASCAR Cup champion Jimmie Johnson has targeted the Le Mans 24 Hours as one of his top priorities after his full-time stock car career comes to an end at the finish of this season.

Johnson announced last December that 2020 would be his last full-time NASCAR Cup Series season, after a run of 19 consecutive full campaigns. He said that the decision was made to spend more time with family, but added that his quest for competition is “still very intense”

and that “I’m not retiring, it’s not that fork in the road for me yet, but I definitely need a balance change”.

Johnson, who has twice finished second in the Daytona 24 Hours in seven starts in the race, told Autosport of his Le Mans wish during an interview for this week’s Daytona 500 preview. “I’m really open to opportunities that might surface throughout the year,” he said. “I think the Indy 500 is off the table, I think ovals in IndyCar are off the table, but outside of that I do have an interest in IndyCar and grew up as a big fan of IndyCar.

“I’ve always been a big fan of sportscar racing and the 24 Hour of Le Mans is one I haven’t participated in yet. I’ve had great experiences in the 24 Hours of Daytona. I think those are the higher tier [of what Johnson wants to do].”

The 44-year-old Johnson has driven Chevrolets for Hendrick Motorsports throughout his NASCAR Cup career, and the marque competes at Le Mans in the GTE Pro class, this year with the new Corvette C8.R.

JACK BENYON

➔ P26 JOHNSON’S 2020 HOPES

Schumacher and Fraga join F3 grid at Charouz

FORMULA 3

David Schumacher, son of multiple grand prix winner Ralf, nephew of seven-time world champion Michael and cousin of Formula 2 racer Mick, will contest the FIA Formula 3 Championship with Charouz Racing System.

Schumacher, fourth in last year’s Formula Regional European Championship, stepped up to FIA F3 for last year’s season finale and the Macau Grand Prix (right). He contested Macau with Charouz

in its former guise of Sauber Junior Team.

Charouz confirmed all three of its F3 team last week. Brazilian Igor Fraga, third in last year’s FRegional standings and currently runner-up in the Toyota Racing Series in New Zealand, is on board. So is ex-Red Bull Junior Niko Kari. This will be the Finn’s fifth season at this level, with 10th in the 2016 F3 European Championship and 2017 GP3 Series his best seasons to date.

Other recruits to the FIA F3 grid in recent days include



Canadian Devlin DeFrancesco, who stays on for another year at Trident, and Italian Formula Renault Eurocup graduate

Federico Malvestiti, who joins Jenzer Motorsport full-time after a one-off outing in 2019.

JACK BENYON

IN THE HEADLINES

RALLY SWEDEN SHORTENED

This weekend's Rally Sweden, which we reported two weeks ago to be under threat due to the warm winter weather, will go ahead – but in shortened form. The lack of snow has forced a reduction from 19 stages to 11, comprising 180km of competitive running. It begins today (Thursday) with one stage, there are four on each of Friday and Saturday, before a double run of Likenas – the last being the powerstage – on Sunday.

RALLY GB BACK TO DEESIDE

Rally GB is moving back to its former base for 2020. After one year in Llandudno, Rally GB returns to Deeside – its home from 2013-18 – for the 29 October-1 November event.

SMILEY HAPPY IN HYUNDAI

The new Hyundai project in the British Touring Car Championship has completed its line-up. Chris Smiley, a one-time race winner in the series, moves across from the BTC Racing Honda squad to pedal an Exelr8 Motorsport i30 Fastback alongside Senna Proctor.

ABERDEIN IS IN MUNICH

Impressive 2019 DTM rookie Jonathan Aberdein has been given the sixth and final slot in BMW's line-up for 2020. The South African shone in a privateer WRT Audi last year and had been slated to join the factory team, albeit as a reserve, before being snatched away by its rival. The news leaves Robert Kubica without a factory drive, but he has been linked with a possible privateer BMW effort.

BIRD BACK TO FERRARI NEST

Formula E star Sam Bird has been named in Ferrari's line-up for the Sebring 1000 Miles round of the World Endurance Championship and the Le Mans 24 Hours. Bird, whose FE date clashes meant he could no longer race full-time with Ferrari, will join Davide Rigon and Miguel Molina in the #71 AF Corse-run 488 GTE in both races.



Mystery over Cassidy in Japan

SUPER FORMULA/SUPER GT

Reigning Super Formula champion Nick Cassidy is not on the series' entry list to bid for a second successive title – that was the big shock of Toyota's revealing of its 2020 motorsport programme.

While the New Zealander is in the Super GT line-up of Toyota powerhouse team TOM'S alongside Ryo Hirakawa (with whom he won the 2017 title), the squad's single-seater entry carrying the #1 earned by Cassidy in 2019 (above) has yet to have a driver assigned for the coming season.

An unusually reticent Cassidy, when contacted by Autosport, said that he was “not too keen to make any comments at the moment”. But his omission – even if it's just for the moment – has sent the Japanese rumour mill into overdrive. It has been suggested in Japan that he is on the verge of a Formula 1 reserve deal, but sources close to Cassidy reckon this is wide of the mark. There is also word that he will take part in the upcoming Formula E rookie test at Marrakech, but an FE race seat – assuming it's for next season – would not affect his 2020 commitments in Japan.

One driver whose Japanese programme is definitely being reduced is ex-F1 racer Kazuki Nakajima. While he continues at TOM'S in SF alongside the fabled ‘TBA’,

Nakajima – who also represents Toyota in the World Endurance Championship – is standing down from Super GT. His place alongside Yuhi Sekiguchi in the new Supra GT500 car has been taken by reigning Japanese F3 champion Sacha Fenestraz. The Frenchman's superb 2019 season, in which he also raced a GT300 Nissan, has been further rewarded with a rookie SF seat alongside Kenta Yamashita at Kondo Racing. Here, Fenestraz replaces Yuji Kunimoto, who moves to a new second KCMG entry alongside Kamui Kobayashi.

Yamashita will not be back to attempt to repeat his 2019 Super GT title with Kazuya Oshima in the wake of the demise of the Team Le Mans squad that ran them. Like Nakajima, he has a WEC campaign, in his case in LMP2. Oshima moves to a ‘new’ team known as Rookie Racing – but actually run by Cerumo Racing – in both series. In Super GT he will partner Sho Tsuboi, who shifts over from Team Bandoh.

Promoted to the Bandoh GT seat alongside Kunimoto is Japanese F3 runner-up Ritomo Miyata. Although he has been confirmed as continuing with TOM'S in ‘F3’ – now renamed Super Formula Lights – for a fourth season, Miyata has been tipped as a Cassidy replacement in SF, and tested the car at Suzuka in December.

MARCUS SIMMONS

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HAAS VF-20

JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE

After a miserable 2019, Haas is back for 2020 with a brand-new livery and a distinctly Ferrari-inspired car. Will the fresh paintwork and new aero concept reignite the team's fortunes, or will it be another year of both on- and off-track difficulties for Gene Haas's operation?

PHOTOGRAPHY HAAS F1

FRONT WING

Out of all of the VF-20's unmistakable similarities with the 2019 Ferrari SF90, the front wing is the most prominent. Last year's issues, in which Haas struggled to keep its tyres within the right working window to maintain a strong race pace, appeared to stem from the disconnect between the front wing and the rest of the car.

With that in mind, Haas put a Ferrari-style wing concept through its paces in the practice sessions towards the end of last year, seeking to refine the airflow paths and boost the

performance of the components downstream. It clearly had some impact, as it returns in the launch-spec car.

The Ferrari-inspired details continue into the endplates, and the small cut-out at the trailing edge helps to improve the outwash capability of the front wing to shift airflow away from the front wheels. By flattening the

footplate, the small box allotted by the regulations allows for a small fin to be added to the top, further enhancing the amount of air turned around the car.

There's also a distinct Ferrari slant to the new Haas nose, which appears to be similar to the Singapore update in September that helped Ferrari to a surprising victory on the streets of Marina Bay.

Haas is aiming to alleviate its 2019 aero concerns with a Ferrari-inspired front wing

BARGEBOARDS AND SIDEPODS

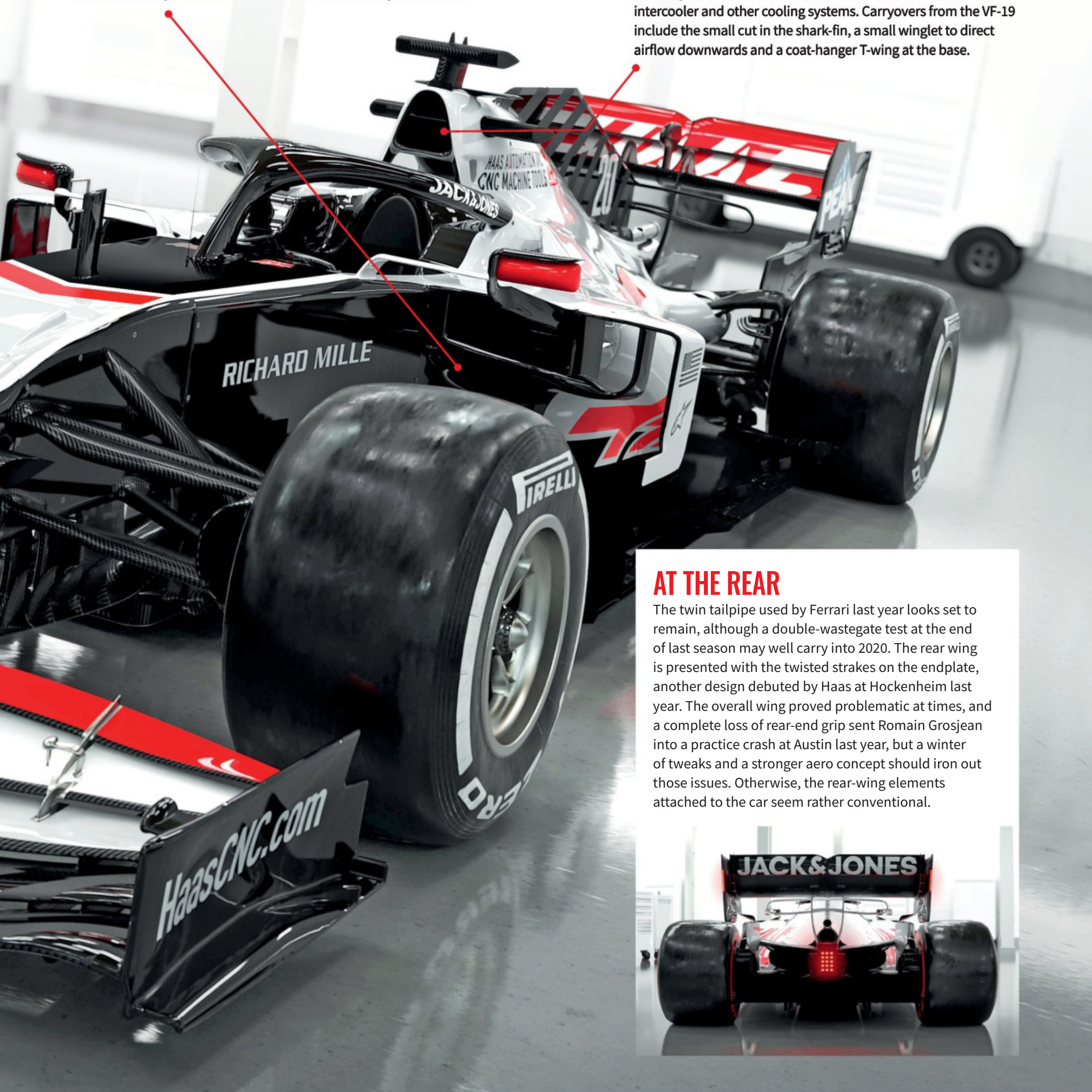
With a conventional radiator set-up, the diagonal position they occupy in the sidepods means a small bulge in the bodywork. Haas has tightened things up, giving the airflow a shorter path towards the rear of the car and an undercut around the letterbox inlets.

The bargeboards appear to be a progression of last year's design introduced at the German Grand Prix in July, and, although the launch images don't give away much, there's a greater number of small serrations and elements around the leading edge, which are intended to direct more airflow outwards. The boomerang device also remains, having been a popular addition across the grid last year.

ENGINE COVER

There are more Ferrari hallmarks in the engine-cover region, and the VF-20 features a triangular air intake much like its 'mother' team. A number of teams have gravitated towards a larger engine cover to fit in more of the cooling components, allowing them to shrink the sidepods, but Haas has persisted with the more conventional arrangement, as also adopted by Ferrari.

The intake now splits horizontally rather than vertically, allowing one path for the compressor and another path for the intercooler and other cooling systems. Carryovers from the VF-19 include the small cut in the shark-fin, a small winglet to direct airflow downwards and a coat-hanger T-wing at the base.



AT THE REAR

The twin tailpipe used by Ferrari last year looks set to remain, although a double-wastegate test at the end of last season may well carry into 2020. The rear wing is presented with the twisted strakes on the endplate, another design debuted by Haas at Hockenheim last year. The overall wing proved problematic at times, and a complete loss of rear-end grip sent Romain Grosjean into a practice crash at Austin last year, but a winter of tweaks and a stronger aero concept should iron out those issues. Otherwise, the rear-wing elements attached to the car seem rather conventional.

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Adding value

Is it time to borrow a popular idea from American football, and introduce a Most Valued Driver award to Formula 1?

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

One of the most enjoyable debates in sport should be – if done properly, and avoiding the pitfalls of tribalism and the general cesspools of Twitter replies and YouTube comments – the question ‘who is the best?’

Of course, trying to argue the case for the best Formula 1 driver ever is fraught with peril, given the championship’s long history and ever-changing nature. But declaring one driver to be the best over a season or a year is much more achievable. It’s not for nothing that Autosport’s Top 50 Drivers of the Year feature resonates with fans and competitors alike.

F1 has happily borrowed ideas from other sports and entertainment divisions since Liberty Media’s takeover was completed in 2017. So, given it’s February and the wait for on-track action goes on, let’s consider taking one more popular element from another sport. Specifically, American football and the NFL’s annual Most Valuable Player award.

First off, it’s important to acknowledge that there are numerous differences between the two sports. American football is an athletic-based team sport, whereas motorsport is about highly developed machinery being driven in competition by individuals.

In the NFL, individual players can make a difference on a much larger and more obvious scale. Consider the recent Super Bowl, where the Kansas City Chiefs recovered from a late-game deficit

“A driver’s performance is harder to analyse than an American football player’s”

to beat the San Francisco 49ers. The latter was probably the better team overall, but Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes made the difference, sparking his offence into life right when it mattered.

It is largely the performances of the quarterbacks that change game outcomes in American football, which is why they’re so highly paid and dominate the history of the NFL MVP. There are 32 NFL teams, represented (mainly) by 32 quarterbacks.

The 10 F1 teams are represented by 20 drivers, who extract performances from the machines built by a supporting cast. While they still rely on their engineers when on-track, it is the drivers who make the fundamental decisions that will get, or lose, a result.

In both championships, money matters. And the better-run organisations will naturally do better over time. But a driver’s performance is harder to analyse than an American football

player’s, simply because it’s harder to see and separate from that of the cars. F1 machines move around less when on the limit compared to those in other categories too. NFL analysts also benefit from regular breaks in play, as well as deep analytics assessing the variables that can be quantified in each game.

For what it’s worth, Autosport has a system used to rate each driver’s performance after every grand prix. The framework will be included in future issues alongside the GP reports. An F1 MVP award could be easily slotted in alongside other accolades.

For example, Autosport’s Top 50 encounters criticism from supporters of various series because of the need to rank categories when assessing driver performances. But for all the championship’s strengths, winning a Formula E title is not the same as triumphing in F1.

A collated F1 team bosses’ vote is always in danger of allowing some drivers to have their scores artificially boosted by their employers. Top 10 rankings from series correspondents still boil down to one person’s analysis and opinion.

This is where an F1 MVP idea takes off. In the NFL, it has been organised by the Associated Press since 1957, and is awarded to the player who comes out on top of a vote of 50 sportswriters covering the contest. If such an accolade could be introduced to F1, the same template should be adopted.

To ensure quality analysis, as well as rewarding media that are prepared to invest in covering the championship, those on the panel would have at least five years’ experience working in the paddock, and cover a range of nationalities and publication types. This would encourage civilised debate and engagement with fans, media and competitors. At the same time, it would reward detailed analysis of the sport and remove the PR sheen that might put off fans who expect honesty and openness.

Turning to Autosport’s Top 50 drivers once more – because that is a panel decision taken at the end of considerable debate from across our editorial staff – it’s interesting to look back at previous winners. Sebastian Loeb finished ahead of Fernando Alonso in 2005. Robert Kubica got the nod ahead of Lewis Hamilton in 2008, with Hamilton beating Jenson Button a year later. Alonso got the accolade in 2012, while Daniel Ricciardo upset Mercedes’ F1 success hegemony in 2014 and 2016. The F1 champions don’t necessarily take our top spot.

It’s easy to see the cases for different outcomes in those years, and while that award going Hamilton’s way in 2017 and 2018 is surely indisputable, given his major role in seeing off Ferrari’s threat, there’s the tantalising possibility that an F1 Most Valued Driver award organised in 2019 along the lines outlined above could have gone the way of a certain Carlos Sainz Jr... 🏆



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We should celebrate our heroes while we can

It's all too easy to moan about the dominance of Mercedes and Lewis Hamilton and forget that we're watching one of the greatest drivers of all time

MATT KEW

Comparisons between Formula 1 and football don't always go down well in the pages of Autosport, but there's a contrast between the attitude of both sets of supporters that has bothered me for some time.

Over the past decade, it's been a pretty torrid time to be an Aston Villa supporter. There's been an 8-0 loss, relegation from the Premier League and the club came within a hair's breadth of financial ruination. Now, however, there's far more promise. Some of that comes from boy wonder Jack Grealish.

If Villa get relegated from the Premier League this season, there's a good chance that this talisman – who has captained the club he has trained with since the age of six – will leave in search of European football. No one in their right mind, Villa fan or not, could blame him. Because of that skill and the threat that he might leave, Villa fans seem willing to sit back each week and watch this star player excel while he's one of our own. Let's revel in his talent because he might not be at Villa Park for much longer; that's the attitude.

This is precisely where not all, but some, of the F1 fandom can learn. As is widely acknowledged, Lewis Hamilton is motorsport's greatest ambassador. He brushes shoulders with the Hollywood

“Surely it's nigh-on criminal to wait until someone is gone before it's OK to wax lyrical”

elite and his social media following far outstrips any of his grand prix competitors. Part of that comes from his high profile in the world of fashion, and he's also dabbled with a music career. What's clear is that his interests sit well outside the paddock – arguably far more so than any of his contemporaries. That means, come the day he retires from F1, there's a genuine possibility he might never be seen at a race again as he pursues other ventures.

Rather than ape Fernando Alonso by venturing into sportscars or taking on the Dakar Rally, if Hamilton retires as a seven- or eight-time world champion, then he has nothing to prove and only a legacy to jeopardize by competing in other categories and not winning. Instead of turning up to a dozen GPs each season like world champions Jackie Stewart and Mika Hakkinen, perhaps Hamilton's remaining time in front of the motorsport media –

blitzing qualifying, winning races, bagging titles, giving interviews in the media pen – is incredibly limited.

As such, let's acknowledge him now as quite possibly the greatest of all time and enjoy the master at work. Let's not bemoan the potency of his Mercedes car, arguing that it's the main reason for his success. Let's not complain when he leads a race from start to finish and no rival team's driver or team-mate can get close. Let's celebrate his brilliance while we can and not rue any missed opportunities to watch him at the peak of the powers once he finally steps aside.

This phenomenon is nothing new to motorsport, but it's surely nigh-on criminal that we seemingly wait until someone is gone before it becomes OK to wax lyrical. A common criticism of the Sky Sports F1 coverage (and, at times, Autosport) is that it's Hamilton hero worship. Even as he smashes every record in sight, this complaint doesn't subside.

The alternative, though, is far more bleak. It's a fair assessment to say the adoration of Michael Schumacher has been heightened since his 2013 skiing accident. Obviously, there's zero point in waiting until drivers have retired or been hurt for it to become more agreeable to sing their praises.

People seem so swept up in an argument as to who is the greatest that it becomes too militant. 'Well, if you champion Schumacher then you can't like Ayrton Senna. Surely, if Senna is top then you in turn must loathe Alain Prost? Ah, yes, but Prost wouldn't have held a candle to Jim Clark. Hang on, wasn't Juan Manuel Fangio the best?' And so it goes on, like it has for time immemorial.

For the most part, football doesn't seem to suffer this cyclical problem to anywhere near the same extent. Aside from the most embittered Manchester City and United fans, who else isn't astounded by the potency of Liverpool this season? Similarly, even the staunchest Cristiano Ronaldo fans don't sniff at Lionel Messi's achievements or vice versa.

Tribalism exists in both sports, but there seems to be a far larger grey area in football. In this instance, that feels like a good thing.

The truth is Hamilton is far closer to the end of his grand prix career than he is to the start. With that in mind, let's not spurn the opportunity to marvel at him by getting lost in never-ending debate. Let's not hide behind Schumacher's records or Senna's charisma out of the car and heightened reputation in death.

Football fans are very far from perfect – on one hand they're fickle, at the other there's persistent and vile issues with racism. But at least, when it comes to revelling in brilliance, for the most part they do seem to do it better than F1 enthusiasts. 🍷



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YOUR SAY

As an F1 ‘petrolhead’ and a greenie/EV fan, I’m now bewildered as to where F1 goes. There is a fork in the road not far away – all-electric F1 (FE Max?!) or petrol...

GUY DORMEHL

Where next for Formula 1 engines?

I foresee very nervy times ahead for Formula 1 engine specs. Despite the astonishing efficiency of the current turbo-hybrid engines, they may become irrelevant as I believe hybrid road cars will change from being lumped with EVs to being chunked in with petrol/diesel and therefore banned in many countries around 2030. The climate change/environmental urgency is ramping up and things will start to change at an extraordinary rate.

As an F1 ‘petrolhead’ and a greenie/EV fan, I’m now bewildered as to where F1 goes. There is a fork in the road not far away – all-electric F1 (FE Max?!) or petrol...

I see the political/social dangers of staying petrol, but if F1 goes carbon neutral for all freight and support vehicles/equipment/factories, and the spectators arrive in EVs, then F1 could clearly make a case for petrol. A petrol F1 would

create a popular ‘off-centre’ sport – or would it wither on the vine as anti-social? Completely non-fossil-fuel motor racing may be the norm post 2030-ish. Much to ponder...

Guy Dormehl
Garden Route, South Africa

Brabham-Honda’s damp-squib debut

I have no wish to disappoint Steve Berning (Letters, 6 February), but the F2 Brabham-Honda debuted on 3 April 1965 at the 40-lap Oulton Park Spring International – also an event with many F1 hands at the wheel. The car was last on the grid, well off the pace and went out after 16 laps with spark plug trouble without worrying anyone. But that’s 15 longer than in the later Gold Cup – clutch failure.

Brian Harvey
By email



Nine-time grand prix winner Mark Webber was one of the star invitees to last weekend’s Leadfoot Festival at Hahei on New Zealand’s east coast, taking to the hillclimb course in a 1906 Darracq

PICTURE OF THE WEEK

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F1
2020

WHY MERCEDES

Red Bull and Ferrari are getting ready to launch fresh challenges to Mercedes in 2020 — we assess their chances

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

PHOTOGRAPHY



It's been more than six years since a team other than Mercedes won a Formula 1 World Championship. Since the introduction of the turbo-hybrid engine regulations, the Silver Arrows have racked up 89 wins with three drivers, 94 poles, 179 podiums, and the headline accomplishment of six title doubles. But in 2020 there's more than just a chance that things *could* change.

The main thinking behind this theory (which some fans hold as hope for a change, any change) is that

because F1's rules are stable going from 2019 into the new campaign, the field will close up. This isn't to suggest AlphaTauri or Alfa Romeo will suddenly take the fight to be the championship's top dog to Mercedes, but that there is the possibility that another one of F1's big three could emerge victorious.

Last year, in addition to tweaks to the rules governing bargeboards, rear wings and brake ducts, the biggest change to the regulations concerned the front wings. The resulting designs were much simpler than the convoluted (not to mention



F1 DOMINATION

COULD END IN 2020



expensive) downforce-laden contraptions used previously. This was an attempt to fast-track some of the thinking behind F1's comprehensive 2021 rules overhaul, in a bid to ease the issue the current cars have when it comes to following closely.

But in one sense, this change robbed F1 of a concentrated three-way fight for the 2019 world title. While Mercedes went on a success rampage in the early season as Ferrari regularly underwhelmed from strong positions and Red Bull took a while to get rolling – both of Mercedes' closest challengers were ultimately undone by their initial designs. That *shouldn't* be a problem this time around.

"Theoretically, the Melbourne [2020] car will be an upgrade of the Abu Dhabi [2019] car," said Red Bull team boss Christian Horner at the end of last season.

So, let's examine the three biggest threats to Mercedes' superiority in 2020, starting with the reddest one. >>

ETHERINGTON

MAIN PIC: TEE

THE FERRARI CHALLENGE

FERRARI WAS AGAIN Mercedes' closest challenger in 2019, but it should have done much better. Although it did get its act together in the second half of the season – particularly when its much-discussed engine gains were allied to a breakthrough update package introduced at September's Singapore Grand Prix – Ferrari haemorrhaged points.

It lost certain wins in Bahrain (to Charles Leclerc's heartbreaking engine-cylinder failure when he was clear in the lead), in Canada (to a controversial penalty that followed Sebastian Vettel making another error under pressure), and in Russia (where a team-orders row for a second race in a row came before Vettel's MGU-K-induced retirement, which cost Leclerc the lead to Lewis Hamilton under the ensuing virtual safety car).

There's also a case to be made for further lost wins in Baku – Leclerc showed the speed to qualify at the front, where he could have at least disrupted Mercedes' march to a fourth (out of a total of five) 1-2 in succession at the start of last year – and Austria. In the latter race, Max Verstappen capped a storming recovery from a poor start to overcome Leclerc in battle late on, with the Ferrari driver left feeling that the lesson learned in that moment might have saved the victory.

Although any suggestion about performance improvements are of course pure speculation at this point in the season, we should give Ferrari the benefit of the doubt and believe that a team of its size and strength should be able to address its shortcomings. If the Scuderia can avoid wasting points in 2020, that will immediately eat into Mercedes' advantage.

Another reason why the Tifosi should be looking forward to the coming campaign concerns Ferrari's drivers. By any measure, Leclerc's first season with the team – and let's not forget that it was just his second in F1 – was a success. Even if reliability and his own mistakes did cost him on the occasions we've outlined, the 22-year-old had a breakout season, which led to Ferrari rewarding him with a contract extension to the end of 2024.

That's a fine show of faith and, allied to his clear ease at living in the spotlight at the front of the F1 grid, there's every reason to expect Leclerc to make another step forward in 2020. If Ferrari's new car can present the same problems for Mercedes as the SF90 regularly did last year, then Leclerc's ultimate potential as a world championship-winning-calibre driver should become clear.

On the other side of the garage is a mere four-time world



Leclerc looked like a future champion in 2019

GALLOWAY



Binotto (right) will want to eliminate team errors

SUTTON



Vettel knows he must make fewer mistakes

MAUGER

champion. That's not a misguided attempt to goad Vettel fans, it's a reminder of just how good he is. It may feel like a long time since his last title triumph with Red Bull back in 2013 – and as we covered at the beginning, it is – but Vettel has it within him to triumph at the highest level.

The worrying element to his form over the past few seasons was how quickly he seemed to go to pieces under pressure. There was the lost win in the rain in Germany in 2018, plus the spins in battle with Hamilton, Daniel Ricciardo and Verstappen at Monza, Austin and Suzuka respectively that year. Then there was another spin while racing Hamilton in Bahrain in 2019, which was followed by his win-costing Canada off, the crash with Verstappen at Silverstone, and his rejoining madness at Monza involving Lance Stroll. Then there was the big one – the clash with Leclerc in Brazil that put both Ferraris out.

That underwhelming run ended with Vettel finishing fifth in the 2019 drivers' standings – his worst result as a Ferrari driver. It's no wonder that when he spoke to TV crews, quite candidly, after last season's Abu Dhabi finale, he said he feels: "As a team we must



Leclerc made errors,
here in Baku qualifying

FERRARI HYBRID ERA STATS

17

WINS

21

POLES

25

FASTEST
LAPS

2639

POINTS

perform stronger, as an individual I think I can. I must do better. I can do better – it wasn't a great year from my side."

Just as Ferrari has the right raw materials, it's possible to believe that Vettel can return to the performance level that took him to those four world titles. Last year, rumours swirled that he would walk away from F1, and Leclerc's new Ferrari deal means the team sees *him* as its future, not Vettel. But a multiple world champion with a point to prove is dangerous to bet against.

His team also clearly thinks he can do it. Speaking to Autosport at the end of last year, Ferrari team principal Mattia Binotto said: "I must say the performance offset has been always great [meaning not large] – except for maybe the mistake in Monza, but the performance there was still good. So, in the second half of the season, certainly Seb's base was as good if not better than Charles."

If its drivers can step up in 2020, then Ferrari must give them a car that can challenge Mercedes. Although the FIA technical directives issued late last year shed some light on what many assume Ferrari was doing to get such potency from its engine in 2019, it cannot be assumed that its advantage will be gone

in this area. If Leclerc and Vettel can use this to get ahead in qualifying in the early races, then there's every chance they can endanger Mercedes' dominance.

There's one final intriguing area to keep an eye on with Ferrari in 2020: F1's political theatre. "We are not good enough in polemics, and there are people who are stronger than us – even in using the media to put pressure on," Binotto explained. "So it is something that we need to understand how to do better, and to better act in the future, because that's part of the overall balance of a season."

A fired-up Ferrari using Machiavellian tactics to gain every advantage is worth taking seriously. And there's also the spectre of F1's 2021 cost cap to consider. Ferrari CEO Louis Camilleri said at the end of 2019 that the team is "prepared to invest" and is expecting 2020 to be "significantly more expensive" in budget terms as it gears for the new era, when the budget cap arrives. Ferrari is already committed to building a new simulator and it's not unreasonable to expect such investments to benefit the team this season, as well as in the future. One caveat here is that Mercedes and Red Bull can take the same approach... »



THE RISE OF RED BULL-HONDA

THE RULES STABILITY for 2020 significantly increases Red Bull's threat to Mercedes. It must start the season as strongly as it finished last year – especially if Horner's upgrade prediction rings true. In 2019, the team made another slow start – somewhat undone by the changes to the front-wing rules. But an update introduced for the Austrian GP in June turned things around, and during the run into the summer break Red Bull provided stiff opposition to Mercedes.

The team and Verstappen capitalised on chaos in Germany and showed impressive form in Brazil to add two victories to go with Verstappen's triumph over Leclerc in Austria. They probably should have won in Mexico too, given Red Bull's historical strength at

altitude and the fact that Verstappen was quickest in qualifying before receiving his penalty for not slowing under yellow flags.

This season is the second test for Red Bull's new relationship with Honda, but there's every expectation that the engine builder will make another step forwards. As long as Verstappen and Alex Albon aren't hamstrung by grid penalties necessitated by Honda needing to introduce early upgrades out of sequence with its rivals – for reliability or performance purposes – they should have the tools required to take the fight to Mercedes and Ferrari on the power front.

Red Bull knows it and Honda must start fast in 2020, with its motorsport advisor, Helmut Marko, recently telling Autosport: "We want to fight for the championship and to do so we know that we have to be competitive with the chassis right from the start – and that means the very first race. Honda has good increases for this year. And since everything has been fulfilled so far, we assume that this will happen. That means we have no more excuses."

As with Ferrari, Red Bull can be confident that its drivers will also raise their respective bars in 2020. Like Leclerc, Verstappen has a freshly inked, new long-term deal, which will keep him at Red Bull until the end of 2023. Not only does this give him the solid foundations needed to perform excellently consistently, but it is also a serious sign that he feels Honda can deliver what it must for Red Bull to front a title challenge.

Verstappen is untested in the world title fight arena, but there is nothing to suggest this utterly determined driver doesn't have what it takes to prevail when the pressure is at its most intense.



RED BULL HYBRID ERA STATS

15
WINS

5
POLES

24
FASTEST
LAPS

2264
POINTS

MAIN PIC: ANDRE



Albon heads into 2020 knowing he'll have a full winter test programme with the new Red Bull, which will surely help him when it comes to the new campaign. This time last year he had zero F1 experience, and 2019 didn't exactly work out badly. The RB15 was a demanding car, so Albon can be given credit for stepping into it mid-way through the year, after the Pierre Gasly seat-swap, and not disgracing himself.

It will never be known how much of a boost that lost Interlagos podium would have given Albon – it certainly capped Gasly's late-2019 form resurgence – but it's fair to assume that if he can avoid the sort of troubled pre-season his predecessor endured, then he'll have every chance of starting 2020 strongly.

Red Bull's line-up may be youthful, but it has the needle needed to exploit any chinks in Mercedes' armour. >>

HOW 'SECOND' DRIVERS COULD BE KEY

If Ferrari and Red Bull are going to have a hope of defeating Mercedes in the constructors' championship, then both squads need both sides of their respective garages to be bagging maximum points.

As was evidenced at last year's Hungarian Grand Prix, having two drivers capable of winning can turn the tide during races, which will add up over the course of a campaign. Had Pierre Gasly been in a position to back up Max Verstappen during the race at the Hungaroring, then Mercedes would not have been able to take the strategic gamble that led to Lewis Hamilton's charge to victory.

Ferrari's drivers need to avoid taking points off each other, while Red Bull needs Alex Albon to get among the leading positions rather than making up the end of the top six in races where conditions or reliability don't play a part. After joining the senior Red Bull squad for the final nine races of 2019 – three fewer than Gasly had before the summer break – Albon scored 76 points, which isn't bad considering Verstappen picked up 97 in the same period. But being a regular podium threat must be the minimum Red Bull expects Albon to produce in 2020.

Assuming Ferrari can stem the implosions and Red Bull does have both its drivers firing in top results, this will eat into Mercedes' points potential. In that case, Valtteri Bottas's performances will become a key focus point for the season.

Bottas has already said he

Bottas has to deliver if he's to get 2021 deal



"VALTTERI BOTTAS'S PERFORMANCES WILL BECOME A KEY FOCUS POINT FOR THE SEASON"

wants to make it a "no-brainer decision" for Mercedes to extend his contract into 2021, and he can make that a reality by taking second place in the drivers' championship again – or by going one better. He almost halved the gap between himself and Hamilton from 161 points in 2018 to 87 last season, but, even though Bottas secured his personal best championship finish, that was still adrift of the 58 points to his team-mate in 2017, his first year at Mercedes.

If the usual assumptions about leading points scorers at Mercedes and Red Bull holds true, and Ferrari can find a way not to squander results, then it could well be the second best finishers per round at each of Formula 1's top three teams that make the difference in 2020.



THE MERCEDES THREAT FROM WITHIN



Wolff (left) has built a team with winning mentality

FAMOUS AGITATOR Fernando Alonso recently outlined his feeling that Hamilton has “weak points” that have “not been stressed yet”, in an interview with *F1 Racing* magazine. He went on to explain how he feels his former team-mate and rival “starts the year slowly and no one takes the benefit of that”. Well, that’s exactly what Red Bull and Ferrari must do this year, and a three-team fight at the front would unleash pressure that both Hamilton and Mercedes have not had to cope with so far in the turbo-hybrid era.

Somewhat undermining Alonso’s point are Hamilton’s six victories in the first eight races of 2019, and a championship lead that he didn’t lose his grip on after the fifth round of the last campaign. But then there’s a case to be made that Mercedes’ rivals combined to flatter it early on last year...

Nevertheless, there are outside distractions that have the potential to destabilise Hamilton and Mercedes – as equally as they may not. First up, Hamilton does not have the contract certainty that Verstappen and Leclerc can boast. His deal with Mercedes is up at the end of this season, and there have already been rumours – which Hamilton was quick to demolish on his social media channels – that talks over an extension have stalled. True or not, the fact that there is – at the time of writing – no final decision taken means energy-sapping questions remain, and answering them will be a distraction.

Then there was the report in *Autocar* that suggested Mercedes may be about to start discussions to exit F1 after all its recent success. These were also quickly scotched by overarching Mercedes boss Ola



Will Hamilton be distracted by contract negotiations in 2020?

MERCEDES HYBRID ERA STATS

89
WINS

94
POLES

62
FASTEST LAPS

4231
POINTS

Kallenius. But, and again we enter the realm of speculation, it’s not inconceivable that the manufacturer feels enough is enough and 2021 is the perfect time to Mecexit F1.

Just before Christmas, when asked what his future holds after all of his squad’s success, Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff told *The Bulletin with UBS* podcast that it is “in a transition phase”. He continued: “Where we aim to turn this Formula 1 team into a company that can stand among the most successful sports teams in the world – not only Formula 1. [A team] that is self-sustainable.”

That line likely means making the team self-sufficient to the point that Mercedes has no reason to leave it on cost grounds, rather than it trying to carrying on winning with another suitor – or simply doing it by itself. A new multi-year deal with technology company AMD and a five-year “principal partner” link-up with petrochemical firm INEOS suggest this squad is going nowhere anytime soon.

Mercedes High Performance Powertrains boss Andy Cowell saying “as ever, [we’re] fighting a few little issues as we pull everything together” when talking about its 2020 engine generated headlines last week. The team hasn’t been bulletproof in the reliability stakes during its dominant run, so Ferrari and Red Bull will be hoping this is more than a fuss over nothing. But at the same time, they’ll have to hope their designs can go the distance.



WHY MERCEDES IS STILL *THE FAVOURITE*

FOR ALL THE ANALYSIS and outside hope that Mercedes will finally lose its crown in 2020, it must be acknowledged that the team goes into the new season as the heavy favourite. After all, it is unbeaten in the hybrid era, and the W10 saw off all its challengers last season, thanks to its undeniable strength in slow corners and the way it worked with the thinner-gauge Pirellis that are staying the same for the new season.

Mercedes has the same chance to benefit from a year of heavy spending before the cost cap comes in for next season, which is why any expectations that it will take its eye off the ball with major regulation changes coming should be headed off for now. The team already proved in 2017 that it can overcome a rules reset, when it picked up where it had ended 2016 when the cars became wider.

There's also something about Wolff and the culture he has created at Brackley that make it hard to see it dropping any balls.

Mercedes may be unbeaten in the championship stakes since 2014, but it has lost individual races. We're a long way past the high-water mark of 2016 – when Mercedes lost just twice, to Red Bull – and, while the team recovered from 10 defeats in 2018 to six last year, it feels clearly intense pain at each one. But the days you lose, Wolff reiterates, are the days you learn the most.

“In our industry, or with our background, finance and sports,



it is less naivety, it is more being OK with the worst possible outcome,” he told *The Bulletin with UBS* podcast. “You can launch yourself into a project if you can cope with the worst possible outcome. If not, I think if you say it would have a massive impact on my life, a massive impact on our future, then we are always on the risk-averse side – we would rather not do it.

“I think every year you need to define objectives that motivate you. Every single year since 2013 we have come up with targets that were exciting for us. And, in the same way, 2020 looks like an exciting year where we are maybe able to provide Lewis Hamilton with a car that he can win a seventh championship.

“We’re actually very keen on doing a better job than we did in 2019. Although we won the championship we don’t feel it came in the way we anticipated. And then we prepare for 2021, which is a completely new set of regulations – everything is upside down – and we’d like to prove that we’re capable of maintaining our position as one of the leading teams.”

None of that suggests Mercedes will be caught on the blindside in 2020 – it may even be an acknowledgement that the team knows it had things easier than they could have been at the start of last season.

But if those of us on the outside can spot potential pitfalls, you can bet Mercedes has done that already. ❧



A WINNING END FOR THE JIMMIE/HENDRICK EXPERIENCE?

Seven titles preceded a slump and a re-evaluation for Jimmie Johnson. Now he believes there's a chance he can bow out with an eighth NASCAR Cup success

JACK BENYON

PHOTOGRAPHY  **motorsport**
IMAGES

After seven titles in 18 years at the top level, Jimmie Johnson starts his last full-time NASCAR Cup campaign at Daytona this weekend. It hasn't all gone to plan over the past two seasons, where the now-44-year-old has gone winless. But he is hell-bent, convinced that a record-breaking eighth title is on the table this year, however unlikely that may sound.

Stadium Trophy Truck driver-turned-NASCAR dominator Johnson burst onto the scene full-time in 2002 and just a year later he finished second in the Cup standings, hailed as the young challenger to threaten superstar Jeff Gordon. Gordon himself helped Rick Hendrick set up the #48 team to launch Johnson to stardom, perhaps creating a beast he couldn't tame in the win-thirsty youngster, who has so far amassed 83 victories – the sixth highest in Cup Series history.

Johnson won the 2006-10 championships – earning the nickname 'Five-Time' as the first to win five Cup titles in a row – and added the 2013 and 2016 crowns as others caught up and perfected the tactics of 'The Chase', a 10-race shootout playoff that was introduced just after Johnson's debut, and which he immediately took to.

But by March 2018, early on in what would be his first winless full season in NASCAR, everything was falling apart. The Hendrick Motorsports Chevrolets weren't competitive against the Toyotas of Joe Gibbs Racing and the Fords of Team Penske, and after 17 seasons together Johnson and crew chief Chad Knaus parted ways. Since then, Johnson has been in damage-limitation and then recovery mode. But 2020, his final full season, is about winning and taking his rightful place at the top of the pile.

When asked if he thinks a turnaround is possible and whether

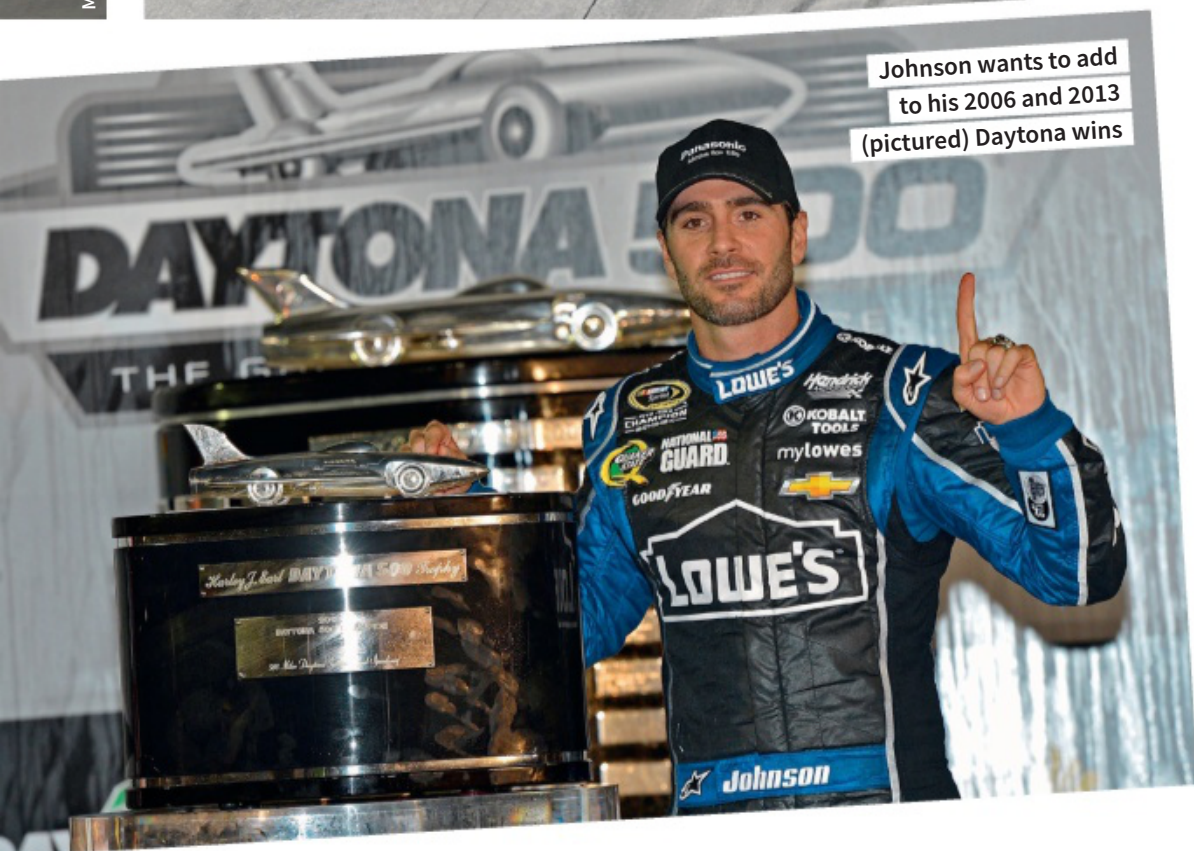
Gordon (24) helped
launch Johnson's career



Johnson's last win came
at Dover in 2017



Johnson wants to add
to his 2006 and 2013
(pictured) Daytona wins



he can have one of his trademark seasons, he replies: "Yeah, I really do" with the kind of blunt – albeit extremely polite – directness that hints he doesn't even think it's a question worth asking. "The move with Cliff Daniels [crew chief] coming in late in the year and watching him grow as a leader within the team, there are a lot of things trending the right way," Johnson adds.

"What's funny is when I knew everything was aligning that way [positively] at the end of last year, it made making this decision [about ending his full-time career] even easier because I really in my heart feel like I have a great shot of becoming an eight-time champion. That kind of helped with the process and it really could be one of my best years yet."

The thing is, a final year in American sport is usually a farewell period, a 'thanks for your contributions, we appreciate all you've done, finish now after a lucrative retirement circus tour and don't

worry about your results'. But while Johnson accepts that he doesn't know how emotional he's going to be when he hits the track this year, he knows his team is motivated. The fact that Chevrolet is bringing an updated car this year is a big help to what has been a struggling manufacturer and Hendrick organisation that mostly dominated NASCAR for 20 years.

"I don't know what the emotions will be like at the track, especially later in the year," he adds. "But the excitement this [ending his full-time Cup career] has brought to myself, my family, my friends, and then inside the shop, everyone knows how much of a competitor I am and how badly I want to have a competitive year in 2020. So, honestly, I haven't seen [such] energy in this race team before, in all of Hendrick, so I'm very excited for it."

"YOU ALMOST FEEL LIKE YOU WENT TO VEGAS AND YOU PUT YOUR MONEY DOWN AND, 'HELL YEAH, I JUST WON THAT!'"

Any opposition reading this should be worried about that last statement. Hendrick basically revolutionised modern NASCAR, and Johnson has been around it since the early 2000s. So for Johnson to be saying he's not seen this level of energy from the team means his evergreen will to win and refusal to go out as a marketing tool to boost ticket numbers is going to be met with a like-minded team, eager to see off one of NASCAR's greats in the best possible way.

There's further proof of Johnson's competitive nature as he picks out some stats he's not happy about. OK, he's the equal best of all time in terms of championships won; he's the most successful driver at four tracks – Fontana, Texas Motor Speedway, Charlotte, Dover; and he's sixth all-time in race wins. But he's still picking out wrongs to right. He lacks wins at Watkins Glen, the Charlotte 'roval' and Chicagoland, and is one short of Gordon's win tally in the Brickyard 400 at Indianapolis and in the Daytona 500, where he could line up for the last time this weekend, even though he is open to a return under the right conditions.

"I'm definitely open to it [a Daytona 500 return], adds Johnson. "This is about me getting more balance in my life. More family time. Honestly, the competitive side is still very intense. I have some bucket-list races and cars and series I'd love to participate in, and if I don't get to it I'm not going to have a chance. When you package all that up, that's why I made the decision, and I'm excited to have 2020 be my last one, but if the right opportunity came along... I'm not retiring. It's not that fork in the road for me yet, but I definitely need a balance change."

"The racing there [at Daytona] is really so different than anything else that luck and other drivers' decisions play a role in success. You almost feel like you went to Vegas and you put your money down on the right colour and, 'Hell yeah, I just won that!'"

"The Brickyard or some of the other marquee events, the team and driver play a greater role. For me it's more the fact that it's the 500 and it's the only race in NASCAR that you get the title for. In 2006 we also won the championship at the end of the year, but when we won the race it was mindblowing to me how, everywhere I went, I went from being NASCAR driver to Daytona 500-winning driver Jimmie Johnson – that literally came with the title."

With 30-plus races per year on the calendar, it's easy to see why family man Johnson has announced an end to his full-time career. But he's convinced he's got a chance of a title, and what better way to kick off than with the only race that can be considered bigger than a NASCAR crown – the 500? Johnson, ever the competitor, fancies a third win at the event to tie the legend that is Gordon. And the motivation is there to pull that off. 🏆



THORNS IN THE SIDE FOR BUSCH

Reigning champion Kyle Busch is a NASCAR superstar, but he's never won the Daytona 500. And this weekend's running of the famous race could fall to a dark horse instead

JACK BENYON

Kyle Busch will without doubt go down in NASCAR history as one of its best drivers. Even snapping his leg before the season started couldn't stop him from claiming a first Cup title in 2015 after missing 11 races, and another resolute campaign in 2019 delivered a second triumph. But still, one of NASCAR's biggest jewels eludes him.

To some, the Daytona 500 is an even bigger prize than the NASCAR championship. And it's not uncommon for great drivers – even great superspeedway aces – to take a long time to win a 500; Dale Earnhardt proved that, taking 19 years to claim his 1998 victory. Busch is four years off breaking that unwanted record, and there's little else for him to prove other than to go and win the 'Great American Race'.

He'll have strong competition, but the Joe Gibbs Racing team is one of the best when it comes to restrictor-plate racing – Busch's double Daytona 500-winning team-mate Denny Hamlin took last year's race with the Toyota-equipped squad. Of the active drivers, Hamlin and Busch have led the most laps at Daytona, while Busch has won on the other superspeedway at Talladega. JGR's Erik Jones also won last weekend's Daytona Busch Clash (see page 49).

The Chevrolet and Ford camps will have plenty to throw at Busch too. Of those with 10 starts or more at Daytona, the man with the best average finishing position is Richard Childress Racing's 2018 500 winner Austin Dillon. He'll be a challenger, especially as the Chevy marque brings an updated Camaro ZL1 1LE to the series this year, with engine updates expected to help.



Busch won last year's title, but still lacks a Daytona 500 trophy

The Hendrick Motorsports stable led by Jimmie Johnson, in what could be his last 500 (see p26), means the Bow-Tie is well covered, and Dillon's RCR team-mate Tyler Reddick comes with superspeedway pedigree (see p31).

At Ford, Brad Keselowski and Joey Logano are both fierce restrictor-plate racers – Logano won this blue-riband event as recently as 2015 – and their Team Penske squad is one of the big teams poised to challenge the pre-event-favourites tag enjoyed by Busch and Gibbs.

But this year there might just be an outsider to keep an eye on. Wood Brothers Racing – affiliated to the Penske set-up – is one of the most successful teams in NASCAR history and has been around since the 1950s. It also helped deliver one of the most incredible sporting upsets when Trevor Bayne won the 2011 event in just his second Cup Series start. That is one of only three Cup podiums of his career. The team's driver to watch this year is Matt DiBenedetto – he led the most laps of the 2019 Daytona 500 before he was caught in 'the big one', which always strikes on the superspeedways at Daytona and Talladega.

DiBenedetto had bounced around the 'smaller' teams in the Cup since 2015, but 2019 was his breakthrough year. Following his meteoric rise in the 500 that ended in disaster, his Leavine Family Racing effort helpfully bumbled along courtesy of Joe Gibbs Racing Toyota machinery. Sacked by Leavine in order for it to install a JGR protege for this year, his salvation in a Wood Brothers Ford means he has the full-time drive his breakout 2019 season deserves, and is confident of being a challenger at Daytona.

"We're going to be a strong team,



DiBenedetto (95) led eventual 2019 Daytona winner Hamlin (11) before 'the big one'



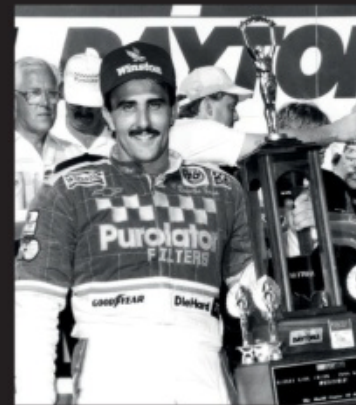


THE SHOCK OF THE 1990 DAYTONA 500

Once in a blue moon, the unpredictable nature of pack racing and the 'big one' – a crash that usually wipes out a large proportion of the field – throws up a shock winner in superspeedway racing. And arguably one of the biggest shocks in NASCAR history came at the 1990 Daytona 500. Winning any NASCAR race in that period was an achievement, with Dale Earnhardt, Bill Elliott, Rusty Wallace and Darrell Waltrip in the field, but 30 years ago everything fell the way of relative unknown Derrike Cope.

The Californian, who had competed only sporadically in NASCAR's top series, secured the backing of Purolator to sponsor a full campaign in 1988-89, and in 1990 a switch to Chevrolet pushed Cope forwards. Come the season-opening 500, he was a challenger 'all-day long' and the late-race caution that Cope's crew chief Buddy Parrott had promised opportunistically arrived to erase Earnhardt's lead. Earnhardt at this point had won three NASCAR titles but never the prestigious 500.

Earnhardt's bad luck was to continue. Having held a big lead before that late caution, he hit debris from Geoff Bodine's car, cutting a tyre. Cope hit the same debris, but he survived and headed home Terry Labonte and Elliott for the biggest win of his career.



DAYTONA INTERNATIONAL SPEEDWAY

A week later he was on the David Letterman show, and became one of the most famous sportsmen in the US thanks to his major upset.

"I knew it would change my life drastically and it would elevate my notoriety extensively," reflects Cope. "It was a moment in time that all of us didn't know what to expect or what it would do for us over time."

"The magnitude of winning that race, I don't think anyone realises what it does. People see you on David Letterman, which was a major happening. Your face becomes well known and you can't walk through an airport without someone stopping you. The sport was really in a special time right about then – that was when *Days of Thunder* was getting ready to come out, so there was a lot of attention."

Cope won again at Dover later that year, but it would be his last career victory. Even so, a long NASCAR career followed – it didn't end until 2018 – and now the 61-year-old is focused on the StarCom team that competes in the Cup Series.

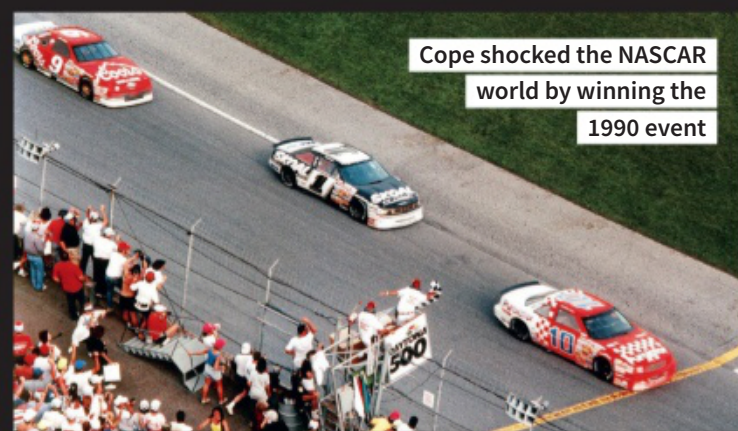
"THE THING IS WITH DAYTONA, THERE ARE SO MANY VARIABLES AND THINGS OUT OF YOUR CONTROL THERE"

we're going to turn heads all season long," says DiBenedetto. "But Daytona is always a big opportunity; the Fords are really fast there. They've had good success in the past, so if things work out we'll definitely have the race car and the speed to go out and contend for it. The thing is with Daytona, there are so many variables and things out of your control there. The thing I focus on with my team is doing everything to the best of our ability within our control and hope that the things out of our control go our way and allow us to contend for the win."

"Superspeedway racing has been something over the years I've studied hardest on and worked on the most to become a better plate racer, and it's directly correlated to my performance on the race track. It's become more and more down to a science. Drivers study more and make better decisions and that turned into team-mates working together and now that's turned into manufacturers working well together. There's a lot more studying and fine-tuning that goes into it now than, say, four or five years ago – it's drastically changed."

DiBenedetto's securing of the Wood Brothers ride was the feel-good story of 2019, and the best possible way to follow up on that would be with victory. But so much of Daytona is down to luck, and there's strong opposition for what is NASCAR's version of the Le Mans 24 Hours – the event that's bigger to some drivers than the championship. 🏆

P31 HOTLY TIPPED ROOKIE



Cope shocked the NASCAR world by winning the 1990 event

DAYTONA INTERNATIONAL SPEEDWAY

CONGRATULATIONS LEE DEEGAN



A massive congratulations to Lee Deegan and the whole team at Lee Deegan Racing on winning the Civic Cup in 2019 as well as winning several other races in other championships across the globe last year. Not only that but after a very busy and successful year Lee Deegan was also crowned Autosport's Top Club Driver.

This year sees Lee pushing forward in his racing career with plans being put into place for the Ginetta GT4 supercup. Firstly Lee would like to thank all of his current sponsors: SW Motorsports, Diggers Bury Ltd, Regency Autos and MRF tyres for all their support and work that made this all possible.

With taking this step towards racing on the TOCA package we are also looking for new sponsors to be involved from 2020 and beyond. Please email us to discuss all options at leedeegan@hotmail.co.uk or call us on **07976 281020**.



DAYTONA
500
PREVIEW

FROM XFINITY AND BEYOND

Two-time second-tier champion Tyler Reddick is the hotly tipped NASCAR Cup rookie in the Daytona 500 field

JACK BENYON

PHOTOGRAPHY NKP



This year's isn't the strongest rookie class in NASCAR Cup history, but one driver graduating to the big time *magna cum laude* is Tyler Reddick, the winner of the past two titles in the second-tier Xfinity Series. The 24-year-old from Corning, California will be one to watch from the get-go at this weekend's Daytona 500, having won at the track in the Xfinity and Truck Series championships on his slightly meandering path, where a switch to the famed Richard Childress Racing for 2019 realigned his route to stock car racing's highest level.

Reddick is likened to Kyle Larson for his ability to move around the race track, find different lines and, crucially, make his car work high or low on the circuit. And the signs are good for an immediate challenge at Daytona, as the Chevrolet teams have received a new front end and a tweaked engine package that should make the Camaro ZL1 1LE draft better. RCR itself won the 2018 500 with Austin Dillon, and is the most recent Chevy team to achieve the feat.

"Racing at 200mph around a superspeedway with the Cup drivers that are in the series, it's a recipe for disaster but that's what makes it really fun," is how Reddick describes it.

This will be his second 500. He started the race last year as part of a three-race Cup programme, but was eliminated in an accident, so he's still on his Daytona learning curve. The biggest thing for Reddick is the draft racing, how to get in position and ultimately

how not to annoy the people you need to push you to victory.

"You want to race hard but you don't want to aggravate the veterans of the sport if you will, and make them think you drive too aggressive for a rookie," explains Reddick. "That's one of the things that makes it different to racing at the other tracks we go to. You have to worry about what everybody else thinks about you because that can decide how much help you get at the end of the race."

For rookie of the year, Reddick's only real challengers are likely to be Cole Custer, who joins a Stewart-Haas team that won races in 2019, and Christopher Bell, who gets Joe Gibbs Racing-blessed machinery at the Leavine Family Racing squad.

In terms of his other targets, Reddick has lofty goals of making the playoffs – the final 10-race shootout for the title. In his Xfinity and Truck Series career he never took the most wins in a campaign, but it only takes one in NASCAR's current format to qualify for the end-of-season shootout. Despite the fact that Dillon's 2018 Daytona win remains RCR's most recent, and that none of its cars made the playoffs last year, Reddick is bullish.

"As crazy as it sounds, I feel like making the playoffs is not unrealistic," he says. "All you have to do is put together one good race. It's going to be a matter of executing and making the most of that day."

"I realise how difficult it is to win a race in the Cup series, especially as last year Joe Gibbs Racing won more than half of them, and you know, Penske and Haas, Penske won a lot of races and Kevin Harvick won towards the end of the year. But we've got a new body [the Camaro ZLE updates], we've got a new mindset, we're pumped up and we'll give it our best shot."

RCR showed signs of emerging from its slump at last year's Homestead finale. Maybe Reddick is exactly the type of confidence-inspiring and dreamy rookie it needs to push forwards. 🏆



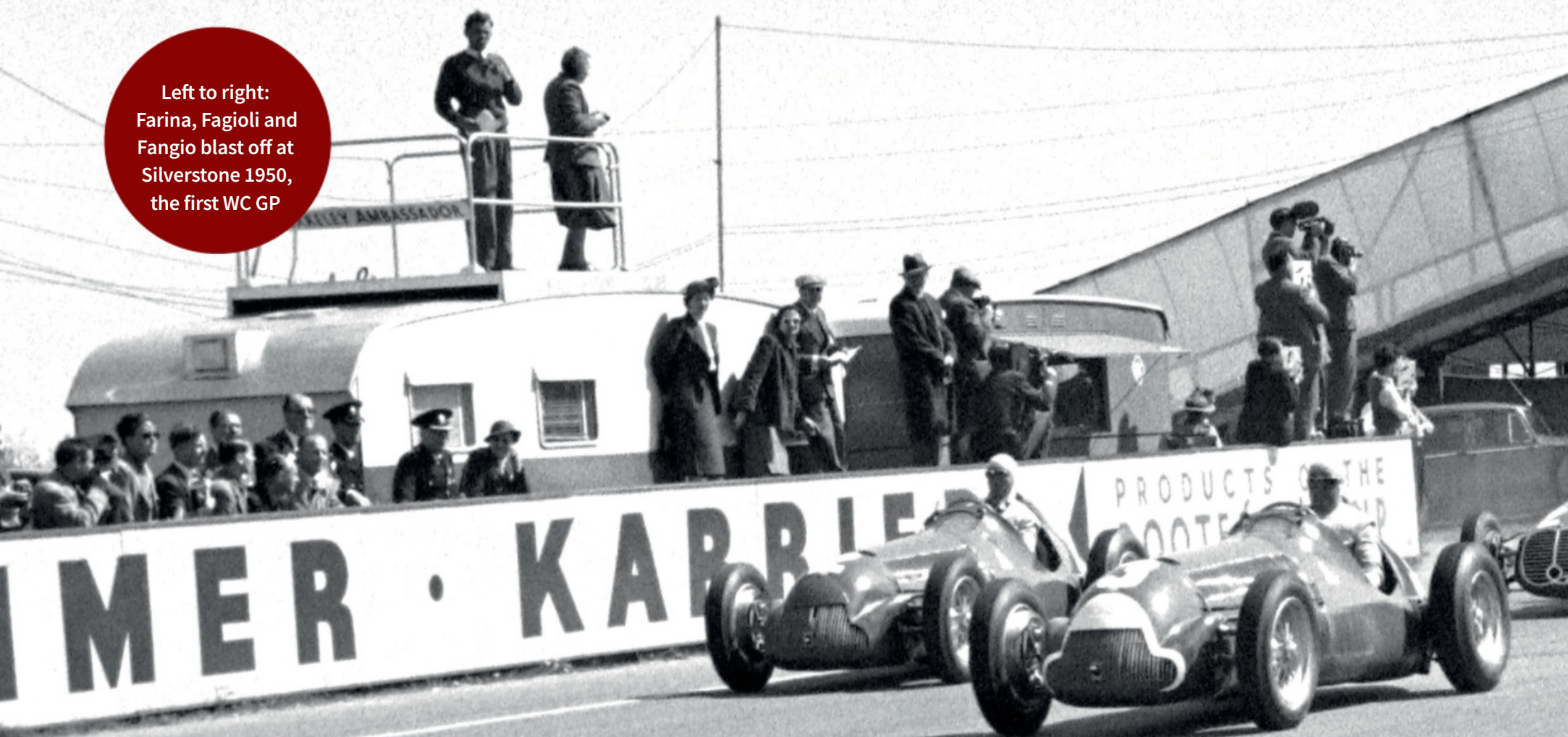
Reddick claimed his second Xfinity title in 2019 at Homestead

NEXT WEEK

DAYTONA 500 REPORT 20 FEBRUARY ISSUE

All the action from the 'Great American Race'. Plus coverage of Rally Sweden and Formula E from Mexico City.

Left to right:
Farina, Fagioli and
Fangio blast off at
Silverstone 1950,
the first WC GP



THE THREE-WAY CIVIL WAR THAT CROWNED F1'S FIRST ALFA MALE

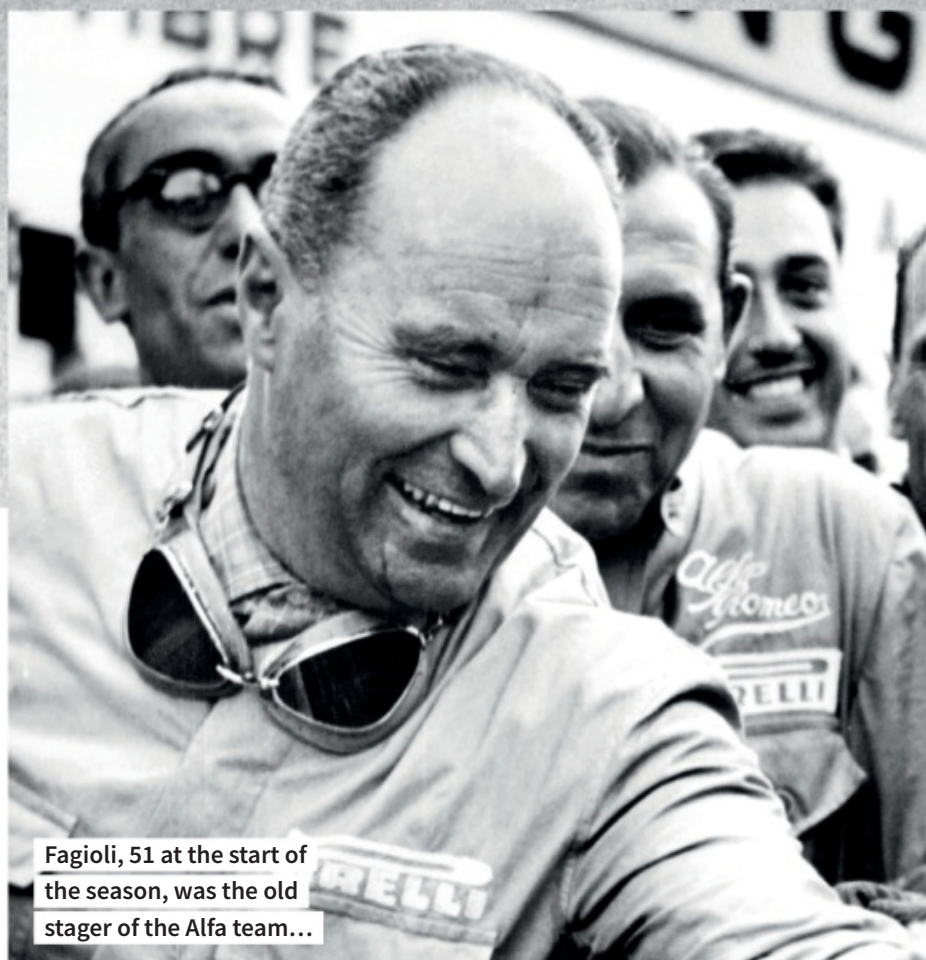
Farina, Fagioli and the exciting newcomer Fangio waged a season-long 1950 battle to become the first world champion, and all drove for Alfa Romeo

PAUL FEARNLEY

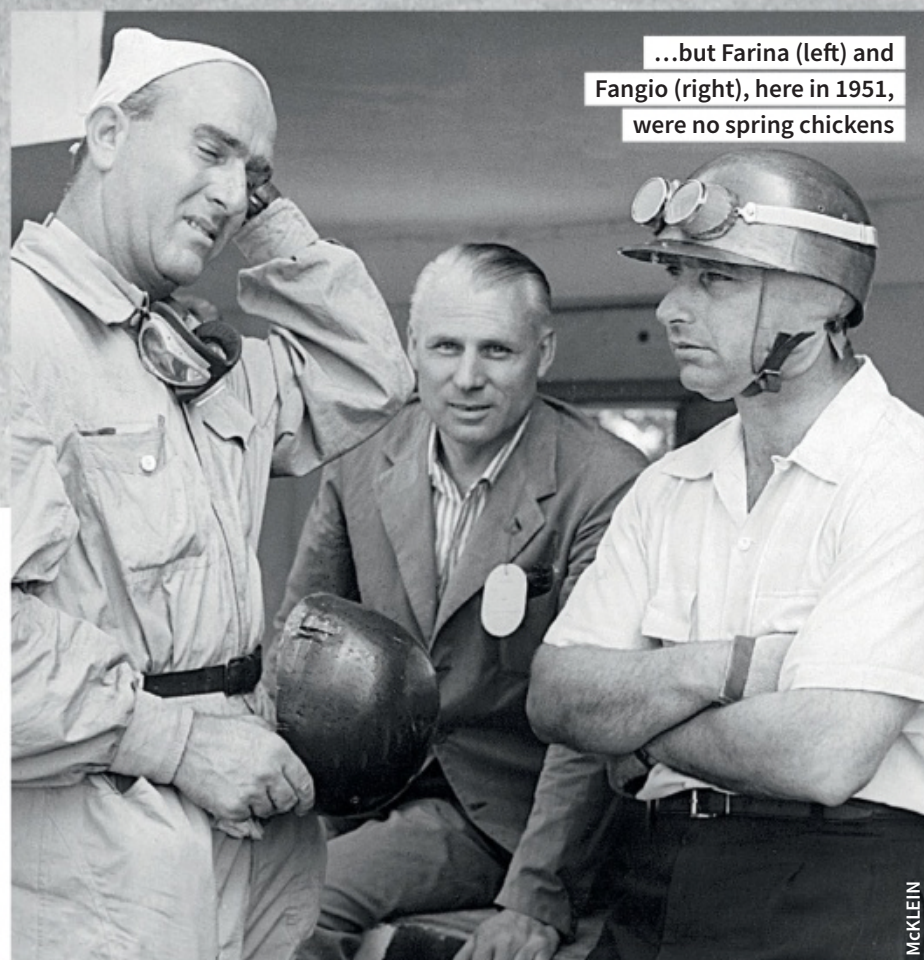
PHOTOGRAPHY  **motorsport
IMAGES**

The 'Three Fs' first performed in concert — for a royal audience at Silverstone — on Saturday 13 May 1950. A boy band they were not: their combined age was nudging 135 years. They were replacing a line-up swept away by accidents and illness within 10 months from July 1948: Achille Varzi (aged 43), Jean-Pierre Wimille (40) and Felice Trossi (41). And the car they were driving had first raced in August 1938. Age was no barrier in this age of no barriers.

Two of the Fs were wealthy, privileged Italians, long on experience but short of temper. The third was an outlier: a humble mechanic from Buenos Aires Province. One of them was well past 50 and his pre-Second World War career had been curtailed by crippling rheumatism. Another had unwisely injured himself — just two months before the inauguration of the Formula 1 World Drivers' Championship — in a crash during practice for a Formula 2 race of marginal note. Yet it was the signing of 38-year-old Argentinian Juan Manuel Fangio — the



Fagioli, 51 at the start of the season, was the old stager of the Alfa team...



...but Farina (left) and Fangio (right), here in 1951, were no spring chickens

sensation of 1949, and with close family links to the Abruzzo – that was exercising a pressing Italian press the most. His singleton entry for the San Remo Grand Prix – the return of the unbeatable Alfettas following a year's sabbatical in preparation – was at best tough love on Alfa Corse's part.

Fangio arrived at this seaside resort – 25 miles across the Italian border from Monte Carlo and boasting a circuit of similar aspect to that of its more famous neighbour – on the back of a second consecutive

Pau GP win aboard a Maserati. Though he had won at San Remo in 1949 too, he was taking little comfort from these breakthrough and confirmatory victories. Receipt of the offer from Alfa Romeo had been the happiest moment of his life – he likened it to being invited to perform at La Scala (a suitable venue for the Three Fs!) – but already (16 April) it felt like sink or swim. And that was before the heavens opened before the start.

Talk of Alfa's possible withdrawal and threats of legal action by the »

organisers had marred the build-up; Fangio's presence was confirmed at the last minute. No wonder he felt under pressure and little wonder he muffed his start from the middle of the front row. Once he settled to the task, however, he picked off the Ferraris of Raymond Sommer, Luigi Villoresi and Alberto Ascari before pacing himself to victory in changeable conditions. He was no longer knocking on the door; he had stepped right in – directly onto the toes of Giuseppe 'Nino' Farina.

The 'Gentleman of Turin' – stylishly elegant but as tough as old boots – was a fearsome competitor in the mould of his mentor Tazio Nuvolari. He had crashed injuriously from his debut event – a hillclimb, as long ago as 1932 – and thereafter carved a win-or-bust reputation. A doctor of political science, he kept his cards close out of the cockpit but was a decisive and effective performer in it, though inclined to gamble. He knew more than most what to expect of Fangio, having witnessed his progression during the winter-sun Temporada series from 1948-50, and given hellish chase during the 1949 Albi GP. On the latter occasion his Maserati had refused to fire after refuelling and, though he congratulated the victorious Fangio, he proffered the caveat that he hadn't deserved it. Fangio, being Fangio, agreed. Therein lay Farina's greatest advantage: confidence. That's not to say he lacked speed. Recovered from his injuries, he secured pole position for the Grand Prix of Europe at Silverstone – the four tenths separating him from Fangio being sufficient to allow Luigi

“FANGIO WAS NO LONGER KNOCKING ON THE DOOR; HE'D STEPPED RIGHT IN – ONTO THE TOES OF FARINA”

'Gigi' Fagioli to squeeze between them.

The 'Abruzzi Robber' – as tough as his dishevelled appearance suggested – had been a fearsome competitor against the likes of Nuvolari. He too had survived early spills – switching from bikes to cars as long ago as 1925 as a result – and preferred to park healthy machines rather than acquiesce to team orders. Such intransigence cost him his prime seat at Mercedes-Benz after 1936 – as it would for Farina at Alfa Romeo 10 years later. In possession of an unconvincing accountancy diploma, he wore his heart on bulging sleeve and muscled rather than coaxed cars, his powers of concentration and stamina formidable: in 1935 he became the first to lead a Monaco GP from start to finish. His fall from grace, however, was swift and inglorious – he had physically threatened former Mercedes-Benz team-mate Rudolf Caracciola in the aftermath of the 1937 Tripoli GP – and he hobbled from the sport after an inconsistent campaign with Auto Union.

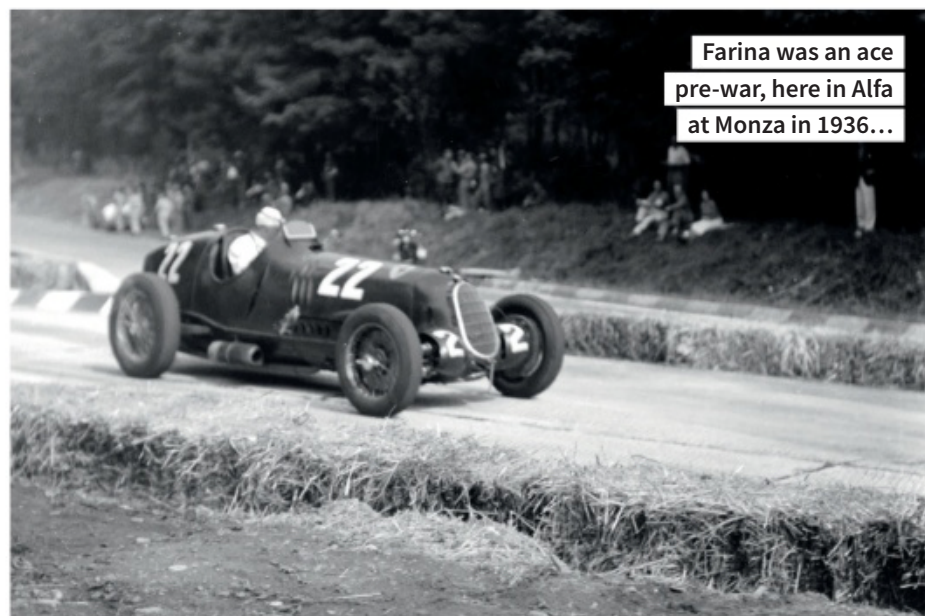
Farina's return had never been in doubt and nor was his determination to prove that he had not lost his best years to the war

Farina with the garland of victory after the 1950 British GP



(though probably he had). Having been the Alfetta's most successful campaigner of 1939 – he also won the 1940 Tripoli GP in one – he would score its first post-war triumph: the 1946 GP of Nations at Geneva. Though he sat out 1947 in a magnificent fit of pique, subsequent performances – victory in Monaco in a Maserati and, at Lake Garda, the first win for a Ferrari single-seater – had by 1948 put him back on the map and in Alfa Romeo's good books. Fagioli in contrast had made only sporadic and inconclusive post-war appearances in an OSCA sportscar. His fire had been damped and Fangio – or his ghostwriter at least – called him 'the stout-hearted dean of drivers': damned with fulsome praise. For sure Fagioli's stamina was of a lesser order now – measured consistency would keep him in the 1950 title race until the final round – and he seemed content to play third fiddle.

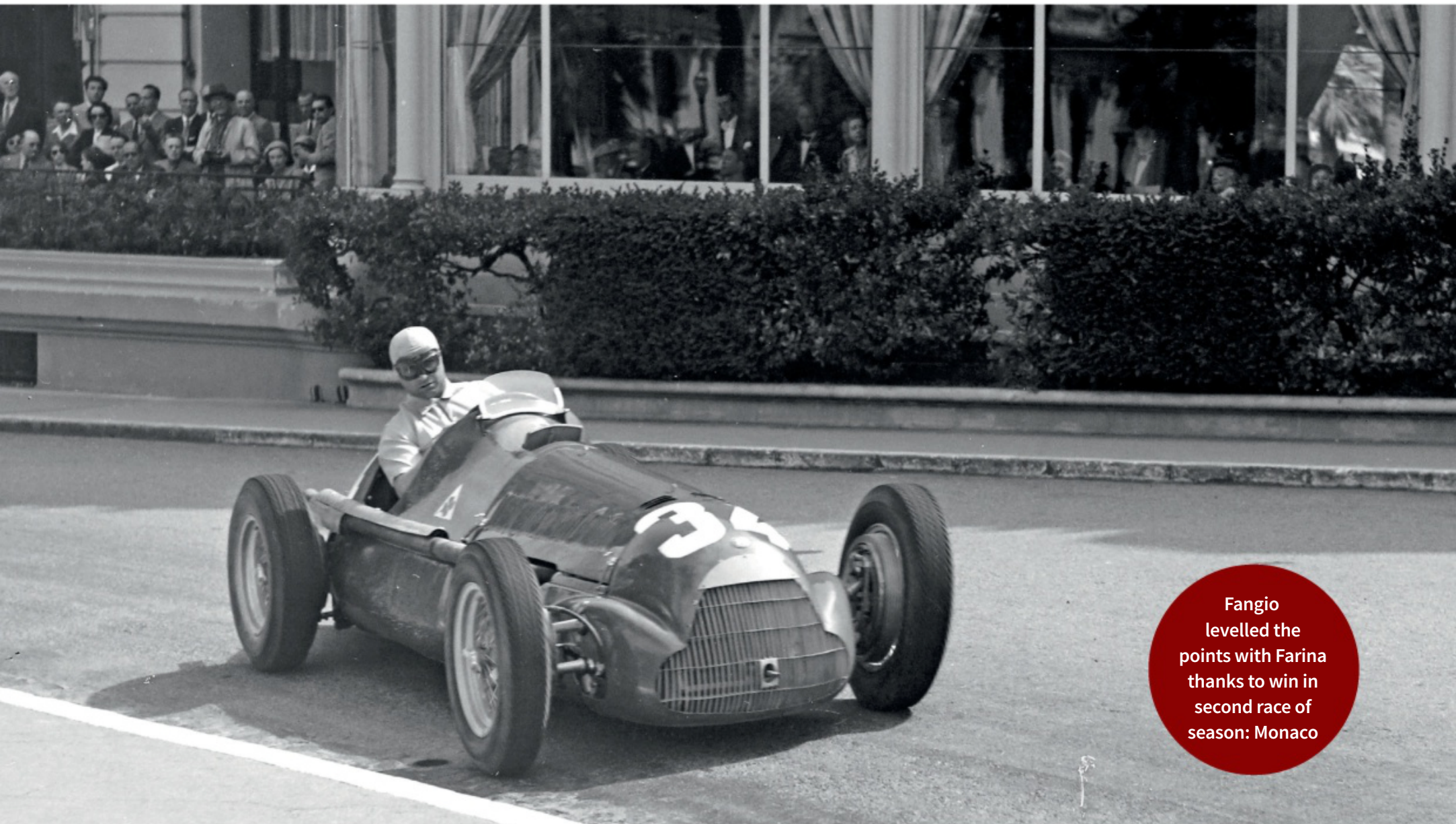
The same was not true of the mercurial Farina. He shot away from pole at Silverstone and set the race's fastest lap – worth a championship point – on the second lap. Having led the vast



Farina was an ace pre-war, here in Alfa at Monza in 1936...



...while Fagioli raced Mercedes Silver Arrow, here at Nurburgring



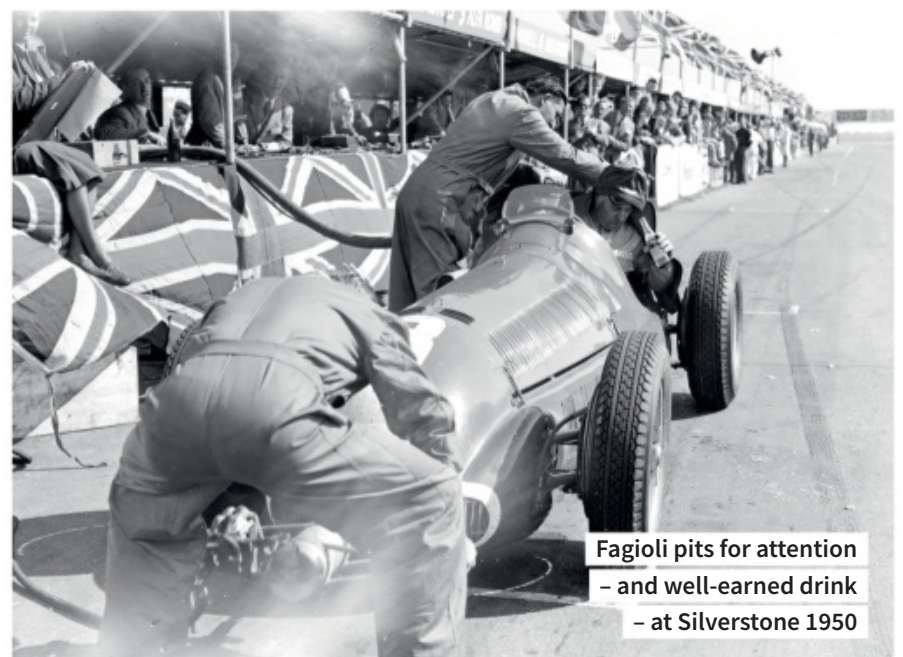
Fangio levelled the points with Farina thanks to win in second race of season: Monaco

majority of the race, he allowed Fagioli to close to within 2.6s at the chequered flag. Fangio had led only briefly and been the first to make a mistake – grazing a hay bale – before retiring because of an oil leak. Farina had put down a marker.

Fangio had known what to expect too. He admired Farina's relaxed stance at the wheel – copying it while adding some of Fagioli's brawn – but chafed at his no-prisoners racecraft. (So wary was Fangio that he even refused to passenger with him in a road car!) He had befriended easily Varzi and Wimille – the former enabled Fangio's first European foray; the latter tipped him for greatness – but Farina remained aloof. And that's how Fangio preferred it – at cramped Monaco at least. Determined to stay out of trouble, he passed the fast-starting Farina on the climb to Casino Square and thus was ahead of the pile-up at Tabac that eliminated his team-mates before the opening lap was complete. Fangio led throughout and set fastest lap.

Farina, however, was back on top at Bremgarten's Swiss GP and had Fangio in his pocket when the Argentinian retired because of engine trouble. The Italian set fastest lap too – as he would at Spa-Francorchamps. He and Fangio were inseparable in qualifying for the Belgian GP – Farina awarded pole due to his setting the time first – and they swapped the lead several times, neither able to pull away, until Farina's sagging oil pressure and/or seizing gearbox caused him an extra pitstop that relegated him to fourth place. Fangio, now five points shy of Farina and one behind Fagioli, was back in the game and daring to believe: "At the bottom of my heart I reproached myself, thinking that my candidature for that first-time world title was conceited. But the small flame of my ambition went on burning." Perish the thought that Farina's ghostwriter should have written such a thing. Red pen. Stricken through.

The battle continued in the French GP at Reims-Gueux, Fagioli mixing it before fading and Farina holding the upper hand until a fuelling issue delayed and then sidelined him. Fangio, unwilling to let Fagioli reduce the gap to within 25s in the closing stages, moved ahead in the points. Fagioli handed him the scrap of paper that confirmed it – and Farina's congratulatory wink "that said



Fagioli pits for attention – and well-earned drink – at Silverstone 1950

more than words" affirmed it. The rivalry was red hot but friendships had warmed, without thawing.

Before September's finale at Monza, there waged a (mainly) phoney war of non-championship races. Farina won at Bari after Fangio's car faltered, low on fuel, on the last lap of what had been a demonstration. Fangio won the GP of Nations, a race made real by the presence of Ferrari's gathering unsupercharged threat and the accident that killed three spectators – Farina crashing in avoidance at the scene. Pescara was another demonstration, with Fangio happy to cede to Fagioli in Farina's absence – despite having been more than 20s faster in practice – only to take victory when Fagioli's front suspension collapsed on the final lap. And the BRDC International Trophy at Silverstone was a thinly veiled sparring session, Farina crossing the line four tenths ahead of Fangio. The edge had generally been held by Fangio in qualifying, but there was little to choose between them in race conditions. >>



WHEN THE WAR WAS OVER



Formula 1 existed before the creation of a world championship for 1950, and was initially called Formula A. That nomenclature was a carryover from the capacity/weight sliding scale for supercharged and normally aspirated GP cars – up to a maximum of 3.0 and 4.5 litres respectively – that in 1938 had replaced the 750kg Formula.

Its 1947 successor reflected thwarted plans to halve the supercharged limit in 1940, and the reality that most racing cars available in the aftermath of the Second World War were either supercharged 1.5-litre voituresses or 4.5-litre grand

prix machinery from the 1930s.

The sport recovered quickly. Racing was held in Paris's Bois de Boulogne within four months of VE Day – Jean-Pierre Wimille, given leave from the Free French Air Force, winning the main event for Bugatti – and spread rapidly across (mainly) France in 1946. By 1947 the calendar was sufficiently full to warrant awarding the more important national races – the Swiss, Belgian, Italian and French – Grande Epreuve status: an international championship in all but name. Monaco came and went in 1948, the same year that Belgium skipped and

in which Britain arrived to stay. It was in 1948, too, that Formula 1 began its journey into common parlance and Formula 2 – originally known as Formula B – was codified.

Drivers with pre-war experience dominated the scene until the sport's dispersion into South America unearthed its first post-war hero. With support from his country's government – a sign that motor racing was on the up-and-up and once again a symbol of national pride and dynamism – Juan Manuel Fangio dipped his toe in European racing in 1948 before making a splash the following season: a wave

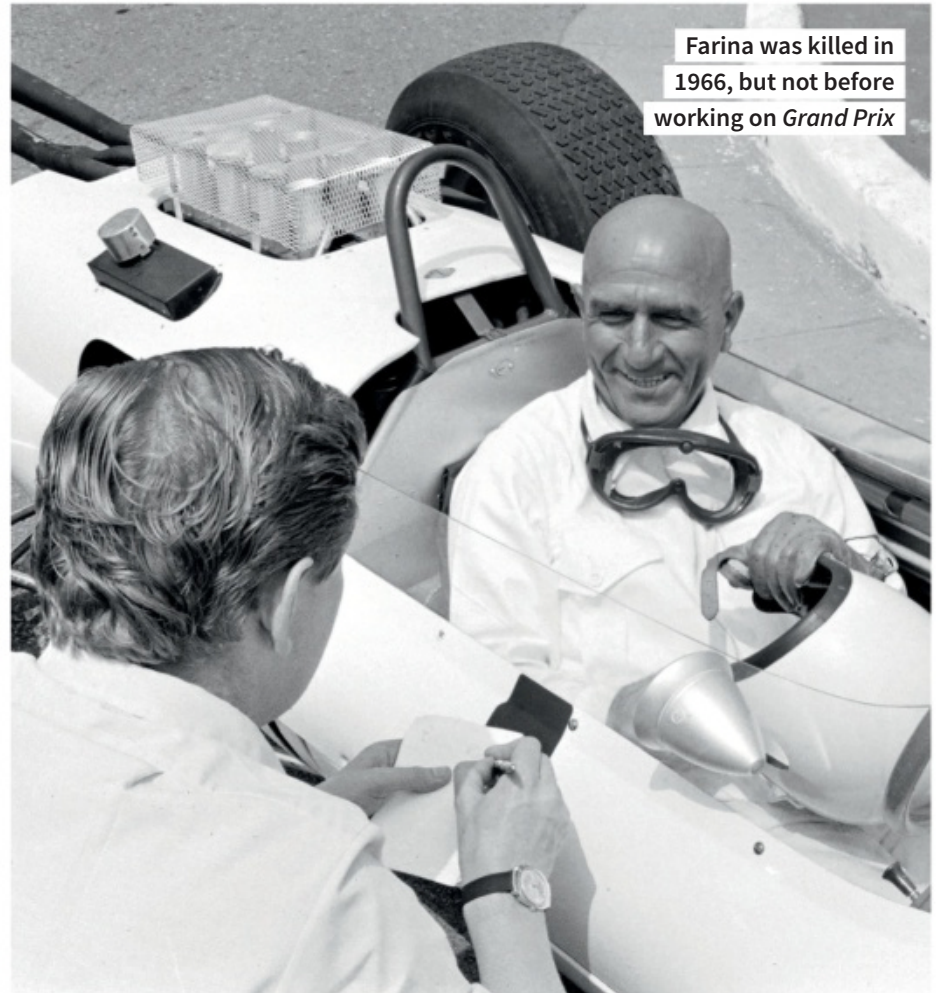
At the Italian GP, however, ran the strong rumour that Farina had been assigned the more powerful car. Fangio qualified on pole but Farina set the race pace, chased by the Ferrari of Alberto Ascari. Fangio, needing only to finish second to become world champion, had let Ascari through. His understandable caution, however, would go unrewarded; he pitted his smoking Alfa Romeo after 23 laps. There came a glimmer of hope when team-mate Piero Taruffi handed over his car – he and Fangio would have to share any points earned – but 10 laps later it dropped a valve.

Farina, five years Fangio's senior, had summoned the reserves to become a deserving champion. Fangio, in turn, had driven like the champion he would become. Their 1951 battle would be more clearly cut – and decided in Fangio's favour. The once-svelte Alfetta, now bulging with fuel tanks due to an excessive thirst, its supercharged 1.5-litre straight-eight boosted to within a psi of its life, demanded an iron fist within a velvet glove that Farina was either unable or unwilling to offer. Ferrari man Ascari was the championship rival

“FARINA, FIVE YEARS FANGIO'S SENIOR, SUMMONED THE RESERVES TO BE A DESERVING CHAMPION”

that Fangio had to beat now, and victory in the Barcelona finale allowed him to do just that.

His run to the title had included a victory at Reims, shared with Fagioli after Fangio's original car developed a misfire. The ignominy of standing aside, having been overlooked that season in favour of factory tester Consalvo Sanesi, was too much for the oldest winner of a world championship GP: aged 53 years and 22 days, Fagioli walked away – this time without the aid of crutches. He had one more great drive in him: third overall – ahead of Caracciola! – to win the GT class of the 1952 Mille Miglia in a two-litre Lancia Aurelia B20. Later that month of May, he crashed the same car during practice for the Prix de Monte Carlo. Newspapers ran photos showing him nursing a damaged knee and apparently in recovery, but he would die of his injuries three weeks after the event.



Farina was killed in 1966, but not before working on *Grand Prix*

Farina was by this time fuming in Ascari's shadow at Ferrari. He would win the 1953 German GP – after Ascari had lost a front wheel while leading – but thereafter his appearances became sporadic and increasingly wild. He retired in 1955 – morphine unable to quell the pain of his mounting injuries – but couldn't resist a misguided qualifying bid for the 1956 Indianapolis 500: Ferrari engine/Kurtis chassis was not a happy mix.

Crossing the Alps in the rain en route to the 1966 French GP at Reims, where he was to act as adviser/driver to the film-makers of *Grand Prix*, Farina lost control of his Ford Lotus Cortina and struck a telegraph pole. The original world champion was dead.

Fangio, a five-time world champion who died, aged 84, of natural causes, had the oldest head on the 'youngest' shoulders. He was not only the fastest of the Three Fs but also the wisest. ❧

of victories at San Remo, Pau, Perpignan, Marseilles, Monza (an F2 race but the most competitive and crucial of these wins) and Albi. The building blocks of a soaring career.

Fangio's last outing before returning home to Argentina to a hero's welcome was the French GP at Reims, where he was scheduled to also contest the F2 support race; he would start both from the front row and lead before retiring because of broken throttle cable and gear lever respectively. No matter, he was accepted widely as the sport's future.

For those perspicacious few capable of taking a longer-term view,



Varzi leads Wimille at start of 1947 Belgian Grand Prix at Spa

however, the sport's future lay with the bike-engined buzzbomb being pushed silently for the best part of a mile back to its pit by an Englishman not yet turned 20. Stirling Moss's

Cooper-JAP had failed on this occasion, but this little car – built in a garage in a west London suburb – with its engine sited behind its still amateur driver, were the unlikely

blueprints for an increasingly 'British' sport, much of their experience and expertise being gained and honed on converted airfields that also provided a circuit map of the road ahead.



STAT
10

It was Onyx's 10th F1 start when Johansson scored his podium in Portugal

NEARLY FAMOUS DEFINITELY INFAMOUS



Left to right: driver Stefan Johansson; engine builder Brian Hart; designer Alan Jenkins; team boss Mike Earle

The Onyx team went from nothing to an F1 podium in its first season, yet within 12 months it was gone. Here are the scarcely believable stories around its brief existence

GARY WATKINS

PHOTOGRAPHY



It's a tale that involves a snake, laundry bags stuffed full of Belgian francs, a Porsche deliberately set on fire in downtown Brussels and attempts to get hold of a bazooka. Yet the most remarkable thing about the Onyx squad's maiden season of Formula 1 in 1989 was the success it enjoyed with a car that hadn't turned a proper lap prior to the first grand prix. Imagine a team stepping up from Formula 2 today and making it onto the podium in year one after building up its machinery in the pits in Melbourne.

That's what Onyx did just over 30 years ago after making the move from Formula 3000. Its Cosworth DFV-engined ORE-1s were barely finished when they briefly took to the track at the Brazilian Grand Prix in March, yet the best of them had made it into the points by the middle of the year. Before the season was out, lead driver Stefan Johansson would add to his points tally with a famous podium at Estoril.

What makes it all the more amazing is that the F1 entry that year boasted no fewer than 39 cars, and 13 of them, the two Onyxes included, had to fight through a one-hour prequalifying session at an indecent hour on Friday morning. Four cars went through to qualifying proper, and for the rest it was weekend over.

As for the bundles of cash, city-centre pyrotechnics and ballistic weapons, they were part of the backdrop to the team's highs and lows provided by a maverick backer who became the British team's majority shareholder during the summer. The late Jean-Pierre van Rossem, described by Autosport that season as looking like "an out-of-work sumo wrestler", kept Onyx on track and the rest of the F1 paddock entertained. The Belgian can't be blamed for the snake, though.

The name of van Rossem and his shady Moneytron investment >>

Lehto presses on at Monaco.
It was be one of his few
starts for Onyx in 1990



It was a rush to get the ORE-1 ready for the first race at Rio Jacarepagua

company that provided the bulk of the team's budget are inextricably linked to the tale of Onyx. But the story of the operation from the Sussex coast moving to the big time predated his involvement by the better part of 18 months.

Onyx boss Mike Earle wasn't new to F1, though by his own admission he'd only ever "dealt around the peripheries". He'd had brief involvements at the pinnacle of the sport alongside all-action hero David Purley in 1973 and 1977, and again with Emilio de Villota in 1982 after starting his own team in between times. With Stefano Modena leading the 1987 F3000 points in an Onyx-run factory March and turbocharged engines on their way out of F1, Earle reckoned it was "time to give F1 another go".

There was also a desire in Marlboro circles to start some kind of B-team underneath McLaren. Modena was sponsored by the Philip Morris tobacco empire and Onyx was a key player in its young-driver programme.

"The plan was for us to be a kind of Marlboro junior team with Stefano," says Earle, who recalls that the idea was to run in the gold-and-white of

its Lights brand. John Hogan, who ran Philip Morris's sponsorship activities out of Switzerland, confirms that there was a clear idea to run a second team "because we'd run out of places to put our drivers", but reckons it was never conceived as a vehicle to promote Marlboro Lights.

Earle brought in former McLaren designer and engineer Alan Jenkins on the advice of old mate John Watson, who was part of a south coast racing clique that included sportscar legend Derek Bell. "Wattie was a good friend of mine and a good friend of Jenks's," recalls Earle. "He'd been at McLaren and worked alongside John Barnard, so I thought he must have soaked up lots of his experience and expertise. Our first meeting was at the Birmingham Superprix in August 1987, which we won with Stefano."

Within months, Jenkins had left his role with the Penske CART squad to join Onyx, but he admits that he was doubtful of its chances of making it to F1 in 1988 even before Marlboro decided not to go through with its plan. "There wasn't really an Onyx F1 team at that point," says Jenkins, who had engineered Watson and Alain Prost at McLaren in 1983 and 1984 respectively. "It was just me and a drawing board in my bedroom. It was never going to happen for 1988."

Earle and Jenkins have differing opinions on whether Onyx would have actually made it into F1 the following year without van Rossem. Earle says, "Yes, but not in the manner that we eventually did it", while Jenkins is more forthright. "Van Rossem's money was what got it all started again," he says.

The deal with van Rossem was brokered by Pascal Witmeur, a mover-and-shaker in Belgian motorsport. He managed Eric van de Poele and approached the financial guru for sponsorship for F3000 after running into an old friend – a Ferrari dealer – in a restaurant. "He told me he'd just sold van Rossem his 11th Ferrari," recalls Witmeur. "He gave me his number and told me I should talk to him."

Van Rossem dismissed the idea of sponsoring an F3000 team. He declared in no uncertain terms that any money he put into racing would go to F1. That explains why Bertrand Gachot got a call straight after the meeting. "I didn't manage him, but I'd known Bertrand since he was young and we spoke all the time," recalls Witmeur.



Onyx had run Stefano Modena to 1987 F3000 title with a March



Gachot came as part of Belgian connection

"I'VE GOT A PHOBIA ABOUT SNAKES, SO I WAS ON THE BRAKES AND OUT OF THE CAR BEFORE IT HAD STOPPED"

"He reckoned he didn't have time to go to see this guy, but I told him very clearly to do it. Fortunately he did."

Onyx already had one driver under contract by the time Gachot and the Moneytron cash arrived in early 1989. Johansson had signed as early as the Australian GP weekend the previous November after local property developer Paul Shakespeare bought into the team that autumn and allowed it to push on with its F1 plans.

Just as Jenkins had been recommended by Watson, so the designer put forward Johansson's name. They'd worked together at Ron Dennis's Project 4 team in 1980. The Swede won that year's British Formula 3 Championship, while the Brit worked in a tiny office known as the fish tank alongside Barnard and Steve Nichols on what would eventually become the revolutionary carbon-chassis McLaren MP4/1.

Onyx had a glitzy – "tasteless", said Autosport – launch at the Hippodrome, then a nightclub rather than the casino of today, in London's Leicester Square in March 1989. The car on display was taken straight to Heathrow for immediate dispatch to Rio de Janeiro for an official pre-season test directly ahead of the Brazilian GP, but it wasn't anywhere near a runner.

"The car at the Hippodrome was far from finished," recalls Jenkins. "We effectively built up the cars in the pits at Rio, mostly out of bits brought out in suitcases. It wasn't that you could blame anyone; it was just that we didn't have the money until the last minute."

Autosport recounted that the nosebox collapsed on Johansson on his first lap out of the pits on the Jacarepagua circuit. Once a new one



Van Rossem was the colourful backer with money to burn

arrived from the UK – presumably in another suitcase – Johansson went back out. This time it was the car's gearbox that broke before he could complete a lap.

The newcomers desperately needed some kind of running before heading into the prequalifying shootout and the team found a local kart track at which it could undertake a shakedown of sorts. Again, the run came to a premature halt, at least initially thanks to the aforementioned snake. "We'd put some planks on a pick-up truck so we could put the car on it to get it to this tiny go-kart place," recalls Johansson. "I was going down the tiny front straight and ran over a gigantic snake. All I remember was seeing it flying up in the air. I was convinced that it had come down in the cockpit. I've got a real phobia about snakes, so I was on the brakes and out of the car before the thing had stopped."

Neither Johansson nor Gachot made it through prequalifying, and predictably so. "Everything was a guesstimate," recalls Jenkins. "We sent the drivers out and the first thing we could hear was the cars on the rev limiter down the back straight. I'd got top gear wrong!" But Johansson >>

wasn't dismayed: "You could tell the car was good even in those first few laps in Rio. The car felt right — it wasn't one of those when you get in and you think, 'This is going to be hard work'"

The ORE-1 wasn't quite the conventional kit car that it might have appeared. It was designed on CAD, using the facilities of automotive specialist IAD in Brighton, and had a bespoke Xtrac transverse gearbox to, says Jenkins, "get the weight between the axles to make the thing change direction better. I remember Patrick Head wandering down the pitlane in Rio and looking at the car. He said, 'Well, you're brave'"

Onyx came through prequalifying for the first time with Johansson in round four at Mexico City after a near-miss in Monaco. In France, both cars made it into qualifying proper and Johansson finished fifth from 13th on the grid. Gachot, who'd outqualified his more experienced teammate in 11th, would have been sixth had not a battery lead come loose.

A points score so early was an impressive result for an F1 newbie, but what it achieved three months later at the Portuguese GP seems

“PATRICK HEAD WANDERED DOWN THE PITLANE IN RIO AND LOOKED AT THE CAR. HE SAID, ‘WELL, YOU’RE BRAVE’”



An F1 team that would not be around for long

outlandish by today's standards. Reliability played its part, but so did twin gambles made by the team. "Once we got on top of the car we knew we could qualify well if we got out of prequalifying," explains Jenkins. "We'd be knocking on the top 10, but as the season went on it was becoming that much harder to get up there. I spent a long time with Brian Hart [who built the team's DFVs] in the run-up to the race asking if there was anything we could do to find an extra 10 or 12bhp to put the car a couple of places further up the grid. We eventually came up with quite a complex change to the oil system for a qualifying-only engine."

The second gamble was to run non-stop through the race on one set of Goodyear tyres. "That was the whole strategy from the beginning and we always felt a podium was a possibility if we executed well," says Johansson. "We ran two laps on the tyres in practice before putting them to one side to cure. You might be a tenth or two off at the beginning but you could gain that back 10 times over."

From 12th on the grid, Johansson passed four cars in the opening 10 laps. His progress up the order continued when the pitstops began. The Swede was running fifth when Nigel Mansell and Ayrton Senna had their famous coming-together. Riccardo Patrese briefly demoted the Onyx out of the podium positions before retiring with overheating.

It was a close-run thing for Johansson. The hard-worked left-front



Johansson passed Larrousse Lola of Michele Alboreto on way to third in Portugal 1989

tyre was shot by the finish. "There was no rubber left across half the tyre and I could see the steel radials," he says. "I was just hoping that the thing wasn't going to go pop through that long last corner."

The Onyx also ran out of fuel on the slowing-down lap, which meant Johansson was late to the podium. By that time race winner Gerhard Berger had

cleared off, leaving him to celebrate with second-placed Prost.

The lack of fuel and worn tyres very nearly resulted in the exclusion of the Onyx. Jenkins reveals today that the car was on the cusp of failing post-race scrutineering, the digital scales fluttering at just under the minimum weight. "Then someone pulled up roller-doors on the scrutineering bay, the wind blew in and the read-out flicked onto the minimum," he recalls. "Charlie [Whiting, F1 technical delegate] quickly said, 'Right, you're through, I've got a plane to catch'"

For all the euphoria of a podium, all wasn't well at Onyx. Van Rossem had bought Shakespeare's shares in the team, and he and Earle had more or less stopped speaking as the new owner became ever more unpredictable. "In Phoenix he told me to rent a bazooka," recalls Witmeur. "I asked him what he was going to do with a bazooka. 'I want to put one million dollars in it and spray it into the tribunes,' he said. 'Then I will have instant worldwide publicity.' The problem was that the law in America didn't actually allow you to do that. I could tell you 200 stories about van Rossem just like that one. He was a crazy guy."

Van Rossem was never one to pull his punches in public and was loose-tongued in the extreme when it came to dealing with the press in his homeland. He was chasing a deal for the forthcoming Porsche V12 engine for 1991, which came with a reputed \$40million price tag, and



declared that if he didn't get it he'd wave goodbye to F1. Onyx had what Earle calls "a skeleton of an agreement" to use the engine. All parties agreed to stay shunt while the details were thrashed out, only for the news to be plastered over the Belgian newspapers the following day. It was clear who had told them.

The Porsche deal eventually went to Arrows with backing from future owner Footwork, and van Rossem remained true to his word. "After we had to tell van Rossem that the Porsche deal had been cancelled, I got a phone call telling me that he'd taken his Porsche road car down to central Brussels and set it on fire," says Earle. "I thought, 'Well that shows them.'"

Van Rossem was keeping the team afloat, though getting the money wasn't always easy. Johansson remembers "sitting in his office in Antwerp with Alan telling him that we weren't leaving until we got the money for the team" on more than one occasion. Johansson also wouldn't see one dollar of his retainer until the penultimate round in Japan: "I was staying in Tokyo for a few days to get over the jetlag when van Rossem calls me at something like nine in the evening, asking if I could get over to the Imperial Palace Hotel right away. He said, 'I've got something for you.'"

"Up in his massive suite, he has this suitcase full of cash. It was my salary for the year — in Belgian francs, which at the time was something like seven [we reckon 40! — ed] to the dollar. Then he asks for the bag back! So I had to stuff this money into laundry bags and walk out of the hotel."

The decline of Onyx was swift. Earle and long-time partner Joe Chamberlain walked away from the team shortly after the final race of the season. Jenkins took over the running of the team and scabbled together a budget for the 1990 season opener at Phoenix.

It was over the weekend of the US Grand Prix that it emerged Onyx had a new owner. Peter Monteverdi, a sometime niche manufacturer of sportscars in Switzerland, had bought the team. Shortly afterwards, Jenkins found a lawyer sitting in his office one morning and was summarily dismissed. Johansson was given the push too, when he declined Monteverdi's offer to continue driving without payment.

Earle was brought back to run the team, only to walk out again in

double-quick time. "Some of the things Monteverdi was talking about doing were quite frankly dangerous," he recalls. "He couldn't get his head around the idea that everything on the car had to be lifed. He'd ask why we were changing the suspension when they'd only done a couple of tests. He said, 'Why don't you make them stronger?' I told him because they'd be too heavy."

Monteverdi carried out his promise to move Onyx to Switzerland and performances continued to decline along with reliability. Gregor Foitek, who had replaced Johansson alongside JJ Lehto, walked away after a repaired suspension component failed on him on at the Hungaroring. His team-mate failed to qualify too, and the team, which had been allowed to change its name to that of its new owner, was not seen again.

It was an ignominious end to a team that had promised so much. "It is a sad story in many ways, but to get a podium so early still ranks as one of the great days I remember," says Jenkins. "I had a reasonably long career and I was lucky to win a lot of races with Alain, so there are quite a few days to think of." ❧



WHY A LE MANS WINNER PLAYS GAMES

Many drivers compete online, but it's not necessarily for the reasons you think

KEVIN TURNER

PHOTOGRAPHY HOYER/JEP

The role of simulators in modern motorsport is well established, but what about racing games? Max Verstappen and Lando Norris teamed up to win the virtual Spa 24 Hours last year and real racing drivers are often competitive in the virtual world, but what are the benefits?

Factory Porsche GT driver and outright 2015 Le Mans 24 Hours winner Nick Tandy is one of many active racers who compete on *iRacing*. His main motivation isn't to try set-ups or even learn tracks – it's much more fundamental than that.

"The main reason I do it is for the fun factor – it's the competitive aspect I enjoy," says the 35-year-old. "The level is good and you can race at any ability level."

"If you're really good you get placed in higher 'splits' for each event – you get grouped together with your ability level, which is logged during your career. It's very well structured. It's professionally set up for competition, rather than just a driving simulator."

Anyone who has played online racing games will know the frustration of rogue 'players' deciding to cause trouble and take people off rather than drive properly, but *iRacing* is well policed. For those familiar with Tandy's successful but sometimes dramatic career, it perhaps won't come as a surprise that he has incurred the wrath of the online officials.

"I got banned for two weeks once!" he says. "I was racing at Iowa in NASCAR Xfinity and I got turned around. Then I purposely spun as I rejoined to try to get a safety car so I could catch up. That actually happened, but someone protested. They reviewed the replay and banned me. I had no complaints."

"They also only let you drive certain cars when you start and you have to gain licences by good driving. The main point is it's regulated competition. It's like a proper series, not just a game."

It's not just drivers who are



getting involved either. Manufacturers have seen the benefits of potentially attracting a new, younger audience.

In 2018 Tandy attended an *iRacing* event organised by Porsche. Following on online competition in a Carrera Cup car, the fastest players, Tandy and another wildcard took part in a two-day event. "I went there thinking that if I wasn't last that would be a big result," says Tandy. "I qualified in the top 16 in the individual stuff



Tandy's home sim set-up is useful for staying race sharp – but most of all it's good fun

on day one and then we were paired up on day two. I eventually finished third with my team-mate. But I'm far from the top level because, like in all sport, you need to practise."

The event was primarily a promotional one for Porsche to "get people in the growing industry that is Esports to recognise the brand". The 2019 Porsche Esports Supercup championship had a prize pool of \$100,000 and the champion got to attend Porsche's Night of Champions, underlining online gaming's growing importance.

As with any contest, the level of professionalism has increased with time too. "The quick ones get paid to work within the industry," asserts Tandy. "There's not a lot of money in the competitions at the moment, but it's a bit like driver coaching – giving advice. It's going

more that way, towards professionalism. It's still growing. It's another branch of motorsport."

That last line probably won't go down well with motorsport purists, but anything that can get more people interested in the sport as a whole must surely be welcomed. Better to embrace it than spurn it.

Beyond the competition, Tandy has used *iRacing* to help some elements of his driving, though that's very much a secondary appeal. "There's also the circuit-learning aspect of it," he adds. "It's unbelievable how accurate the tracks are. At Brands Hatch even the lights on the main straight are in the right place and facing the right way. Generally, bumps and kerbs are 90% correct.

"When I went to the States [to compete in IMSA in 2014] I didn't know the tracks so I did a lot of learning them beforehand >>



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— that’s why I got this set up.”

And Tandy’s racing room is impressive. As well as his various trophies, helmets and models of many cars he has raced, his *iRacing* rig includes the usual seat and pedals, plus three screens and, perhaps coolest of all, the steering wheel from one of his 2014 911 RSR race cars. His PC was bought specifically for the task, much of the equipment is from Fanatec and he has Heusinkveld pedals — “I’ve found pedals are very important for good performance,” says Tandy. “It’s very difficult to control traction on a sim. In reality when you lose traction you feel it, but when you do on the game you don’t feel anything.”

Pretty much every track you can think of is available, including the American dirt ovals, and scores of cars can be bought. Tandy is a NASCAR fan and also likes driving the game’s Formula 3 Dallara, but on Autosport’s visit he selects a 2017 911 RSR GT racer, an LMP1 919 Hybrid and a ludicrously hairy Dirt Midget.

In 2018, JTR’s Porsche Carrera Cup drivers — and Tandy — would have an *iRacing* contest at the upcoming circuit on the real calendar, though Tandy admits the results were normally dictated by “who practised the most”.

The set-up possibilities are almost limitless. That’s good for getting the virtual cars to handle and lap close to the real thing — power, weight and grip can be adjusted to match what the cars do in reality. “They offer parameters to change, just like the real car,” says Tandy. “On the Porsche 919 you can mess about with everything you can on the real car. Even more sometimes — in GTLM we’re restricted to three sets of gear ratios, but online you can do what you like.”

Despite that, it’s in the set-up area that Tandy feels the game is least useful for real racing. “It’s still a sim, so having



THE FALLACY OF ‘NATURAL TALENT’

Like Autosport, Porsche ace Nick Tandy is not a fan of the phrase ‘natural talent’. All too often drivers are described as having it — or not. Lewis Hamilton is frequently referred to as a ‘natural talent’, but that’s a lazy way of explaining his success, and completely underplays the amount of hard work that goes in to being the best.

Many would describe Tandy as a ‘natural racer’ given his record of dropping into unfamiliar machinery, from Formula Palmer Audi to British Touring Cars, and

being quick immediately, but he honed his skills on the family farm and in Ministox. And he has always put the graft in to making the most of his one-off outings, such as placing friends and colleagues around the circuit to see what the best drivers are doing.

The progress of returning finalists in the Aston Martin Autosport BRDC Award also reveals the nonsense of the ‘they’ve got it or they haven’t’ myth.

“I’m sure it’s true in every sport, or walk of life,” agrees Tandy. “The best golfers are the ones who



Set-up options are “too much”.
Top left: wheel is from 911 RSR GT;
bottom left: decent pedals are
vital for good performance

the availability of set-up options is too much,” he reckons. “What you can get out of the system is just due to what’s been put into it. In reality tracks evolve and weather changes and you set up for that. In the sim it’s already hard-wired. It lacks the nuance. “We test things at Porsche, such as set-up changes, but it’s the same thing. You’ve got to be very careful changing really minor things [and drawing conclusions].”

So *iRacing*’s appeal for real racers is less about the tracks and the cars and more about the combat. With 20-odd cars in each race and some series running a race every hour, there’s plenty of it.

“It’s good for getting into the right mindset, particularly if I’ve not raced for a while,” adds Tandy. “You’ve got to concentrate from lap to lap, just like reality, and have the same anxiety before the race – probably more so because I’m more familiar with a real race start.

“Most drivers I know race. Sometimes I might go on it every day for a couple of weeks, sometimes I might not for months. If you’re good at a sport it’s because you’re competitive. I do it to enjoy it and if I’m losing I don’t enjoy it!” ❦



Tandy is a versatile racer,
here winning in Formula
Palmer Audi in 2007

started when they were youngest. The best footballers have played the most. With the factory drivers, you’re bound to be good if you’re driving cars all the time.”

There are, of course, natural traits that can help, such as good hand-eye coordination, but it

takes a lot more to be successful.

“You can have abilities, but that’s not the same thing as ‘natural talent,’” continues Tandy. “You need thousands of hours of practice in order to excel, and the intelligence and application to make the most of the experience.”

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TILTON/GETTY IMAGES

Jones wins all-too-literal 'Clash'

BUSCH CLASH
DAYTONA (USA)
9 FEBRUARY

The Daytona Speedweeks kicked off with a chaotic Busch Clash, eventually won by Toyota Camry driver Erik Jones.

The Joe Gibbs Racing pilot was one of only six drivers to finish the non-points race, which unofficially marks the start of the 2020 NASCAR Cup season, after four multi-car accidents caused stoppages and extended the race by 13 laps.

The first incident came just 10 laps before the scheduled chequered flag, when then race leaders Joey Logano and Kyle Busch collided. Long-time leader Brad Keselowski was caught up in the incident, as was last year's race winner Jimmie Johnson.

As the field prepared to go racing again, Ryan Newman and William Byron triggered a pile-up when they moved down from the outside line. All but the leading three were caught up in the crash, which prompted a

red flag and sent the race into overtime.

The final two incidents happened before the field could complete a full lap after the restart. On the first attempt, race leader Denny Hamlin spun out and collected a number of drivers. Then Kyle Larson and Chase Elliott collided on the penultimate restart, prompting the final caution period.

Chevrolet driver Austin Dillon had managed to navigate the race relatively unscathed to head the six-car field at the final restart.

But, now a lap down, Jones's team-mate Denny Hamlin proved pivotal in the outcome of the lead. He shoved Jones into first place on the final lap.

Newman was also in the mix as part of a three-way fight for the win. He led at the start of the final lap before Jones ultimately swept past to take the victory. Dillon and Clint Bowyer completed the podium.

Larson, Newman, and Hamlin were the only others to make the finish.

BETHONIE WARING

WEEKEND WINNERS



Jones won with some of his car still intact...

TILTON/GETTY IMAGES

BUSCH CLASH
DAYTONA (USA)
Erik Jones
Joe Gibbs Racing (Toyota Camry)

TOYOTA RACING SERIES
PUKEKOHE (NZL)
Race 1 Liam Lawson
M2 Competition
Race 2 Jackson Walls
MTEC Motorsport
Race 3 Liam Lawson
M2 Competition



For full results visit motorsportstats.com

Lawson resumes TRS control

TOYOTA RACING SERIES
PUKEKOHE (NZL)
8-9 FEBRUARY
ROUND 4/5

Red Bull Junior Liam Lawson moved back into the driving seat on the Toyota Racing Series' first visit to Pukekohe since 2009, with two wins – including the prestigious New Zealand Motor Cup – putting him back in front in the points as he bids for a second successive title.

Polesitter Lawson lost the lead at the start of race one to M2 Competition team-mate and pre-weekend points leader Igor Fraga, but got past at Turn 5 on the opening lap. Fraga was edged off

line, allowing another M2-run Red Bull Junior, Yuki Tsunoda, up to second.

Despite Fraga's efforts, Tsunoda held on to second, with Ido Cohen making it a 1-2-3-4 for M2 on the road after a race that featured two safety cars. But if there's one thing that infests TRS races almost as much as cautions, it's penalties, and Tsunoda and Cohen were pinged down to fourth and seventh for speed infringements on the formation lap. This promoted Fraga to second and Franco Colapinto to third.

Fraga's challenge to Lawson in the NZ Motor Cup finale was foiled on the opening lap when he was tapped into a spin by Gregoire Saucy. The Swiss was rewarded with a drivethrough penalty, elevating



Red Bull Junior Lawson snared pole and two wins

the Kiwi Motorsport car of Colapinto to second and Lirim Zendeli (Giles Motorsport) to third, while Tsunoda charged from 16th on the grid to fourth. A safety car helped Fraga up to eighth.



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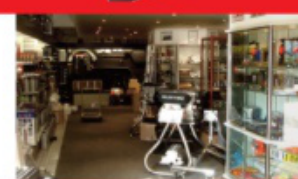


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A Williams F1 car, predominantly blue and white, is shown from a rear three-quarter view on a racetrack. The car features various sponsor logos including 'ROKIT', 'Rexon', 'Acron', 'SOFT', 'ORLEN', and 'V'. The driver's helmet is visible in the cockpit. The background shows a blurred racetrack and a red safety barrier.

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Falvey won the Caterham 270R title in 2018 but now moves to Ginettas

DAVE ARCHER - KINGSIZE PHOTOGRAPHY



CATERHAM, CIVIC CHAMPS JOIN GT4 SUPERCUP GRID

GINETTA GT4 SUPERCUP

Club racing champions Jamie Falvey and Lee Deegan will both race on the British Touring Car Championship support bill next season after agreeing deals to drive in the Ginetta GT4 Supercup.

Falvey won the Caterham 270R title in 2018 before making select appearances in the top-level 420R series last year while preparing to move into Ginettas for this season. He will compete with DW Motorsport, a successful Caterham team run by double 420R champion Danny Winstanley.

"We were on the sponsorship hunt and picked up a title sponsor in Prophet FX," said Falvey, who is targeting a top-five finish in the Pro standings this year. "It's chalk and cheese between the two cars [Caterham and Ginetta]. The 420R last year – you've got to hustle

the car to get the most out of it but it's quite easy to overdrive. So we're going from that and having a fairly light car and the Ginetta is totally different. The tyres are a big challenge – they are very peaky and you need to make sure you get the most out of them."

Meanwhile, two-time Civic Cup champion Deegan will also race in the series as part of a new entry from former BTCC team Maximum Motorsport. Deegan was part of a Maximum line-up that won the Birkett Relay in 2018 and has decided to move into Ginettas after weighing up a drive in the Mini Challenge.

"I've tested the Ginetta before and got on well with the car," said Deegan, who added he still needs to find additional sponsorship to complete the full season. "I feel that after a bit of practice, I can be on the pace. I'm not expecting to go out there and win races from the word go but it would be nice to get on the podium."

Deegan will give the car a shakedown at Silverstone next week alongside Maximum boss Stewart Lines, who will also race as part of a two or three-car line-up.

Lines explained his team was looking to add a new programme for this year and he had the chance to buy the Ginetta G55s. There are no date clashes with the Touring Car Trophy and Volkswagen Racing Cup categories that Maximum organises, so Lines felt a return to the TOCA package was a "sensible option".

"We've not run cars like that before but the deal came about because we ended up with some cars," he added. "We needed a second programme anyway and I wanted to do something [race himself], and this opportunity came."

STEPHEN LICKORISH



STYLES

King to Parker as Hanafin also joins Carrera Cup field

PORSCHE CARRERA CUP GB

New Porsche GB Junior Harry King will drive for Team Parker Racing in his first season in the Porsche Carrera Cup GB and will be joined on the grid by defeated Junior finalist Lorcan Hanafin.

Reigning Ginetta GT4 Supercup champion King won the shootout at the end of last season to secure £85,000 towards his budget for the next two Carrera Cup seasons along with a wealth of support from Porsche.

"After being announced as the Porsche Junior driver, we were in conversation with a few teams over the winter but Team Parker for me felt like the right team to step into Porsche Carrera Cup," explained King. "Their successful 17 years of competing in Carrera Cup means I'll have access to lots of support and extensive knowledge from the experienced members in the team, which I wouldn't get anywhere else on the grid."

"I tested with Team Parker prior to the Porsche Junior shootout so I got a very good idea of the team environment and how well I'd fit in with mechanics and engineers. I'm approaching the 2020 season with no expectations, with it being a new car, new



Porsche GB Junior
Harry King

championship and new team, I honestly don't know what to expect. But knowing I was chosen as the Porsche Junior driver gives me confidence in my own ability."

Hanafin will drive for JTR as he attempts to follow former Porsche Junior Dan Harper's path of racing for Douglas Motorsport in Ginetta Junior, then winning the Carrera Cup with JTR.

"I think it will be a bit of a baptism of fire," said Hanafin. "The grid will be competitive and there will be me jumping straight out of Ginetta Junior and trying to show what I can do. This year will be all about learning, getting used to the car and still being competitive at the same time."

STEPHEN LICKORISH

IN THE HEADLINES

BRDC SUPERSTARS NAMED

The British Racing Drivers' Club has unveiled its 13 drivers for the 2020 SuperStars programme. Reigning Porsche Carrera Cup GB champion Dan Harper, Lamborghini Super Trofeo World runner-up Sandy Mitchell and British Formula 3 runner-up Johnathan Hoggard have joined the roster for this season.

Drivers to remain part of the programme include Charlie Eastwood, Seb Morris, Phil Hanson, Kiern Jewiss, Callum Ilott, Ash Sutton, Dan Ticktum, Tom Gamble, Jake Hill and Enaam Ahmed.

REVOLUTION AT RICARD

A French final round for the Sports Prototype Cup has been announced and will take place at Paul Ricard on 6-7 November, consisting of two one-hour races. The event will include classes for the Revolution Trophy, Radical SR3 Trophy and Sports Prototype Open.

G-CAT BACK TO BRITISH GT

G-Cat Racing will return to British GT this year with an unchanged line-up aboard its Porsche 911 GT3-R, with all-Bronze pairing Greg Caton and Shamus Jennings set to contest the full season after a partial campaign last year. Caton and Jennings entered four races last year, scoring a best finish of 11th at Donington Park.

LIDSEY TO NURBURGRING

Renault UK Clio Cup race winner Brett Lidsey will switch to competing in the Nurburgring Endurance Series this season. Lidsey (below), who finished fourth in the Clio standings in 2019 in his second season in the category, will now drive a Sorg Rennsport BMW M240i in the series that was formerly known as VLN. He tested the BMW at the Algarve circuit at the end of last month and will race alongside Russian Ivan Berets – a graduate of Italian Formula 4 – and a yet-to-be-announced third driver.



JEP



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Pulling's single-seater move

BRITISH FORMULA 4

Ginetta GT5 Challenge racer Abbi Pulling will switch to single-seaters this season and race in British Formula 4 as she eyes a future W Series campaign.

Pulling twice won the Junior TKM karting title before competing in Ginetta Junior and the GT5 Challenge. She will now drive for the JHR Developments team in F4.

"It's been challenging to learn the car [above, in testing], but we've worked hard and done lots of preparation on JHR's simulator so it's starting to go well," said Pulling. "I'm matching the times Carter [Williams, a race winner in F4 with JHR in 2019] set last year on the sim, which is good. I'm putting everything into this year. I want to do an amazing job and get into W Series."

Clubmans joins MSVR after 50 years at BARC

CLUBMANS/FERRARI CHALLENGE

The Clubmans Sports Prototype Championship has received a surge in registrations for 2020, following the Clubmans Register's decision to promote the series itself and run in partnership with MotorSport Vision Racing.

A total of 42 drivers have already registered to compete this year as the category has benefited from six new and six returning drivers signing up.

The Register decided to end a 50-year partnership with the British Automobile Racing Club for 2020 in a bid to boost interest in the championship and take advantage of what it thought was a more attractive calendar offered by MSVR.

"We're up to 42 registrations now so that's far more than what I was ever hoping for," said Clubmans Register vice-chairman Peter Richings. "We've got a lot of new drivers and quite a few that have been away and are coming back."

"For the returning drivers, it [the changes to the championship] has captured their



imagination. With the new people, one or two have been preparing cars for a little while and it's spurred them on to get ready for the start of the season. It reaffirms the move to promoting the championship ourselves and going with MSVR was the right thing to do."

Clubmans is not the only category to join MSVR for this season as the Ferrari Challenge UK will also move across from the BRSCC. The Ferrari series was new for 2019 and attracted an average of 19 cars across its four-event calendar.

"We've been working closely with the team behind Ferrari Challenge since they first revealed their intention to run a series in the UK," explained

MSVR competitions manager Joe East. "They have ambitious plans and we're very pleased to be appointed as organising club for their second season. It's very exciting to be involved in its evolution."

BRSCC chairman Peter Daly added: "Ferrari invited the BRSCC to tender for the organisational services and we were not successful because we couldn't offer all the facilities that the successful organising club could offer."

The Track Attack Racing Club has also partnered with MSVR for 2020 having previously predominantly run with the BRSCC.

STEPHEN LICKORISH

Alvarez steps up to British F3

BRITISH FORMULA 3

British Formula 4 runner-up Sebastian Alvarez has completed Double R Racing's line-up for the BRDC British Formula 3 Championship this season.

The Mexican (right) will join his F4 team-mate Louis Foster in making the step up and continuing with the team, where they are joined by ex-Douglas Motorsport racer Benjamin Pedersen.

Alvarez finished just 20 points behind eventual

champion Zane Maloney in the 2019 F4 standings after a strong second half of the season.

Double R team boss Anthony Hieatt said: "Sebastian really came of age as a driver last season in British F4. He put together a fantastic championship and his pace was outstanding. Only bad luck prevented him from winning the title, but his performances showed he's definitely ready for the step up into F3."

• Double R's British F4 squad – which is being run by Michael Meadows in partnership with his karting team Argenti Motorsport – has also completed its line-up for 2020. Chilean driver Nicolas Pino will join the already-announced Casper Stevenson and Reema Juffali. It will be Pino's first full season of car racing after making a one-off appearance in South East Asian F4 at the end of last year.

STEPHEN LICKORISH



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SPORTS RACERS

Two races for sports-prototype machinery will be held at Castle Combe in 2020 as part of an event that will celebrate 45 years of the circuit's Sports and GT championship.

The Sports Racer Challenge will consist of a 20-minute qualifying session plus two 20-minute races with rolling starts at the 4 July meeting.

There will be four classes open to machines ranging from more than 2000cc engines to

a separate class for Irish Global Lights, with interest levels indicating entries will easily reach double figures.

"The 4 July event is a celebration of GTs and not so long ago those sports racers used to race with the GTs, but because of the speed difference we split them," said Castle Combe Racing Club competitions director Steve Weston. "It's quite fitting to get them back on that day."

The one-off event should

also be boosted by cars from the OSS Championship, which was disbanded for this season.

"That was where the conversation started [when OSS disbanded]," said Weston. "Some people running with OSS found they didn't have as much opportunity to run."

"It's attracting a few of the guys who used to run here and it's a great opportunity to see how it goes. Whether it goes to anything else, who knows, but we're always open to ideas."

STEFAN MACKLEY

Ian Briggs 1947-2020

OBITUARY

One of the most versatile and successful racers of his era, Ian Briggs considered himself a newsagent first and foremost, yet habitually took on and beat contemporaries heading for the top.

Briggs debuted in Mini Se7en in 1970, graduating to Special Saloons, but 750 Motor Club Formula 4 proved his metier. Runner-up in the ex-Ian Taylor March 733 in 1975, he drove Deltas to a championship hat-trick in 1978-80. An interim Mini Miglia spell – an epic Thruxton battle with team-mate Steve Harris and the Curnow brothers is immortal – underlined his talent.

A promising shoestring Formula Atlantic effort with the ex-Tony Rouff/Mike Wilds Ralt RT1 netted placings in 1979 ahead of a pole and thirds in 1980. The ambitious Trevor Hegarty-managed Penistone Hardmetal Company team thus took their F4 ace a step back to Formula Ford 2000 for 1981. Briggs won at Thruxton in an old Lola T580 and a wet Oulton Park in the ungainly T582 wing car before business pressures intervened.

Briggs refocused on self-run tin-tops, winning Ford Fiesta Challenge crowns and excelling in VW Polo G40 and Vento VR6. The Reading racer will be remembered as a fierce and respected adversary.

MARCUS PYE

IN THE HEADLINES

BWRDC NAMES WINNERS

The British Women Racing Drivers' Club held its annual awards dinner last Saturday. Race-winning Junior Saloon and GT4 driver Jemma Moore received the Natalie Goodwin Trophy for the best performance in circuit racing. Its equivalent for rally drivers, the Louise Aitken-Walker Trophy, was won by European Ladies' championship runner-up Nabila Tejpar. Sasha Heriot, who has won three British Targa events outright, was named the club's overall champion, and also won the Co-Drivers' Trophy.

EX-BARC CHAIRMAN DIES

Long-standing British Automobile Racing Club chairman Michael Groves has passed away at the age of 88. Groves was one of two vice-presidents of the club at the time of his death. He first attended a motorsport event at Goodwood in 1948 and later became a flag marshal and observer at Thruxton and Goodwood before becoming a BARC council member. The chartered surveyor was appointed chairman of the club in 1979 and held that position for 30 years. Before stepping down in 2009, he was awarded the BARC Gold Medal for his services to the club.

BMW SERIES CELEBRATED

A group of six Vintage Sports-Car Club members will mark 40 years since the final season of the BMW County Challenge by tackling this weekend's Pomeroy Trophy at Silverstone in the manufacturer's cars. The County Challenge featured a fleet of 323is representing BMW dealerships and donated prize money to local charities. Famous names including Derek Bell and Andy Rouse appeared on the grid, as well as up-and-comers Nigel Mansell and Martin Brundle.

WOOD YOU BELIEVE IT?

Snetterton's 'Scary Tree' (below), described as the circuit's "most popular piece of topiary", has lost its arm-like branches during Storm Ciara. People have been sharing their condolences on Twitter via #RIPScaryTree.



MOTORSPORT IMAGES/JEP

McRae king of the hill once again in NZ

LEADFOOT FESTIVAL

Alister McRae – brother of 1995 World Rally champion Colin – took his fourth consecutive victory at New Zealand’s fabled Leadfoot Festival hillclimb.

At the wheel of a 1998 Subaru WRX which used to be raced by the late Peter ‘Possum’ Bourne, McRae was in good company as ex-WRC driver Hayden Paddon and rallying stalwart Rod Millen also made the final top-10 cut. While Paddon’s time was not quite as quick in a Semog Crosskart, Millen sent his successful Pikes Peak Toyota Celica (below) off the track into the bushes.



Subaru WRX was driven by Alister McRae and took the spoils

RITCHIE



RITCHIE

What started off in 2011 as a get-together to celebrate Pikes Peak champion Rod Millen’s 60th birthday has now turned into an iconic national event. Set in the idyllic seaside village of Hahei, on New Zealand’s east coast, the Leadfoot is labelled as a ‘mini Goodwood Festival’. The hillclimb course is a one-mile asphalt sealed driveway owned by the Millens, which starts off on the fast paddock section before twisting and turning up into

the woodlands and onto the finish straight.

This year’s event included over 100 vehicles, from cars and off-roaders to trucks. Other guests to attend the event included NASCAR team owner Ray Evernham, ex-Formula 1 driver Mark Webber and Le Mans victor Earl Bamber. Webber took to the course in a 1906 Darracq Grand Prix that competed in the world’s first Grand Prix at Le Mans.

STEVE RITCHIE

Streamlined AMOC calendar gathers support

AMOC

The Aston Martin Owners Club has unveiled a streamlined calendar for this year as it seeks to rebuild ahead of 2021.

The club had a difficult season last year as it struggled for entries at some events and had a change in management. But the new director responsible for racing, Peter Snowden, has been encouraged

by the response to the plans.

These centre around a single AMOC-run meeting at Silverstone on 3 October. Its six race grids – Pre-Wars, Jack Fairman, Innes Ireland, Intermarque, Aston GT4 and GT Challenge – have rounds at events organised by other clubs.

“We’ve just signed some contracts,” said Snowden. “We will have the St John Horsfall meeting on 3 October on

Silverstone National – this is important as it’s the traditional AMOC race meeting, especially for our Pre-War competitors.

“It’s baby steps but I am pleasantly surprised by how positive people are. There’s still a lot of people wanting to support Aston Martin club racing.”

Snowden added that the club will make a number of tweaks to the regulations of its series

in order to encourage more drivers to compete.

One example of this is the GT Challenge category, which will now allow drivers to use slick tyres from a range of suppliers rather than just Dunlop, which was mandated in the past. Additionally, the maximum nominal capacity of 3000cc in the Innes Ireland Cup series has been removed for 2020.

STEPHEN LICKORISH

Edwards starts title defence in perfect style

BRITISH RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

Matt Edwards got his British Rally Championship title defence off to the perfect start on the Cambrian Rally with a 38.4-second victory over series returnee Osian Pryce.

Armed with M-Sport's Ford Fiesta R5 Mk2 for the first time, Edwards looked at ease throughout and won five of the rally's seven special stages to seal a second Cambrian win in a row.

The only minor blip came at the start of the opening stage with a stall on the startline, but he and co-driver Darren Garrod were quickly on the pace and set a stunning time on SS4 – Great Orme – that was seven seconds quicker than anyone else to set up their victory.

The honour of the first fastest stage time of the year went to Tom Cave and Dale Furniss in their Hyundai i20 R5, who outpaced Pryce and World Rally Championship 2 driver Rhys Yates by 0.6s. Cave continued to hold the outright lead despite losing time to Edwards on SS2, only for it all to go



wrong on the 11.7-mile Penmachno test. "We just lost the rear on a third-gear right-hander, hit a big rock and ripped the wheel off," he said. Three and a half minutes were lost and the 2019 BRC runner-up eventually finished sixth.

Pryce admitted second "felt like a win" as he adjusted to the i20 R5 on gravel during his first BRC event since 2017, and Yates (Fiesta R5 Mk2) was happy to finish third on stages he hasn't always gone well on in the past.

Ollie Mellors brought the Proton Iriz R5 home fourth on its BRC debut and on his first rally without organisers' pace notes for four years, while James

Williams was an ecstatic fifth in the sister car on his R5 debut.

Former Junior WRC driver Tom Williams lost sixth to Cave on the final stage on his first rally in a four-wheel-drive car. Josh McErlean ran as high as third overall, but retired his Hyundai i20 R5 towards the finish of the penultimate test after clipping a rock and damaging his steering.

William Creighton edged Finlay Retson in the Junior BRC on his first ever rally in a turbocharged car – a Ford Fiesta R2T – as David Kelly was third, beating Eddie Lewis by just 0.7s.

LUKE BARRY

Victory for Beaumont at Passion for Speed event

HGPCA

Andrew Beaumont's remarkable victory in the second Historic Grand Prix Cars Association race at Cape Town's hallowed Killarney International Raceway last Saturday broke Will Nuthall's stranglehold on South Africa's Passion for Speed retrospective.

"After nine years with Classic Team Lotus [headed by Colin Chapman's son Clive] I've



finally won a race," grinned the disbelieving Beaumont, having staved off Nuthall in a full-blooded duel that delighted the large audience. The triumph came against the odds after a driveshaft failure savaged his UDT Laystall 18's left-rear corner in morning qualifying.

Period Team Lotus mechanic Chris 'Doc' Dinnage and the crew dug deep to get their charge onto the grid in fifth, behind a quartet of Coopers with Zwartkops winner Nuthall (T53) on pole. Having finished second to Nuthall in the opener, Beaumont dived ahead in its sequel and thwarted a constant threat.

Second qualifier Chris Drake (1500cc Cooper-t/c T70/73) finished third both times. Greg



Thornton (LDS-Alfa Romeo) led the chase in race one, but Steve Hart (Cooper-Maserati T51), Eddy Perk (Heron-Alfa) and James Willis (ex-Denny Hulme Cooper T45) slugged it out to the chequered flag later.

Spectators love V8 saloons (left), and a mighty fight between top dog Peter Lindenberg (Shelby Mustang), Colin Ellison (Ford Fairlane 'Thunderbolt') and Jonathan du Toit (Chevrolet

Nova) set the tone, with Lindenberg coming out on top.

British Formula Junior visitors Richard Smeeton (Wainer) and Richard Wilson (Brabham BT6) topped the single-seater races. They were kept on their toes by HSSA FF1600 standout Matt Nash (Van Diemen RF81), shadowed by Marcus Pye (Merlyn Mk20) in a cracking opener.

MARCUS PYE



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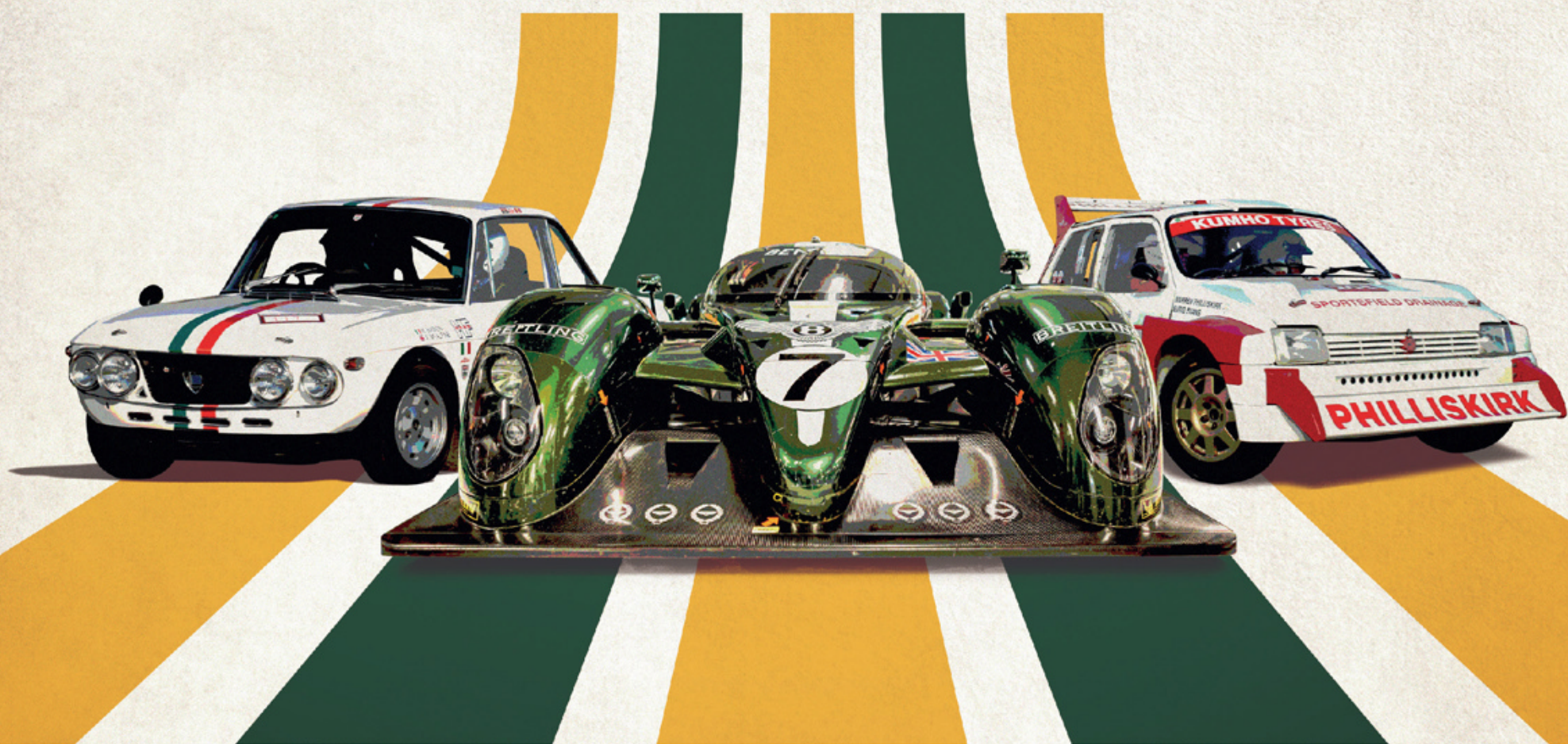
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Less is more

UK club motorsport has had to adjust to changing times and reduce the number of race meetings on the calendar, but this can only benefit everyone in the long term

STEPHEN LICKORISH

It's not a new argument. For over 40 years, Autosport has regularly raised concerns about the amount of club motorsport in the UK. There are too many poorly supported race meetings; too many events spreading competitors, marshals, officials and spectators too thinly and diluting the limited pool of people interested in grassroots motorsport. And this in turn can lead to a further downward spiral.

But, for this new decade, there has been a new approach. The number of club race meetings in England and Wales is set to reduce for 2020. An analysis of the provisional calendar reveals there will be 19 fewer days of club racing action this season compared to last year, and there will be 18 fewer individual meetings. Now, that doesn't sound like a huge amount — excluding top-level British Touring Car Championship, British GT and international events, there are still due to be 243 days of clubbie action — but it represents a 7% reduction in the number of days of racing and an 11% reduction in the number of meetings.

A breakdown of the calendar reveals where this decrease in club racing has originated. Three organising clubs in particular have massively cut the amount of track time they have booked. Two of these are among the largest clubs, as the British Automobile Racing Club will have 20% fewer days of racing this year and the British Racing and Sports Car Club

“The BARC will have 20% fewer days of racing this year and the BRSCC has a 30% reduction”

has implemented a 30% reduction.

Both of these clubs are in a similar position, having lost categories to other organisers for this year. In the BARC's case that's Classic Formula Ford 1600 (to the Historic Sports Car Club), along with Clubmans and Series Elite (to MotorSport Vision Racing), and it has also amalgamated a few of its other grids.

“Because we lost a couple of championships to other clubs and a couple of series have amalgamated there hasn't been quite as much demand for track time,” says BARC general manager Ian Watson. “It means those race meetings should be a little bit fuller.”

It's the same story with the BRSCC. The loss of the Ferrari Challenge UK to MSVR instantly accounts for four meetings and eight days of racing being cut. Combined with Alfa Romeos moving to the 750 Motor Club, and OSS and its Porsche

series no longer existing, it too has a significantly reduced portfolio of series for 2020.

“There were too many low grids in 2019,” says BRSCC chairman Peter Daly. “We've got less meetings consciously — we're concentrating on higher-quality race meetings and having quality not quantity. The cost of running a race meeting where grids are significantly below capacity is not sustainable.”

Both clubs were guilty of overbooking track time last year and struggled to fill the timetable at certain events, but this certainly appears to have been addressed for this season.

The final club featuring a major reduction in its number of meetings is the Aston Martin Owners Club. This suffered from a damaging combination of poor grids in the second half of 2019 and a last-minute change in management at the end of the season, which meant it had no choice but to slim down its calendar from five events to one for this year.

Even with MSVR expanding its calendar to cater for its additional 2020 series, and the popular 750 Motor Club having a slight rise in the number of its meetings (it almost had the opposite problem of struggling to book enough track time), it all makes for an overall reduction in racing for this year.

The 2020 fixture list also reveals other interesting trends. The number of one-day events has fallen from 63 last year to 45, which amounts to a decrease of nearly 30%. Clubs are continuing to favour two-day events as doing so can reduce their logistical costs, and many organisers report that competitors prefer to make a weekend of their racing and have track activity spread across two days.

The other interesting feature is where these race meetings are taking place. Following the closure of Rockingham at the end of 2018, it was expected that smaller venues would benefit. Sure enough, Anglesey featured significantly more race dates last year, although many tracks received no boost at all. And this year it's the smaller venues that have lost out again. While the likes of Brands Hatch, Donington Park and Oulton Park have all had small reductions in their meeting numbers, the bulk of the reduction has come from Croft, Cadwell Park and Anglesey as each has four fewer race meetings compared to last year. But, as always, there are winners and losers — Mallory Park and Castle Combe have both benefited from slight increases.

Regardless of where the events take place, having a more streamlined club racing calendar can only be a good thing. Nobody wins from having too many poorly supported events and, at a time when costs are continually rising, such unpopular and unnecessary fixtures cannot be justified. The 243 days of club racing this year may not be a radical reduction, but it's a decrease nonetheless and that has to be welcomed. 🏁



DAILY GOES FOURTH

Steven Dailly has been the driver to beat in the BMW Compact Cup for the past three seasons – and he's back for more this year

STEPHEN LICKORISH



MAIN PIC: ROBERTS



The Scottish racer is used to being number one

ROBERTS

Title one: a crown inherited months after the season concluded following a disqualification for the provisional champion. Title two: a year of “outright domination” with eight victories and a worst result of third place. Title three: a triumph at the end of a year full of ups and downs. Three BMW Compact Cup seasons; three titles for Scottish racer Steven Dailly – and three entirely different championship wins.

And now the undisputed king of the Compact Cup field is back for more in 2020 as he seeks to make it four titles on the spin.

It's fair to say that Dailly's BMW racing career has been unconventional and that first title triumph in 2017, after former British GT champion James Gornall was disqualified for a non-compliant crankshaft and unsuccessfully appealed to the National Court, was something of a surprise. “I still believe to this day that ‘Jiggy’ [Gornall] should've won that championship, but you're never going to refuse it!” admits Dailly. “Last year the driving standard was good but it wasn't as competitive as it was with me and ‘Jiggy’”

If 2017 was Dailly's pick of his title battles, then the 2018 triumph was the most impressive on paper. He destroyed the opposition to take a comfortable win and it was not until the final meeting of the year that he finished a race outside the top two – and even then it was a third. But last season was much less straightforward.

“Last year was a bit of good luck and a bit of bad luck,” says Dailly. “I had a few setbacks last year, I had a few crashes. We had the car behind us but there were a few incidents that could've been avoided – we got there in the end.”

Those incidents included an early crash at Croft that led to Dailly spending the second race on the sidelines. That was followed by a bitter-sweet Anglesey meeting where, while travelling to the circuit,



he received the sad news of his grandmother's passing and then suffered a nasty crash in qualifying that left him on the back foot, before he bounced back to take a victory.

But what makes Dailly's three consecutive championships so impressive is the amount of opposition he was up against. Last year, the Compact Cup had the third-highest average grid size – 40 cars – out of the plethora of different championships that run in the UK. And that's part of the reason why Dailly has stuck around in the series for so long.

"It's a competitive series and people are attracted to it – the paddock is fantastic," he says. "There are drivers coming through and there are regulars like Ian Jones and Matthew Parkes. It's a constant rotation, I'm always racing new drivers."

Dailly says he has looked to move up the racing ladder but been thwarted by that common motorsport barrier: a lack of budget. "I work full time, 10 hours a day, so finding sponsorship is particularly hard," says the 28-year-old engineer. "Work takes a lot of focus and, as much as I would love to be a full-time professional driver, I have to be realistic."

He is also reluctant to end his successful relationship with the KC Motorsport squad, which dates back to his first steps in car racing. "The chemistry is good between me and the KC Motorsport team," says Dailly, who made his circuit racing debut with the squad in the Scottish BMW series at the end of 2013. "If I go into another team in Mazda MX-5s, for example, I wouldn't feel as comfortable."

One example of his early success with the team came in the Scottish series in 2015, when he won every single race of the season. "That was very difficult – I didn't really think about winning every race until three quarters of the way through," Dailly recalls. "I was in bits before the start of the last race because I didn't know what was



going to happen – there was too much pressure! I was lucky because I was qualifying on pole and the first corner is a right-hander so I could get away [at the start]."

That clean sweep ensured Dailly won a bet with an ex-sponsor that allowed him to test a Ginetta G40, but he was unsuccessful in securing the necessary funds to follow that with a season in the GT5 Challenge.

As for 2020, Dailly admits the level of domination he achieved five years ago in Scotland is extremely unlikely, but a fourth consecutive UK-wide title is undeniably the target. "It's going to be a tough year," he acknowledges. "The only thing that bothers me about [staying in] the Compact Cup is I can only go backwards!" ❄

STICKING TO WHAT'S TYRED AND TESTED



DOCUMENTARY FALKEN - 20 YEARS IN 20 STORIES

Available to watch at bit.ly/Falken20

Anybody who has watched the Nurburgring 24 Hours in the past 20 years can't fail to have noticed the lurid turquoise-and-blue-liveried Falken Motorsport cars – ranging from Nissan to Toyota, from Porsche to BMW. The Japanese tyre manufacturer has been a mainstay of the race since 1999 and, to commemorate its 20th anniversary at the Nordschleife last year, has released a documentary on its YouTube channel.

Falken has never won the race – its best result remains a third in 2015 – so *Falken – 20 Years in 20 Stories* is not a self-congratulatory watch. Rather, it's a 40-minute love letter to the race that charts the trials and tribulations of Falken-entered cars with interviews featuring the team's drivers past and present, team members and tyre technicians.

Around half are in English, so there's a fair amount of subtitles-reading involved, but it doesn't detract from the viewing experience and allows the interviewees to express themselves freely.

As you might expect of any film that has the Nurburgring as its setting, the videography is excellent – director Tobias Kahler has made full use of glorious

archive footage, sweeping drone shots and hair-raising on-boards. One clip in wet conditions, plunging down into the Fox Hole with the throttle pinned flat and the wipers working overtime, does more than any interview could to underscore the challenge posed.

The concept of 20 years in 20 stories works well for the most part, although some subjects get very limited screen-time or have little relevance to the Falken Motorsport story. It's a shame that a driver of Dirk Werner's pedigree gets all of 20 seconds that amount to little more than PR bluster, and while Jim Glickenhaus gets one of the best lines – "I mean, there's 250,000 people, it's like Woodstock!" – he seems a curious choice to involve given the absence of any connection to Falken.

As you might expect, some of the older names explaining the origins of Falken's involvement at the Nordschleife get plenty of screen time, and their hitherto little-known stories provide some interesting insights.

Belgian journeyman racer Dirk Schoysman, who contested the N24 for Falken between 1999 and 2010, explains how he was introduced to senior company officials while working at a Nissan technical centre developing the flame-spitting Skyline GT-R and volunteered his services as a driver. The challenges of simultaneously developing a car and tyres for the unique challenge posed by the Nordschleife soon became apparent, but Schoysman and ex-DTM driver Roland Asch helped the team of Nurburgring newcomers find its feet. Asch, who features heavily throughout, speaks reverently about the Skyline as "a really important car" for fans.

There are the predictable platitudes about danger, but they are given a real edge by ever-cheerful Scotsman Peter Dumbreck narrating footage of his monster shunt at the Tiergarten section in 2014: "The impact was so big that the roll-cage came





[autosport.com/podcast](https://www.autosport.com/podcast)



With the Formula 1 teams set to launch their 2020 challengers in the coming weeks, the Autosport team discusses what these unveilings actually tell us about the year ahead. We also look into how much the teams genuinely reveal before Australia, and could F1 learn from Glastonbury by being open to taking the occasional year off?



over the seat. I was very lucky that day..."

Dumbreck's interview is one of the surprise highlights of the film. The 1998 Macau Grand Prix winner has missed only one of the past 17 runnings of the N24 since his debut in 2003, and shares his determination to keep going as long as he can past his current age of 46. "It's my life," he says. "I'm not just going to throw that all away and stop when I'm still on the pace and I'm still physically fit."

Yet for the die-hard sportscar fan, there's a feeling that there could have been a little more meat on the bones. Falken has, for the past three seasons, run two GT3 cars – a BMW M6 and Porsche 911 – but the decision to take this unusual path and the challenges it poses aren't even discussed.

The team's fortunes during the 2000s are largely skipped over as Kahler perhaps dwells a little too much on the race itself, rather than telling the Falken story.

But for those unfamiliar with its mystique, that's maybe understandable. While as driver Martin Ragginger puts it, the N24 is "the hardest race in the world", it's easy to see why Falken keeps coming back year after year in search of that elusive victory.

JAMES NEWBOLD

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15 February

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Round 2/8

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15 February

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Daytona 500

NASCAR Cup

Round 1/36

Daytona, USA

16 February

TV Live Premier Sports
1, Sun 1900

Toyota Racing Series

Round 5/5

Manfeild, New Zealand

15-16 February

TV Livestream

Motorsport.tv

Asian Le Mans Series

Round 3/4

Sepang, Malaysia

15 February

TV Livestream

Motorsport.tv,
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Asian Formula 3

Round 4/5

Sepang, Malaysia

14-15 February

MRF Challenge

Round 3/3

Irungattukottai, India

15-16 February





FROM THE ARCHIVE

Denny Hulme (#12 McLaren-Ford M19A), up from fifth on the grid, and third-place qualifier Emerson Fittipaldi (#8 Lotus-Ford 72D) briefly usurp poleman Jackie

Stewart (#1 Tyrrell-Ford 003) at the start of the 1972 South African Grand Prix at Kyalami. Stewart was almost immediately back in charge and held the lead until his gearbox failed on lap 45 of 79. Fittipaldi

was the immediate beneficiary, but he couldn't hold back Hulme, who got ahead on lap 57 and extended his advantage to 14.1 seconds at the flag. Hulme's team-mate Peter Revson was third.



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The unveiling of a Le Mans conqueror

15 February 1990

Peugeot Talbot Sport – then fronted by future Ferrari and FIA boss Jean Todt – unveiled its V10-engined Group C 905 sportscar to the world ahead of its world sportscar championship campaign this week in 1990.

Autosport covered the technical intricacies of the project – after more than a year of knowing very little about it – and what it aimed to achieve, including seeking inspiration from then-recent Formula 1 innovations such as electronic clutches, carbonfibre honeycomb chassis and sequential gearboxes, as well as adopting a Pikes Peak-style four-wheel steering system at some tracks.

It was highlighted that the team aimed to make the final two rounds of the 1990 WSC season, with test driver Jean-Pierre Jabouille set to secure a drive. “We will be patient enough to wait three years before it’s really successful,” Todt stated at the time – a figure that turned

out to be slightly pessimistic.

After early issues and losing out to Jaguar in 1991, it only took until 1992 for Peugeot to taste major success. It won the Le Mans 24 Hours with Derek Warwick, Yannick Dalmas and Mark Blundell, and then claimed the drivers’ and teams’ titles in the championship.

As sportscar racing floundered, Peugeot would follow that up with Geoff Brabham/Eric Helary/Christophe Bouchut leading a 1-2-3 at the 1993 24 Hours. It then pulled out of top-line sportscar racing until the mid-2000s in favour of an ultimately unsuccessful F1 stint.

Sportscars got substantial coverage in the rest of the magazine, too. The two chicanes down the Mulsanne Straight at Le Mans were given the green light by FISA that week, and Martin Brundle chatted about his second place at the Daytona 24 Hours with Tom Walkinshaw’s Jaguar team.

CRAIG WOOLLARD



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