

F1 Hamilton signs with Mercedes – for just one year

AUTOSPORT

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When – and how – will the Mercedes F1 era come to an end?

What can stop the Mercedes steamroller? Red Bull? Rule changes? Lewis Hamilton deciding to leave Formula 1?

The current Mercedes team is a truly remarkable one and has to go into the 2021 season as the favourite, yet again. But, as Alex Kalinauckas points out on page 18 – with the help of Mercedes technical director James Allison – there are things that could trip up the F1 giant. There are some tricky regulation changes to navigate, such as the new cost cap and windtunnel restrictions, which *could* hit Mercedes hardest, particularly with the 2022 rules on the way.

Perhaps the most intriguing challenge is its driver line-up. Hamilton has now signed a new deal – but only for one year (p4). Is that merely a pragmatic response to the strange, coronavirus-influenced way the negotiations had to take place or indicative of something else?

Mercedes won't stop winning purely because Hamilton leaves, but all great eras must end eventually and it is normally change – or multiple changes – that make that happen.

One thing that hasn't changed for years is the NGTC philosophy in the British Touring Car Championship. It's now a decade old and Marcus Simmons assesses its impact on p28.

Matt Kew also talks to the British drivers hoping for success in Formula E in 2021 (p34), we preview the Daytona 500 (p38), and look back at the successful career of the versatile Ellen Lohr (p46).



Kevin Turner

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18 FEBRUARY

Red Bull's F1 quest
How can Adrian Newey
and Max Verstappen
beat Mercedes?



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HAMILTON DEAL RAISES QUESTIONS OVER 2022

FORMULA 1

Mercedes put an end to speculation about Lewis Hamilton's immediate Formula 1 future by announcing on Monday (8 February) that he had signed a new contract to stay at the team. But the seven-time world champion has only put pen to paper on a one-year deal, leading to questions regarding Hamilton and Mercedes for 2022 and beyond.

Hamilton and Mercedes agreed last year to postpone any contract talks until after the championships were settled, only for a series of delays to follow their coronations in November. Plans for Hamilton to sit down with Mercedes F1 boss Toto Wolff between the two Bahrain races were then dashed when he contracted COVID-19. Wolff himself also suffered from the virus over the winter, causing further delays.

In the end, a one-year deal was agreed to account for the upcoming regulation change in 2022, the uncertain global picture, and the lateness of negotiations, which both sides vowed would not be repeated this year.

"In the end, we started our conversation just before Christmas so it was important to get it done as soon as possible," Wolff explained. "And in that respect, we thought, let's postpone the discussion about 2022 and onwards to a later stage in 2021."

The announcement of the one-year deal nevertheless opens up the driver market for 2022, with Mercedes theoretically holding two free seats for next year. The team was always set to be a focal point in the driver market as it weighs up whether to replace Valtteri Bottas — who is also out of contract for 2022 — with star junior George Russell, who is now entering the final year of his Williams deal.

But much of the silly-season narrative will also surround Hamilton's future, and whether he continues racing beyond 2021. This year he will vie for a record-breaking eighth world title, as well as surely hitting a century of race wins and pole positions. He would be in uncharted territory, standing alone as F1's statistical greatest of all-time. The narrative is there for Hamilton to make it eight and call it quits.

Wolff wouldn't comment on whether he thought 2021 would be Hamilton's last season. "This is very much Lewis's decision," he said. "As long as he enjoys racing, I think he's very capable of going longer. He develops as a driver, he looks after himself in terms of physical training and mental preparation. I don't think in terms of ability that ends in 2021. But at the end, it's his decision. That's why I wouldn't want to comment on where Lewis stands."

The prospect of Hamilton stepping away from racing



ETHERINGTON/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

would put drivers such as Max Verstappen on high alert for a potential switch. While Verstappen's Red Bull contract runs to the end of 2023, the team has previously included exit clauses in driver contracts, such as with four-time world champion Sebastian Vettel.

There are signs that Hamilton's relationship with Mercedes will last beyond 2021. A focal point of discussions surrounded his 'big-picture' interests, namely the ongoing push to improve inclusion in motorsport. Hamilton and Mercedes will jointly launch a charity — the brainchild of Daimler chairman Ola Kallenius — with multi-million-euro backing to further this.

"I am excited to be heading into my ninth season with my Mercedes team-mates," said Hamilton. "I'm equally determined to continue the journey we started to make motorsport more diverse for future generations, and I am grateful that Mercedes has been extremely supportive of my call to address this issue. I'm proud to say we are taking that effort further this year by launching a foundation dedicated to diversity and inclusion in the sport."

Wolff also rejected suggestions that Hamilton had



Hamilton and Wolff aren't yet committed to podium bearhugs beyond the end of this year

been chasing a veto over his future team-mates in contract talks, calling the claims "baseless". "The truth is that there was not one second of discussion about any driver-specific clause," Wolff said. "He has never asked for that in the last eight years. It's a team decision."

Nevertheless, as Mercedes enters the driver market for 2022 with two seats still unconfirmed, it will need to look to the future and plan for life after Hamilton. "The team needs to decide long-term what we are going to do about drivers," said Wolff. "Valtteri and Lewis have our 100% commitment and loyalty for 2021. We will support them with everything we have."

"Our first discussions are going to be with Valtteri and Lewis. But on the other side, the young drivers are the future, and therefore we need to consider how we want to set ourselves up for the years beyond."

Hamilton will make his first public appearance back with Mercedes at the launch of its new W12 on 2 March, before the start of pre-season testing 10 days later.

LUKE SMITH

➔ P18 MERCEDES' 2021 PITFALLS

Second Bahrain GP poised to step in for Portugal

FORMULA 1

Formula 1 could hold a second grand prix in Bahrain to start the season amid growing concerns over the planned Portuguese Grand Prix in May.

F1 had intended to return to the Algarve Circuit on 2 May, taking the existing TBA slot as it awaited government approval, only for a spike in COVID-19 cases in the country to lead to fresh restrictions coming into force.

The uncertainty over the race has prompted F1 to look at alternatives, including a second

race in Bahrain that would likely take place on the outer loop (below) – just as it did towards the end of the 2020 season.

"One of the possible Plan Bs could be a double race in Bahrain," said F1 chief Stefano Domenicali. "But this is one plan and nothing is confirmed. We're focusing to try to keep the calendar as it is."

Should a second Bahrain race be added to the calendar, it is likely that the Emilia Romagna Grand Prix at Imola would be pushed back one week to 25 April to maintain the calendar spacing.

LUKE SMITH



Forest-threatening Rio F1 track finally canned

FORMULA 1

Plans to build an Interlagos-replacing Formula 1 track on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro have officially been scrapped.

F1 had agreed a deal to move the Brazilian Grand Prix from Sao Paulo to a new circuit in Rio from 2021, only for the project to come under fire when it emerged that it would require the felling of thousands of trees in the Camboata forest.

With the proposal lacking government approval, F1 signed a new long-term deal to keep

Interlagos on the calendar, representing the end of the Rio race project.

Rio's environment secretary has now confirmed that the track-build plans have been completely abandoned. "Rio is racing for a sustainable future: Camboata Forest shall not be supplanted by Rio international race track," said Eduardo Cavaliere.

"Under Mayor Eduardo Paes's leadership we have *officially withdrawn* the construction's licensing process."

LUKE SMITH

STALEY
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IMAGES

It's 10 years this summer
since Peugeot last raced
in the Le Mans 24 Hours

Peugeot unveils its seven for Le Mans return

WEC

Three former grand prix drivers, an outright winner of the Le Mans 24 Hours, and two up-and-comers. That's the make-up of Peugeot's driver line-up for its return to the top flight of sportscar racing some time over the course of the 2022 World Endurance Championship.

The French manufacturer has named Kevin Magnussen, Paul di Resta, Jean-Eric Vergne, Loic Duval, Gustavo Menezes and Mikkel Jensen as the race drivers for its pair of Le Mans Hypercars next year. James Rossiter will act as reserve and simulator driver.

Peugeot dipped into the pool of sportscar talent as it put together its driver roster. All bar Magnussen are established stars of the discipline, and, of course, the Dane is on his way to becoming one after his performance on his debut with the Chip Ganassi Racing Cadillac squad in the IMSA SportsCar Championship at Daytona last month.

The marque's hierarchy always made

it clear that its choice of drivers would be unfettered by nationality and marketing appeal. "We went for drivers that have huge experience in sportscar racing," said Olivier Janssonie, technical director of the LMH programme at Peugeot. "We went through the statistics of the WEC, the European Le Mans Series and IMSA: we tried to assess their performances based on data."

The approach contrasts with Peugeot's choices at the start of its previous sportscar efforts with the 905 Group C car and 908 LMP1 turbodiesel. Back in 1990, it brought 1982 Formula 1 world champion Keke Rosberg, a driver with only a handful of sportscar starts to his name, out of retirement. In 2007, Jacques Villeneuve and Marc Gené were on the squad despite having a combined total of three appearances in endurance racing.

The line-up also has a less Gallic feel than at the start of Peugeot's previous two bids for Le Mans victory. There were four Frenchmen when its line-up expanded to six drivers on the 905's

debut at the 24 Hours in 1991. In 2007, there were three home drivers across its two cars at the French enduro.

Peugeot has, arguably, made some obvious choices. Two-time Formula E champion Vergne races for sister marque DS Automobiles, while 2013 Le Mans winner Duval has links with Peugeot from a two-year stint driving a works-assisted 908 HDi run by ORECA in 2010-11 that encompassed a victory in the Sebring 12 Hours.

Antonio Felix da Costa, Vergne's team-mate at DS Techeetah, the reigning FE champion and a race winner in LMP2 in the WEC, had been mentioned in connection with a Peugeot seat. Jean-Marc Finot, overall motorsport boss of the Stellantis group of which Peugeot is now a part, described having both drivers racing across the FE and WEC programmes as "maybe tricky to manage".

Janssonie also explained that it was important to have a youthful element to its line-up. The credentials of Menezes are better documented than Jensen's. The American, who will race the new Glickenhaus LMH in 2021, is an overall race winner in the WEC with Rebellion Racing, and before that an LMP2 champion with Signatech Alpine. Jensen, who was formerly on BMW's books, has been picked up after an impressive maiden season of LMP2 with the G-Drive squad that followed three seasons in LMP3. He was also right up there on the averages with team-mate Vergne on his Le Mans debut last year.

What Peugeot hasn't told us yet are the driver combinations for its two cars. That is likely to follow initial testing.

GARY WATKINS



Ilott set for Euro GT campaign

GT WORLD CHALLENGE EUROPE

Ferrari Formula 1 test driver Callum Ilott looks set to race in the GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup with the Italian manufacturer in 2021.

It has been announced that the Ferrari Driver Academy member and 2020 F2 runner-up will be given a GT programme go with his new F1 role. Ferrari's statement only said that Ilott will be "taking part in a GT programme at the wheel of a Ferrari for some of the most famous sportscar races". A spokesman clarified that the programme will be at the wheel of a GT3-spec 488, rather than a GTE car, and that an announcement will be made shortly.

A seat with AF as its defends the GTWCE title won in dramatic style by Alessandro Pier Guidi at last year's Paul Ricard finale looks most likely. Ferrari has confirmed its intent to return to the series in 2021 and hasn't ruled out expanding the programme to two cars.

Pier Guidi is likely to dovetail his World Endurance Championship campaign with a return to the GTWCE enduros, while Davide Rigon, who has been replaced in Ferrari's full-time WEC GTE Pro line-up, is also set to be part of the programme.

Ferrari has ruled out Ilott taking the vacant slot alongside Pier Guidi and James Calado at the Le Mans 24 Hours.

GARY WATKINS



Fittipaldi out of Ferrari, off to US

INDY PRO 2000

Enzo Fittipaldi has split from the Ferrari Driver Academy and will move to the US this season to race in the Indy Pro 2000 series. The move comes with the support of top IndyCar team boss Michael Andretti, who has offered him an Indy Lights seat for 2022.

Miami-born Fittipaldi, the 19-year-old grandson of two-time Indy 500 winner and 1989 Indycar champion Emerson Fittipaldi and younger brother of one-time grand prix starter Pietro, has spent four seasons in European single-seaters as a Ferrari junior. He was 2018 Italian Formula 4 champion and 2019 Formula Regional European runner-up, but finished 15th in his FIA F3 campaign last year with HWA.

Fittipaldi, who describes the move as "a step forward towards achieving my dream of racing in F1 and IndyCar", will this year race with RP Motorsport and will have assistance from



Andretti Autosport with driver coaching, fitness training and set-up advice.

His fellow Brazilian Gianluca Petecof, who beat Arthur Leclerc to last year's FRegional title in Europe, is also off the FDA scheme. The 18-year-old will graduate to the FIA Formula 2 Championship with Campos Racing, where he will race alongside Ralph Boschung.

DAVID MALSHER-LOPEZ

IN THE HEADLINES

DOMENICALI WANTS FREEZE

Formula 1 CEO Stefano Domenicali has urged teams to back Red Bull's call for an engine freeze for the good of the series, ahead of a crunch meeting of the F1 Commission today (Thursday). Red Bull wants to take over the Honda engine project from the end of this year, but only if a development freeze is imposed. Calls for a freeze have not met with universal approval, with Renault not keen as it is scheduled to introduce a new engine for the start of 2022. "I'm hoping that everyone realises that is the best choice, not only for Red Bull, but for the entire world of F1," said Domenicali.

SCHUMACHER TO TRIDENT

David Schumacher, the son of ex-F1 driver Ralf, has switched to Italian team Trident for his second season in the FIA Formula 3 Championship. Schumacher scored a best result of 12th in his rookie campaign, which he started with Charouz Racing System and finished with Carlin.

TALENTS JOIN FIA F3 GRID

Dane Oliver Rasmussen – a title contender in last season's Formula Regional European Championship – and Italian Formula Renault Eurocup race winner Lorenzo Colombo will both step up to FIA F3 this season. Rasmussen joins HWA Racelab, which has also confirmed 2020 British and French F4 midfielder Rafael Villagomez. Colombo and fellow FRenault graduate Amaury Cordeel have joined Campos Racing.

GREENGT'S HYDROGEN DEAL

The Swiss-based GreenGT organisation will supply the powertrains for the new hydrogen-fuel-cell prototype category due to come on stream at the Le Mans 24 Hours in 2024. The group, which has already partnered with Le Mans organiser the Automobile Club de l'Ouest to build two hydrogen test cars, will supply the electric motors, batteries and transmissions, leaving manufacturers and teams to produce the hydrogen fuel cells. The chassis will be developed by ORECA and Red Bull Advanced Technologies.

VERNAY'S ELECTRIC HYUNDAI

World Touring Car Cup star Jean-Karl Vernay has joined Hyundai as test driver for its electric Pure ETCR project. Pure ETCR's inaugural season kicks off at Vallelunga on 18-20 June.



Whincup to step back and take over Triple Eight reins

AUSTRALIAN SUPERCARS

Australian Supercars hero Jamie Whincup will call time on a record-breaking driving career and take over from team co-founder Roland Dane as managing director and team principal at Triple Eight Race Engineering at the end of this year.

The powerhouse squad will undergo the biggest shake-up in its near-two-decade stint in Supercars, which includes a significant ownership change. Successful businessman and long-time racing enthusiast Tony Quinn has bought a 40% stake in the team to become the biggest single shareholder. Dane's daughter Jess Dane and Whincup have had their individual stakes increased to 30% and 19% respectively, with Dane Sr's share scaling back to 11%.

The retirement of seven-time champion Whincup doesn't come out of the blue. The 38-year-old bought what was initially a 15% stake in T8 back in 2018, and successfully lobbied for election to the Supercars Commission the following year.

He's yet to decide if he'll continue in an endurance co-driving role with T8, or just focus on the team boss position beyond the 2021 season.



"There's plenty of emotions," said Whincup of his impending career change. "There's obviously sadness, but there's excitement for what the future holds. And a little bit of relief as well, to finally announce the plan so we can focus on executing. I love driving. I'm really looking forward to this year. One [emotion] doesn't outweigh the other."

Whincup's replacement in the driver line-up is yet to be determined. Dane told media during the announcement that there is a "plan" in place, but warned that could easily change. As for his own plans, Dane will move into a part-time advisory role as part of the shake-up, along with continuing as the chairman of the board of directors.

"Since Jamie expressed an interest some years ago in continuing his career in motorsport with Triple Eight after he retires from full-time driving, the plan has always been for him to take the reins," said Dane. "COVID-19 has reminded me that I'm not getting any younger, and I'm looking forward to having more time on my hands to enjoy different forms of motorsport in different capacities and spend more time with my elder daughter in the UK, once the pandemic permits."

Triple Eight was born in late 1996 to run the factory British Touring Car Championship Vauxhall line-up of John Cleland and T8 co-founder Derek Warwick. It dominated in the early 2000s with Jason Plato, Yvan Muller and James Thompson, before Dane (left), Warwick and Ian Harrison expanded the squad into Australia in 2003. Whincup joined in 2006 and has scored 122 race wins.

ANDREW VAN LEEUWEN

DTM poised for five Mercedes

DTM

Mercedes will be represented by "multiple customer teams" when the new-look DTM kicks off with a grid of GT3 cars this year.

The German manufacturer made the statement last week as part of its announcement of its continuing commitment to customer racing with the Mercedes-AMG GT3. It has subsequently suggested that there could be four or five AMG GT3s in the field on its return to the DTM after an absence of two seasons.

Autosport has learned that HTP Winward and HRT, the new-for-2020 operation created by Hubert Haupt out of the Black Falcon team, are looking likely to run two cars each alongside a solo entry from GruppeM, which announced its plans last year. A spokesman for AMG confirmed that there had been discussions with HTP and HRT, but stressed that no contracts had been finalised.

The German HTP squad, which is now under US ownership, and HRT, as Black Falcon, have extensive histories with Mercedes in GT3 and have fielded cars as so-called 'performance' teams, which means they have enjoyed factory support. It appears likely that they will continue with that status should they join the DTM.

Mercedes has also announced two additions to its pool of factory drivers. Daniel Juncadella, who raced for the manufacturer in the DTM in 2013-16 and in 2018 (below), now has a factory deal, along with Bentley refugee Jules Gounon.

Adam Christodoulou and Yelmer Buurman no longer have full factory deals, but are likely to continue to drive AMG GT3s and find seats in 'performance' entries at the Nurburgring 24 Hours. Maro Engel, Raffaele Marciello, Maximilian Buhk, Luca Stolz, Maximilian Gotz and Thomas Jager have all been retained.

GARY WATKINS



Chovet heads the F2 ringers

FORMULA 3

FIA Formula 3 Championship-bound Pierre-Louis Chovet (right) moved into the F3 Asian points lead thanks to equally sharing the victories over the six-race Yas Marina marathon with Formula 2 race-winning Red Bull Junior Jehan Daruvala.

With the Regional F3 cars proving tough to race in at the best of times, the chances of overtaking were further reduced by running the event on the so-called Corkscrew layout. This features a downhill S-bend after the first couple of left-handers, and brings the field out some way down the first of the two long back straights, cutting the chances of a slipstream.

The pick of the races was the second. Daruvala had already won the first to begin to mitigate his disappointing opening round with Mumbai Falcons in Dubai, and was leading the sequel, under pressure from French F4 graduate Isack Hadjar. The 16-year-old swept around the outside of Daruvala into the Turns 8/9 chicane, but wasn't assertive enough on the inside line for the second apex. Daruvala ran off the circuit while getting the power down, but wasn't penalised. His momentum was slowed, and briefly he was three-abreast with Hadjar and Ferrari-backed Swede Dino



Beganovic. Once again Daruvala showed far more racecraft than the youngsters by asserting himself from the middle of a near-pincer on the brakes at the end of the following straight.

Chovet, who had arrived in Abu Dhabi just one point behind series leader Guanyu Zhou, was fifth in the first two races, before winning the next three at the wheel of his Pinnacle Motorsport car. F2 ace and Alpine F1 protege Zhou, meanwhile, provided another highlight with his drive in race three. He'd placed second and fourth in the opening two races, but stalled his Abu Dhabi Racing by Prema car at the start of the third,

before carving through to fifth.

The event finished with Daruvala leading home Zhou, and Chovet a distant fourth. Daruvala therefore topped the podium count, on five out of the six races, with Zhou and Hadjar on four, Chovet on three, and Beganovic on two. Italian F4 graduate Beganovic, who like Hadjar has consistently impressed with his pace, will now give his seat over to his 2021 Prema Formula Regional by Alpine team-mate David Vidales for the final two rounds.

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Aberdein from Germany to Yorkshire

ELMS

United Autosports has completed its two line-ups for the defence of its European Le Mans Series LMP2 crown in 2021 with former DTM driver Jonathan Aberdein and series regular Nico Jamin.

Sportscar rookie Aberdein (left), who raced for BMW in last year's DTM and the privateer WRT Audi team in 2019, will line up alongside reigning champion Phil Hanson

and Tom Gamble. Jamin, who has also been confirmed by the team for the Le Mans 24 Hours, will drive alongside Job van Uitert and Manuel Maldonado – the cousin of ex-Formula 1 driver Pastor and who finished fourth in last year's Euroformula Open series – in the sister ORECA-Gibson 07 LMP2.

Aberdein, 22, expressed confidence that his line-up with Hanson and reigning LMP3 champion Gamble “will be a force to be reckoned with” in the

2021 ELMS, which is scheduled to kick off at Barcelona on 18 April. United team boss Richard Dean added that he is confident that his new signing “will get to grips with LMP2 quickly”.

Team co-owner Zak Brown described 25-year-old Jamin, who last year finished third in class at Le Mans with the Tech 1/Panis Racing squad, “as a crucial part of our team as we aim to defend our championship title”.

GARY WATKINS





Barrichello Jr steps onto European ladder

FORMULA REGIONAL

The merger between the Formula Renault Eurocup and Formula Regional European Championship for 2021 may have extended the Prema-versus-ART single-seater war into a third arena, but that won't be the only focus this season. Eduardo 'Dudu' Barrichello, the son of ex-Formula 1 star Rubens, is following in his father's footsteps by going to an Italian team to contest a continent-wide, F1-supporting series.

Barrichello Jr, 19, has taken his baby steps in the States, and was runner-up in last

year's IndyCar-supporting USF2000 series. Now he has joined long-time FRenault squad JD Motorsport to compete in FRegional by Alpine, which has early-season Spanish and Monaco GP support rounds. His father won the 1990 equivalent, the Opel Lotus Euroseries, with Draco Racing.

FRegional dominator Prema Powerteam has completed its line-up, with Mercedes F1 protege Paul Aron defecting from ART's Renault squad to join David Vidales and Ferrari junior Dino Beganovic. Estonian Aron is the younger brother of ex-Prema F3 and F4 ace Ralf, who has acted as team manager

for the squad's FRegional operation.

Defecting in the opposite direction to Aron is Prema's exciting 2020 Italian F4 champion Gabriele Mini. The Nicolas Todt-managed Sicilian is limbering up at ART with Gregoire Saucy (who stays on for another year) and Thomas ten Brinke – the 15-year-old son of Dutch Dakar Rally veteran Bernhard ten Brinke was third in Spanish F4 last year, his rookie season in cars.

R-race GP has recruited French F4 graduate and Asian F3 ace Isack Hadjar to join 2019 British F4 champion Zane Maloney.

MARCUS SIMMONS

Alistair Walker 1944-2021

OBITUARY

Fifth place in the 1970 Le Mans 24 Hours, sharing an Ecurie Francorchamps Ferrari 512S with Belgian baron Hugues de Fierlant, was a career-crowning achievement for Briton Alistair Walker, who died last month aged 76.

Gifted a Ford Lotus Cortina for his 18th birthday and an AC Cobra for his 21st, Yorkshireman Walker developed into a competent privateer for

much of European Formula 2's 1600cc era.

Having raced an old F3 Brabham BT18 in 1967, he went F2 in an ex-John Surtees Lola T100 in 1968, finishing sixth on his continental debut in the Nurburgring Sudschleife's Eifelrennen. Plans to run a Tecno in 1969 were abandoned, but Walker acquired an ex-works Ferrari 330P4 and contested Springbok races with Robin Widdows. Second to Frank Gardner's

Lola T70 at Lourenco Marques was a fine effort.

Enthused, he formed Alistair Walker Racing for 1970, running Widdows and himself in Brabham-FVA BT30s. Fifth, behind Widdows, in Thruxton's Euro F2 round was a high.

Third in a works Brabham in a non-points race at the Nurburgring, and fourth in a leg of the 1971 South American Temporada series, also coloured Walker's CV.

MARCUS PYE



IN THE HEADLINES

OLIPHANT BACK IN BMW

British Touring Car Championship race winner Tom Oliphant is to remain on board at the West Surrey Racing-run BMW squad this season. As expected, Oliphant gets a third year at WSR, and is the second of the squad's three drivers to be confirmed for 2021, with four-time champion Colin Turkington already in place. Team boss Dick Bennetts said: "We asked far more of him last year and he responded extremely well both on-track and off it. I think we'll see even more from Tom in 2021 and that would be great for both him and us."

PRIAULX IN A PORSCHE

American-based Guernseyman Seb Priaulx is to race in the inaugural Porsche Carrera Cup North America this year. Priaulx, who has had two seasons in Multimatic Motorsports' Ford Mustang GT4 line-up, will drive for Multimatic-affiliated Kelly-Moss Racing. The 20-year-old son of four-time World Touring Car champion Andy Priaulx is hoping that it provides a pathway to the Porsche Junior shootout in Germany.

SCHNITZER LIQUIDATED

Multiple championship-winning squad Schnitzer Motorsport is set to be liquidated and is preparing to sell its assets after BMW Motorsport decided against renewing its contract for 2021. Boss Herbert Schnitzer Jr said: "Our hearts are really bleeding. We've spent more time together in some cases than with our families – apart from me, because it is my family."

PETER BRYANT 1942-2020

Best known as the co-driver to Ari Vatanen when the Finn won the 1976 British Rally Championship in a Ford Escort RS1800 Mk2, Peter Bryant died in December. He was 78. Bryant, who claimed Tour of Britain honours with Vatanen in 1976, also co-drove Russell Brookes with success in Escort and Talbot Sunbeam Lotus machinery.



Solberg Jr's Hyundai chance

WRC

Oliver Solberg will step up to the premier class in the World Rally Championship with Hyundai on this month's Arctic Rally Finland. The drive is seen by Hyundai as part of the "ongoing learning curve" for 19-year-old 2020 European Rally Championship runner-up Solberg, whose i20 Coupe WRC will be serviced by French team 2C Competition.

Hyundai team principal Andrea Adamo is keen for Solberg, the son of 2003 World Rally champion Petter, to work closely with factory stars Ott Tanak and Thierry Neuville, as well as Irishman Craig Breen, who will make the first of several planned appearances of 2021 at the Arctic event.

"We are keen to see his performance level, of course, but there is no pressure on his shoulders in his debut WRC event," explained Adamo. "He has to enjoy the rally and take all the experience possible. It will be his first time at the top level of world rallying but it is more of a test than anything else; he has to acclimatise and get acquainted with the high-speed nature of

the car in these wintry conditions.

"We hope to see him at the arrival, the end of the powerstage, with lots of enjoyment and happiness – that's the main target."

Many had expected Solberg to continue his Rally2 programme with Hyundai that was announced last December. He has shown flashes of brilliance in the class, with consecutive victories on Rally Liepaja in 2019 and 2020 his biggest achievement.

Solberg and co-driver Aaron Johnston go into the event in good shape after finishing third in January's Arctic Lapland Rally. The roads that featured will be similar to the ones that make up the route of the Arctic Finland Rally, but the young Swede is keen to temper expectations.

"I have driven quite a lot on the snow, and I know this type of condition quite well, but the car is completely new for me," he said. "The only target for me in Lapland is to learn and take the experience. I want to come out of every stage understanding the i20 Coupe WRC more than when I started it."

JASON CRAIG

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Hamilton's title haul potential

The world champion's one-year contract extension shouldn't necessarily be taken as an indication of intent. Who's to say that the 36-year-old has yet to reach his peak?

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

Jhere is a strong school of thought that Lewis Hamilton's one-year contract extension with Mercedes means he is now set on a path to walk away from Formula 1 after clinching an eighth world title in 2021. But this underestimates several important factors in Hamilton's case, and with these taken into account a new narrative emerges. It's also one that could yet defy an age-old expectation.

For a start, although Hamilton clearly has lots of interests outside F1, and may indeed decide that enough is enough at the end of 2021, it cannot be automatically assumed that he is going to be done with F1 then. The COVID-19 pandemic may even have made him massively reassess what he wants to do in terms of immediate life goals. After all, less time travelling in 2020 could have considerably rejuvenated him after a life mainly spent on the road – a positive minor side-effect of the awful year the world has experienced, and potentially true of lots of others working in F1.

Then there's Hamilton's stated final goal in F1 – furthering the push to increase diversity in motorsport. Bluntly put, people care more about current drivers than ex-drivers, so the best way for him to achieve this aim is to remain an active competitor at motorsport's top level. A case in point would be the T-shirt message demanding justice for Breonna Taylor that Hamilton wore after winning the Tuscan Grand Prix. What this conveyed from the top step of the

“Hamilton often mentions his desire to take on the younger F1 generations in a closer battle”

podium was witnessed by a broader audience than had he posted the message from his own, non-sporting, platforms alone (although his reach on these is considerable). Hamilton knows the power he has at the top of F1's game, which makes his efforts to further such an important cause all the more impressive.

Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff explained that Hamilton's one-year deal was a product of the unique challenges that the pandemic – and both parties contracting COVID-19 over the winter – had posed to the negotiations. Essentially, they have agreed to resume talks later this year about a further, presumably longer, extension starting in 2022. There are also important economic impacts from the pandemic that must be taken into account for both sides when it comes to another new deal.

Hamilton turned 36 in January. In 2021 he will be the third

oldest driver on the grid. But he is yet to show that he is entering into anything like the decline that is often expected of sports people as they get older. Sebastian Vettel is two and a half years younger than Hamilton, but has a clear track record of errors in recent seasons that he did not generally make in his younger days.

As an aside, consider NFL record-setter-in-chief Tom Brady. The now-Tampa Bay Buccaneers quarterback won his seventh Super Bowl last weekend aged 43, which puts him on the same number as Hamilton's F1 title haul. Brady, who is now the oldest Super Bowl-winning quarterback by four years, isn't declining at the dramatic rate as some of his peers, and this is often put down to his fitness and diet regime. But this is also only a product of modern innovation in these fields – it stands to reason that earlier great NFL players would have benefited from these techniques.

In that way, Hamilton's situation is similar – F1 teams are simply better than they were in the past. His rise to F1 domination might even be considered 'easier' because the advantages in F1 take longer to undo compared to the NFL, which is supposed to be geared to stopping one team/player dominating by providing the best new players to teams ranked at the bottom of the league (this factor enhances Brady's reputation considerably).

Hamilton is far from F1's oldest champion (Juan Manuel Fangio, aged 46 in 1957) and is currently ninth on the all-time oldest champions list. Drivers 'peak' at different times and it may even be that he is still yet to reach his best form. For example, Nigel Mansell arguably hit his peak in his late thirties. Plus, in motorsport, while age decline should be acknowledged, it must surely be considered less of a factor compared to other sports, as physical fitness is less important (although still significant).

Mercedes has gone out of its way to highlight why it could be tripped up in 2021, but by pointing this out the team reinforces why it's the favourite yet again. So, yes, Hamilton is the overwhelming favourite to win in 2021, but this doesn't automatically mean its 'one (more) and done' on his time in F1.

The 2022 ruleset represents the most tangible threat to his chances of taking titles beyond this year. If the new regulations close the grid up as hoped, then Hamilton will inevitably have a harder path to the title. But that doesn't mean he will come to a sudden halt. Plus, Hamilton has regularly mentioned his desire to take on the younger F1 generations in a closer battle, so we should take him at his word in considering his future.

Securing an eighth title is Hamilton's target in 2021. But it's far from the potential total he could go on to achieve, should he take his career towards Fangio's F1 record or even continue to win at Brady's age. ❧



P18 THE HURDLES MERCEDES FACES



RICHARDSON RACING POWERS FORWARD

ON AND OFF THE TRACK

The past year was not a straightforward one for the motorsport world. But, despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020 still marked a very significant 12 months for the Richardson Racing squad. The team took major steps towards its goal of racing in the Le Mans 24 Hours in the future – with important developments coming both on and off the track.

When racing finally resumed, it was a successful year for Richardson Racing as the team powered Josh Malin to a hard-fought Ginetta GT5 Challenge title, grabbing seven victories along the way. The outfit also moved into the Porsche Carrera Cup GB for the first time, running leading Ginetta Junior graduate Will Martin. He became one of only four drivers other than the dominant Harry King to take a victory in 2020 and a strong second half of the season netted Martin five other podiums as well as runner-up in the rookie class. Meanwhile, in Ginetta Junior, the team got off to a strong start with novice Georgi Dimitrov grabbing an impressive two wins and a podium at the opening weekend of the season, before going on to finish fourth in the overall standings and second in the rookie points.

Alongside those successes, there was also plenty going on for the Richardson Racing team away from the circuits. It has invested significantly in its Corby headquarters, expanding and updating the services it is able to offer. All of the squad's drivers will benefit from the operation's state-of-the-art simulator, along with experienced driver coaches and dedicated sports marketing advice to help create a driver's individual brand. ▶



Now, the team is seeking to build on the foundations from the past few seasons as it looks to secure more silverware in 2021. "Using the blueprint of our successful year in 2020, where we won the Ginetta GT5 Challenge championship, we are committed to replicating this result across all championships in 2021," says team boss Gwyn Richardson. "Our highly skilled and experienced team are excited about the year ahead and delivering success for our roster of drivers."

As well as continuing to run drivers in Ginetta Junior, the Ginetta GT5 Challenge and the Porsche Carrera Cup GB, Richardson Racing is also making a return to single-seater action in British Formula 4 in 2021. Seats are still available in all of these series so, if you want to take advantage of the new facilities and investment the team has made and join Richardson Racing on its exciting journey towards the highest levels of motorsport, get in contact now. ■

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Website: richardsonracing.co.uk



Why Grosjean's taking on IndyCar

The chance to rediscover the purest pleasures of motor racing appeals greatly, although the circumspect father-of-three is steering clear of superspeedways

DAVID MALSHER-LOPEZ

When Romain Grosjean first pulls out of the pitlane in his Dale Coyne Racing with RWR Dallara-Honda in testing at Barber Motorsports Park later this month, he may initially be underwhelmed with the power on offer from the IndyCar Series' 2.2-litre twin-turbo V6 formula.

It's not the fact that it falls approximately 250bhp short of the near-1000bhp believed to come from the Ferrari unit he ran in his last Haas Formula 1 car. It's more the manner of delivery: acceleration will feel far more gradual without a hybrid's instant low-down response, and because the Xtrac gearbox has just six rather than eight ratios and is therefore more reliant on torque.

The bigger challenges will await him at the corners. An IndyCar's spec PFC brakes are good, but they can't compensate for the relative lack of downforce in the one-make Dallara's aero package, so deciding how late he can brake will be a voyage into the unknown for Grosjean.

And then there's the turn-in. When Juan Pablo Montoya returned to IndyCar racing in 2014 after six years in F1 and seven in NASCAR, he admitted that the lack of power steering came as a rude (re)awakening. "You've got to heave it in, but do it very precisely," was his perfect description of the process.

Making such precision second nature despite the bumps and kerbs is an art in itself, and the resultant kickback without

"It's top-level, but outside of the car it's back to why we started racing – because we loved it"

assisted steering makes driving an IndyCar at speed quite a workout. And it is this point that may compromise Grosjean's first outing, as he admits. His left hand is not yet recovered from the burns incurred in the Frenchman's infamous crash in the Bahrain Grand Prix last November.

"The right hand is 100% OK and the left hand I would say is 50%," he told Autosport last week. "But it's getting better every day. For our first test at Barber on 22 February, I may have some limitation about using some of the kerbs. At the downhill chicane, the drivers use a lot of the left-hand-side kerb and that could still be a bit tricky. But by the time we go back there for the first race of the season in the middle of April, I should be fully back and ready to go. I can't wait."

Grosjean's enthusiasm for his IndyCar deal for 2021 matches

that of erstwhile Haas F1 team-mate Kevin Magnussen for his IMSA ride in Chip Ganassi Racing's Cadillac DPi-V.R. Yes, there will be aspects of F1 they miss, and yes, they'd probably answer in the affirmative if presented with a one-off opportunity to race for Mercedes-Benz. But the days of being gridfillers just to be in F1 are gone.

"While I'm on my exercise bike in front of the TV, I watch the IndyCar channel on YouTube," said Grosjean. "I've got to say, it's the pure racing that I loved for many years as I was coming through, and that I missed for so many years recently. In Formula 1, you don't feel like you are even competing in the same championship as the Mercedes."

"Knowing that basically everyone has the same car, the same chance, is something I've missed. And then knowing that if you have a tough qualifying or a problem at the beginning of a race, you as a driver can make the difference because the cars are so closely matched or the team can help you make the difference with strategy... it's mega."

It's no surprise that Grosjean is a fan of the even playing field, for he truly excelled in spec and near-spec junior formulas. Between 2005 and 2011, he accrued championship titles in Formula Renault, Formula 3 Euro Series, GP2 (now Formula 2), GP2 Asia and Auto GP.

But the 34-year-old's enthusiasm for IndyCar doesn't extend to the superspeedways, and as such he will sit out the double-header at Texas Motor Speedway and the Indianapolis 500. "That's the limiting factor compared with how I was before the accident in Bahrain," said Grosjean. "If I was 25 and didn't have kids I would do the whole season, no question. But I'm a father of three, and for two minutes and 45 seconds in Bahrain, they thought they had lost their father... My kids have already had a feeling that truly no one ever wants to have, and I can't put them through that again."

The pure challenge of oval racing does intrigue him, however, and he may well try Gateway's 1.25-mile track. If he does, Grosjean can expect to have fun – as he should throughout the rest of the season.

"I heard it's a different atmosphere in IndyCar, and that's going to be great," he grinned. "The fans are made very welcome, the drivers are having barbecues beside their RVs, socialising... It's top-level racing on track but outside of the car, it's back to why we started racing when we were young – because we loved it. That's something you lose a little bit through your professional career, but I think in IndyCar I can get it back. And I'm ready for that."

Equally, Dale Coyne Racing is ready to go back to Victory Lane – and I wouldn't bet against a reborn 'RoGro' delivering. 🏆

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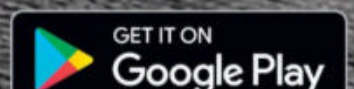
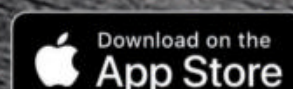
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YOUR SAY

*Now we can see what these cars can really do,
and the signs are that we shall be impressed*

JOHN ASHMOLE

Formula E let loose on a proper race track

Hooray! At last, the prospect of a Formula E race taking place on a proper race track, Vallelunga or Valencia (Pit+Paddock, 4 February). Now we can see what these cars can really do, and the signs are that we shall be impressed.

Let's get away from grossly narrow so-called city centre tracks with horrible surfaces (Berlin) and chicanes and hairpins so tight that, if one driver fouls up, several others clatter in behind at embarrassingly slow speeds.

Mexico, a shortened version of a real track, gave us a limited view of what this might become, with enough track space for drivers and cars to express themselves.

All we need now is to do away with Fanboost and booster lanes and apparently random penalties, and we shall have some serious forward-looking motor racing that will be worthy of the millions that the manufacturers are required to spend.

John Ashmole
Spalding, Lincs

Vintage inspiration stirs memories

I was intrigued to read about the Alfa Romeo 158-inspired 'Tip0184' concept created by Ant Anstead and his Dowsett Cars company (Club Autosport, 4 February). But am I correct in remembering that Tom Wheatcroft and his Donington Park organisation once tried to instigate a similar retro-style racing series some years ago, called something like 'Formula Classic'?

I seem to recall that there was an example of one of the cars – a similarly 1950s-inspired single-seater – on display in the Donington Grand Prix Collection. Do any other readers recollect this – or does my memory deceive me?!

James Rollin
Belper, Derbyshire

Keeping the purists and the thrill-seekers happy

Roger Smith's ideas to spice up F1 are thought-provoking (Opinion, 4 February), but it seems we have to do something that provides excitement while keeping the purists happy. It's quite simple: have normal qualifying, then an hour later a 45-



minute reversed-grid sprint race for half championship points. The Sunday race will be the 'main event' for full championship points. I think it will keep both sides of the debate happy.

Rob Cliff
Rochester, Kent

Welcome reminder of an attempted F1 foray

Thanks for revisiting Gordon Kirby's Al Unser Jr piece ('When Little Al showed his F1 credentials', autosport.com); it was nice to think back to those days and to have the insight into his Williams test. I remember hoping it would have been Little Al to go to F1 from the US (I'm in Canada, and of course soon after we had our own IndyCar star head over to Williams).

Robert Pearson
Byemail

Verstappen takes it to the max

On again viewing some of Max Verstappen's great saves (Brazil 2014 and 2016, Turkey 2020), a thought occurs: Max's car control is best demonstrated by him losing control of the car(?!).

Graeme Innes-Johnstone
Elland, West Yorks

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DANGEROUS BENDS FOR MERCEDES-BENZ

*The 2021 breed of F1 car may be based on the 2020 machines.
But that doesn't mean to say there won't be tricky times
for the habitual dominator. Here are some areas
that could trip up Mercedes*

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

PHOTOGRAPHY  **motorsport
IMAGES**

The 2020-21 Formula 1 off-season has been like no other in the championship's recent history. After pulling off the remarkable feat of holding 17 races during unprecedented global disruption in our modern, hyper-connected world, attentions quickly turned to what comes next. But the way F1 teams have been preparing for the 2021 campaign, since well before the 2020 season came to a flat finish in Abu Dhabi, is rather unusual.

The main difference is that in the wake of the agreement between the teams, F1 and the FIA from during the initial COVID-19 lockdowns, the 2020 car designs will be largely carried over into this season. There were subsequent tweaks to the arrangement, significantly involving changes to the car floors to reduce downforce levels by 10%, and a token system allowing some limited development, but the thrust remains essentially the same. The teams will be heavily relying on the work they did producing their 2020 challengers – and many of the mechanical parts these contained – for another year.

The design rules revolution that was supposed to be introduced now is, of course, postponed until 2022.

But that doesn't mean preparations for the 2021 season are the same for everyone. McLaren has switched engine suppliers to return to being a Mercedes customer. It has therefore had to significantly adapt its chassis to fit its new engine, with team production director Piers Thynne saying the process means McLaren will enter the new season with "essentially a new car".

All the teams are also now operating under F1's cost cap, which stands at \$145million for 2021. Some squads, such as Williams, were already operating under that ceiling, so have not had to alter their approaches, or indeed are considering plans to spend upwards towards the cap. But the bigger teams have had to make significant operations changes to comply.

The Mercedes squad can arguably be considered the 'biggest' team operating in current F1, given its large staff (approximately 950 people), three engine deals to supply other squads, and, critically, its enormous run of recent success. All told, in

**"THE MOST INTENSE AND DIFFICULT
THING FOR US IS REACTING TO THE
2021 AERODYNAMIC CHANGES"**



addition to the seven world title doubles it has secured since the start of the turbo-hybrid era, it has won 102 races. Factoring that sustained success – and, of course, not forgetting that 2021 follows a year where at times its car design achieved performance gaps to the rest of the field that have not been witnessed since the earliest years of the current engine formula – alongside the carryover requirement inevitably makes Mercedes the favourite once again. And this is why it was so striking to hear Mercedes technical director James Allison recently say: “If you are looking at this new season of 2021 and you are thinking it’s just going to be a carryover of what we saw in 2020, well, don’t be fooled by anyone who is telling you that.”

“The work we’ve had to do has been very wide-reaching,” Allison said in a video, released by Mercedes, explaining the scope of the 2021 rule changes. “And we hope we have done enough to stay successful. But as

ever at this time of year we are just full of the anxiety and excitement of waiting to find out whether all this investment that we have made into the new car will indeed pay off.”

Since it reached its current position as F1’s all-conquering team, Mercedes has not made the clichéd mistake of resting on its laurels. And despite the impressive performance levels the W11 produced, the team did look vulnerable on several occasions last season, which cost it points. There are potential pitfalls that all F1 teams must consider for 2021, and Mercedes has already publicly acknowledged the challenges it faces. Here we examine exactly what the team is worried about, and how likely it is that such stumbling blocks could bring down F1’s current giant.



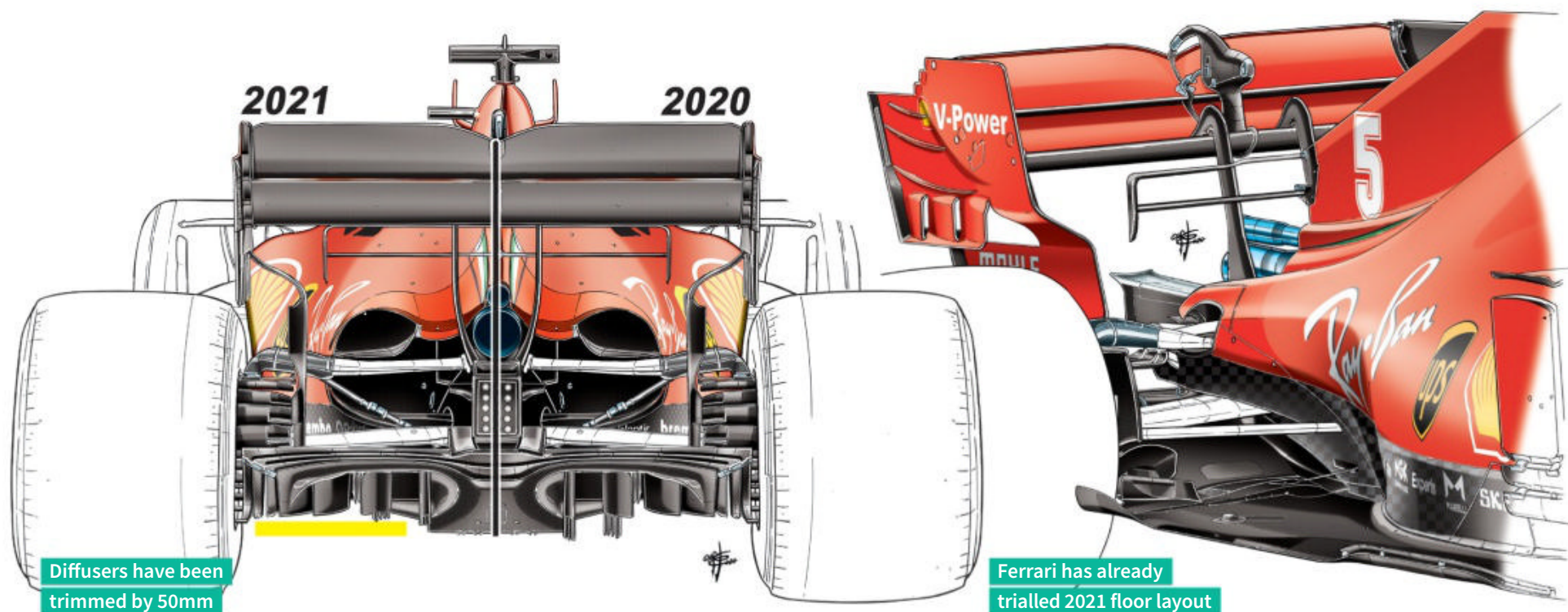
WILL THE FLOOR AERO RULE CHANGES BE A SIGNIFICANT FACTOR?

“Probably the most intense and difficult thing for us is reacting to the aerodynamic changes that come for 2021,” says Allison, firmly cutting to the heart of the matter.

Plans to change the floor designs were made in reaction to the awesome speeds reached by the 2020 cars. Although the current aero rules package has been in place since 2017, chassis and engine evolution, allied to the stable tyre compounds in 2019 and 2020, meant that the cars were reaching speeds and lap times that had not been achieved for many years. But with higher speeds came problems.

The FIA has a long history of stepping in when F1 cars reach an ultra-high performance level. That’s for very good reasons, as modern tracks are graded via their safety status, and it’s easier to rein in the cars than rebuild every circuit. It was for this reason that 2004 held on for so long as F1’s lap-time high-water mark, because the rule that required drivers to run a single set of tyres for an entire race in 2005 was introduced in a bid to curb cornering speeds. When this was removed a year later, the V10 engines had been replaced by V8s, and three years further on the design rules were altered drastically to slash downforce levels, creating the criss-crossed slope that has led F1 to its current speed point.

After tyre failures rocked the British GP, as well as additional puncture problems at Mugello and Imola, the FIA stepped in. The decision was made with F1 to enforce alterations to the floors, as well as introduce reinforced tyre compounds for 2021. The floor changes essentially scale back the intricate designs that had become prevalent in this area, with a triangular exclusion zone added here, where no bodywork can be placed between the back of the driver >>



cell and a car's rear axle. The outlawed slots and perforated edges had a knock-on effect in helping diffusers (which have also been trimmed by 50mm for 2021 in a concurrent required change) generate downforce, because they prevented distorted air getting in. Judging by the designs trialled by Ferrari, Renault and Haas late in 2020, small tapering curls could be introduced to try to replicate what the various slots and cut-outs were previously doing.

"When you see it, you'll think, 'That doesn't look that big,' but on its own in its rawest form if you just chop that area off your car it'll take about a second a lap away," Allison explains, regarding the triangular area of floor restriction.

There have been additional small rule changes regarding aero-generating parts that are more along the lines of what has been cut from the diffuser, as what Allison describes as "the little fins and flicks that were on the rear brake duct" must be smaller. The toothy strakes applied to the bargeboards further towards the front of the car are also now banned. But it remains possible for the teams to make considerable changes to nose bodywork and associated fairings without needing to spend their critical development tokens.

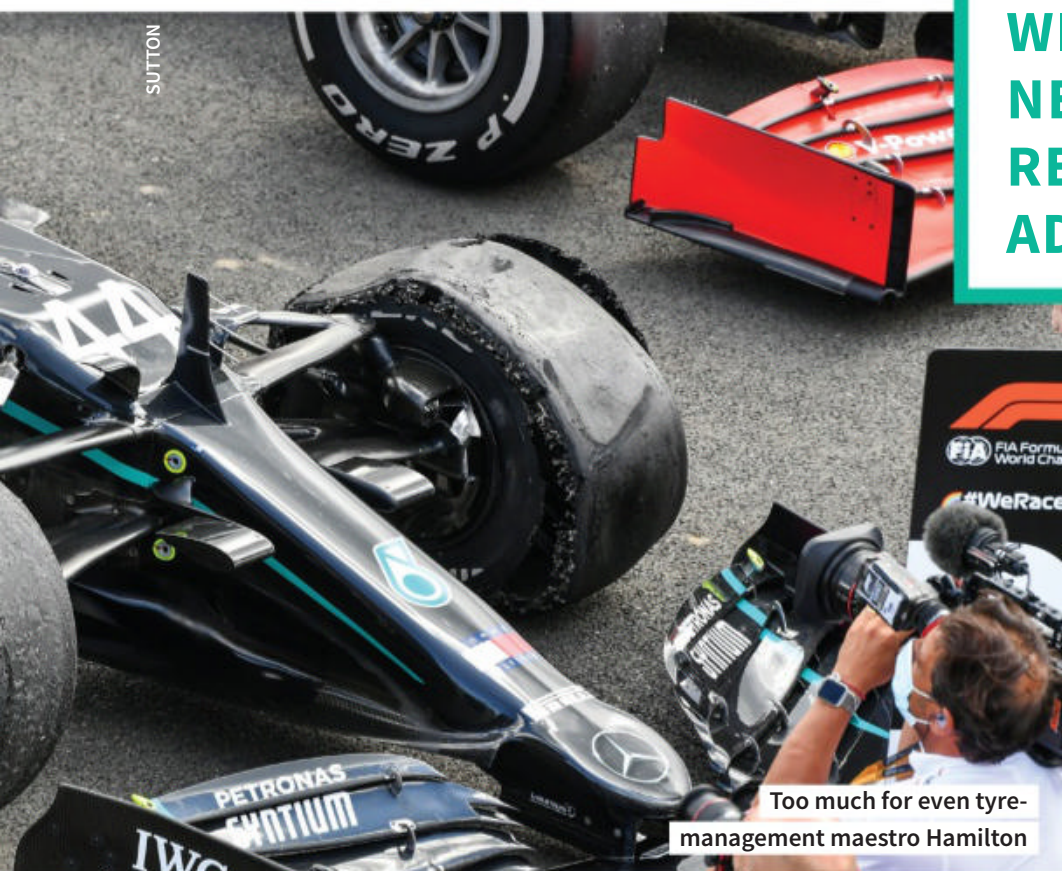
"The combination of those four effects [floor triangle, diffuser cut, brake ducts fin reduction and bargeboard alteration] in their rawest form – just cut-off and trimmed back in a way that the rules require – brings the performance of the car way back to sort of somewhere near 2019 levels," says Allison.

The challenge to recover the downforce loss is one of arguably

"IN ITS RAWEST FORM IF YOU JUST CHOP THAT AREA OFF YOUR CAR IT'LL TAKE ABOUT A SECOND A LAP AWAY"

the two biggest potential stumbling blocks that Mercedes (and everyone else) is navigating ahead of the 2021 season. Any team that can claw back the approximately one-second deficit, or 10% overall downforce loss, by developing the few areas of the cars that remain unrestricted by the token system will have an enormous advantage.

Mercedes remains in a very strong position approaching this design obstacle. For a start, the W11, on which the W12 will be mostly based, was without doubt the class of 2020, and, as we explain on page 27, can be considered the best F1 car Mercedes has ever produced. This is mainly because the team found a way to make such massive gains despite the rules remaining stable going into 2020. The main thrust of those stems from the good job Mercedes has done with its chassis designs as the turbo-hybrid era has progressed – it has been the case for several seasons (mainly since it traversed the 2017 rule changes so well) that the team's power prowess is not just the sole factor behind its success.



WILL THE NEW TYRES REMOVE OLD ADVANTAGES?

As part of Autosport's 70th anniversary special edition, Mercedes chief designer John Owen said: "Most of the vices that we've ever had [in terms of car design] are about tyres." And it's worth revisiting this comment once again in the context of the new rubber being introduced for 2021.

The teams got to sample the new compounds Pirelli is producing – the first new tyres since 2019, after the teams rejected the ones that had been set for use last year – at the Portuguese, Bahrain and Abu Dhabi grands prix. They are around 3kg heavier to incorporate the additional strength the rubber design now requires to cope with the higher speeds, although this is building on an existing approach rather than being all-new. Last year Lewis Hamilton estimated the new tyres would perform "like a second worse per lap".

It has long been recognised that the world champion holds a distinct advantage when it comes to in-race tyre management over his rivals, particularly team-mate Valtteri Bottas. This perhaps explains his initial pessimism regarding what were then prototype tyres, although his negative assessments were shared by many others, as it would be natural for Hamilton to seek to protect

Red Bull seized its tyre advantage in Abu Dhabi to end the 2020 season with a Mercedes defeat

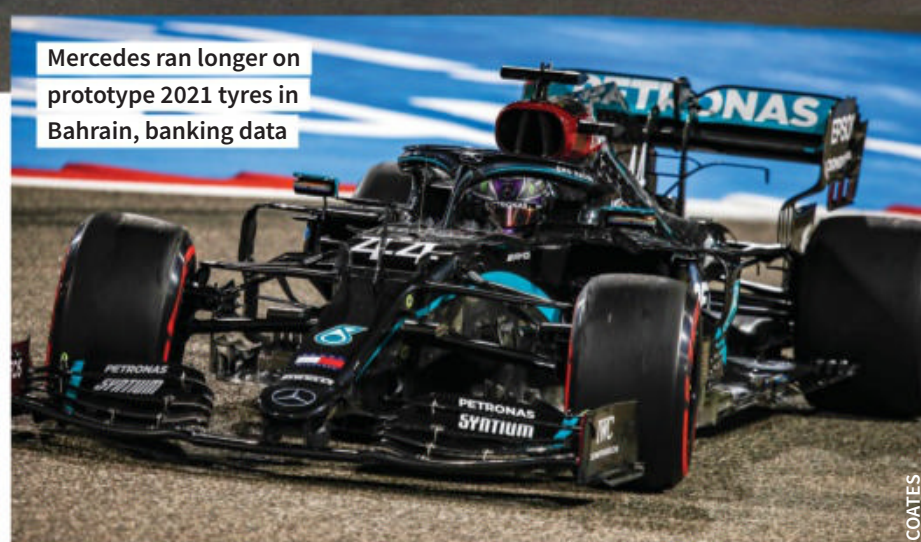


that advantage. After all, the negative driver feedback played a major part in the 2020 tyres being abandoned.

But it's the danger the tyre change represents for Mercedes overall that is the second of the two potentially most cumbersome stumbling blocks. And this is why we again refer back to Owen's point: failing to make the tyres work best is simply one of the biggest mistakes a modern F1 team can make. Mercedes even has a loud warning from the most recent F1 event – that defeat to Max Verstappen in Abu Dhabi, where a problem getting the best out of the soft tyres cost Mercedes in qualifying at a venue where track position is so crucial.

“These tyres will affect the way that the car performs and they affect the way that you have to design the aerodynamic platform and the way that you have to set up the car,” says Allison. “So it's been a big challenge for us to try and stretch out that testing data that we had at the tracks last year and to try and make as much as we can out of the tyre data supplied to us by Pirelli, so that we would be ready to really optimise the car around the characteristics of these new tyres.”

Just as with the challenge to overcome the downforce loss, nailing the understanding of new Pirelli tyres is not a task to be underestimated. But although its risk of messing up critical calculations is as high as other teams' – see its shocking



Mercedes ran longer on prototype 2021 tyres in Bahrain, banking data

underperformance in the early parts of the 2020 Turkish GP – Mercedes does have a major advantage it can rely upon here.

During FP2 at the 2020 Bahrain GP, the team ran the prototype tyres for longer than any of its rivals, as it sacrificed its usual race preparation programme to gain additional understanding about the new rubber. Again, this emphasises how big an advantage Mercedes still had at the end of last year, with the opening Bahrain race being eight rounds since the W11's last performance upgrades were added. Mercedes also completed additional running that other teams did not in second practice in Abu Dhabi. In short, the team managed to make an early start on the critical work to make sure it nails the switch to new, stronger rubber. >>

COULD SMALLER NEW CHALLENGES COMBINE INTO A MAJOR OBSTACLE?

Although the floor-design tweaks and the new tyres are the headline (of limited) changes for the 2021 cars, there are a few other areas where things will be different to 2020, even with the carryover requirements.

The first is that Mercedes' innovative dual-axis steering system has been banned, with the team's agreement, and will not feature on the W12. Mercedes even removed DAS from its cars during Friday practice at several of the late 2020 races, as it focused on preparing for life without it in 2021. When George Russell replaced Hamilton for the Sakhir GP, DAS was left on to allow the younger Briton the chance to get familiar with what Allison calls "an old friend".

Engine manufacturers are now only permitted to make one performance upgrade in 2021, which "really ramps up the pressure on the PU organisation to make sure that we get as much as possible from that single opportunity", says Allison. Again, Mercedes has strong past form to call upon in this particular area, but it should be noted that Ferrari has overhauled its engine after its 2020 disaster, and Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff expects

"THAT HAS BEEN A HUGE BODY OF WORK THAT HAS KEPT US REALLY ON OUR TOES FOR A LONG, LONG TIME"

that "Honda will really step on the gas to compete for the championship in their last year as a manufacturer" with Red Bull. Plus, the car minimum weight has been raised by 6kg compared to 2020 and now sits at 752kg. The heavier new tyres account for some of this, while the minimum weight of the power unit has also been raised by 5kg to 150kg, with some suggestions that this was in response to teams trying to find small, but expensive, weight gains by using innovative materials.

Mercedes, alongside the rest of the teams, has also had to work hard to ensure it is now in line with F1's new cost-cap regulations. In theory, this would be expected to have a minimal impact on car performance for 2021 given the carryover requirements, and because the cost cap only applied from 1 January this year, long after the teams started planning the adaptations of their 2020

cars. But it's a critically important rule, and Mercedes, as one of F1's largest teams, has had to alter the way it deploys its staff to stay within the confines of the cost cap, which includes using its personnel in its recently created Applied Science division and considering entering additional motorsport categories in the future. The team does not want to lose the staff that has created its stunning success. "That has been a huge body of work that has kept us really on our toes for a long, long time," says Allison.

The cost cap runs alongside F1's first handicap system for aero development, which, as the 2020 winner, impacts Mercedes most. For the first half of 2021 – there is a reset based on the constructors' championship order after 30 June – Mercedes is permitted to use 90% of the 2020 windtunnel allowance, while Williams can go up to 112.5% after finishing 10th last year. CFD tool usage, already heavily governed, is now restricted in a similar way.

For the same reasons as the cost cap, the impact this new rule could have on the 2021 competitive order should be minimal. But the sliding handicap scale alters rather dramatically from the start of next year, with the 2021 winner down to 70% windtunnel allowance and the squad finishing last up to 115%. Allison suggests Mercedes is viewing the clampdown on resources as a further chance to improve, by making it so that "the methodology and approach to those CFD calculations [and windtunnel work] are as valuable as possible".

"We've tried to adapt our approach to this," he adds. "So, we mitigate and maybe even completely offset the effect of this reduction in the amount that we are allowed to use these fundamental tools."





WILL THE SWITCH OF FOCUS TO THE 2022 RULES RESET IMPACT MERCEDES' 2021 CHANCES?

carryover requirements make things easier but, given the remaining unrestricted aero development areas and the allowances within the token system, there are still gains to be found heading into 2021 and during the season's opening stages.

There will come a point, as is the case in every normal season, when resource allocation shifts towards the new design, and the 2022 cars are set to be so vastly different with their venturi tunnels and slashed overall downforce that it will be a key focus for every team. Even at the back of the grid, Williams is committed to continuing development for its 2021 machine, but wary that it must already plan backwards from the expected initial test dates in 2022 to make sure it does not miss any track

The delayed major rules reset will be an important factor in how the teams approach their 2021 development campaigns. The

running with the all-new chassis concepts.

The cost cap is an additional consideration in this area, because the decision to push the introduction of the new cars back means that much of the design development must now be done within 2021's limit. Had the new cars been brought through for this year, the teams would have had unrestricted budgets to design them alongside developing their 2020 challengers. In theory, again, the cost cap limits the possibilities of bigger teams such as Mercedes gaining a significant advantage. That's really for this time next year, but it should be noted that the teams were not allowed to start aero testing their 2022 designs until 1 January 2021.

The danger for any team now is that it spends too much time and resources upon 2021, and not looking enough at the rules reset. This hurt McLaren and Ferrari as they fought for the 2008 championship with the 2009 reset looming. The team that gained most — Brawn GP from Honda's ashes — is of course now all-conquering Mercedes. Plus, the carryover requirements and token development restrictions act as natural limits to how much the teams can focus on 2021 in any case. >>



Bottas/Hamilton combo
has brought valuable
harmony to the squad

COULD DRIVER LINE-UP UNCERTAINTY DESTABILISE MERCEDES?

Here we enter the realm of speculation, but it is worthy of consideration for one key reason: the Red Bull/Verstappen

combination. On several occasions in 2020, Mercedes was hamstrung by Verstappen clinging to the front of races it was dominating, while the rest of the pack fell far behind. This serves to highlight what is at stake for Mercedes if it were to drop the ball towards Red Bull. Wolff also says that “Red Bull, with [Alex Albon replaced by Sergio] Perez, will be a much stronger opponent in terms of the constructors’ championship”.

Just before this issue went to press, it was announced that Hamilton had signed a fresh, one-year contract with the team for which he has raced since 2013. This ended plenty of wild

theories regarding his immediate future, but the length of the new deal still stood out. Effectively, what Mercedes and Hamilton have done is agreed to kick talks about a longer-term deal down the road.

Given the state of the world right now (and as was proved in 2020), alternative line-ups for unexpected reasons must be acknowledged as a consideration for Mercedes. It always remains possible that an unfortunate and shocking outside incident could prevent Hamilton’s return even now his new deal is announced. But the potential distraction that talks about another contract extension could create represents exactly the same circumstances that tracked him last season.

So, there are real (if slim) risks that the driver line-up harmony that Mercedes has worked so hard to preserve since Nico Rosberg’s departure could be jeopardised. If that unlikely scenario were to happen, expect Verstappen to pounce on any resulting weakness.



Allison’s video just part
of Mercedes’ candid,
open approach

WHY IS MERCEDES RAISING THE RISKS TO ITS DOMINANCE SO PUBLICLY?

Mercedes’ regularly repeated mantras are that after every win it resets to focus on the next race, and that it learns most from its defeats. There is a relentless focus on self-improvement and fostering team spirit. Its ‘no-blame’ culture is rightly

lauded in the context of the staggering success it has achieved, and how a lack of this approach has cost other teams in F1’s history.

Mercedes is also one of the most open and inviting teams in the F1 paddock, which explains why it produced Allison’s video. It’s simply a part of the winning formula — being open gives it further chances to learn when things go wrong.

By pointing out the potential pitfalls it faces even after yet another year of dominance, Mercedes manages to further cement its strong foundations. While it will be galling to some to hear talk of ‘challenges’ that will almost inevitably be overcome by what is a superb organisation, this diminishes the respect due to F1’s greatest current team. While its complex culture cannot be copied like a car development design, the lessons Mercedes provides with its attitude and approach should not be dismissed lightly. ❧

TOP FIVE

F1 STATS

Starts 227

Wins 115

Fastest laps 126

Poles 84

MERCEDES GRAND PRIX CARS

Mercedes had a rich history in grand prix racing long before the arrival of Formula 1, so we've not restricted ourselves to cars built since 1950. Here are our top 'Silver' Arrows

KEVIN TURNER

PHOTOGRAPHY
MERCEDES AND



5 18/100 (1914)
The 1914 French GP Mercedes wasn't the firm's first car to win what was then the world's biggest race, but it helped forge the legend. Five cars were entered as Mercedes returned to GP competition and, after a heroic performance from Peugeot's Georges Boillot, Christian Lautenschlager (below) led a 1-2-3. Ralph DePalma then took one example to the US and won the 1915 Indianapolis 500.



4 W05 HYBRID (2014)
Any of the Mercedes F1 cars of the turbo-hybrid era could be included in this list, but we've gone for the one that kicked it all off. The W05 was miles ahead of the rest in 2014, and was only once beaten to pole. Lewis Hamilton and Nico Rosberg won 16 races from 19 starts and finished 1-2 in the drivers' standings. Mercedes also took its first F1 constructors' crown, starting a run of success that has yet to end.



3 W196 (1954-55)
Aside from two off days in 1954 and atypical unreliability at the following year's Monaco GP, the W196 was unbeatable. Mercedes returned to the pinnacle of the sport at the 1954 French GP and smashed the opposition. The streamlined version was more striking, but the open-wheeled car was more effective. Either way, the W196 won nine of its 12 championship outings before Mercedes again withdrew from motorsport.



2 W125 (1937)
The W125 wasn't the *best* pre-Second World War Mercedes – that's the W154 of 1938-39 – but it is one of the greatest GP cars of all time. Rudolf Uhlenhaut's masterpiece crammed in a 5.6-litre supercharged straight-eight for the 750kg rules, producing more power (640bhp) than would be seen in F1 until the turbo cars of the 1980s. Rudolf Caracciola took the important European crown as Mercedes defeated Auto Union.



1 W11 (2020)
To maintain a place at the top of F1 is impressive, but to extend an advantage so far into a regulations cycle is truly remarkable. Mercedes threw everything into its 2020 design, including innovative dual-axis steering, and was further ahead at the start of the campaign than any team had been for years. Mercedes stopped developing the W11 before half the season was done, yet took 13 wins and 15 poles from 17 races.



NEVER-ENDING GENERATION TOURING CARS

It won't be long until the current BTCC rules become the longest-lasting the series has ever had. NGTC is not totally perfect for everyone, but it's been a huge success

MARCUS SIMMONS

PHOTOGRAPHY JEP  motorsport
IMAGES



WHAT IS AVAXHOME?

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Cheap constant access to piping hot media

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When James Thompson took part in free practice for the 2010 British Touring Car Championship finale at Brands Hatch at the wheel of a brand-new Toyota Avensis, little could this veteran of the series know that he was setting the tone for what will become the longest-lasting BTCC ruleset in history. The GPRM-run machine was the first car conforming to what at the time was known as the Next Generation Touring Car formula. The word ‘Next’ has long become inaccurate, hence it is now known simply as NGTC. Its 10th anniversary of competition comes at the start of the 2021 season and, when NGTC makes it through to 2022, it will have outlasted the 11 BTCC seasons of Super Touring.

Super Touring, of course, originated in the BTCC in 1990 and was adopted by the FIA as the code for tin-top racing worldwide. That got too expensive, and was replaced in the UK by the home-grown BTC Touring. That eventually gave way to the FIA’s Super 2000 rules, but these too were becoming troublesome, and BTCC boss Alan Gow came up with a plan. “Alan had the idea of cutting the front off [the cars] and putting the frame on, and then we did it from there,” recalls series technical director Peter Riches.

That entailed a spec subframe – housing suspension, brakes, transmission and engine – plus suspension, initially provided by GPRM, but which in 2016 switched to former Vauxhall, Nissan,

“THE MONEY WAS GETTING SILLY, AND YOU COULDN’T COMPETE WITH THE MANUFACTURERS”

SEAT and Chevrolet tin-top works team RML. “With Super 2000 we were fed up with the production suspension,” continues Riches. “There was a SEAT team having failures that the works team claimed never happened, and we were convinced theirs were being made to different materials. The money was getting silly, and you couldn’t compete with the manufacturers. We decided we needed to get rid of the [production] suspension, and have common fixing points, which takes you to a new front end.”

There is a host of other spec parts – from fuel tank to fire safety system – but the other main key to the success of the two-litre, turbocharged NGTC machines was the introduction of an optional customer ‘TOCA’ engine, supplied since the formula’s birth by Swindon Engines, but which switches to M-Sport with the introduction of hybrids for 2022. At present, the BMWs built by West Surrey Racing use the marque’s powerplants tuned by Neil Brown Engineering; Team Dynamics is also an NBE customer with its Hondas; and the Motorbase Performance/MB Motorsport Ford mills are fettled by Mountune. The rest, including the Laser Tools Racing/BMR Infiniti driven to the 2020 title by Ash Sutton, use the Swindon unit. >>



Thompson at wheel of Avensis in 2010

Snetterton 2020: BMW leads Toyota and Ford as NGTC nears 10th birthday



**NO ADS.
JUST MORE
PERFORMANCE**



Speedworks has risen to manufacturer status. Ingram wins here at Thruxton in 2020

“That’s hugely important, and one of the key components of the regulations,” asserts Speedworks Motorsport boss Christian Dick, whose team entered the BTCC with the standard GPRM Toyota at the birth of NGTC in 2011, and has risen from the tail end of the field to becoming a title contender with Tom Ingram and, since 2019, the official Toyota Gazoo Racing effort in the series – still with the TOCA engine. “We wouldn’t have stood a chance of being able to get on the grid if it wasn’t for that engine. To box off one part of the project and know you’ve got a competitive engine is a huge part.

“In some respects we’re the poster boys for NGTC. We came in with a gentleman driver with no BTCC experience, worked our way to the front, and ended up getting a manufacturer deal off the back of it. I think it’s a fantastic set of regulations that we’ve got. It isn’t super-cheap to do, and it has enough engineering scope for us to be able to tie ourselves in knots.”

The beauty of NGTC is that the non-reliance on production parts, plus the spec subframes and customer engines, has democratised the BTCC in allowing a colourful array of different models into the series. It’s not a case of finding the production base car with the best layout for racing use, and that’s great for the fans. Much the same thinking went into the BTC Touring rules introduced in 2001, but the subframe/engine concept of a decade later was a step too far in those days. For 2020, the grids featured Audi S3, BMW 330i and 125i, Ford Focus ST Mk4, Honda Civic Type R FK8 and FK2, Hyundai i30 N, Infiniti Q50, Mercedes A-Class, Toyota Corolla, Vauxhall Astra and Volkswagen CC – that’s an extraordinary 12 different models.

And a model can stay competitive for the best part of a decade, with the homologation rules written so that a car is eligible for up to five years after being withdrawn from the showrooms. It’s only the rate of improvement of recent machines such as the 330i, Corolla and Mk4 Focus that has prompted the disappearance of the 125i, FK2 Civic, Merc and VW from the field in 2021 (although it gains the Cupra). Take the Toyota Avensis. That was the genesis of NGTC at the end of 2010, yet Speedworks was still winning races and contending for the title with the same model in 2018.

From buying the first customer car for Tony Hughes to drive in 2011, Speedworks then acquired the ex-Thompson test mule “for a supply of parts”, according to Dick, although that ended up being



raced by Dave Newsham in 2013. Then it gained the confidence to start producing its own cars. “Pretty much from 2015 onwards we were designing the complete chassis here,” says Dick. “GPRM did the initial design and manufacture because we didn’t have the skillsets, but as we progressed we made amendments and upgrades. Once we understood what we needed from a new-build, we did it.”

The next step was the new-for-2019 Corolla. “We were trying to get as much information as we could, because it was a brand-new car,” recalls Dick. “We had two donor vehicles before anyone had seen one in a showroom. It was very cloak-and-dagger. Every time the doorbell went at the workshop, it was ‘who’s that?!’”

Dick estimates it costs “around £200,000” to build an NGTC car “from the ground up” – much cheaper than the Super Touring

“IT WAS VERY CLOAK-AND-DAGGER. EVERY TIME THE WORKSHOP BELL WENT, IT WAS ‘WHO’S THAT?!’”

ballpark of £350k. And don’t forget, that was over 20 years ago. But Matt Neal, a veteran along with the family Team Dynamics squad of all four BTCC two-litre rulesets, is not quite so positive. “From a team point of view the BTC Touring regulations were the best,” he says. “They were the most affordable, and had close racing, and were less reliant on aero. You could build a car for £120,000 then, and it’s double that for NGTC – if you’re lucky.”

Neal pinpoints the FIA’s introduction of Super 2000 as the ruination of BTC Touring, which had been another product of Riches and his TOCA technical team. “They somehow devised the Super 2000 rules to be almost identical to BTC Touring, but completely different!” he says. “There were so many loopholes you could drive through, and it got out of hand.”

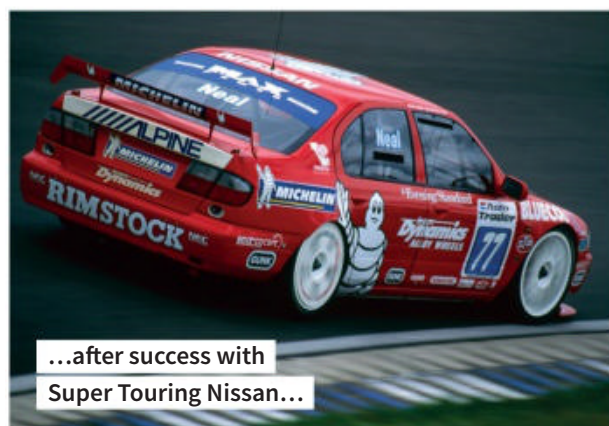
The indigenous NGTC, by contrast, has become the tin-top equivalent of Brexit – except run by people who actually knew what they were doing. “Sweden got very close,” says Riches when asked >>





Neal and Dynamics
still a force with NGTC
Civic in 2020...

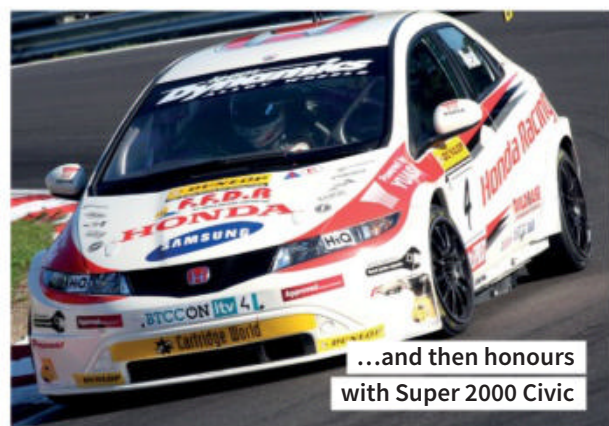
JEP



...after success with
Super Touring Nissan...



...plus titles with
the BTC-T Integra...



...and then honours
with Super 2000 Civic

about take-up of NGTC elsewhere, “but they had their silhouette, Solution F formula. We talked to others, but the Belgians decided it was too expensive. Others with manufacturers involved don’t like it, because you tell them what to do.”

It’s wrong to lament the passing of Super Touring, because times are so different to the 1990s heyday of huge manufacturer involvement. NGTC is, simply, a very good attempt at making the best fist of the times we live in. Ask Neal what the best driving experience was over the eras of Super Touring, BTC Touring, Super 2000 and NGTC, and it’s no surprise what he plumps for. “From the adrenalin rush, probably Super Touring,” he reflects. “It was no holds barred, but what we’ve got now is pretty good. We’ve got more power [approximately 50bhp more than Super Touring], which is great. You’ve still got to wring the neck of them to get the maximum out of them. You’ve got to be pretty darn committed.”

Funnily enough, Neal pinpoints the brief early-2010s phaseover era, where the regulations temporarily allowed an NGTC engine to be bolted into a Super 2000 car, as a highlight. For 2011, Dynamics used a Super 2000 Civic with the NGTC unit: “It was great! You put a turbo engine in, and the difference in torque was astronomical. And we were only on the 17/9 wheels!” He agrees that it was the closest thing in the modern(ish) era to a Ford Sierra RS500.

But that was only until NGTC was established, and since 2013 all cars have conformed completely to this formula. With TOCA in the process of renewing all its contracts with spec suppliers until the end of 2026, it’s got a long life ahead too. “They have kept costs under control, and what people forget is that a lot of what we do as an organisation these days is to prevent teams spending money, to protect them from themselves,” declares Riches.

Problems with NGTC? The components are expected to go on forever. Riches points out that, regarding subframes and suspension, “some teams aren’t very good at lifing parts, and when they fail it’s always RML’s fault!”. Or of gearbox supplier Xtrac: “His biggest complaint is he doesn’t sell enough spares. One year, the only

spare Dynamics fitted was one dog ring, and they were running two cars...” On the engine front, Riches says of 2020 that “probably 50% did a full season, and that has to be quite amazing – even people like [title contender] Ingram only used one engine”.

Neal would like to see more of a challenge on tyre choice: “The problem is, for seasoned drivers like me, Jason [Plato] and ‘Turks’ [Colin Turkington], the Goodyear tyre is too good. You just drive it flat-out from start to finish.” Harking back to those distant days of Super Touring, he explains that his famous win at Donington in 1999 in the Dynamics Nissan was achieved on two hard-compound tyres at the front, a medium at the left-rear and a soft at the right-rear: “It would be good to have something like that again. You had

“A LOT OF WHAT WE DO IS TO STOP TEAMS SPENDING MONEY, TO PROTECT THEM FROM THEMSELVES”

16 tyres [for an event] and could choose whatever you wanted.”

That, though, would require a return to the longer races of the Super Touring era, and the banning of safety cars (we can but dream...). Purists would prefer to see the top liners such as Turkington and Sutton rewarded, even if that meant a bigger spread across the field. But there’s no question that the short, sharp format works – for this era, anyway. “The thing we’ve learned is we have to be an entertainment business,” points out Riches. “You look back at the Super Touring era because of the manufacturers, the drivers and the characters they were, but the racing wasn’t that good. We all thought it was great at the time, but a two-year-old car was two seconds off the pace.” ❧

WINS (DRIVERS)

Colin Turkington	37
Jason Plato	29
Gordon Shedden	27
Andrew Jordan	23
Matt Neal	20
Ash Sutton	19
Tom Ingram	16
Mat Jackson	13
Rob Collard	8
Sam Tordoff	8
Dan Cammish	8
Josh Cook	8
Adam Morgan	8
Rory Butcher	6
Jack Goff	5
Aron Taylor-Smith	3
Rob Austin	3
Aiden Moffat	3
Andy Priaulx	2
Tom Chilton	2
Ollie Jackson	2
Frank Wrathall	1
James Cole	1
Senna Proctor	1
Matt Simpson	1
Daniel Lloyd	1
Chris Smiley	1
Stephen Jelley	1
Jake Hill	1
Tom Oliphant	1

WINS (CARS)

Honda Civic Type R FK2	62
BMW 125i M Sport	35
MG6 GT	24
Subaru Levorg GT	21
BMW 330i M Sport	17
Honda Civic Type R FK8	16
Ford Focus ST Mk3	15
Volkswagen CC	14
Toyota Avensis	11
Mercedes A-Class	11
Toyota Corolla	7
Infiniti Q50	5
Ford Focus ST Mk4	5
Honda Civic Tourer	4
Vauxhall Astra	4
Ford Focus RS	3
Audi A4	2
Audi S3	1

WHO ARE THE MOST SUCCESSFUL DRIVERS OF THE NGTC ERA?

Well, we've put together a BTCC-style grid of 30. Yes, we know Alan Gow has kept back the 30th TBL entrants' licence, but we've given it to Stephen Jelley because he's such a nice bloke we wanted him on the grid. We've taken the drivers' points in NGTC machinery (remembering to scale up the 2011 points to the current system introduced in 2012), and divided it by the number of races at the events in which they've taken part. Oh, and we've only included those who've done at least two seasons (ie 60 races).

1 Gordon Shedden

POINTS	PRESENCES	AVERAGE
2112	180	11.7

3 Dan Cammish

POINTS	PRESENCES	AVERAGE
870	87	10.0

5 Ash Sutton

POINTS	PRESENCES	AVERAGE
1373	147	9.3

7 Matt Neal

POINTS	PRESENCES	AVERAGE
2034	237	9.1

9 Sam Tordoff

POINTS	PRESENCES	AVERAGE
1466	171	8.6

11 Rob Collard

POINTS	PRESENCES	AVERAGE
1381	195	7.1

13 Tom Chilton

POINTS	PRESENCES	AVERAGE
750	114	6.6

15 Josh Cook

POINTS	PRESENCES	AVERAGE
1065	177	6.0

17 Aron Taylor-Smith

POINTS	PRESENCES	AVERAGE
768	150	5.1

19 Rob Austin

POINTS	PRESENCES	AVERAGE
1055	234	4.5

21 Dave Newsham

POINTS	PRESENCES	AVERAGE
477	126	3.8

23 Senna Proctor

POINTS	PRESENCES	AVERAGE
423	117	3.6

25 Nick Foster

POINTS	PRESENCES	AVERAGE
203	63	3.2

27 Aiden Moffat

POINTS	PRESENCES	AVERAGE
656	216	3.0

29 Michael Epps

POINTS	PRESENCES	AVERAGE
100	60	1.7

2 Colin Turkington

POINTS	PRESENCES	AVERAGE
2691	237	11.4

4 Andrew Jordan

POINTS	PRESENCES	AVERAGE
2350	237	9.9

6 Mat Jackson

POINTS	PRESENCES	AVERAGE
1378	150	9.2

8 Jason Plato

POINTS	PRESENCES	AVERAGE
2164	240	9.0

10 Tom Ingram

POINTS	PRESENCES	AVERAGE
1687	207	8.1

12 Rory Butcher

POINTS	PRESENCES	AVERAGE
671	99	6.8

14 Adam Morgan

POINTS	PRESENCES	AVERAGE
1756	267	6.6

16 Tom Oliphant

POINTS	PRESENCES	AVERAGE
469	87	5.4

18 Jack Goff

POINTS	PRESENCES	AVERAGE
1149	234	4.9

20 Frank Wrathall

POINTS	PRESENCES	AVERAGE
369	90	4.1

22 Jake Hill

POINTS	PRESENCES	AVERAGE
526	141	3.7

24 Chris Smiley

POINTS	PRESENCES	AVERAGE
435	132	3.3

26 Jeff Smith

POINTS	PRESENCES	AVERAGE
400	126	3.2

28 Ollie Jackson

POINTS	PRESENCES	AVERAGE
380	207	1.8

30 Stephen Jelley

POINTS	PRESENCES	AVERAGE
183	117	1.6


POLES (DRIVERS)

Jason Plato	17
Colin Turkington	13
Sam Tordoff	7
Jack Goff	6
Andrew Jordan	6
Ash Sutton	6
Matt Neal	4
Tom Ingram	4
Mat Jackson	3
Gordon Shedden	3
Rory Butcher	3
Dan Cammish	3
Andy Priaulx	2
Rob Austin	2
Josh Cook	2
Frank Wrathall	1
Aron Taylor-Smith	1
Jeff Smith	1
James Cole	1
Matt Simpson	1
Adam Morgan	1
Brett Smith	1


POLES (CARS)

Honda Civic Type R FK2	23
MG6 GT	18
Subaru Levorg GT	9
BMW 125i M Sport	6
BMW 330i M Sport	6
Honda Civic Type R FK8	5
Volkswagen CC	4
Toyota Avensis	4
Ford Focus ST Mk3	3
Vauxhall Astra	2
Ford Focus ST Mk4	2
Toyota Corolla	2
Audi A4	1
Mercedes A-Class	1
Ford Focus RS	1
Infiniti Q50	1

KEEPING THE BRITISH END UP

A record seven Brits will contest Formula E this season. But all must play a part in their teams' recoveries if they are to earn national bragging rights

MATT KEW

PHOTOGRAPHY  **motorsport**
IMAGES

Even accounting for social distancing measures, chances are that those wandering the Formula E paddock in 2021 will never be more than two metres away from a past finalist of the Aston Martin Autosport BRDC Young Driver of the Year Award – formerly sponsored by McLaren.

Of the 24 seats on offer for what is, arguably, the most desirable and best-paid gig for racers this side of F1, a record seven will be occupied by Brits who sought to impress the Award judges in a variety of single-seater and closed-cockpit machinery at Silverstone in years gone by.

Having since delivered on their initial promise as an up-and-comer to develop into a seasoned pro, each can realistically head into the new electric campaign with an eye on an occasional podium. For some, they should expect much more than that.

There's something else the cohort of Sam Bird, Tom Blomqvist, Jake Dennis, Alex Lynn, Oliver Rowland, Alexander Sims and Oliver Turvey have in common. All of them head into the new term looking to galvanise teams that, to varying extents, need to recover lost ground.

Nissan e.dams incumbent Rowland, winner of the Award in 2011, and new Jaguar Racing recruit Bird – a two-time shootout finalist – should both harbour serious title designs. For Rowland, the odds have fallen in his favour. Nissan opted for a revised homologation window to delay the introduction of its new powertrain until the spring. As per the original calendar for this season, that would have meant wading through five races with the old car. But due to the pandemic's continuing impact, which forced three of those rounds to be postponed, he and team-mate Sebastien Buemi must only make do with last year's set-up for the Saudi Arabia double-header, albeit the car has been lavished with software updates. If they keep the results respectable in Diriyah, they can



Sims made fortuitous move to join the Mahindra team

SBLOXHAM

welcome their new car and the performance boost it should bring for the bulk of the season.

It will allow Nissan to build on its Berlin rejuvenation of last season. When the team agreed to a ban of its 2018-19 twin-motor powertrain concept in the interests of cost control, Nissan entered last season on the back foot, having needed to change tack completely. But it used the mid-season COVID hiatus to great



Dennis has one season to stake his claim to remain in the championship

SBLOXHAM



effect to close the development gap and came out all guns blazing in the German capital, with Rowland winning the penultimate race.

Assured that the car is now back on the money, Rowland can make good use of his rediscovered one-lap confidence after a heavy shunt in Santiago qualifying early last year meant he left too much on the table in subsequent sessions. “My approach in Santiago was obviously too aggressive and it wouldn’t have lasted throughout the season like that,” he says. “I needed that lesson. I missed superpole by three or four hundredths many times last year, which would have made a big difference to my championship position [fifth]. If I can just improve a tiny bit in that area and be in superpole then I can consistently challenge for race wins. That’s what [champion Antonio Felix] da Costa did, hence why he was so dominant in the end.”

Bird – who incidentally, while in GP2, coached Rowland as he won the 2015 Formula Renault 3.5 title, and recognises his former mentee’s “raw outright pace” – moves to Jaguar as it recovers from a Berlin slump. Only DS Techeetah, which sewed up a second teams’ crown last term, was demonstrably quicker in the early part of last season. But a ponderous showing in the six German races and an overreliance on lead driver Mitch Evans to do the heavy points

**“IF I CAN JUST IMPROVE A TINY BIT
AND BE IN SUPERPOLE THEN I CAN
CONSISTENTLY CHALLENGE FOR WINS”**

lifting knocked the team from third to seventh in the final table.

The team, directed by James Barclay, was already on the phone to reignite a past interest. Bird, courted by Jaguar back in 2016, departed his effective second home at Virgin Racing, and now partners Evans to create one of the finest driver pairings on the grid.

For Bird, he catches the windfall of the squad’s F1-specification simulator from Williams and the benefits of the extra testing allotted to manufacturers, as opposed to the previous two years, when Virgin Racing operated customer kit borrowed from Audi. As the only driver to have won in each of the six seasons of FE to date, achieving a championship best of third in 2017-18, he will hope Jaguar has found its Berlin fix so that he can truly »



challenge for the overall crown, having slipped to ninth and then 10th in the campaigns that followed.

BMW Andretti didn't take kindly to the races on its home soil either, which massively stymied its championship aspirations as drivers Sims and Maximilian Guenther failed to score points at nine of the 12 opportunities. Second in the table soon turned to a lacklustre fifth. The manufacturer then followed Audi in announcing its intention to quit FE at the end of the season. That gives new signing Dennis, who replaces Sims at the Bavarian squad, a defined timeframe in which to put himself in the shop window.

"I want to continue my career in Formula E, for sure," says Dennis. "I need to try and do the best job I can... I need to focus for this year and by the time the season is finished, hopefully I've done good enough to continue in Formula E."

That ambition to remain in FE puts Dennis only half a step behind his compatriots Lynn and Blomqvist. Both have been on the periphery, contesting part campaigns – Lynn for Jaguar, Virgin and Mahindra Racing; Blomqvist for Andretti and Jaguar. Now they're dead set on sticking around for the long haul.

Lynn does so at Mahindra, having been drafted in for Berlin – one of many driver changes for the 'mini-series' – to replace Pascal

“THESE GUYS ARE AT THE LEVEL TO COMPETE AT THE VERY TOP WHEREVER YOU PUT THEM”

Wehrlein, whose position became untenable in the eyes of team principal Dilbagh Gill after the German signed a deal with Porsche for this season. Bird, who also coached Lynn, rates him as the kind of guy who "if you put him on pole, he'll win you the race". That paves the way for an impressive year to come, given Lynn showed fierce one-lap pace in Berlin, achieving three superpole appearances.

"That was my second time coming in as a sub and I definitely felt ready," Lynn says. "It feels really nice to come back and finally have a full-season ride and a proper pre-season."

Team-mate Sims admits that his impeccable timing to leave BMW and replace the retiring Jerome D'Ambrosio at Mahindra, which is committed to FE until 2025 at the earliest, was accidental,

DEREK WARWICK'S ELECTRIC PROTEGES



SAM BIRD
2005 and '06 Award finalist
Jaguar Racing driver



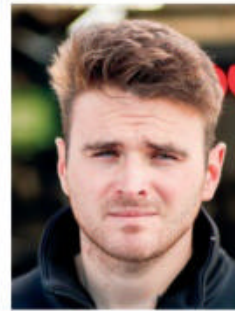
OLIVER TURVEY
2006 Award winner
NIO 333 driver



ALEXANDER SIMS
2008 Award winner
Mahindra Racing driver



TOM BLOMQVIST
2010 and '11 Award finalist
NIO 333 driver



OLIVER ROWLAND
2011 Award winner
Nissan e.dams driver



ALEX LYNN
2011 Award finalist
Mahindra Racing driver



JAKE DENNIS
2012 Award winner
BMW Andretti driver



Bird has finally joined Jaguar as he searches for overdue FE title

and his joining Lynn means this is a refreshed attack for the Indian squad. Its start to last season was plagued by unreliability that stemmed from a change of transmission supplier, which led to gearbox specialist ZF now taking on the overall design of the powertrain. It looks to bounce back from a first podium-free term since the very first FE season in 2014-15.

That leaves Turvey and Anglo-Swede Blomqvist, who fought off Daniel Abt and Tom Dillmann to bag the seat, to front the protracted NIO 333 recovery. The two softly spoken racers face the biggest task of the British contingent to find their way onto the podium, with NIO 333 having been the rank backmarker of the past two years. But a stellar engineering line-up and less bureaucracy to navigate thanks to new Chinese owners means this squad has its ducks in a row. If the 2019-20 campaign was about consolidation, the inbound season should mark the occasion when the team closes the gap to the midfield and surpasses the Dragon Penske Autosport concern, which appears far less organised despite being awash with backroom talent.

"It's been quite a tough two seasons with the way the team changed a lot last year," says Turvey, who has been at the squad since 2015. "A lot of effort has been put in to develop this new powertrain for the next two-year cycle. A lot of the focus last year even was put towards this. I hope we can be fighting in the midfield more consistently."

Blomqvist, taking a break from a full day in the simulator, adds: "It's all about building up and having a good, strong development and making the most of what we've got. Everyone's super-determined to prove that we've made this step. It's been a tough few years for the guys and everyone wants to get back to where they deserve to be."

Delivering a championship challenge and fighting for race wins, an FE rookie battling to make his mark, and all seven shouldering the responsibility of guiding their teams back up the pecking order. There's a lot of pressure riding on the British FE class of 2021. But as Award head judge Derek Warwick reckons, anyone who makes his shortlist is up to the task.

"To have seven British drivers in any formula is special, but to have seven Award finalists is extra special for me," says the 1992 Le Mans 24 Hours victor. "They can handle anything motorsport throws at them. These guys are at the level to compete at the very top in whatever formula and whatever situation you put them in. When these drivers come through, it gives you such a buzz because you know just how good they are." ❄



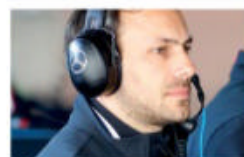
Santiago shunt dented Rowland's quali confidence

FORMULA E'S 'OTHER' ACTIVE AWARD ALUMNI



DARIO FRANCHITTI
1992 Award winner

Formula E co-commentator



GARY PAFFETT
1999 Award winner

Mercedes reserve and development driver, and sporting and technical advisor



JAMES ROSSITER
2003 Award finalist

DS Techeetah development driver



SUSIE WOLFF
2003 Award finalist

Venturi Racing team principal



JORDAN KING
2012 Award finalist

Mahindra Racing simulator and development driver





FROM RACIAL ISSUES BACK TO RACING ISSUES

Kyle Larson was in disgrace last spring. But now he's rehabilitated and has been given a great opportunity with NASCAR powerhouse Hendrick Motorsports

JAKE NICHOL

PHOTOGRAPHY motorsport
IMAGES

There comes a time in the lifecycle of elite sports when, to stay ahead of the competition, a team or series must reinvent itself by phasing out the old battle-scarred heroes and bring in fresh and energetic new contenders. That helps reignite the torch and give the flame a new lease of life.

It's a tricky business, one that takes a sagacious mind to implement and ensure a seamless transition from the all-conquering era that has just closed to the next chapter. This is a journey that Hendrick Motorsports, NASCAR's most successful team, has found itself on over the past few years, as its roster of drivers – arguably the biggest names over the past two decades of stock car racing – have all taken their last dance. They've passed on the duty of repeated excellence that has come to define Rick Hendrick's eponymous squad.

Grizzled veterans Jeff Gordon and Dale Earnhardt Jr were replaced with William Byron and Alex Bowman respectively. Chase Elliott, meanwhile, stepped up to the mantle to assume the role of de facto team leader as septuple champion Jimmie Johnson lost his mojo in what was a painful last two full-time seasons, before departing at the close of 2020 to embark on an IndyCar programme.

Johnson came home fifth in his last race in the famous #48 Chevrolet, while Elliott's credentials as the new leader of the Hendrick pack were reinforced with a dominant win to secure himself a maiden Cup crown. It was the 13th overall, a NASCAR Cup record, for Hendrick.

With Byron and Bowman (who will move across to the #48

this year) still in the Hendrick finishing school, it's the effective replacement for Johnson who is tipped to be the final piece in the jigsaw. And it's a chance that this generational talent very nearly threw away, legacy of an off-hand comment that left him sacked, banned and in disgrace last year.

A strong start to the 2020 campaign for Kyle Larson had resulted in his banking a solid three top-10 results from the first four races for Chip Ganassi Racing. Then the pandemic took a cleaver to the global sporting calendar. Larson was competing in an iRacing event along with fellow drivers from the American scene and, believing a loss of communication had occurred with his spotter and unaware his microphone was live, he used a racist slur. Key sponsors such as McDonald's, Credit One Bank and Chevrolet ended their association, before Ganassi sacked him the next day. NASCAR revoked his licence, and ordered a period of sensitivity training before reinstatement would be considered.

"I've grown a lot in the last year and have just surrounded myself with people who can help educate me; that was very important," he says as he enters his new era as the driver of Hendrick's #5 Chevy – incidentally, that's the race number that the first Hendrick driver Geoff Bodine used in the team's debut year of 1984. "Last year, hiring a diversity coach was probably the biggest thing to help educate myself, and going to Minneapolis [after the murder of George Floyd], and also doing a lot of things first-hand and in-person and trying to learn a lot."

This "first-hand and in-person" mindset included a visit to a racing school in Philadelphia that introduces black children to motorsport, and had been a partnership that Larson worked >>



Larson's first Daytona 500, in 2014, ended with an accident



Hendrick (right) celebrates 2020 crown with Elliott

Larson's last Cup start to date netted fourth at Phoenix with Ganassi Chevy last March



hard to cultivate during his Ganassi days. And because of that relationship he'd built, he felt it right to issue a "face-to-face" explanation to owners and students alike.

"We talked about difficult subjects for more than two hours, and I spent a lot of time listening," he wrote in the essay on his website. [Owner] Michelle [Martin] educated me on the journey of black people in America and the ugly history of racism and derogatory slurs. I offered my apologies to [student] Jysir, his mum and the Martins for the pain I caused. Instead of the anger I expected, what I got in return was empathy."

In a world that now demands someone to be immediately cancelled for an act of discrimination, without allowing them the opportunity to repent and begin to make right their wrong, there will always be those who'll shun Larson. How does he respond to those who aren't willing to give him a second chance?

"People are always going to doubt me – I understand and accept that," he says. "I know I'm never going to be able to

convince every single person that I've changed, and being back in NASCAR and having that platform to really get myself out there [will help]," he explains. "Hopefully over time, people will grow and get to have a different opinion of me. Nothing happens overnight, but especially gaining people's respect back doesn't."

The platform he has been given to make those changes is the highest one in NASCAR, and one he acknowledges will suffer "growing pains", but he is confident of challenging for race wins and championships, even as soon as this season.

"I think for myself at the beginning, being with a new team, crew chief and engineers, not having any practice and things, I am sure there will be some growing pains, the first month or so, but once we get the hang of each other, we should be really competitive and hopefully contending for lots of wins and being a championship contender," he says. "That's my hope for the season, but you really don't get a good idea until you get out there racing, and baring any crazy bad luck."

HOT STUFF ON THE CHILI BOWL DIRT

Although his NASCAR competition licence was suspended following that infamous iRacing event, Kyle Larson was able to race competitively during the summer months of 2020 in the World of Outlaws dirt track racing series for his own squad.

A quiet return to competition at Knoxville in early May was followed by a crushing run of form later in the summer, where the California native reeled off a further nine consecutive wins following a sweep of Indiana Midget Week in June. In total he contested 82 dirt races, and recorded a healthy tally of 42 victories.

For a driver whose earliest forays into motorsport came in dirt racing, Larson's successful defence of the Chili Bowl title last month was a proud achievement, especially as the field of midget racers included fellow Cup drivers Chase Elliott, Ryan Newman and Chase



Briscoe. But why do the Chili Bowl nationals – think the Super Bowl of midget racing – draw in so many high-profile drivers, and take them outside their comfort zone?

"Number one, it's a fun event and there is nothing going on in the United States for racing

at that time of year," muses Larson days after clinching that second crown. "I think people spend it as a vacation like, 'Hey, I can go race too', and I think a lot of the drivers get excited about learning a new type of race car and what that challenge brings. That attraction came long before I started racing in the Chili Bowl. NASCAR drivers would come and run, or NHRA [hot rod] drivers, now lately some IndyCar guys do it."

Famously, Rick Hendrick is a man who is somewhat averse to his drivers taking part in extracurricular activities away from the Cup Series. However, as part of the deal struck to bring Larson back to stock car racing, he was able to negotiate to loosen the shackles, and allow him to dabble in the finer arts of midget racing. The only catch is, the Cup programme takes priority. Given the journey Larson has been on in the past year, that seems an equitable deal.



NKP

“I OFFERED MY APOLOGIES. INSTEAD OF THE ANGER I EXPECTED, WHAT I GOT IN RETURN WAS EMPATHY”

The NASCAR that Larson will step back into is a different beast from the series he last experienced in March 2020. To limit the chances of virus transmission in the garages, practice and qualifying was done away with, and drivers just turned up on a Sunday to race. This is something that new team-mate Elliott remarked surprised him when the season resumed at Darlington. And, having not been in a stock car for the best part of a year, it's a challenge that excites Larson.

“If I'd stayed in the seat last year, I feel this schedule would have benefited me the most, compared to other drivers, given my experience racing dirt cars,” he explains (see left). “Because really you have only three to five laps of practice and then you're on to racing, so that's trained me to adapt to things, and me being out of a race car for so long, and then jumping into a new team, I wish we did have practice. It would help us get up to speed quicker, but at the same time I've got three other team-mates I can lean on for support, and the same with my crew chief [Cliff Daniels] — he's probably got more resources than I had at Ganassi with just one



Larson (42) got 'acquainted' with Elliott (9) in last year's Daytona Clash

NKP



Dover 2019 was last visit to Victory Lane to date for Larson

team-mate. I think our race team is excited about a fresh face and a fresh outlook on things with me coming in, and I think my other team-mates are excited to see what I have to offer.”

A key part of Larson inserting himself into the Hendrick roost will be his chemistry with Elliott, Byron and Bowman, and how the quartet of race winners work together on car set-ups, although he does point out the challenge of understanding and interpreting the raw data, compared to his new neighbours across the shop floor.

In a new NASCAR, where the focus on representation and equality has been the heart of the message after the shocking events that sparked outrage in 2020, the ongoing rehabilitation of the series' fallen rising star is an important process. Larson points out that he is pleased to see an increase during the off-season of drivers being pushed to complete their diversity training — “because inclusion is a big part of our sport” — and that the sanctioning body doesn't get “enough credit” for all it has done to promote its product to the huge sections of the public who have traditionally been nonplussed by it.

But for all NASCAR can do, it's now up to Larson to maintain and push even harder to restore his cracked reputation. He is thankful to Rick Hendrick for giving him the chance to return to competition in one of his prized machines, but the hard work begins now.

Whatever happens on-track and in the shop is the easy bit. Larson is a racing driver, and the muscle memory from stepping back into a 1500kg stock car will quickly return. He has not shirked responsibility and accountability for his actions and does not underestimate the challenge before him. It would be easy for the Japanese-American to simply turn his back on repairing relations now that he has returned to the highest level, but that would be doing a disservice to the driver chosen to help chart the course of potentially the next decade in Hendrick's rich history. 🏆

P42 WHAT'S NEW IN NASCAR



WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR IN NASCAR 2021

This weekend's Daytona 500 kickstarts a season where there will be some interesting subplots

JAKE NICHOL

PHOTOGRAPHY motorsport IMAGES

GLOBAL SUPERSTARS GET INVOLVED

There isn't a great deal that Michael Jordan and Pitbull haven't achieved in their respective careers. One has an Olympic Gold medal and is a household name for his performances on the court; the other is a Grammy-award winning rapper who's flogged over 100million singles. But, until now, one thing neither had done was to be the co-owner of a NASCAR Cup team.

Along with Cup star Denny Hamlin, Jordan is the co-owner of 23XI Racing, with Bubba Wallace as the driver and the team enjoying a technical link-up

with Toyota. Pitbull, meanwhile, has joined forces with former NASCAR and sportscar driver Justin Marks to run the only foreign-born champion in NASCAR's history – Mexico's 2016 Xfinity champion Daniel Suarez – for Trackhouse Racing, which is affiliated to Richard Childress Racing.

The importance of two new high-profile, non-white owners entering NASCAR cannot be overstated. And they are not here simply to make up the numbers or as a cynical marketing ploy to boost their brands. Pitbull believes in using the

platform of NASCAR to improve STEM education in those minority communities historically indifferent to motorsport. "This is deeper than sponsorships, this is a movement," he says. "This is a revolution, taking a sport and creating a culture because when we first opened SLAM [his school system in minority areas], we brought [along] a NASCAR car.

"If you'd have seen the look on those kids' faces when they saw that car, they just had no clue that it was actually something that was tangible. It's all about creating awareness."



Wallace (left) and Suarez represent teams of Jordan and Pitbull respectively

Watkins Glen has returned
to Cup schedule for 2021



LABOUNTY

NASCAR MAKES A TURN TO THE RIGHT

One criticism (fairly) laid at NASCAR's door in recent years has been the dearth of road courses on the schedule. Instead of throwing something different into the mix, we got lumbered with Kentucky Speedway.

With NASCAR forced into a calendar rejig in 2020 by you know what, the road course at Daytona was used for the first time at Cup level, to go with the increasingly popular Charlotte 'roval'. And for 2021, the road-course presence has been further ramped up, with seven events across the 36 rounds. Sonoma returns, but the real star attraction is a trip to Circuit of The Americas, to use the full-length 20-turn Formula 1 layout.

"I think it's great to have a fresh schedule and probably the most challenging track is

CoTA," explains Austin Dillon. "There is so much that road course has to offer. I feel like it's multiple road courses in one – it's one of the biggest tracks we have ever gone to."

Watkins Glen makes a welcome return, with Road America making its first Cup appearance since 1956. The final new road course is a switch from the oval to the infield of Indianapolis for the Brickyard 400.

But the biggest curveball is the spring Bristol round being turned into a dirt race – the first since September 1970. The obvious cashing in of the 'entertainment' card here is one thing, but as Dillon muses: "Some people who are very comfortable on other tracks are not going to be as comfortable at Bristol..."



MILLER

PRACTICE SHORTAGE MAKES IT TOUGH FOR ROOKIES

Harvick (4) made hay as
track time was limited



When NASCAR stuck its head up and became the first major sports championship to resume its season last May, the protocols put in place were strong, and decimated the tried-and-tested three-day-weekend format.

"I remember that first race, I was like, 'Are we really going to go to Darlington and not make any laps and all expect not to crash in Turn 1?'" remarked eventual champion Chase Elliott.

NASCAR built in competition cautions around 25 to 30 laps into stage one of races, to provide drivers and crew chiefs a limited time to fettle their machines on the go. But it was perhaps no surprise that it was two of the most experienced drivers – Kevin Harvick and Denny Hamlin – who ran the show during the summer months, racking up win after win as the struggle to drive through any problems afflicted most of the field.

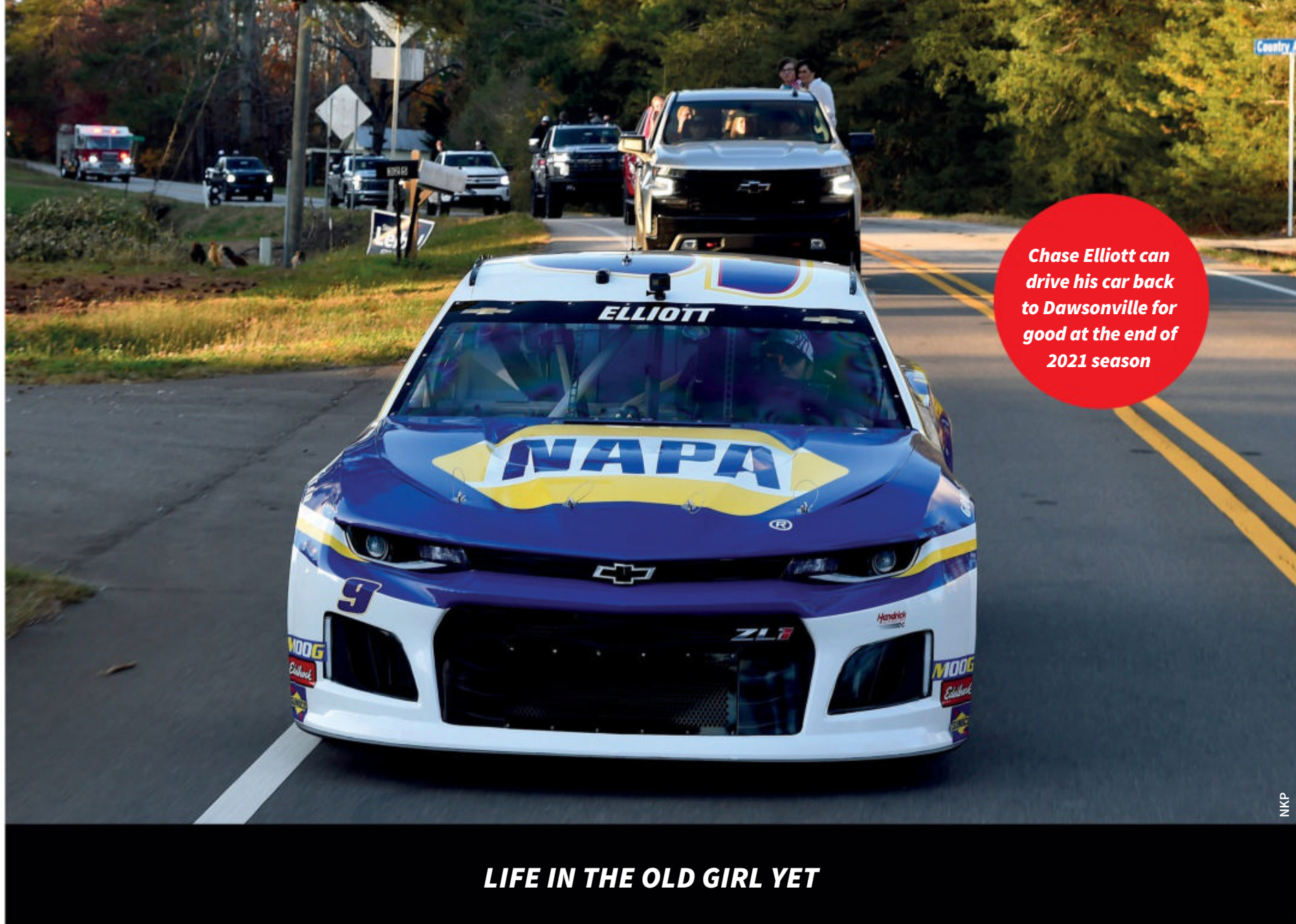
It'll be more of the same this year, with only a few high-profile events – the Daytona 500, the new road courses, Nashville, and the Phoenix finale – featuring any practice or qualifying. With seat time therefore at a premium, the rookies of 2021 have a tougher job acclimatising to the step up from Xfinity, and will be forced to rely on their teammates to a greater extent than usual.

The biggest challenge? "Just trying to figure out how the track is going to change," explains Chase Briscoe, the latest recruit through the revolving Stewart-Haas Racing door. "Obviously, guys like Kevin, Aric [Almirola] and even [sophomore] Cole [Custer], they kind of know how these tracks transition through 400, 500-mile races. I'll be trying to go with them and figure out what the car needs at the start of the race, or at the end of it.

"And even things like green-flag pitstops and knowing what their mark is, maybe there's a sign on the wall or whatever they use."

For his part, Almirola is willing to assist Briscoe, but insists that the rookies must learn the hard way. "Transitioning to the Cup car, he doesn't know what to expect when he fires off at Homestead or even at Daytona how the car is going to drive, what is it going to be like in the draft, how is it going to behave in the middle of three-wide or late in the tyre run," explains the two-time race winner.

"As much as somebody else tells you, until you experience it for yourself, it's really difficult. We can talk to him, he can pick our brains, but until he goes out there and feels it for himself and experiences it, it's going to be all-new."



Chase Elliott can drive his car back to Dawsonville for good at the end of 2021 season

LIFE IN THE OLD GIRL YET

Like in Formula 1 with the new technical regulations originally planned for this season, the decision was swiftly taken by NASCAR last spring to kick the Next Gen car down the road, giving the current cars a stay of execution. It means that the Gen 7 contraption has an extra 12 months of real-life testing to refine it before it's introduced to competition at the 2022 Daytona 500. And that might be a good thing.

An independent rear-suspension system is probably the biggest trick in the new car's armoury, one that leaves it like a "completely

different creature", according to Joey Logano's crew chief Todd Gordon.

"I would say it's the biggest change we'll see in how we work on our race cars and how they work on a race track, probably comparable with when we went to the Car of Tomorrow back when," he says. "There are tons of opportunity, and one of the things that we've done pretty well here as a group is exploiting the opportunity that comes with change and look forward to what that brings."

In on-track testing last year, 2004 champion

Kurt Busch noted a big problem with the new steering system on ovals – not exactly ideal when three-quarters of your calendar is on them...

"The high load issues with the steering were discovered on the oval, and the feel in the steering was so far off that it made [Martin] Truex [Jr] and I look at each other awkwardly, like, we're going to be on tiptoes around each other with the sequence of trying to learn the aero," he elucidates. Busch also alluded to the new twin exhaust, which will run under the driver, as another area where attention is needed.



Busch just about kept his record going with late-season Texas win

THE DRIVER WHO DESERVES TO GET A RIDE IN 2022

Usually, a driver is given their P45 if they aren't performing and delivering results, with the name-sticker ripped off their steed at the end of that year. What is most definitely unusual is for a driver performing at a high level to be shown the door with a full season still to complete.

That's the situation Matt DiBenedetto finds himself in after the Team Penske juggernaut opted to place reigning Xfinity Series champion Austin Cindric at the affiliated Wood Brothers team for 2022.

"Winning takes care of it all, that's the best goal!" he replies when asked when he'd like to finalise a 2022 drive. "I think those talks start popping up around summer time. Most people have deadlines in their contracts, and I think mine is 1 September, so probably around late summer to have discussions or to have an idea of what is going on."

The variety of tracks on which DiBenedetto's 11 top-10 finishes were produced in 2020, including superspeedways and short tracks, was impressive. He has morphed into a consistent, dependable runner in the higher echelons of the midfield, and it would be a travesty if he was sidelined in 2022.



THE CURIOUS CASE OF KYLE BUSCH

Kyle Busch is in a unique situation at the start of the 2021 season. Now that Jimmie Johnson has departed, he's the sole multiple Cup champion on the grid, and he's in the middle of an alarming dip in form.

Since winning at Pocono in June 2019, Busch has claimed just two victories in 58 starts. Although the first of those was at Homestead to claim the 2019 crown, drastic action was called for to get the #18 Joe Gibbs Racing Toyota back at the front of the pack.

"I kind of feel like I got fired from the #18 car and moved over to the #20 guys with the way everything played out, how it looks in the shop," he jokes when asked about the 2021 change in crew chiefs at JGR. Long-term chief Adam Stevens has moved over to Christopher Bell's garage, with Ben Beshore coming aboard to boss a driver who is, on his day, arguably the quickest in the field.

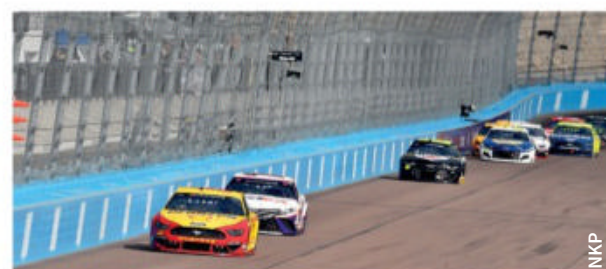
Busch's 2020 campaign was a disaster, with various calamities leaving him in a scrap to extend his record of a Cup win in every full-time season. That's something he eventually did with a 'Hail Mary' fuel strategy at Texas Motor Speedway in October, after following a new car-build direction with Stevens.

"I feel like there was something to that, and that kind of opened up some eyes around JGR as a whole," says Busch. "And hopefully, what we can do to get ourselves back in the right frame of mind to go out there and have a more successful season as a four-car group, not just the #18 team."

Busch is known to tinker with his car throughout practice more than most, and the loss of such sessions in 2020 was a major contributing factor to the largely anonymous campaign. But there are no excuses now. A fresh start means he must deliver.

NASCAR CUP CALENDAR

VENUE	DATE
Daytona 500	14 February
Daytona	21 February
Homestead	28 February
Las Vegas	7 March
Phoenix	14 March
Atlanta	21 March
Bristol	28 March
Martinsville	10 April
Richmond	18 April
Talladega	25 April
Kansas Speedway	2 May
Darlington	9 May
Dover	16 May
CoTA	23 May
Charlotte	30 May
Sonoma	6 June
Nashville	20 June
Pocono	26 June
Pocono	27 June
Road America	4 July
Atlanta	11 July
New Hampshire Motor Speedway	18 July
Watkins Glen	8 August
Indianapolis	15 August
Michigan	22 August
Daytona	28 August
Darlington	5 September
Richmond	11 September
Bristol	18 September
Las Vegas	26 September
Talladega	3 October
Charlotte	10 October
Kansas Speedway	17 October
Texas Motor Speedway	24 October
Martinsville	31 October
Phoenix	7 November



NEXT WEEK

DAYTONA 500 REPORT 18 FEBRUARY ISSUE

Read our full report as the 2021 NASCAR Cup season roars into life at the famous Florida speedway.

Runner-up finish in final truck outing at Le Mans in 2016 showed Lohr was still competitive



FROM MONACO TO DAKAR, VIA HOCKENHEIM

There's not much that Ellen Lohr hasn't seen in a hugely versatile racing career that highlights the merit in being a generalist. She says it was a necessity born out of lack of opportunity

JAMES NEWBOLD

As Laurent Aiello splashed to victory in the 1990 Monaco Formula 3 race, a piece of history was unfolding in the spray 21 seconds behind him. Thanks to what, at the time, was the best-ever finish for a German in the event's history, second-placed Ellen Lohr achieved not only a landmark result for female racing drivers, but expected this to have put her name on the watchlist of the Formula 1 team bosses.

"I really thought, 'OK, that's it, now they know my name, they have my name on the list,'" she recalls. "Everyone was telling me, 'F1 will call for a test', but nothing happened. That was disappointing – and naive of me to think it would happen."

Rather than F1, Lohr's career featured spells on the books of major manufacturers BMW, Volkswagen and Mercedes, and she became the only woman to win a DTM race, following a wheel-to-wheel tussle with Keke Rosberg at Hockenheim in 1992. Oh, and she knows of "a minimum three people who named their girls after me". But her career is littered with tantalising what-ifs.

After battling to raise an F3 budget for 1988, Lohr earned money as a contracted VW racer in the 1989 German F3 Championship and used it as a springboard to Formula 3000 in 1990, only for her one-off appearance at Le Mans in Helmut Marko's RSM Lola to be thwarted by a broken gearbox that scuppered her efforts to qualify.



Lohr thought big-time
would beckon after 1990
Monaco F3 landmark result

MOTORSPORT IMAGES



Second at Salzburgring
highlight of three-race
DTM trial in 1987

FOTO TEXT/RICHARD KIENBERGER

McKLEIN



Celebrating DTM win
at Hockenheim in 1992

DAIMLERAG

“EVERYONE WAS TELLING ME, ‘F1 WILL CALL FOR A TEST’, BUT NOTHING HAPPENED. IT WAS DISAPPOINTING”

After establishing herself in tin-tops, a chance to test an F1 car for Sauber in 1994, arranged through her links with engine supplier Mercedes from the DTM, also came to nothing when it was cancelled after Karl Wendlinger’s Monaco accident. Faced with these disappointments, she set about becoming an all-rounder, with experience across the full breadth of motorsport, from truck racing to rallying and GTs.

“I’m happy with my career, no doubt about it,” says Lohr, who today works as director of motorsport marketing and communications for Austrian engineering powerhouse AVL. “But I never had a real mentor who could guide me, which is a pity because otherwise I would have done many things differently. But my way let me do many different categories and that was always my thing, to be an all-rounder.”

The Monchengladbach chemistry student “had to find out everything myself” on her rise through the ranks, starting in the German Formula Ford championship in 1984 with a two-year-old Van Diemen. By 1987, her small family-run team, aided by Germany’s Van Diemen agent Peter Krober, was en route to the FF1600 championship, beating the likes of Wendlinger and Le Mans winner Marco Werner. A three-race DTM trial with BMW squad Alpina followed, Lohr placing second at the

Salzburgring finale. The world appeared to be at her feet — and indeed, she became a fully fledged BMW works driver in the 1988 European Touring Car Championship — but single-seater opportunities weren’t forthcoming.

“If this would have happened nowadays, a young woman against 40 other FF1600 drivers, winning a championship, the same weekend being second in a DTM race, many people would be saying, ‘Let’s do something with this girl,’” she says. “But times then were very different, you really had to struggle. I did things I would not have dreamed about before, like these European races [with BMW], as the dream was a formula career.”

While combining her studies with German F3 for Lechner Racing in 1988, she did enough to earn VW backing for 1989: “I didn’t have to be a waitress while studying to earn my living like many of my student friends.” This put her into the marque’s Bertram Schafer Racing-run team and, in the squad’s eponymous BSR chassis, she finished second to team-mate Frank Kramer at the Hockenheim season opener, with a certain Michael Schumacher in third. But she couldn’t hit the same heights again, Monaco 1990 excepted, and found herself at a career crossroads.

“It was too tough for a young woman without anyone around having connections into F1 to make a real career in formulas,” says Lohr, who elected not to engage a manager as “no one could give me the feeling they trusted my talent as they would trust if I was a young man”. “So when I got the [DTM] offer from Mercedes I was really happy. I was earning for me a huge amount of money as an ex-student and there was never a question anymore — I was a professional in motorsport.”

The 1991 season was a struggle but, after placing second at >>

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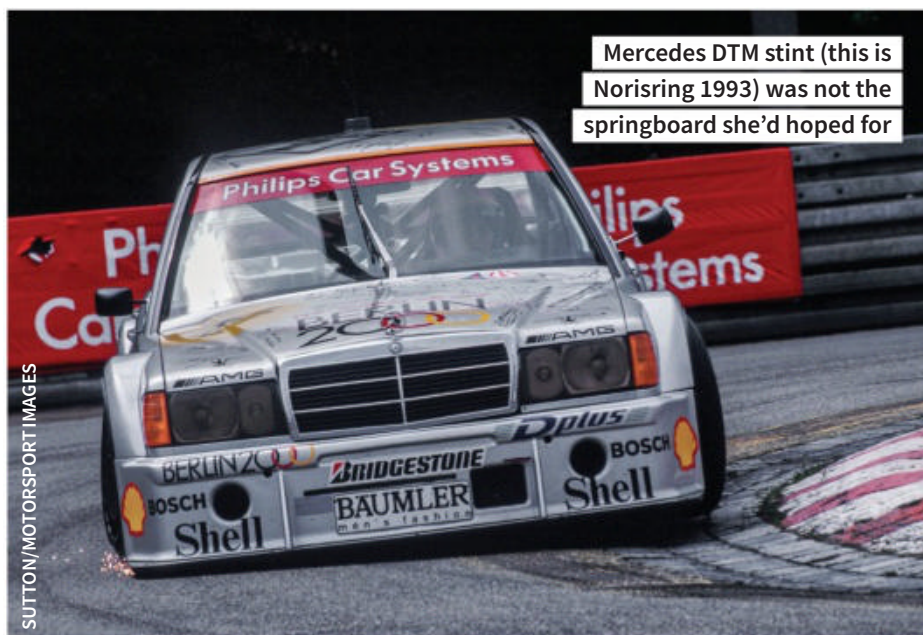
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Mercedes DTM stint (this is Norisring 1993) was not the springboard she'd hoped for



Trucks took some getting used to, but all part of eclectic CV

Avus in 1992, Lohr showed it was no fluke at Hockenheim, where she overhauled Mercedes team-mate Rosberg with a forceful move at the first corner with two laps remaining and pulled away to win. The 1982 world champion retaliated at the start of race two by taking both off. "If this would have happened nowadays, he would have gotten a big penalty!" she chuckles.

But while the win was a confidence boost for her car crew, Lohr believes it didn't make a difference with those who mattered most. "I would say I never got the same chances in testing, in material and so on, and that is really a pity," she says. "I was much too early. If the same things were happening today, can you imagine? I had five podiums in DTM – for a young woman now, the career would take off to Le Mans, to everything. But every step I had to fight. That was exhausting sometimes."

Lohr remained with Mercedes until the collapse of what had become the ITC at the end of 1996, then started afresh in the European Truck Racing Championship in 1997 for an initial two-year stint. She returned to trucks for another five years from 2012, after spells in German production touring cars, three Dakar Rally starts and a move into Germany's national rally championship in 2008. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Lohr admits she "definitely had my difficulties the first year" of trucks as she adapted to sliding to scrub off speed, "because the brakes were difficult to handle".

"In my very first race weekend, somebody crashed into me in practice and I thought, 'Oh my God, everything is damaged!'" she says. "But you had to have this impact once to feel that for truck racing it was nothing. My mechanics were looking at me like, 'Why are you coming into the pits?'"

Lohr retired after the 2016 ETRC season, where she proved

"FOR A YOUNG WOMAN NOW, THE CAREER WOULD TAKE OFF. BUT EVERY STEP I HAD TO FIGHT"

her competitiveness by finishing second in her final race, at Le Mans. And, when she was offered a EuroNASCAR drive in 2019, she quickly accepted. "I started missing it because it's my life, it always will be," she says.

Still, Lohr was pragmatic about racing as a "gentlewoman" driver, even if there was still plenty to learn – including a first experience of oval racing at the age of 54. "I didn't see myself as a professional driver anymore," she says. "Of course I still wanted to win, but I had to accept that this is probably not possible because I'm not as quick as I was and the team never had the budget to be successful."

The team's money ran out before the end of 2019, and COVID-19 meant a return in 2020 was never on the cards. But Lohr had enough of a taster in an eight-year-old car – "Even for a EuroNASCAR that's quite old!" – to recapture the old fire, and ran third in the Challenge Trophy sub-category before she was forced to stop. "That was enough for me," she says. "I had some nice races. You can enjoy very much even when you are fighting for 15th place, it doesn't matter."

Lohr remains involved in motorsport through what she describes as her "dream job", combining her experience in marketing from working with the Venturi Formula E squad and her own Monaco-based consultancy (co-owned by 2001 Dakar winner Jutta Kleinschmidt) with AVL's involvement as a supplier to top-level series from F1 to NASCAR and beyond. It's an appropriate role for a racer who prided herself on being a generalist.

"I put all my knowledge into one job, it's perfect," she says. "Without being an all-rounder, you can't stay for 30 years in professional motorsport. When I changed direction completely, people would look at me like I'm crazy. It was crazy actually, but it was fun!"

TOP TIPS TO BECOMING A WELL-ROUNDED RACER

Ellen Lohr's motorsport career is testament that racing is a "constant fight" and that you can "never trust in a result" to open doors. Early on, she found she had to "fight every day for everything", and recognised that success on-track was no guarantee of deals coming together off-track to progress.

"The person in second may fight harder than you in networking and he's getting the seat instead," she says. "So networking, speaking to journalists not only when they ask you, is really important to build a successful career. You have to fight for your hours in the simulator, rent a flat close to the company you're driving for, and be there every day."

Lohr also advises drivers to build a strong mechanical understanding. She learned to work on her own car in Formula Ford, and carried that knowledge all the way through her career, "even in trucks".

"Young drivers will trust completely in their engineers explaining the data, and that's not enough," she says. "Look at the data yourself, learn if the team's engineers are really good or not – which is possible. Get into the technical side. Be involved, because that makes you a complete driver. It could be that you do Dakar and you have to change your clutch in the sand..."



Formula Ford Festival, Brands Hatch 1986

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- Computer Programming language skills an advantage.
- Good English written and oral communication skills.
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- Support and maintain user notes, guidelines and technical documentation.

Knowledge, skills and experience:

- Business domain experience; especially in a Production and Parts stock control or equivalent is a prerequisite for this role.
- Experience of MRP/ERP systems, ideally Javelin.
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Greystone GT is stepping up from offering trackdays and tuition to racing McLarens this season

CARROLL AND WEBB JOIN NEW TEAM FOR GT CUP BID

GT CUP

Successful endurance racers Adam Carroll and Oliver Webb will both compete in GT4 McLarens in the GT Cup this year for the new Greystone GT squad.

Carroll (below left) has raced in the World Endurance Championship and Formula E in recent seasons, before spending 2019 competing in the Ferrari Challenge Europe and the GT Cup, but did not race last year as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Meanwhile, Webb has been a WEC regular with the ByKolles LMP1 squad, and has not contested a full UK-based series since finishing third in the British Formula 3 points in 2010.

Each will be supporting a driver contesting their first season of racing: novices Mark Hopton and Iain Campbell. Both have taken part in Greystone's

Supercar Trackdays and will now join the team in stepping up to racing.

"We can see a lot of potential in Mark and he's one of the best we've seen in a long time," said Carroll of his co-driver Hopton. "I did a few days coaching him in a GT4 and he decided the next step was to go racing."

Carroll believes that Greystone – led by former single-seater racer and FF Corse team boss Mark McLoughlin and British GT champion Tim Mullen – has all the ingredients to become a successful racing squad, and is looking forward to competing against Webb. "We're both very experienced professionals and we know what we need to do, but we're going to be flat-out and we'll push each other and the team forward," he said. "Mark and Tim have put a really good team together and they do a really professional job – this is just the start for Greystone."

Webb added: "It's nice to be shaping up for a UK championship for the first time since I raced a single-seater! I started working with Iain a couple of years ago on trackdays and it's been great to see not only how he's progressed in that time, but how much he's enjoyed it."

As well as its Supercar Trackdays, Greystone has organised a number of High Performance Test Days, which have attracted numerous British GT teams. McLoughlin feels that expanding into racing is the logical next step. "When Greystone GT was formed in 2016, the aim was always eventually to create a team as a destination for drivers looking to move up from non-competitive track driving and test themselves in a racing environment," he said.

STEPHEN LICKORISH



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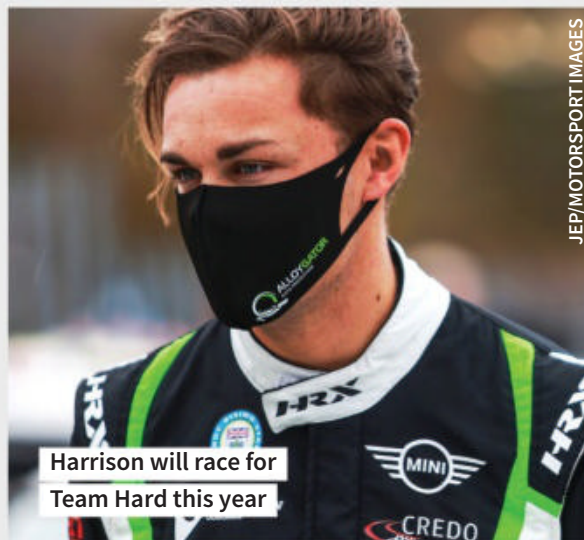
Mini champion Harrison to race in Carrera Cup

PORSCHE CARRERA CUP GB

Mini Challenge champion Nathan Harrison will switch to the Porsche Carrera Cup GB as part of a two-car Team Hard entry.

Harrison, who finished as the Mini runner-up on three occasions before his title win last year, had been targeting a graduation to the British Touring Car Championship for 2021. But a key sponsor pulled out last month and he was left looking at alternative options.

"I was prepared for a year out – with the way the world is at the moment, I thought it would be a sensible time to recharge and plan for the following year but, if you have a year out, it's hard to get back into racing," explained Harrison. "We looked at other championships and Porsche was on the radar. I had a call with Tony [Gilham, Team Hard boss and former Carrera Cup racer] and we came up with a deal and the timing was perfect for both parties."



"It's going to be a challenge – I've never experienced a rear-wheel-drive car and will jump into a Porsche that's got 480bhp. Because Porsche is a worldwide brand, when you approach corporate sponsors, they seem more interested in it because it's a brand they know."

Harrison plans to test the car for the first time at the end of this month. He will enter the Pro-Am class this season before targeting a bid in the Pro category in 2022.

"We want a two-year plan in Porsche, so the logic behind it is to hopefully win Pro-Am and then go up to the Pro championship," added Harrison.

STEPHEN LICKORISH

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Buurman/Loggie stay with RAM

BRITISH GT

British GT Pro-Am champions Yelmer Buurman and Ian Loggie will continue in the series with RAM Racing this season.

The Mercedes pair didn't win a race outright last year, but proved more consistent than main rivals Adam Balon and Phil Keen to snatch the title with four class wins.

With the Silver-Silver pairings that dominated GT3 last year now outlawed, Pro-Am crews will again be in the ascendancy, and Mercedes factory racer Buurman told Autosport that he is confident of challenging for the outright crown alongside the ever-improving Loggie.

"Ian has got a mega learning curve behind him and to see how he improved last year, he did an amazing job," the Dutchman said. "If you tell him something, he really listens carefully, pays attention and basically does it, so it's really impressive. His pace [last year] was really strong, so I'm really confident for the season."

Buurman, who returned to British GT last year after a race-winning campaign for ERC Sport in 2018, added that he was "really impressed from the beginning" with the RAM squad.

RAM will again enter two cars, but Autosport understands that Silver-graded 2020 runner-up Sam De Haan is unlikely to remain in British GT.

JAMES NEWBOLD

IN THE HEADLINES

ARRESTS OVER STOLEN CARS

Three men have been arrested and released under investigation in connection with two BMWs that were stolen from Cadwell Park last month. The BMW M240i safety car and BMW X5 medical car were stolen on 26 January from the MotorSport Vision venue. The X5 has now been recovered and Lincolnshire Police are continuing their investigations to find the second vehicle. Anyone with information should contact 101.

MG LIVE CANCELLED AGAIN

The popular MG Live event at Silverstone has been cancelled for a third consecutive year. In 2019, it was called off due to urgent resurfacing work at the Northamptonshire venue, while it has now been axed for two years in a row because of the coronavirus pandemic. The MG Car Club's race meeting on the Grand Prix circuit is still set to go ahead on 12-13 June without the infield activities that are a key feature of MG Live.

MORE GINETTA SIGNINGS

Ginetta Racing Drivers Club squad Raceway Motorsport will move into Ginetta Junior this year with karting graduate Zac Meakin. James Higgins is also set to be on the grid with Preptech UK after a partial 2020 campaign, while Jamie Osborne – brother of British Touring Car racer Sam – will return to the series with Assetto Motorsport, having last contested it in 2018.

BWRDC AWARDS REVEALED

The British Women Racing Drivers' Club has announced its Gold Stars for 2021. The Junior Gold Star for those under the age of 25 was awarded to Jem Hepworth in recognition for her Britcar title win, driving a Praga R1T (below). The senior award went to rally driver Cathy Sewart, who won the MN Circuit Rally class in her Talbot Sunbeam Lotus. New for this year is the Non-Competing Gold Star, awarded to British Motorsports Marshals Club chair Nadine Lewis.





JEP/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Ginetta Junior champion Lebbon and FF1600 racer Aron move to F3

BRITISH F3

Reigning Ginetta Junior champion Tom Lebbon will graduate to single-seaters in the BRDC British F3 Championship this year.

The 15-year-old, who last season became the first rookie to win the Ginetta Junior crown (above), will remain with the Elite Motorsport squad that took him to the title as the team also makes a move into single-seaters in 2021.

Lebbon has already conducted six days of testing ahead of the season, which is due to begin on 22 May at Brands Hatch, and says that being able to remain with Elite was a key factor in his decision.

"We did think about moving into the Ginetta G55s, but eventually we thought British F3 was the best option for me," said Lebbon. "I have become comfortable in the

team and have got a bond with the mechanics and, if we changed teams, it would take half a year to get settled again.

"Last year was a bit of a shock to be so fast and we went in thinking of doing it for two years, but going into this year just learning is the main aim. We're hoping to pick up some good results. We probably won't be challenging for wins but maybe the odd podium, but with Ginetta Juniors we surprised ourselves. In karting I always moved up early and we thought 'why not keep moving up?'"

Meanwhile, Carlin has confirmed American Bryce Aron as completing its roster for this season, when he will partner the team's 2020 British F4 graduates Zak O'Sullivan and Christian Mansell. Aron was a podium finisher in the Walter Hayes Trophy last year with Low Dempsey Racing after being one of

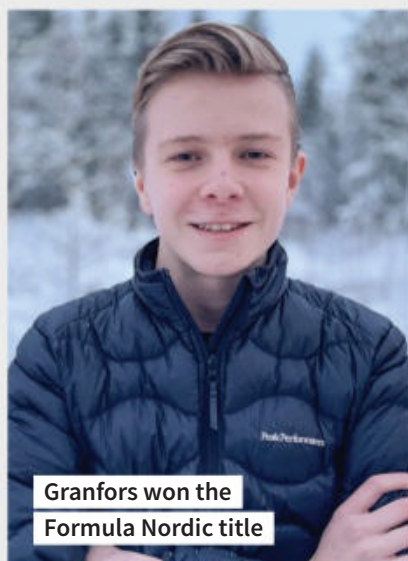


the winners of the Team USA Scholarship.

"No doubt 2021 will be a steep learning curve for me but I'm so excited to be joining Carlin, a team with such a strong history in F3 and the junior formulae," said Aron (above). "To be following in the footsteps of so many incredible drivers that have come through the team feels really exciting."

STEFAN MACKLEY

Nordic champion Granfors to race in the UK



Granfors won the Formula Nordic title

BRITISH F4

Formula Nordic champion Joel Granfors will switch to British Formula 4 with Fortec Motorsport this year.

Granfors claimed the title in the Scandinavian series, which uses 1.6-litre Formula Renault machinery, last year despite missing the opening event as he was too young to compete. He also topped the Aquila Synergy Cup Sweden, a category for the mini

prototype cars.

The Swede is the first driver announced by Fortec, which powered Luke Browning to last year's title, for British F4 this season.

"I'm thrilled to make this announcement and to start my international career in British Formula 4," said Granfors. "We have worked hard over the winter to make this happen, and I couldn't be more excited. It is going to be all new for me this year,

learning all the circuits and a brand new car, but I'm confident that Fortec Motorsport is exactly the right environment for me to be in."

Fortec team manager Oliver Dutton added: "His track record speaks for itself; to go out and win two well-contested championships in Sweden in such a dominant fashion has really marked Joel's card as 'one to watch' for the future."

The Collins siblings lead the field at Ruapuna



Collins adds another brace in New Zealand F5000 Tasman Cup

FORMULA 5000

Michael Collins added two more victories to his quiver in the New Zealand Formula 5000 Tasman Cup Revival Series' penultimate round last weekend.

The battle was fought out in his home city of Christchurch, where the annual Skope Classic historic showcase was staged at Ruapuna's Mike Pero Motorsport Park.

On pole for Saturday's heat, Collins looked left from the Hey family's ex-Graham McRae Leda GM1 to sister Anna alongside in her Leda LT27. The 2.8-second gap was irrelevant as the siblings made history, but Kevin Ingram (Lola T332), Glenn Richards (Lola T400), Codie Banks

(T332) and David Banks (Talon MR1) were within a second of Anna's best.

A broken valve spring ended Anna's weekend and a puncture stopped David Banks, but Codie Banks and Richards chased Michael to the chequered flag. Ingram shadowed Collins to the line in Sunday's feature finale, with David Banks a solid third.

The rolling-start handicap, which has brought intrigue this term, rewarded Shayne Windelburn (T400), who dug deep to deny Collins by 0.168s. Aucklander Windelburn also won the Stan Redmond Memorial Trophy, presented annually in memory of the Northern Ireland-born series stalwart.

MARCUS PYE

Winfield's TCT drive confirmed

TOURING CAR TROPHY

Civic Cup champion Bruce Winfield's graduation to the Touring Car Trophy with Area Motorsport for 2021 has been confirmed.

Winfield will contest the series, which incorporates TCR UK and caters for British Touring Car-spec machinery, in a Cupra TCR.

"We want to be at the front, as everybody does," said Winfield. "I'd hope, with several trackdays before it comes to race season, that we'd be able to get on the pace."

Area Motorsport boss Rob Baker has experience of TCR UK from running Carl Swift's Cupra in 2018, and paired up with Swift to take a similar car to the Club Enduro crown last year. "We've plenty of experience with the cars now and we know Bruce is quick," said Baker.

Area will also field at least seven cars in the Civic Cup, which runs on the same Time Attack package as TCT. Regular frontrunners Alistair Camp, George Alp-Williams and Martin Dalzell all return to the squad. They

will be joined by sophomore Jamie Tonks, Civic stalwart Oliver Barsby and newcomer Darren Meddings. Matt Luff, who won the final two races of the Mazda MX-5 Championship last year, completes the line-up.

Meanwhile, Max Hart will switch to a Hyundai i30 N TCR in this year's TCT. Hart will continue to be run by Maximum Motorsport, with which he took a Cupra to victory at Donington Park en route to third in last year's championship.

MARK PAULSON

IN THE HEADLINES

WIGGIN CROWNED CHAMPION

Joe Wiggin has been named as the champion of the British Racing & Sports Car Club's Mazda MX-5 Championship for Mk1 models of the sportscar, following a post-season National Court hearing. Oliver Allwood was provisionally crowned champion last year, but Wiggin has successfully appealed against a disqualification for an illegal flywheel and has therefore won the title.

MIKE STREET 1936-2021

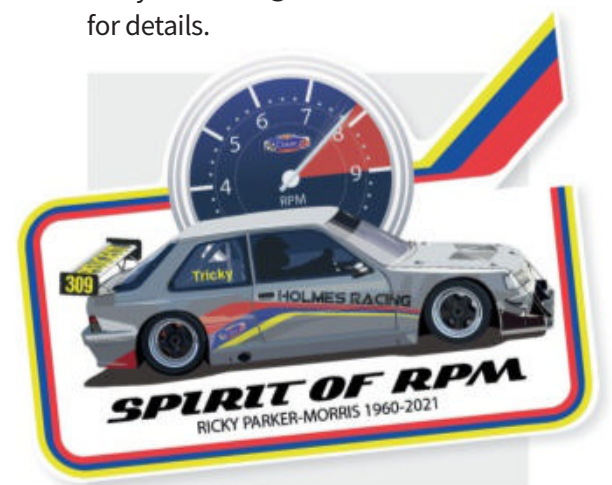
Former 750 Formula champion Mike Street has passed away. He was a stalwart of the club's South London Centre, organising hundreds of events, and made his competition debut in navigational rallies before moving on to sprints and hillclimbs. Street then switched to circuit racing and enjoyed a successful four-year spell that culminated in winning the 1971 750 Formula crown. He stopped racing soon after when his brother Ray suddenly died, but was still a regular at events.

TURNER MOVES TO VW CUP

Olly Turner, the 2019 Fiesta Junior champion, will switch to the Volkswagen Racing Cup this season. Turner, who was a race winner and finished third in the senior Fiesta Championship last year, will pilot a Golf as part of what is intended to be a three-car team run by JM Racing.

RPM STICKER FOR CHARITY

Spirit Of RPM stickers created by artist James Nairn and Autosport's Marcus Pye in memory of Special Saloons and Modsports racer Ricky Parker-Morris – who died of COVID-19 last month – are selling fast at £10 for two. All profits will be donated to the Chelsea and Westminster Hospital NHS Foundation Trust's CW+ charity, with a target of raising at least £1500 for Ricky's last workplace. Email nicky1sheridan@hotmail.com for details.



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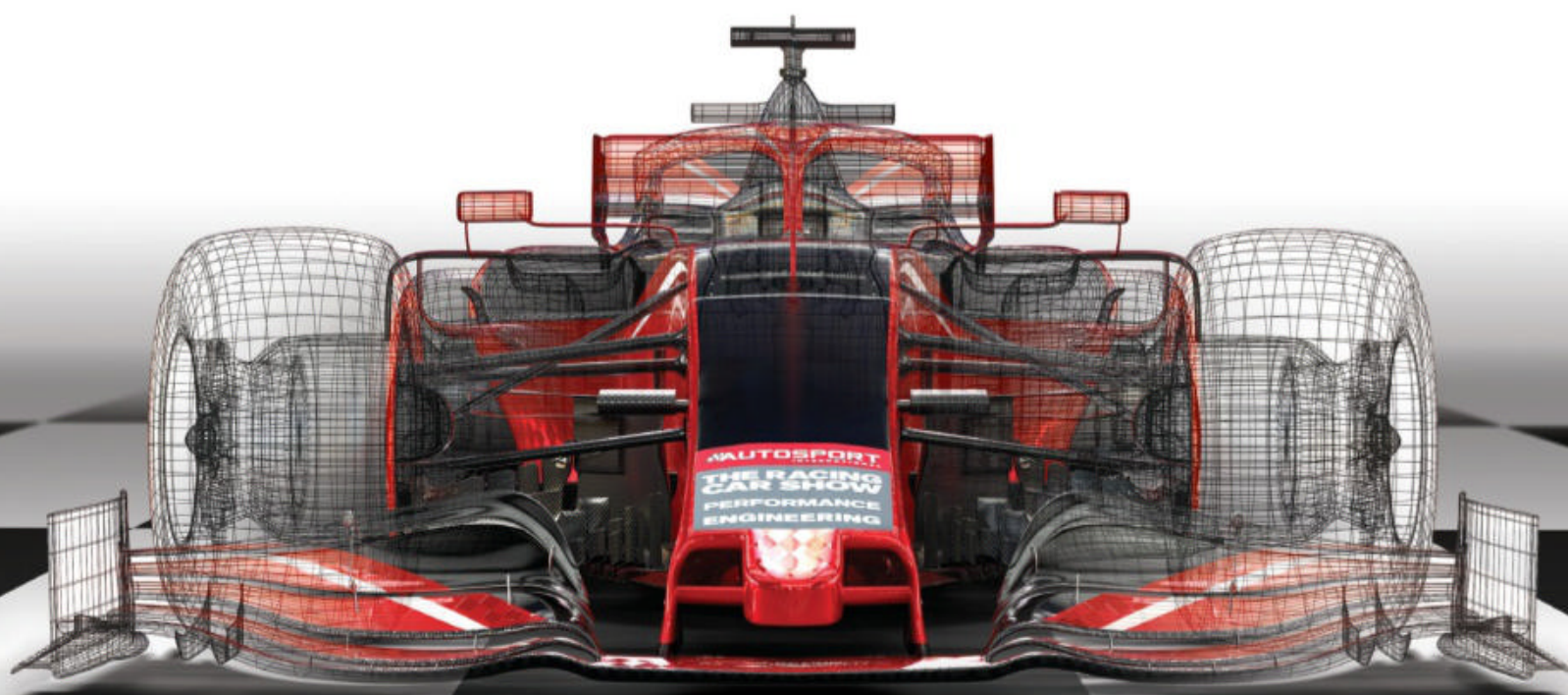
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Circuits not eligible for government COVID loans

UK MOTORSPORT

Leading circuit operators have revealed they have not been eligible to secure proposed funding from the government through its winter sport survival package.

MotorSport Vision – which operates the Brands Hatch, Snetterton, Donington Park, Oulton Park and Cadwell Park tracks – and the British Automobile Racing Club, which runs Thruxton, Croft and Pembrey, were both listed as suggested recipients of the government loans when they were first announced in November.

A total of £6million was earmarked for motorsport venues to make up for shortfalls in income from the absence of spectators. At the time, both MSV and BARC said they needed more details about the scheme before knowing if they would be able to take advantage of it but it has now become apparent the loans are aimed at

organisations on the brink of insolvency.

“We never formally applied for the funding and were not offered a loan,” said MSV chief executive Jonathan Palmer. “We did engage in the process to find out if it could be relevant to mitigating our COVID losses. Clearly, very mindful of the situation, we’ve been lining up further funding from our bankers, so because we’ve done that or because we are in the process of that and we’re certainly not about to collapse, then we are not entitled to any of the loan funding.”

BARC group CEO Ben Taylor says it was good motorsport was recognised initially to

receive support but people need to realise there has not been a major investment.

“The bottom line was that funding was aimed at sports companies who had to make immediate payments in order to keep going,” he said. “We’re not in that position in motorsport so it became pretty clear that, in spite of the generosity of their action, it was not actually going to be of any use to us. It’s important for people to understand that, although the government announced a big amount of money for motorsport, it hasn’t materialised.”

STEPHEN LICKORISH AND STEFAN MACKLEY



Budd brothers join Legends roster for this season

LEGENDS

Racing brothers Charlie and Dan Budd will make their debuts in the Legends Cars National Championship this season, taking the total number of registered drivers so far to 20.

The siblings have most recently raced in the Ginetta

GT5 Challenge, having previously competed in Mini Se7en, with Charlie winning the 2017 title.

They will be joined on the grid by another pair of siblings, Kieran and Mark Beaty who have raced Legends cars in Scotland. Also competing full-time will be Andy Bird, the 2019

Division 1 Superkart champion, and Chris Brockhurst moves across from Super Silhouettes. Meanwhile, race winner Marcus Pett will return, having sat out 2020.

“This season’s grid really is shaping up to be one of the most exciting in years,” said Legends Cars National

Championship owner Phil Cooper.

“We’re attracting racers from a very diverse spread of motorsport, which shows the strength of the package we offer in Legends and the superb quality of the racing. It continues to be one of the most cost-effective forms of racing anywhere.”

ANGELO R. DRIVE

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Livestreaming delight

One of the club motorsport trends in the past few years has been the increasing livestreaming of race meetings, and this brings a number of benefits

STEPHEN LICKORISH

Like all elements of motorsport, club racing has continually evolved over the years. There have been a number of trends to have developed over time, such as the shift from single-day to two-day meetings and a gradual move from many single-venue or regional championships towards more series that race at circuits across the UK. Another way national motorsport has developed in recent years has been the increasing number of race meetings that are being livestreamed.

As technology has improved, more and more events are getting shown live on the internet, from high-profile fixtures such as the Formula Ford Festival at Brands Hatch to club meetings being shown online via Castle Combe TV. At a time of economic uncertainty, it may be a surprise to see clubs increasingly investing in livestreaming, particularly as it's far from essential for the running of events. But it does bring plenty of different benefits compared to the more costly traditional route of a highlights show on a satellite TV channel.

One club that's expanding its livestreaming commitment this year is the British Automobile Racing Club. It plans to show an incredible 16 events online in 2021 after agreeing a partnership with 247.TV. In the past, individual BARC-administered categories have invested in livestreaming, but the club has now seen the merits of the service and is offering it more widely.

“It helps make people realise there's this world of club racing out there that's in reach”

“We think it's an important thing to add to our events and our offering and so we've made that commitment,” says BARC group CEO Ben Taylor. “It started last year as a toe in the water and it seemed to work really well, so the conversations started last year about how to coordinate that for everybody.

“Livestreaming is more important than I thought it would be in that it's really what the competitors and their associates feel is important. People don't necessarily want to wait for a post-production piece of coverage, which then has to go on a platform or channel – it feels a bit arcane waiting to see what happened – but as technology has developed, livestreaming has to be the holy grail. But we shied away from it before because of the costs of doing it.

“What we've seen is, with the advent of better technology, we no longer have to have the satellite truck, the outside broadcast

unit and miles of cabling, and it has become more cost-effective.”

Taylor admits to being surprised by the number of people tuning in to watch club events. “You might think it would be just friends or family, but there were thousands of people logging in from all round the country and the world,” he says, adding that the BARC is also investing in more traditional platforms, with the terrestrial channel Freesports running coverage from events this year.

The 750 Motor Club has livestreamed some of its events for several years now and plans to offer 11 days of racing live online this season, while providing commentary and a static camera from its other meetings. It intends to begin with livestreaming both of its scheduled events over the Easter Bank Holiday weekend and will again be working on this coverage with Alpha Live, the company founded by former 750MC racer Luke Austin. The club's communication manager, James Winstanley, says livestreaming has become “extremely important”, and that the positives of doing so are wide-ranging.

“Club racing has developed over the years and things have changed, and the benefit is livestreaming works for everybody,” he says. “It works for competitors to make a bit more of their race weekend and watch it back and show sponsors, family and friends, and may help them get a bit of a financial top-up. It's nice to see yourself racing and have it as a memento, and it works for our championship sponsors because you get a huge number of views both on Facebook and YouTube – we get 10,000-plus views across a weekend.

“It also works for the club because it helps to get our name out, and helps to bring in new entries and make people realise there's this world of club racing out there that's in reach. We've had enquiries come off the back of it. So, it's good for motorsport as a whole. What all clubs want is a bigger pool of people to dip into for club competitors, so the more people we can bring into the world of motorsport, the better.”

It is estimated that the cost of livestreaming a race meeting is around 15–20% of the total that a club used to pay to have events broadcast live on cable TV channels six or seven years ago, and that has clearly contributed to its ever-increasing use. And it really came into its own last year during the pandemic. With many events held behind closed doors, or drivers self-isolating or sitting out due to budgetary reasons, livestreaming allowed people to stay involved.

The 750MC has taken an incredible 1639 race entries in 24 hours since they opened on Monday, across a range of events, and its livestream offering perhaps plays a small part in this success. Given its clear popularity, it seems that livestreaming is a club racing trend that is certainly a change for the better. ❧

GETTING BACK ON TRACK

The COVID-19 pandemic plagued all of UK motorsport last season, but some venues, clubs and championships were hit harder than most. Here's how they're attempting to bounce back

BY STEFAN MACKLEY AND STEPHEN BRUNSDON

Some action did take place at Santa Pod last year once UK lockdowns were lifted



SANTA POD

Santa Pod Raceway endured “three winters”, according to CEO Keith Bartlett, during a 2020 season where it lost 85% of its revenue and placed most of its staff on furlough.

Only a handful of events were run, and Bartlett believes these were crucial in terms of not only generating some form of income, but ensuring that the venue could put in effective COVID safety protocols ahead of 2021.

“We launched our ‘Back On Track’ events in July for racers only, with strict protocols for hygiene and social distancing under the close

supervision of our local authority,” he says. “As a result of that success, we were able to develop further protocols across the entire venue, allowing us to revive the latter half of our season’s schedule, albeit run on a reduced scale and permitting spectators in limited numbers.”

A full roster of events has been released for 2021, with provisional highlights being two international drag races – the first and last rounds of the FIA/FIM European Championships in May and September – as well as a plethora of specialist festivals, modified car shows and public track days.

“Our experience from last year showed that it’s not just our competitors who are hungry to get back to action,” adds Bartlett. “To what level spectators want to return, one cannot be 100% certain at this point in time, but if the summer of 2020 is anything to go by, Santa Pod, which has an extremely loyal fanbase, should see a good turnout.

“Our 2020 experience has already demonstrated that we can safely handle reduced but still significant spectator numbers, and we have worked tirelessly with the local authority to become a COVID-secure venue.”



Standalone hillclimb events, such as Shelsley Walsh, did take place

LAWRENCE

BRITISH HILLCLIMB CHAMPIONSHIP

An illustrious and continuous history of the British Hillclimb Championship dating back more than seven decades was abruptly halted last year as the uncertainty surrounding the pandemic meant the contest did not take place for the first time since 1947.

Championship coordinator Tim Wilson admits that the decision wasn't an easy one to make, but it was supported by competitors.

"I spent a lot of last year talking to not just sponsors and organising clubs but also competitors, because it was important that whatever we decided to do – I know we're the organiser and we do what we want in some respects – it is amateur sport, and we've got to have the support of competitors," he says. "Last year more than ever it was important to have the competitor backing, and we did."

A 16-event calendar with 32 rounds is scheduled for the 2021

season, beginning at Prescott (24-25 April) and followed by Craigantlet in Ireland (1 May), but Wilson has already been working on contingency plans to hold these events later in the season if needed.

With no minimum number of events required to stage the championship, Wilson is confident that not only will a champion be crowned in 2021, but that the turnout for events will be strong.

"I'm confident we'll get a season," he adds. "Most of the

organising clubs ran events last year – Prescott, Loton Park, Shelsley Walsh, Wiscombe Park, Harewood all ran events. We have experience of running events under COVID conditions so we're very confident.

"Certainly the view I got last year was competitors were very responsible, but when the time is right they're chomping at the bit to get out, and as long as the conditions are right then I'm expecting good turnouts."



The Cambrian Rally was the only BRC event to be held in 2020 due to COVID

JEP

BRITISH RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

Perhaps more than any other discipline of motorsport, rallying has been hit the hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic. Just one round of the British Rally Championship took place in February last year. While circuit racing was able to

resume by July, rallying was not in that position primarily due to being staged across a wider area and there being two occupants in the car, meaning that adhering to safety protocols was impossible.

"Every other form of motorsport managed to make a return," says BRC championship manager

Iain Campbell. "It's just really when you come down to the multi venues and the very nature of rallying, which generally means it covers a large area, it makes it hard to restrict access, which is what we were needing to do to get it up and running. It certainly wasn't for the lack of trying."

Even ahead of this season the continuing effects of the pandemic have already impacted the proposed 2021 calendar, with the opening three rounds – the Circuit of Ireland, Tendraing & Clacton and Jim Clark Rally – already cancelled.

The new provisional calendar consists of five rounds, beginning with the Nicky Grist Stages on 10 July, followed by the Grampian Rally (14 August), Trackrod Rally (24-25 September), Mull Rally (8-9 October) and the Cambrian Rally (30 October).

Despite the continued adversity, Campbell is confident that a championship will take place this season – a minimum of three rounds would be needed – and that there will be more scope to include new events on the calendar.

"I'm actively speaking to other events to see what their plans are and see if they would entertain the British Rally Championship coming to them," he says. "These discussions are going quite healthily at the moment, so fingers crossed."

"From the Nicky Grist onwards [the organisers] are actively working on the assumption that their events will go ahead. They're doing everything they can to ensure that it does happen and that's all we can ask for at the moment."



The VSCC's Mallory Park event in 2020 proved to be popular with drivers

VINTAGE SPORTS-CAR CLUB

The only club included in this round-up, the Vintage Sports-Car Club generally holds a handful of race meetings each year as well as trials, hillclimbs and solo events totalling around 40 across a season.

But last year closer to half a dozen took place because of the pandemic, including just one race meeting at Mallory Park in August. Three other race meetings were

cancelled, and two races at Castle Combe were rained off.

Ahead of this season, the club is hopeful of building on the success of its single race meeting last year, and has four events planned at Silverstone (17 April), Cadwell Park (19 June), Oulton Park (10 July) and Mallory (22 August).

"The one race meeting we were able to do was an absolutely fantastic event," says VSCC club secretary Tania Brown. "It was full

of competitors, we had families there, three generations of the same family on track in one race, so that in itself was an amazing event. It was very challenging to run it with all the regulations around COVID, but it was a good event."

The club has had to manage a downturn in revenue, with eight full-time staff placed on furlough, while some competitors showed their support by donating race entry fees for the cancelled

meetings last season.

"We're lucky with our staff – they're not just paid employees who turn up to do the job, they all absolutely love the club," adds Brown. "So despite the fact that it's been a little bit challenging when they've been furloughed, they've all given their absolute all to make sure what we've done has worked."

"The club has been around for 87 years – it's going to take more than COVID to stop us."

ARMED FORCES RACE CHALLENGE

Returning for 2021 will be the Armed Forces Race Challenge, which didn't hold a single race last season as some of the competitors were called up to help during the pandemic.

The championship has a provisional calendar of 10 races at five meetings this term, including Cadwell Park (17 April), Anglesey (19 June), Snetterton (17 July), Brands Hatch (11 September) and Mallory Park (10 October), as well as the popular end-of-season Birkett Relay (23 October).

"We're all really grateful for the help that the 750 Motor Club gave us – there was no way we could commit last year because of the amount of stuff going on," says Armed Forces Race Challenge volunteer Chris Slator. "The average entry this season will be below 2019 only on the grounds that the circuits that we're planning to visit this year have lower capacities."

"Last year we were going to do bigger circuits and we'd sold out for all the races bar one, so even at the beginning of the season we were



looking at averaging 42 entries. This year four out of five weekends have a 34-car limit, so the numbers will be lower than what they were as an average in 2019, but it offers us a great opportunity to reset."

Despite this, the championship has already had more than 40 registrations, and Slator is confident

that "we will be running all the races at capacity".

With plans to reduce entry fees as much as possible, and main title sponsor McQ Scaffolding rolling over its support to 2021, Slator also believes that "it's looking really good for being able to help drivers out and drive down the costs [of competing] as much as possible".



WELSH SPORTS AND SALOON CAR CHAMPIONSHIP

With motorsport in Wales last season all but non-existent bar a handful of track and test days behind closed doors, due to the decision of the Welsh government, it's perhaps not surprising that the Welsh Sports and Saloon Car Championship was unable to hold a campaign.

Despite the ongoing uncertainty, a provisional seven-round, 14-race calendar has been announced for the 2021 season including three visits to Pembrey, beginning on 16 May.

"We have actually lobbied them [the Welsh Assembly] to say, 'You've made a mistake here,'" says Welsh Racing Drivers Association secretary Robert Allender. "Pembrey is our traditional home and they've got about five paddocks that can be self-isolating. Everyone can self-distance within those paddocks, it's a big site, but they [the Welsh

Assembly] just came out with this particular thing [of not being able to hold motorsport events].

"Hopefully we'll be able to talk to them [the Welsh Assembly] when things start to die down again and the racing starts up because they did have racing in England, in Scotland and in Northern Ireland."

Four 'away' trips have been scheduled for 2021, including races at Mallory Park (13 June), Thruxton (4 July), Castle Combe (30 August) and Donington Park (26 September).

Allender adds: "We're hoping that Mallory, Castle Combe and Donington we will have a big event for those and we'll invite guest drivers, people who think, 'That might be a good idea, let's see what it's like.'" So as well as the championship point scorers we will invite guests who can't score points but can still have some fun because that's what we're all about. We want to put the fun back into racing!"



PICKUPS

The reasons for cancelling the Pickup Truck Racing Championship in 2020 were twofold, according to organiser Sonny Howard, with a lack of spectators and restrictions on team personnel being key.

"I know we're in motorsport but we're also in the entertainment business, and our perception ended up being that we needed an audience," he says. "It was all right just going racing, but it was more about that."

"The other thing with the COVID restrictions was there was

only limited numbers [of team personnel] that you could take."

After last season's sabbatical, Howard is confident that numbers for the upcoming campaign will be strong, with 30 drivers registered, including a number of rookies.

"The feedback that we're getting coming back is everybody is on a positive," says Howard. "There's always going to end up being somebody that will try and pick up some of the pieces and try and steer the drivers away, but they were really loyal. They got frustrated around about September time, but

it's a good group of people and they understand what it's all about."

This season's calendar will feature 22 races including rare trips to Knockhill and Lydden Hill, while there will also be two meetings at the Mallory Park Oval as well as outings at Brands Hatch, Donington Park, Snetterton and Pembrey.

"We've accepted that perhaps we're going to end up losing two rounds and it might end up being the end of May before we start," adds Howard, "but we're saying that whatever happens we are going racing this year."

SCOTTISH FF1600

There was a period during the 2020 season when it seemed there was a very real prospect of Scottish Formula Ford 1600 disappearing off the motorsport map altogether.

COVID-19 came at the most inopportune of times – the championship had struggled to drum up more than eight cars the previous year, despite concerted efforts.

Last year, its planned six-round calendar was cancelled when the Scottish Motor Racing Club was forced into severe measures owing to the pandemic, cutting the number of participating categories to fit into the revised three-round campaign.

FF1600 was an unfortunate casualty in this reshuffle but, through championship driver representative and Knockhill veteran Neil Broome, there was at least some racing courtesy of the Scottish Renegades Cup – one round as part of Heritage Formula Ford, and then two with the Knockhill Motor Racing Club.

"What we were able to do in the remaining months of 2020 was effectively stop the rot," says Broome. "There was every possibility that people would have sold their cars had there not been any racing. And once you sell it, it's not coming back."

Faced with a year without the backing of a club to run the championship, Scottish FF1600 operated largely on a shoestring budget. As Broome explains, the likelihood of the Renegades Cup running in 2021 in the same format was next to impossible.

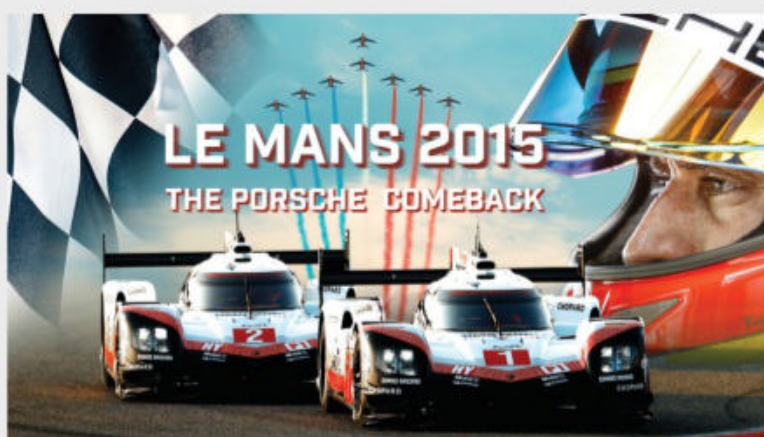
"To get Renegades going last year I forked out a lot of the money, and quite honestly I'm not in a position to do that again this year," says Broome. "Thankfully the SMRC is there and supporting us for 2021, so we will be able to get back to racing."

Back on the SMRC bill for this year, Scottish FF1600 is set to race in five of the proposed six rounds, skipping the reversed Knockhill meeting for an as-yet-unconfirmed alternative venue.





CELEBRATING WHEN PORSCHE



DOCUMENTARY REVIEW LE MANS 2015 – THE PORSCHE COMEBACK

Another week, another review of a documentary that attempts to give its audience an insight into what it takes to be successful at the Circuit de la Sarthe. Fortunately, *Le Mans 2015 – The Porsche Comeback* gets far closer to the mark, and does so with 30 minutes change, compared to *Become Who You Are: 4 Drivers, 4 Stories, 1 Race* that was assessed on these pages in the previous issue of the magazine.

A 60-minute affair that's on Amazon Prime Video, it too has issues with the title. This isn't a specific study of one race. Instead, it recalls the first two seasons of the Porsche 919 Hybrid programme as it rose to World Endurance Championship supremacy, with the French enduro occupying only around 10 minutes of screen time. That aside, and the frustration that it has taken this 2020 release the better part of five years to come to fruition and feels outdated as a result, this is a much better take on the trials and tribulations that come with racing around the clock.

Not that Autosport is easily bought by any attempt

at nostalgia, but it's a good sign that after just four seconds there's period footage of a Porsche 935/76. That soon cuts to the final stages of Le Mans in 2015, with the narrator explaining that Nico Hulkenberg (sharing the additional third car with Nick Tandy and Earl Bamber) is on his way to victory. The context of the race is established clearly and early on, which was a major fault of the convoluted *Become Who You Are*.

The on-track action is then put on ice as the documentary tracks back to the 919's gestation. Although this is predominantly a Porsche PR exercise, winding back to the machine's development at the Weissach test track in the autumn of 2012 does offer interesting insight. Mainly, how the early mule car suffered with a severe vibration that dented progress massively – requiring a new crankshaft before meaningful strides towards reliability could be taken.

From the 919 being officially unveiled at the Geneva Motor Show in March 2014, there's a succinct timeline of the car's initial outings. A third place at Silverstone on its debut that year and a fourth at Spa before the first attack on Le Mans. With some deference given to the concurrent Toyota and Audi LMP1 concerns, and very occasionally the front-wheel-drive Nissan GT-R LM Nismo just about making it into the back of shot, it acts as a great reminder that towards the end of the previous decade, the top class of the WEC was in its pomp.

Having yet to complete a full 24-hour simulation without some variety of problems, the 2014 assault on Le Mans is subdued at best, with Marc Lieb, Roman Dumas and Neel Jani offering only 11th. But benefiting from the safety car required for Mark Webber's enormous Brazil shunt, Porsche does at least celebrate victory in Brazil to close the year.

That leads to a full-bodied refresh for 2015:



S BLOXHAM
motorsport
IMAGES

‘CAME HOME’



L-r: Tandy, Bamber and
Hulkenberg enjoy their
wildcard Porsche victory

new chassis, new front and rear structures and new manufacturing processes. Now 33 minutes in, the main event – Le Mans in 2015 – comes into focus.

With a decent recapture of the race and other highlights including a full onboard simulator lap narrated by Timo Bernhard, a brief interview with Porsche sportscar mastermind Norbert Singer and cuts of period footage from 1977 and 1982, there’s a lot to be enjoyed in the hour.

It’s no warts-and-all documentary but compared to *Become Who You Are*, it’s a good lesson in why simplicity should often be the order of the day. This is a clear and concise celebration of a landmark engineering project winning a landmark race. A touch devoid of atmosphere and emotion and still not a true take on Le Mans it may be, but *The Porsche Comeback* hits many more of the right notes and in the right order for those in search of an off-season endurance racing fix.

MATT KEW

FINISHING STRAIGHT



youtube.com/AUTOSPORTdotcom



McLaren and Mercedes will partner yet again in 2021 for the McLaren MCL35M. But what happened the first time that Mercedes supplied the Woking squad with an engine? Autosport jumps back to 1995 to see why the MP4/10 may not have been the most successful car, but it paved the way for a powerhouse of a partnership. Go to bit.ly/McLarenMerc



bit.ly/WhincupAUS

Why Whincup’s next move is no calculated gamble

Crack Supercars team Triple Eight is set for a radical shake-up next year when Jamie Whincup retires from driving and takes over the reins. Outgoing boss Roland Dane has full faith that he’ll be up to the task

WHAT’S ON

INTERNATIONAL MOTORSPORT

Daytona 500

NASCAR Cup

Round 1/36

Daytona, Florida, USA

14 February

TV Live Premier

Sports 2, Sun 1900

NASCAR Xfinity Series

Round 1/33

Daytona, Florida, USA

13 February

TV Live Premier

Sports 2, Sat 2130

NASCAR Truck Series

Round 1/22

Daytona, Florida, USA

12 February

TV Live Premier

Sports 2, Sat 0000

F3 Asian Championship

Round 4/5

Dubai Autodrome, UAE

13-14 February

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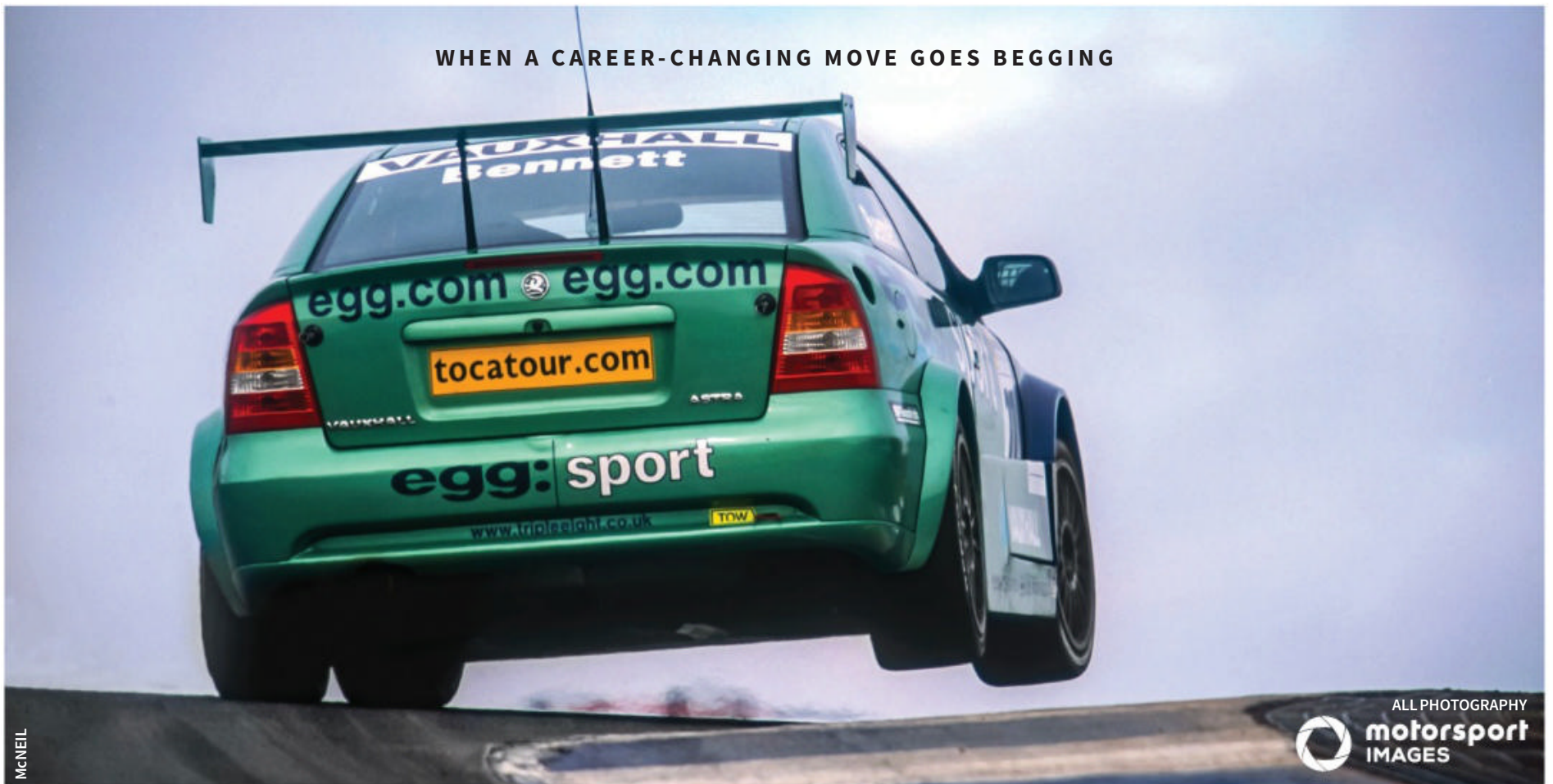
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WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN

WHEN A CAREER-CHANGING MOVE GOES BEGGING



TOM FERRIER

A deal to race the dominant BTCC car of 2001 went awry

JAMES NEWBOLD

Since switching from driving to team ownership, Tom Ferrier's roll of honour with TF Sport has been relentless. The GTE-Am class-winning squad at Le Mans last year has claimed the past two British GT4 titles and secured a second GT3 crown in 2019, its first having arrived in 2016, only its third season.

Little wonder that Ferrier says he's "happy with where I am now", but there remains a nagging 'what if?' about his driving career – the small matter of a Triple Eight Vauxhall drive that fell through on the eve of the 2001 British Touring Car Championship season.

A then-19-year-old Ferrier, who had made his BTCC debut in the nascent Production class at the tail end of 2000,

had signed to drive a 'junior' car alongside fully fledged works drivers Jason Plato and Yvan Muller in what amounted to a ticket to the big time. The Astra Coupe was certainly the car to have in the first year for the new BTC Touring regulations, with a near-clean sweep of 25 wins from 26 starts, but Ferrier's dream ride was curtailed after the briefest of encounters.

"I did a shakedown at Pembrey for two days when the car was first built, doing some electronic mapping, and that was it," he says. "Then Phil Bennett turned up with the Egg money, which ruined my deal basically. Vauxhall took that on and that pushed me off to possibly run with a satellite team, which I didn't take up in the end."

Ferrier recalls that he was offered a deal in a Techspeed-run Astra, but he and manager Tim Harvey turned it down in favour of an Edenbridge BMW in the European Touring Car Championship. The year was tough going, up against stiff opposition that included ex-Honda BTCC man Peter Kox, 1998 BTCC independents champion Tommy Rustad and ex-Volvo racer Gianni Morbidelli. Ferrier finished the year 12th in the points.

His European outings were combined with select BTCC outings in a JS Motorsport Alfa Romeo 147, a project coordinated by Harvey, where Ferrier

"IT'S A LONG TIME AGO NOW AND I'M NOT ANGRY ABOUT IT, BUT AT THE TIME I WAS VERY UPSET"

got to see just what he'd missed out on.

"I was absolutely heartbroken, and more so when I saw how good the car was," he says. "It could have been a really good year, but that's just the way things go. It's a long time ago now and I'm not angry about it, but at the time I was very upset!"

The championship's second visit to Donington provided a stark illustration of what Ferrier had lost. Bennett escaped to victory in the sprint race while title rivals Muller and Plato were preoccupied knocking 10 bells out of each other, while a canny pitstop strategy put Ferrier into the lead in the feature before yet another Alfa engine failure put him out. Had 2001 played out as planned, what could Ferrier have achieved with the Astra?

"It's hard to say what would have changed," he says, "but it would have been a great option and I'm sure we would have won a few races. Even Paul O'Neill [in 2002] managed to win in that car!" ❦



Ferrier has a winning touch as a team owner

JEP

FINISHING STRAIGHT



FROM THE ARCHIVE

Jean Alesi attempts to get his Ferrari 412T2 facing in the right direction after spinning on the inside of the first corner at the start of the 1995 Argentinian Grand

Prix at Buenos Aires. The midfield chaos that his mishap triggered caused the race to be red-flagged. Six drivers, including Alesi, had to use their teams' spare cars for the restart but, because both Minardis

were involved in the melee, Luca Badoer had to sit out proceedings after Pierluigi Martini got dibs. Alesi went on to put in a star turn, finishing in second place behind the Williams-Renault FW17 of Damon Hill.



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IN DEFENCE OF...

ONE-SHOT QUALIFYING

While the form of the racing has resisted change throughout the seven-decade span of the Formula 1 world championship, qualifying has been tormented with increasing frequency in recent years – all in the name of ‘the show’. Once merely a means of setting the starting order (and weeding out timewasters), the qualifying process has been forced by commercial imperatives to become a must-see in itself.

As any harassed television executive will tell you, what any show needs is an element of uncertainty – or, even better, peril. In televised motor racing this introduces a philosophical fault line: where do you draw the boundary between entertainment and purity? One-shot qualifying, introduced in 2003, arguably transgressed this boundary, even though the basic idea had merit.

It came about because of a perceived problem: F1 qualifying had become a one-hour session packaged for TV in 1996, but most entrants sat in their garages until near the end, when conditions were optimal. Perfect competitive sense, lousy TV.

Ferrari’s on-track dominance in the early

2000s brought further clamour for change. Under the one-shot system introduced for 2003, in a new session on Fridays every competitor completed a single flying lap, setting off in championship order. The times from this would determine the starting order for the one-shot session on Saturday, the slowest Friday driver going first. All cars had to carry the fuel load with which they would start the race. In theory this was a near-perfect solution, and you could see why its logic appealed to FIA president Max Mosley. It guaranteed cars on track throughout the hour and, since each driver had just one opportunity to set a lap, peril was constantly in attendance.

But while it threw up several unexpected results, it was open to exploitation. Its fundamental fairness, too, depended on your perspective, especially if you were a driver disadvantaged by a sudden change in conditions. And so the calls for change began again – but the solutions would get worse (eg the stupid and unwieldy aggregate system) before they got better...

STUART CODLING



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