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F1 2021 **PREVIEW**

- Is Red Bull ready to beat Hamilton?
- Ferrari starts its latest revival
- Schumacher name returns



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- 1986 Porsche 944 Turbo Cup
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- 1959 Studebaker Silver Hawk Racer
- 1965 Sunbeam Tiger FIA Appendix 'K' Competition GT
- 1966 Tifosi Sebring Sprite (MG Midget MkII)
- 1975 Triumph Dolomite Sprint - FIA - GP2
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The same players but a different script for Formula 1 2021?

It's three and a half months since the 2020 Formula 1 season came to a close in Abu Dhabi. Thanks to the strange circumstances in which we are currently living, it feels like a lot longer, but this weekend the wait will be over and F1 2021 will properly kick off in Bahrain.

Despite the much-discussed and supposed carryover of last year's machines, there are plenty of changes and question marks to stir the interest ahead of the new campaign.

Chief among those is whether Red Bull can actually put together a championship challenge. Given recent history and the incredible W11, it was easy to assume heading into the winter that 2021 would be another Mercedes season and we'd have to wait for the major rules reset in 2022 to see the team truly under pressure. But, as Alex Kalinauckas shows in the first piece of our bumper F1 preview (page 17), testing indicates that things might not be so simple.

Ferrari's recovery (p24), Sebastian Vettel at Aston Martin (p28), McLaren's return to Mercedes power (p32), Fernando Alonso's comeback (p36), and the 2021 crop of rookies (p40) should also provide plenty of subplots as the season unfolds.

Formula 2 and MotoGP also kick off this weekend. Guanyu Zhou is China's best hope for an F1 driver and needs to make the most of his opportunities (p72), while Marc Marquez's future will play a big role in how the pinnacle of motorbike racing plays out (p76).



Kevin Turner

Kevin Turner
Chief Editor

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**NEXT WEEK
1 APRIL**

Bahrain GP

Our full report on the opening round of the 2021 F1 campaign

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JEDDAH TO BE 'FASTEST' STREET

FORMULA 1

Formula 1 has revealed the street-circuit layout that will be used for the inaugural Saudi Arabian Grand Prix in Jeddah. The night race on 3-5 December will be on a 27-corner circuit designed by well-known track architect Hermann Tilke's company, in collaboration with the series' own motorsport team.

The track is 3.837 miles in length, making it the second-longest on the F1 calendar behind Spa, and is expected to deliver an average lap speed of 155mph. It is therefore set to become the fastest street circuit on the schedule, trumping Melbourne's Albert Park and

the Baku City Circuit.

The anti-clockwise layout runs along the Jeddah seafront, with the long, thin nature of the track allowing for it to be crammed into a small area of land in the Corniche area of the city. It has the potential for three DRS zones thanks to some long straights, and has high-speed sections reminiscent of the Baku street circuit that has proven popular in recent years.

"It's always very exciting to release the details of a new circuit and the Jeddah Street Circuit is no exception," said F1 managing director of motorsports Ross Brawn. "We have worked closely with the team at Tilke and with the promoter to ensure we have a track

that provides exciting wheel-to-wheel racing for our fans and challenges all of the drivers.

"The design brings out the best of a modern street circuit but also has free-flowing areas that will create fast speeds and overtaking opportunities. The setting is incredible, on the Red Sea, and we can't wait to see the cars on track."

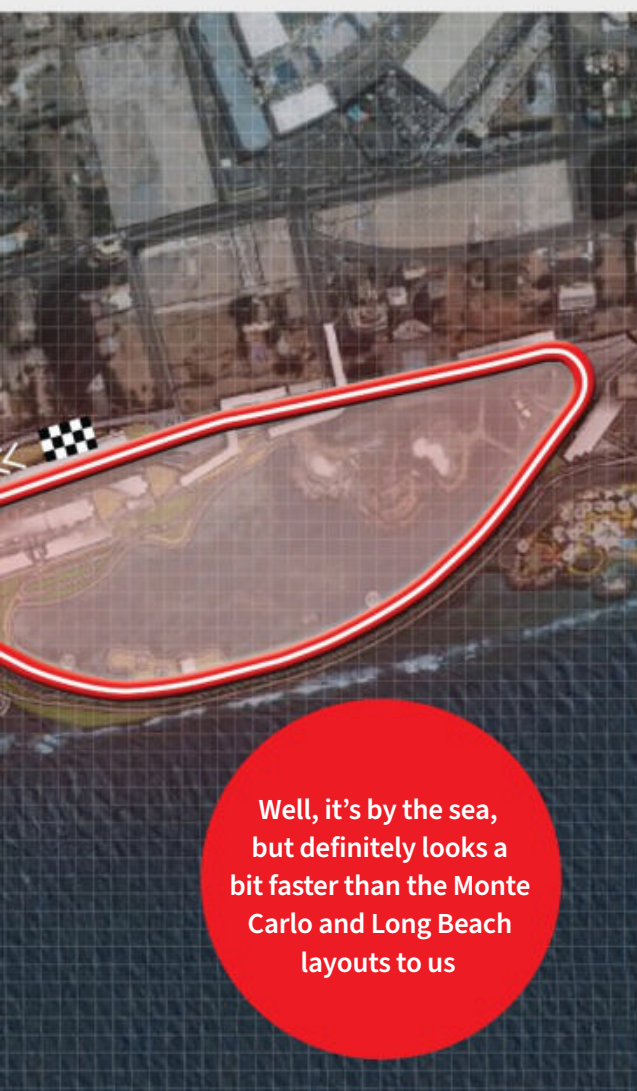
The inaugural race in Jeddah represents the start of a long-term agreement between F1 and Saudi Arabia. F1 is planning to move to a new, permanent circuit in the start-up city of Qiddiya, on the outskirts of Riyadh, in 2023, and said recently that the deal to race in Saudi Arabia would last "a decade, if not longer".

F1'S FASTEST STREET CIRCUITS

Here are the 10 quickest urban street circuits used in the world championship to date, with fastest pole laps. We've left out tracks on public roads out of cities, and those in Las Vegas car parks.

POS	TRACK	DRIVER (TEAM)	YEAR	AVERAGE SPEED
1	Albert Park	Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes)	2019	147.385mph
2	Baku	Valtteri Bottas (Mercedes)	2019	133.621mph
3	Valencia	Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull-Renault)	2011	125.000mph
4	Marina Bay	Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes)	2018	117.956mph
5	Adelaide	Ayrton Senna (McLaren-Ford)	1993	115.244mph
6	Oporto	John Surtees (Lotus-Climax)	1960	113.829mph
7	Pedralbes	Alberto Ascari (Ferrari)	1951	108.189mph
8	Monte Carlo	Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes)	2019	106.385mph
9	Montjuic Park	Ronnie Peterson (Lotus-Ford)	1973	103.643mph
10	Phoenix	Ayrton Senna (McLaren-Honda)	1991	102.208mph





Well, it's by the sea, but definitely looks a bit faster than the Monte Carlo and Long Beach layouts to us

TRACK

"Next December will be a huge moment, when we host the biggest event in motorsport," said Saudi motorsport federation chief Prince Khalid Bin Sultan Al Faisal. "Even though this is the first time we will host a Formula 1 grand prix, delivering such important international events is confirmation of the Kingdom's ability to manage and organise these events to the highest standards for our fans and growing young population."

Saudi Arabia has hosted a number of international sporting events in recent years as part of a push to increase the nation's appeal to tourists, including Formula E in Riyadh and the Dakar Rally.

LUKE SMITH



JUST THREE HYPERCARS LIKELY FOR SPA

WEC

The will-they-won't-they? saga of the Glickenhaus squad taking on Toyota and Alpine in the inaugural race of the World Endurance Championship's Le Mans Hypercar era continues. The US manufacturer is refusing to commit to being on the grid for the Spa 6 Hours on 1 May.

Marque founder Jim Glickenhaus is sticking to his guns on not racing the Pipo-engined 007LMH until it is ready. "I am not going to say we won't be at Spa, because it's undecided," he said. "But I can absolutely say that until we are completely satisfied with both cars we are not going to race."

Glickenhaus stressed that he intends to complete a



30-hour test with the car before its homologation, which fixes the specification for five seasons. He also stated that it is important that Michelin is given enough time to develop its two-wheel-drive tyre on which the 007 will race.

"I am not going to start racing until I have done a 30-hour test," said Glickenhaus, adding that there is now uncertainty over the dates he has booked for early April at Motorland Aragon. "If Michelin tells me they need an extra month to get on top of the tyre, then we are

not going to be at Spa."

The first 007 completed its third test last week at Vallelunga, having previously been shaken down at the circuit and then given two days at Monza earlier this month. He insisted that there were no issues with the car, which would have completed 1000km last week had not the test been curtailed early after a driver he refused to name crashed. Romain Dumas, Franck Mailleux, Pipo Derani and Gustavo Menezes have now driven the car.

GARY WATKINS



Hynes splits from Hamilton

FORMULA 1

Lewis Hamilton has parted company with long-serving right-hand man Marc Hynes, forcing a reshuffling of his management.

Hynes, the 1999 British F3 champion, has been a key part of Hamilton's Project 44 management team for the past five years, but has now left to pursue other interests.

Hamilton said that the parting was amicable and that Hynes "remains one of my best friends", and that he is working on a restructure of his management. "There are plans we're working on for the future," he said.

Hamilton also revealed that he is planning for a new home to be built in the UK, in addition to his current bases in Colorado and Monaco.

LUKE SMITH



Nissan commits to Gen3 era in boost to Formula E future

FORMULA E

Nissan has become the third manufacturer to pledge its future to Formula E by committing to the Gen3 rules that will run into 2026.

Following announcements from Audi and BMW that they will quit the series at the end of this season, Nissan – which joins Mahindra and DS Automobiles on board for Gen3 – issued a statement backing the relevance of the technology. As such, its Gen3 signature is not the most surprising. But if Nissan had opted to depart, its exit would have been the most hurtful.

The Renault Group, of which Nissan is a subsidiary, has been a long-term backer of Formula E, and partnered with constructor Spark Racing Technology to build the Gen1 car. It then entered the inaugural 2014-15 season with race team DAMS, winning the first three constructors' championship titles in succession, before rebranding to Nissan for the current Gen2 era.

Those historical ties by no means bind it to Formula E. But, alongside Nissan's push to go all-electric with its road cars at some point in the next decade, its departure would have been a bodyblow.

Speaking exclusively to Autosport, Nissan chief operating officer Ashwani Gupta said: "For us Formula E is about excitement, energy and environment. For us racing is culture, it has got no direct financial value. We have to keep our culture, and this enriches our employees' motivation. That's what we look at when we participate in Formula E

– passion and full engagement."

With Mercedes set to undergo a major restructure to consolidate its FE operations in Brackley for next season, it too is expected to confirm its continued participation. Porsche is also close to formalising its agreement.

JAPAN, CHINA, INDIA TARGETS

Meanwhile, Formula E chief executive officer Jamie Reigle has targeted rounds in Japan, China, India and the US for future calendars.

"I look at the markets where we need to have an impact," said Reigle. "Japan is big on that list. Mainland China in a tier-one city [Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen] is big on that list as well."

Tokyo and Yokohama have previously been linked as possible Formula E host cities despite series co-founder Alejandro Agag's concerns over "restrictive" policing. It is also understood that Super GT and Super Formula host venue Okayama was lined up as a potential reserve track for the current 2021 season.

Reigle added that he was increasingly "excited" by the prospect of an inaugural E-Prix in India, which follows Mahindra Racing team principal Dilbagh Gill's comments that the manufacturer would "support Formula E to realise this ambition".

A California round is also on the wish list to bolster Formula E's presence in America alongside the pre-existing New York event. "That fits – when you talk to the prime manufacturers, they all sell a lot of cars in California," Reigle added.

MATT KEW

Fassler hangs up his helmet

SPORTSCARS

Three-time Le Mans 24 Hours winner Marcel Fassler has called time on his professional driving career at the age of 44.

After two decades of racing in the DTM and in top-level sportscars, Fassler will now head the Swiss Sportec team in its climb through the sportscar ranks. He will also remain a simulator driver for the Alfa Romeo Formula 1 team.

"I had this big dream as a boy to become a successful racing driver," said Fassler. "The fact that I went this way in my own way, with honest and hard work, with the will to persevere and the belief in my passion, and that I made it to the top of the world with my performances, makes me proud. I gave it my all and achieved more than I ever dreamed of. My big thanks go to all the many people who always believed in me and supported me."

Fassler raced single-seaters in the 1990s before being snapped up by Mercedes as a works driver in the DTM, scoring three wins over four years. After a two-year stint with Opel, he switched to sportscars in 2006, and won the 2007 Spa 24 Hours in a Carsport Holland Corvette C6.R.

An American Le Mans Series cameo for Audi Team Joest in 2008 was the start of a long affiliation with the German marque. Fassler joined Audi full-time from 2010 and formed a formidable trio with Andre Lotterer and Benoit Treluyer. Over seven years, the trio took three overall Le Mans wins with various iterations of the Audi R18, and won the inaugural FIA World Endurance Championship in 2012, while Fassler added a Sebring 12 Hours victory in 2013 with Treluyer and Oliver Jarvis.

Fassler raced in recent seasons as part of Corvette's enduro line-up, and scored Daytona 24 Hours and Sebring 12 Hours class honours in 2016.

FILIP CLEEREN



Neal to sit out 2021 season

BTCC

Three-time British Touring Car champion Matt Neal is to take a sabbatical from racing this season. Team Dynamics, the squad at which he is a director, will instead field BTCC sophomore Dan Rowbottom alongside the returning Gordon Shedden in its line-up of Honda Civic Type Rs.

With the loss of backing from Honda UK and Yuasa amid the current financial crisis, Dynamics has retained support from Halfords. The signing of Rowbottom, who raced a Ciceley Mercedes in his rookie BTCC season in 2019, heralds the start of what is described as “a multi-year partnership” between his sponsor Cataclean and Halfords.

“I am going to be taking a year out of the sport this season,” said 54-year-old Neal, “but I will still be representing Halfords as a brand ambassador and acting as a mentor, both on and off track, for both drivers.”

The announcement of Rowbottom meant that 28 of the 29 seats on the BTCC grid for this season had been filled, and that was followed quickly by the 29th: Nic Hamilton (right), brother of Lewis, will remain with Team Hard as it enters its first season with a four-car line-up of new-build Cupra Leons.

Hamilton, who scored his first BTCC point in Hard’s venerable Volkswagen CC



at Brands Hatch last August, will join Jack Goff, Aron Taylor-Smith and Glynn Geddie in the squad, and testing of the Cupra kicked off at Brands Hatch on Tuesday.

Also out on track as we went to press was the newly liveried Toyota Corolla run by Speedworks Motorsport (main pic). The Toyota UK-backed team, which has recruited 2020 title contender Rory Butcher, has moved towards a generic Toyota Gazoo Racing identification. It unveiled the colours at Oulton Park, but was due to hit the track at Donington Park on Tuesday.

Jake Hill, Butcher’s effective replacement in the new Motorbase/MB Motorsport partnership, took the wheel of the Ford Focus for the first time at Brands on



Tuesday. Also out at the Kent track was Ciceley Motorsport with its new West Surrey Racing-built BMW 330i M Sports, which will be handled this season by Adam Morgan and Tom Chilton.

MARCUS SIMMONS



Gamble gets Le Mans shot in Porsche

WEC

Tom Gamble, the 2018 McLaren Autosport BRDC Award winner, will race in two different categories across the World Endurance Championship and the European Le Mans Series in 2021. The Brit has added a WEC campaign with the GR Racing Porsche GTE Am squad to his ELMS assault with United Autosports in LMP2.

Gamble has been picked up by

the British GR squad, formerly Gulf Racing UK, to take the slot for a silver-rated driver aboard its new second-generation, mid-engined Porsche 911 RSR. He will share the car with team owner Michael Wainwright and long-time Gulf Racing driver Ben Barker.

“Initially it looked like I was just going to be doing ELMS with United, but then the opportunity with GR came up, and it would have been a bit rude to turn

down the chance to race in the WEC and the Le Mans 24 Hours,” said 2020 ELMS LMP3 champion Gamble. “I’ve wanted to do Le Mans for a while.

“It will be good as a young driver to prove myself in both GT and prototype machinery. I want to put myself in the shop window to prove what I can do to the manufacturers: getting a factory drive has to be the ultimate goal.”

GARY WATKINS

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Berger buoyant as DTM field grows



Listen to James Allen talk with Gerhard Berger as part of Autosport's series of #ThinkingForward podcasts.

DTM

DTM supremo Gerhard Berger has said that his series will fill a niche entirely separate to other sportscar championships on its move to GT3 regulations in 2021.

Berger made the comments while speaking to Autosport for the latest in its series of #ThinkingForward podcasts with motorsport industry leaders. And the remarks come as the DTM field continues to gain strong competitors for this season.

BMW factory driver Sheldon van der Linde has been confirmed at the wheel of a Rowe Racing M6 GT3 (above), meaning he

gets a third year in the series. For the first time, he will take on brother Kelvin, already confirmed in the Abt Sportsline Audi team alongside Mike Rockenfeller, and a third R8 LMS has now been added for FIA Formula 3 graduate Sophia Floersch. Meanwhile, ex-Jaguar/Red Bull Formula 1 driver Christian Klien will drive a McLaren 720S for Polish-owned JP Motorsport in three rounds, starting with Zolder in August.

Alex Albon was previously confirmed in a Red Bull-backed AF Corse Ferrari team alongside Red Bull Junior Liam Lawson.

"We have a sprint format, so we don't change drivers," said Berger. "Most of the

other GT series have mixed-up drivers, maybe one professional and one who pays, and they are not just putting a BoP [Balance of Performance] on the technical side — they also putting the BoP on the drivers' side. So that's a completely different business model and philosophy.

"That's nothing to do with DTM. It's the best teams. Look at Audi for example — they have Abt. That was the team in Class 1; that's their factory team. With Ferrari we have AF Corse — it is their strongest factory team. When you look at Mercedes, it's the best teams. So DTM is known as the highest competitive series in this kind of business."

Imola round means three F1 support events

FORMULA REGIONAL

It hasn't been confirmed yet, but the newly merged Formula Regional European by Alpine series has secured a slot on the undercard of the Emilia Romagna Grand Prix at Imola to replace its originally scheduled Spa date as its opening round.

That means it kicks off with three successive Formula 1 support slots, with Barcelona and Monaco following in quick succession, before the rest of the 10-round series.

The first official two-day test was held at Imola last week,

with 32 cars in attendance. Ex-Renault F1 Junior Hadrien David (right), who had a tough rookie season in Renault Eurocup in 2020, topped three of the four sessions on his way

to the fastest time overall. He has switched to long-time Renault powerhouse R-ace GP.

Sicilian Gabriele Mini, the reigning Italian F4 champion, was quickest in the other

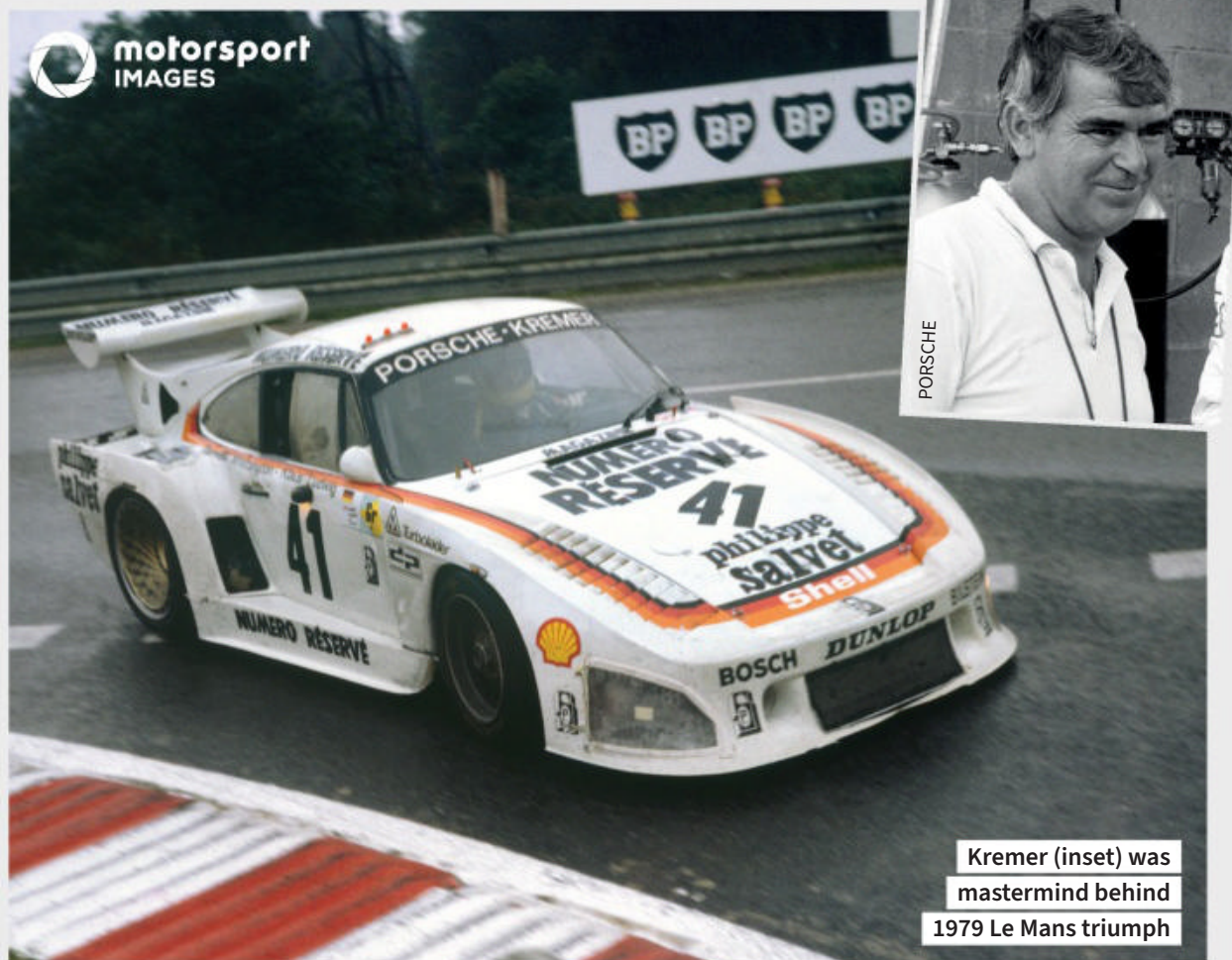
session and was second overall with ART Grand Prix. Another R-ace driver, French F4 graduate Isack Hadjar, matched Mini's time in the final session. The sole British team, Arden, had William Alatalo and Alex Quinn both in the top 10.

The test prompted a spate of late driver announcements. Exciting Argentinian talent Franco Colapinto, third overall in his rookie Renault Eurocup season last year, will remain with MP Motorsport, while Spanish F4 runner-up Mari Boya joins MP-affiliated FA Racing.

MARCUS SIMMONS



FORMULA REGIONAL



Kremer (inset) was mastermind behind 1979 Le Mans triumph

Manfred Kremer 1940-2021

OBITUARY

The technical brains behind the Le Mans 24 Hours-winning team that bore his and brother Erwin's name, Manfred Kremer has died aged 81. The victory at the French enduro in 1979 was the crowning achievement of the engineer's career in sportscar racing spanning four decades.

Kremer Racing's Porsche 935 K3 was arguably the definitive – if not the most extreme – version of the German manufacturer's Group 5 racer. Not only did the K3 win at Le Mans with Klaus Ludwig and brothers Don and Bill Whittington, but it triumphed at the Sebring and Daytona enduros in 1980 and 1981 respectively, and dominated the German DRM series with Ludwig in 1979.

Manfred Kremer helped hone the aerodynamics of the 935, but crucially he squeezed in an air-to-air intercooler into the engine bay atop the gearbox. Those were the keys to the K3's success on the race track, as well as in the marketplace –

a total of 13 K3 racers were built.

John Fitzpatrick, who took Kremer's first major title success in the 1972 European GT Championship with a 911, and who scored the K3's Sebring victory, remembers a quiet but hard-working engineer.

"Manfred was definitely the backroom boy in the partnership," he said. "His strength was as an engine man: his engines weren't necessarily more powerful than everyone else's, but they were more reliable."

Kremer Racing was founded in Cologne to race Porsches in 1962. The team was one of the marque's top privateers from the 1970s into the 1990s. It scored a solo world championship victory with the 962C at Monza in 1985 with Marc Surer and Manfred Winkelhock, and won the Daytona 24 Hours in 1995 with its open-top version of the car, the K8 Spyder.

Manfred retired from the team in 1998. He bought back the assets after the death of Erwin and then Erwin's wife, and found a buyer so that its legacy could continue.

GARY WATKINS

IN THE HEADLINES

SABINE SCHMITZ 1969-2021

Two-time Nurburgring 24 Hours winner Sabine Schmitz has died aged 51 after a long battle with cancer. As Sabine Reck, she won the race in 1996 and 1997 at the wheel of BMW M3 machinery. She subsequently became known as 'Queen of the Nurburgring', a circuit she grew up in the shadow of, and founded the successful Frikadelli Racing team with her husband Klaus Abbelen. Schmitz also contested the Nordschleife's World Touring Car Championship round in 2015 and 2016, scoring a best finish of 10th.

SUZUKA 10H OFF AGAIN

The Suzuka 10 Hours round of the Intercontinental GT Challenge has been cancelled for the second season in a row as a result of the COVID pandemic. The Stephane Ratel Organisation, which runs the series, is aiming to replace the 22 August event with a round in the Middle East to maintain a four-date schedule.

CYAN KEEPS ITS QUARTET

Top World Touring Car Cup squad Cyan Racing has retained the same four drivers as last year for its 2021 campaign with the Lynk & Co 03. Reigning champion Yann Ehrlacher will remain alongside fellow title winners Yvan Muller (his uncle) and Thed Bjork, as well as Santiago Urrutia. Veteran Tom Coronel, who has been almost ever-present since the World Touring Car Championship restarted in 2005, is also back for more in a Comtoyou Racing Audi RS3 LMS.

PRIAULX ON TOP AT SEBRING

US-based Guernsey expat Seb Priaulx took victory in the inaugural race of the new Porsche Carrera Cup North America series supporting the Sebring 12 Hours last weekend. Priaulx, who has switched to sprint racing this year to try to land a works deal with Porsche, led home Kelly-Moss Road and Race team-mate Kay van Berlo in the opening race. The Dutchman returned the favour in the sequel.

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At the Mount Stuart
Classic in 2003

MAUGER/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Johnny Dumfries 1958-2021

OBITUARY

The man known to the racing world as Johnny Dumfries had a supernova career that burned brightly and fizzled out rapidly. But this Scottish aristocrat who subsequently became John Bute was far more than the perhaps enigmatic impression this leaves.

John Crichton-Stuart, 7th Marquess of Bute (to give him his correct title), and who has died aged 62 after a short illness, was a shining talent of motorsport who almost certainly would have achieved more had he made different decisions at crucial junctures of his career. Even so, he was one of the most dominant British Formula 3 champions of all time in 1984, team-mate to Ayrton Senna at Lotus in 1986, and a Le Mans 24 Hours winner with Jaguar in 1988.

A man who adopted the 'Dumfries' pseudonym to disguise his blue blood, he truly belonged in the top stratum of professional drivers. Crucially for him, the success he achieved was down to what he was, not who he was. He had a tremendous personality, a dry and self-deprecating wit, and was hugely popular.

Dumfries was captivated as a child by the racing tales of his cousin, Formula 3 ace Charlie Crichton-Stuart. At 16, he left his public school and struck out on his own, finding work as a builder. By the end of Johnny's teens, Charlie – now at the Williams F1 team – found

him a job as the squad's van driver. From there, he became a mechanic for the BS Fabrications McLaren squad.

After a brief karting career and two years in Formula Ford, Dumfries moved into British F3 in 1983. For 1984, he attracted BP backing and cleaned up with David Price Racing, and even came close to beating Ivan Capelli to the European title, despite missing some races. Price, who also ran Martin Brundle and Nigel Mansell in F3, said Dumfries was "the best driver we ever had" in the category.

Dumfries had been offered the chance by Tyrrell to replace Brundle, who had broken his legs in a crash at the Dallas Grand Prix, for the remainder of the 1984 F1 season. But he turned it down because the fast circuits that were coming up on the schedule would leave the non-turbo Tyrrells uncompetitive. He also had two outings with Porsche in the world sportscar championship in a 'camera

car'. Team sponsor Rothmans wanted to back Dumfries in a Price-run March in Formula 3000 in 1985, and the deal would run in tandem with a Brabham F1 testing contract. Then came a call from Ferrari. Seduced by the romance of F1's glamour team, he signed for Enzo Ferrari to develop the four-cylinder turbo engine. "But the project got shelved, and after a couple of months I didn't do any more testing," he told this writer in an interview for Motor Sport. "I was bloody naive. I should have gone for Brabham."

Following "a fairly crap year in Formula 3000" marred by lack of funds, Dumfries got his F1 call from Lotus for 1986, after Senna vetoed the signing of Derek Warwick. "My face fitted at the time," he said. "That was fate, luck, call it what you like." Initially tasked with developing Lotus's unreliable six-speed gearbox, this hampered his progress. With Honda engines and Satoru Nakajima arriving in 1987, and only two finishes in the points, Dumfries was out of F1.

Some strong performances in world sportscars with Sauber and a Britten Lloyd Racing Porsche led to Dumfries joining Tom Walkinshaw's Jaguar team. Together with Andy Wallace and Jan Lammers, he took victory at Le Mans in 1988. But otherwise the results weren't great: "I made a bit of a mess of it. It's a well-known fact that Tom didn't like crashers, and he fired me."

Dumfries moved to Toyota for 1989 and 1990, but "there was a lot of tension between me and Geoff Lees [who was a hero in Japan]", and he also tested for the Benetton F1 team as it developed active suspension. His last race was at Le Mans in 1991 with Courage, before he returned to the ancestral home at Mount Stuart. Upon the death of his father in 1993, he inherited the Marquess title and developed Mount Stuart into a thriving tourist attraction, including its own motorsport event in 2002 and 2003. He is survived by his wife, the Marchioness Serena, four children and two stepchildren.

MARCUS SIMMONS



Best F1 result,
fifth, came in 1986
Hungarian GP

MOTORSPORT IMAGES



Fascination of team-mate fights

Headlines are dominated by the battles at the front of the field, but throughout the grid the dynamics between each pair of drivers will also help define the 2021 season

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

The eve of a new Formula 1 season is here. Come Q3 in Bahrain on Saturday night we'll know the true pecking order (mention the combo of inevitable windy conditions and track layout making this event a bit of an outlier, if you dare!).

The themes of the campaign will soon be laid bare. In every season and at every team there is a constant specific motif to consider, although the individual flavours vary every year: the ongoing team-mate battles. If Red Bull's Max Verstappen and Sergio Perez are indeed able to regularly get among or even beat Mercedes duo Lewis Hamilton and Valtteri Bottas — possibly team-mates for the last time given their respective contract situations, and George Russell's rise — then things get much more complicated for both squads (as explained on page 18).

But these fascinating intra-team dynamics cascade down the grid. At McLaren, Daniel Ricciardo is making another new F1 start, and going up against the team's home-grown star: Lando Norris. Both are fantastically fast, so their qualifying head-to-head will be worth watching. But Ricciardo's reputation as one of F1's best racers and his status as a proven winner mean he brings elements that Norris is still striving to find. Defeat for either in 2021, particularly if it is a heavy one, would be costly. Norris would be able to point to his lack of experience against a veteran of 188 F1 starts (and counting), but if Ricciardo loses

“Ferrari now has arguably the strongest overall driver line-up on the grid”

this fight his reputation would take a serious hit.

The same goes for the battle between Fernando Alonso and Esteban Ocon at Ricciardo's old squad. The rebranded Alpine team will stand out thanks to its electric livery (and ungainly, bulbous engine cover), but it will get far more scrutiny with one of motorsport's most famous drivers back in the fold. This is excellent for a business trying to promote a road-car brand, but any underperformance will be quickly noted. Alonso will be able to lean on the crutch of his two years out of F1 for a time, although it should be remembered that he completed a testing programme in a 2018 Renault and drove its 2020 car in Abu Dhabi late last year, but his world champion status means that won't hold sway for long.

Across the garage, Ocon should now be back to his best after his own F1 absence in 2019 — he admitted that it took him longer than

expected to do so in 2020 — and he simply cannot afford to be defeated as comprehensively as Stoffel Vandoorne was when he went up against Alonso at McLaren in 2017-18, which led to the now Mercedes Formula E racer leaving F1.

The new AlphaTauri line-up points to fireworks too. That's not to say that Pierre Gasly and Yuki Tsunoda will fall out; they are simply exciting racers. Gasly is out to continue repairing his reputation after his half-season as Verstappen's team-mate in 2019, and surely advertising his skills to other squads if Red Bull continues to keep the door shut on a promotion back to its eponymous 'Class A' squad. Tsunoda is a rookie and will make mistakes, but he's already made quite an impression on F1 with his testing speed — his long-run pace on the final afternoon was particularly impressive. After half-spinning while overtaking Kimi Raikkonen's slow Alfa Romeo midway through his race simulation, Tsunoda pitted to change tyres and immediately set a personal best on his next lap.

Haas has two rookies this year and both will want to shine. Mick Schumacher inevitably carries a weight of expectation given his surname, but would likely take a bigger hit if he loses against Nikita Mazepin given that Schumacher arrives from the junior formulas with a better reputation. As with all rookies, though, one season isn't enough to define their full potential.

At Aston Martin, Sebastian Vettel is looking to make as good a new start as he did at Ferrari in 2015, following on from being edged out of his former home by a new superstar (again). Vettel is going up against Lance Stroll, who has results many drivers desire and yet cannot shake questions over his ultimate ability — almost inevitable when a father buys a team and installs his son in one of the race seats... How both Vettel and Stroll are defined on the outside will matter when considering their intra-team comparison this year, but if they can exceed what the team achieved as Racing Point in 2020 then both will surely benefit.

Vettel has more to lose given his past achievements and later career stage, but should be given credit for wanting to try something new instead of simply walking off into the sunset.

His former team now has arguably the strongest overall driver line-up on the grid, with Charles Leclerc now joined by Carlos Sainz Jr. Should the newcomer prevail in the intra-Ferrari fight, then that reasserts how good a pairing they are. But if Sainz is soundly beaten by Leclerc in 2021, it arguably matters less considering the team is expected to face another season out of the lead fight.

The stage is set for F1 2021. History will only record one champion, but the stories in the victor's wake will be a key part of how the coming campaign is remembered. ❧

➔ **P17 F1 2021 PREVIEW**

YOUR SAY

We keep an eye out for our team-mates and colleagues' physical safety, so why not the mental health and wellbeing of those we work with?

MATTHEW WRIGHT

Work together to support each other

Thank you for your feature 'Racing with an important message' (Club Autosport, 4 March). It's always good to hear about someone starting out in motorsport and especially one doing it in the name of a good cause.

Close to a year ago I (along with many friends) suffered a loss through suicide of an old friend, team-mate and in many ways brother to me. It helps reading about someone else who has known the hurt this situation can bring.

I remember at the time when I was having to phone people to tell them about my friend's death, a few mentioned how common suicide can be in the motorsport industry. Certainly, the demographics are similar in age and gender for most people who work in motorsport.

But there is also something else in play in my opinion: often the masculine culture can have a harmful effect on those who need help but are afraid to ask. The long hours, travel and high stress that we all go through on a normal basis takes its toll on each of us, in different ways to be sure but always at some level of cost.

In motorsport it's common for us to joke around, call each other silly names and generally muck about. This is part of the fun of working in the industry and can be valuable for morale during long night shifts. However, there does need to be a line. We need to appreciate when harm is being done. Motorsport can be a great industry to work in. Let's keep it fun.

We think nothing of looking out for each other in the pitlane or in the workshop. We keep an eye out for our team-mates and colleagues' physical safety, so why not the mental health and wellbeing of those we work with? So, in the upcoming season perhaps the industry as a whole can work together to keep an eye out for each other.

This year is going to be stressful enough, let's make sure that not only those who need help ask for it, but even better they don't need to ask for help – it's already offered.

Matthew Wright

By email

Memories of Raymond Baxter

On reading Adam Cooper's brilliant obituary of Murray Walker (18 March), I was saddened to learn of Raymond Baxter's humiliating experience on TV commentating on the Monaco Grand Prix in 1974.

I have fond memories of listening to Baxter's BBC reports from the Le Mans 24-hour races on my bedroom radio as a schoolboy. I would wake early to catch his brief bulletins when he managed to paint a vivid sound and word picture that brought out all the drama of this great race.

I well remember my immense disappointment when I was invited to a friend's house to watch some of the race on TV, it completely lacked the atmosphere and excitement of the radio broadcast. I'm not suggesting that Baxter's radio commentary could in any way match Murray Walker on TV, but in his day Baxter was superb.

David Drury

By email

Here's ex-Spitfire pilot Baxter hustling his Rover on the 1962 RAC Rally – ed



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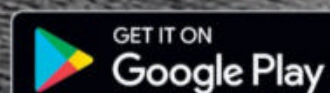
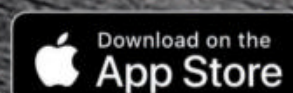
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2021

F1 SEASON PREVIEW

*The new Formula 1 season is about to roar into life.
Here's your essential guide*

Red Bull versus Mercedes

IS THIS RED BULL'S BEST CHANCE TO BEAT MERCEDES?

If the winner of pre-season testing can turn its early form into a season-long challenge, then the hegemony of F1's top team could genuinely be under threat

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

PHOTOGRAPHY



The 2008 Formula 1 season is now a very long time ago. Since that campaign ended, only two teams have won the drivers' and constructors' titles. One, as Brawn GP, picked up the championship double in 2009, the year after McLaren's Lewis Hamilton and Ferrari had split the honours. The other dominated the next four campaigns, and since then the bought-out former Brawn squad has swept every championship.

In 2021, overall triumph for McLaren and Ferrari, or any of the crowded midfield, seems unlikely at best. Once again, Mercedes (formerly Brawn) and Red Bull are set to do battle. But, having been soundly beaten for the past seven years, Red Bull is heading into F1's latest campaign with perhaps its best chance of finally beating Mercedes and reclaiming the crowns it last won in 2013.

But such a turnaround is far from certain, and both squads are playing up each other's chances. "I don't see myself as the favourite at all," Red Bull's Max Verstappen told Dutch TV station Ziggo Sport, despite topping pre-season testing in Bahrain two weeks ago. "I still see Mercedes as the favourite."

"I would say Red Bull are ahead on performance, they are the class act from the test," says Mercedes race strategy chief James Vowles. "I think we are going to have a close championship this year."

The reason why the 2021 pre-season-favourite tag is so disputed is because testing went so differently for each team. It could be flippantly argued that they appear to have swapped places in terms of car handling compared to 2020. Where Mercedes was once utterly secure on track, it now looks unpredictable, and the previously

recalcitrant Red Bull is "planted", as observed by Vowles.

Mercedes' test got off to a bad start when it lost essentially the entire opening session to a gearshift problem as Valtteri Bottas conducted his initial installation lap. That in itself is no bad thing – testing remains the ideal time for reliability concerns to crop up – but it was the time lost overall that hurt Mercedes. The reigning champion squad lost one sixth of 2021's much reduced pre-season testing time in one fell swoop, and that meant it had even less time to sort out the handling issues that soon became apparent.

"RED BULL ARE THE CLASS ACT FROM THE TEST. WE ARE GOING TO HAVE A CLOSE CHAMPIONSHIP THIS YEAR"

Testing's first afternoon/evening session in Bahrain took place in strange conditions as a sandstorm swept over the Sakhir venue. Lewis Hamilton – in for the second session, as Mercedes swapped drivers after a half day each across the three-day test – was quickly and notably struggling when it came to the W12's rear handling.

"It was quite impressive to see how much sand there was actually that came in – behind the cars you saw it kind of swirling around everywhere, but it was surprising it didn't actually set the lap times back a lot further," says Mercedes trackside engineering director Andrew Shovlin.

"The wind was a problem and we had wondered before whether the sand would actually significantly affect the tyre grip, but that didn't seem to be too bad, so it was surprising how much useful work we could do on the afternoon of day one. But the generally windy conditions are quite tricky."

The wind made things more complicated for the teams on the second day, when it switched 180 degrees to blow a headwind down Bahrain's main straight. Hamilton was back in the Mercedes for the second morning when the team's second big problem of testing occurred – the world champion spun off going through the tricky Turn 13 right-hander and became beached in the gravel. It's conceivable that a crosswind gust unsettled the W12 enough to send its rear looping around, but it was a shocking development considering how smoothly Mercedes' recent pre-seasons have gone.

Things definitely improved from there. When Bottas took over from Hamilton for the rest of the

Hamilton heads Verstappen on track in Bahrain, but the times tell another story



COATES

The RB16B drew comment from Mercedes over how “planted” it appeared



SUTTON



Hamilton's car is recovered after spinning off

second day, he smoothly matched his team-mate's lap total for that middle day, and carried on looking steady enough as Mercedes concentrated on the high-fuel data gathering in the final morning session.

But Hamilton's spin on the softest C5 tyres as he prepared to enter Verstappen's qualifying-simulation duel with Yuki Tsunoda as testing's final chequered flag approached undid plenty of reassuring hours. His rapid 360 booting the W12 out of the final corner to start a flying lap again showed how unsettled the car was in testing. It was essentially the final impression Mercedes made, and meant it heads into the new season on a negative note.

"It was pretty evident from [the TV images] that the car was handling poorly, and conversely the Red Bull in fact looked what we would call planted, but it was a very stable car especially through the last sector of the lap," says Vowles. "And I think that's a fair observation. It was visible to the outside and I would say the lap times mirrored that as well. But it's also fair to say that we don't

have answers [immediately] after the end of the test."

"The wind made it tricky," adds Shovlin. "When the wind is behind the car you lose a lot of downforce, because effectively the air speed is reduced so some corners where the wind was behind, it was prone to doing that. And then also the tyres

are quite easy to overheat on that circuit, and if you start sliding you tend to lose grip and it gets worse. So, there are a few problems.

"Now, importantly we could see that some of our competitors weren't struggling in the same way as us, so we need to put quite a focus on understanding why the rear end was a bit weak, how we can get it more stable and predictable, and that work is going on now. Hopefully when we get to the race weekend it won't be so difficult for the drivers, because they were having to work pretty hard to do the lap times that they were doing."

The wind factor at the Bahrain track should not be underestimated – it certainly caught out plenty of drivers across the two events held at the end of last season. But it could be something more tangible >>

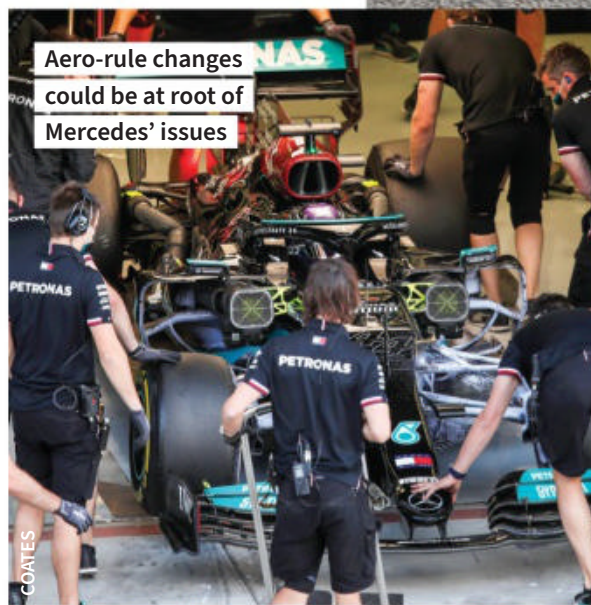
“THEY DID THE SAME LAST YEAR AT SOME RACES. ON FRIDAY THEY SAID, ‘YES, RED BULL LOOKS VERY STRONG’”

that is causing Mercedes concern.

The team went out of its way to highlight how the minor aerodynamic rule changes for 2021 – mainly the mandated cuts to the rear-floor area and the reduced diffuser strakes – could be a stumbling block for any squad. Although minor in comparison to the wholesale rule changes coming in 2022, the new requirements remained a challenge for designers across the grid. But a theory emerged during testing, particularly in light of Mercedes’ obvious struggles, which suggests that the floor-rule changes are causing it particular harm.

This is because of the low-rake concept the team has pursued (Aston Martin too, as it uses Mercedes’ rear-end package and engine). Although there is not yet enough evidence to conclusively say that this is indeed the reason for Mercedes’ new-found handling issues – and the team itself is unlikely to admit as much at this stage – it could well be that its low-rake philosophy is harmed more by the floor-rule changes than the high-rake concept pioneered by Red Bull.

The RB16B features a tweaked rear-suspension design, which, it seemed at least in testing, has helped fix the unpredictable nature of the 2020 machine. Verstappen looked slightly wild on the opening morning of testing, and suffered a half-spin that looked eerily like the ones he and Alex Albon endured across last year’s



Aero-rule changes could be at root of Mercedes’ issues



Pairing Verstappen with Perez should open up team’s strategy options

pre-season, but as the Bahrain event wore on that just went away.

The combination of Mercedes’ struggles and Red Bull’s sudden absence of issues is why F1’s current dominant squad is talking up its main rival. The trouble is, Mercedes has form in this area, which shouldn’t be comforting for neutral observers

hoping for a shake-up in the competitive order.

“You can see on the data, of course, what they are doing,” says Verstappen. “They did their fastest lap with less power, and then two laps taking it easy. And then the next lap with half a second more power from the engine. So, they are fast, no doubt.

“But now that things have been a little bit more difficult in the beginning, of course they try to push us into the favourites role. And then when they are up there again, it’s all genius. They did the same last year at some of the races. On Friday they said, ‘Yes, Red Bull looks very strong.’”

Verstappen’s final point is what feels so familiar. On many

IS 2021 BOTTAS’S LAST CHANCE TO BEAT HAMILTON?



Bottas has worked on his mental approach during winter reset

The uncertainty flowing through the Mercedes-versus-Red Bull battle ahead of the 2021 Formula 1 season arguably extends to their respective driver line-ups.

Sergio Perez is a clear on-paper upgrade for Red Bull, as it aims to re-establish a regular two-car attack against Mercedes for the first time since Daniel Ricciardo departed at the end of 2018. But if he ends up being just as far behind Max Verstappen as Pierre Gasly and Alex Albon were, then speculation about his own Red Bull career will be rife.

At Mercedes, it looks more predictable that the 2022 rules reset will be accompanied by a Black Arrows driver line-up change given Lewis Hamilton, Valtteri Bottas and George Russell are vying for its two seats. It could be it’s ‘eight and goodbye’ for Hamilton; it could be that the team opts to replace Bottas with Russell.

If that scenario comes to pass, then the upcoming campaign – his fifth at Mercedes



would have completed a Bahrain hat-trick.

It remains entirely possible that Mercedes will have used the two weeks separating the Bahrain test and season opener, which included a filming day in the test's aftermath, to solve its problems. But it's also just as possible that by the time this weekend's event gets under way, it still won't know what's causing the handling problems, or whether its package is indeed now inferior to Red Bull's. This is F1's delight – the unexpected, something that has been rather lacking in recent seasons...

Adding Red Bull's testing form to the manner in which it closed the gap to Mercedes over the course of 2020, we must conclude that it seems that the upcoming campaign is indeed its best chance to wrest back the titles it ceded at the start of the turbo-hybrid era in 2014.

Its development in 2020 is a crucial part of the picture at this stage. First, Red Bull closed from nearly 1% adrift at the start of last year to just under 0.6% across the season as an average, and was quicker at the Abu Dhabi finale. It did this by making a steady stream of updates, and the RB16B's rear-suspension update shows how this development has continued. It therefore appears that 2021 is also Red Bull's best chance to avoid the slow-start theme that has characterised its stories in recent seasons. Finally, it can be said that Red Bull looks to be starting fast.

If F1 is indeed set for its first multi-team title scrap since 2012, then Red Bull's new driver line-up is going to play a vital role in how the fight is settled.

Sergio Perez has been brought in to try to balance the team's points haul and to give it strategy options it missed with only one car regularly in the lead fight during the past two seasons. The 2020 Sakhir GP race winner faces a tough task alone to reach Verstappen's impressive level, and he has to do so after just 1.5 days of learning the RB16B and adapting to his new team's design idiosyncrasies, something his two most recent predecessors arguably never did. >>

occasions during 2020, particularly as the year wore on and Red Bull continued piling on developments while Mercedes did not add to the W11's aero package, the Black Arrows talked up Red Bull's pace and said it was ahead. Then, come qualifying and the race, Mercedes usually won out, although this did not happen during the Abu Dhabi season finale, when Red Bull looked to be ahead in practice and stayed there in qualifying and the race.

The teams do not have to run at full tilt in either testing or grand prix practice sessions, and rival squads can usually see from their GPS information to what degree a particular package is turned down or up. This is not to suggest that Mercedes is being deliberately misleading with its post-testing assertions, and indeed the team's general transparency means it should be taken at its word. F1 squads are full of clever people wielding brilliant tools, which can add up to rapid transformations.

The Bahrain track has also not been a Mercedes stronghold in recent years – Verstappen finished just 1.3 seconds behind Hamilton in November's 2020 Bahrain GP and, were it not for Charles Leclerc's cylinder failure the year before, then Ferrari

since replacing Nico Rosberg – will be Bottas's last chance to do what the 2016 world champion did: beat Hamilton. Rosberg was willing to play mind games he knew would unsettle Hamilton, but Bottas is of a different mould. If he is to persevere, then it'll be by self-improvement. And that could be enhanced by Mercedes itself, with tactics such as Toto Wolff's personal radio message to encourage the Finn ahead of the final qualifying runs of 2020.

"Over the years, you learn always more about what works and what doesn't," Bottas says when asked if that approach is going to continue this year. "But I think what I've learned recently is just that the team support and being able to communicate more with the team is quite important.

"With Toto, we try to keep more in touch and talk very openly about everything, but also with other team members. The team, in the end, is there to provide all the support they can

HAMILTON VERSUS BOTTAS AT MERCEDES					
HAMILTON POINTS	YEAR	BOTTAS POINTS	HAMILTON		BOTTAS
363 (1st)	2017	305 (3rd)	42	WINS	9
408 (1st)	2018	247 (5th)	37	POLES	16
413 (1st)	2019	326 (2nd)	22	FASTEST LAPS	14
347 (1st)	2020	223 (2nd)	1531	POINTS	1101

for both of us as drivers. And I shall use it, everything I can – all the support I can get."

Bottas "had a good reset" over the winter and reflected on what he must do to succeed in 2021, which will involve again displaying the pace that Hamilton regularly praises. Bottas, who took five poles to Hamilton's 10 in 2020, was certainly very unlucky on several occasions last year, but the 31-year-old knows he has to show that speed at every available opportunity if he's to triumph in the ultimate prize and at the same time earn

another Mercedes contract.

"The big thing is the consistency," he says. "Obviously many times I perform on the level that I want to, but then there are times where for some reason I don't, and I feel like I couldn't get 100 per cent out of myself and the team around me. I think I've realised that a lot of that is the mental side of things, so [I've been] really trying to focus on all the learnings from previous years, and working a lot on my driving style and technique and trying to perfect the Pirelli tyres."

But Perez has some idea of when he should be feeling completely comfortable with his new surroundings.

“After five races,” he says. “Once we go through very different races, different conditions, you understand the car, and the team, a lot better. Five races, proper races, [and it] should be good.”

Heading into the new campaign, expect Verstappen to again lead Red Bull’s line. He’s proven that he’s one of F1’s best drivers – ranked behind only Hamilton by Autosport last season – but if his team is indeed in proper contention this year, something more needs to come from Verstappen. Simply put, if the RB16B-versus-W12 match-up means Red Bull has a chance to beat Mercedes, then Verstappen must show he can deliver on his immense promise and come out on top in a title battle.

That will surely require a change in mindset on occasion – he cannot always be hard-charging and willing to risk everything for one victory (something that arguably cost him a chance of winning last season’s thrilling Turkish GP), and will have to consider the occasions when settling for consistent points is the best course. Remember, for all his incredible talent, the remarkable career rise it led to means Verstappen has never taken a title in car racing. But just because the test is new does not mean the 23-year-old will fail.

Mercedes has become F1’s ultimate winning machine, with a run of success that is unmatched in the championship’s history. This past form would be a significant factor in its favour if 2021

is indeed set to go down as the first multi-team title fight of the turbo-hybrid era.

Unfortunately, as we all know, the COVID-19 pandemic is ongoing, and could well have an impact on the upcoming season. Every driver and team member will need to do their utmost to stay healthy, while remembering that the virus’s nature means catching it can often come down to luck. Both Mercedes and



“ONCE WE GO THROUGH FIVE RACES, VERY DIFFERENT CONDITIONS, YOU UNDERSTAND THE CAR, THE TEAM”

Red Bull have drivers who tested positive in 2020, something that could prove costly in a title battle if it occurs at a critical point this year (Perez revealed during testing that he accepted Bahrain’s offer to receive COVID-19 vaccinations).

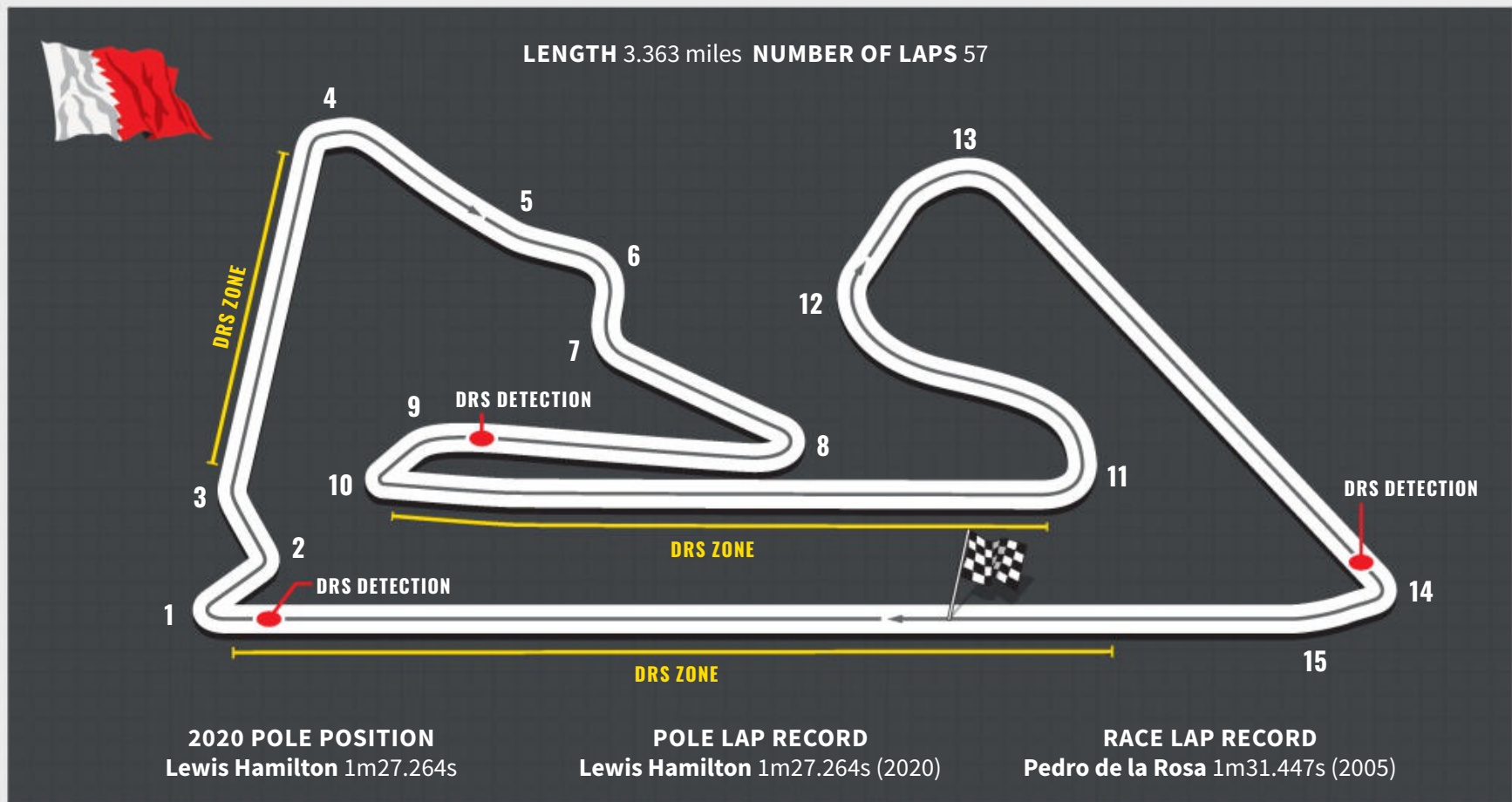
The pandemic’s lasting impact could yet be felt on the calendar, and this may well assist Mercedes too, given that tracks where Red Bull has historically been strong – Mexico City, Interlagos – are far from guaranteed to stay on the schedule. It’s a situation that no one wants to come to pass, but everything feels uncertain – including the F1 formbook heading into the new season.

Ultimately, there’s a reason why the headline to this piece has been posed as a question – it’s very unclear who is the favourite on the eve of the 2021 season opener. It could be Red Bull. It could just as easily be Mercedes. They *could* be equally matched.

It’s a tantalising prospect overall, which surely trumps the certainty of one team being crushingly dominant. *W*



F1 BAHRAIN GRAND PRIX PREVIEW



UK START TIMES

Friday 26 March

FP1 1130 FP2 1500

Saturday 27 March

FP3 1200

QUALIFYING 1500

Sunday 28 March

RACE 1600

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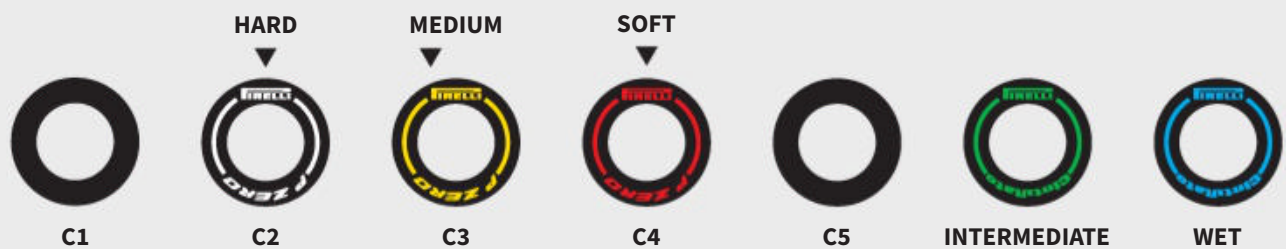
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TYRE ALLOCATION



CHAMPIONSHIP – FINAL 2020 POSITIONS

Drivers

1	Hamilton	347
2	Bottas	223
3	Verstappen	214
4	Perez	125
5	Ricciardo	119

Constructors

1	Mercedes	573
2	Red Bull	319
3	McLaren	202
4	Racing Point	195
5	Renault	181



RACE STATS

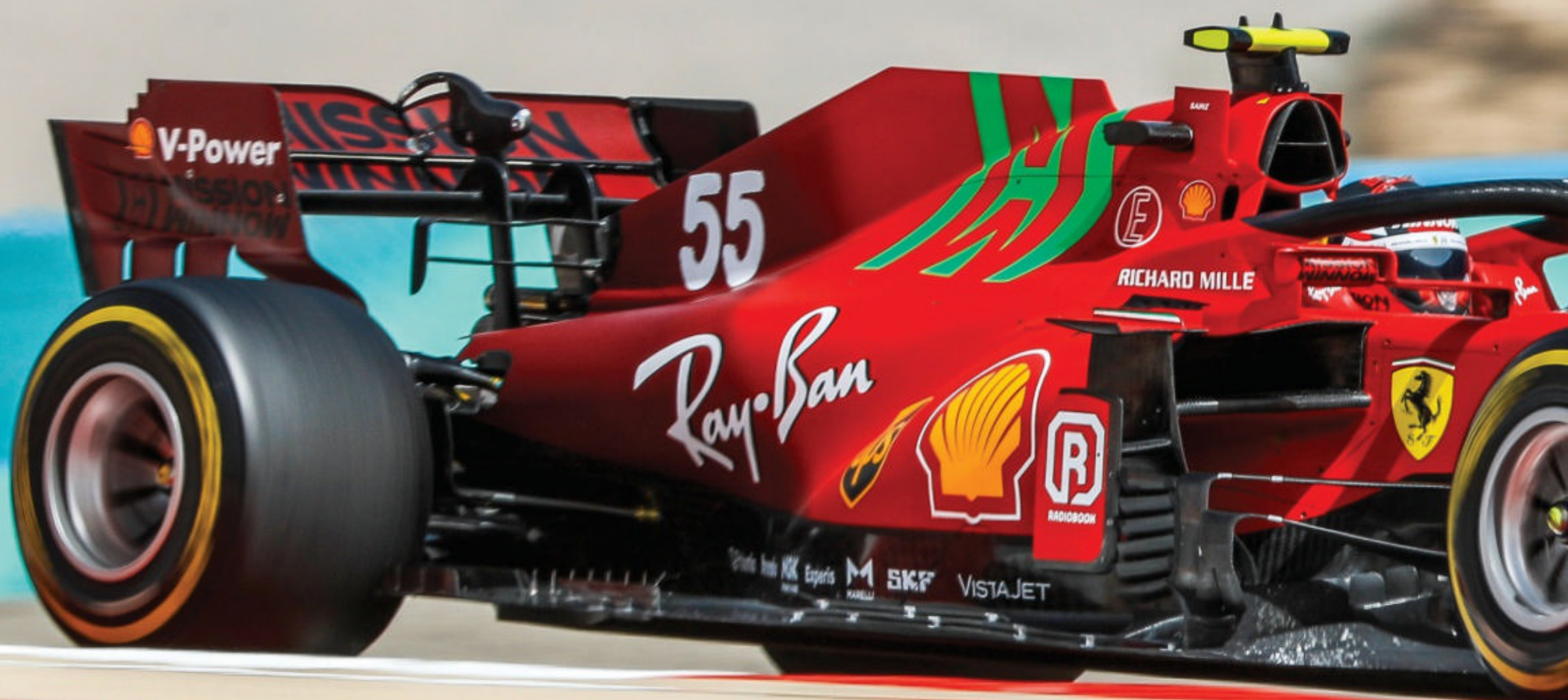
Previous Sakhir winners

2020	Sergio Perez	Racing Point
2020	Lewis Hamilton	Mercedes
2019	Lewis Hamilton	Mercedes
2018	Sebastian Vettel	Ferrari
2017	Sebastian Vettel	Ferrari
2016	Nico Rosberg	Mercedes
2015	Lewis Hamilton	Mercedes
2014	Lewis Hamilton	Mercedes
2013	Sebastian Vettel	Red Bull
2012	Sebastian Vettel	Red Bull



Best results at Sakhir

Hamilton	1st x 4
Vettel	1st x 4
Alonso	1st x 3
Perez	1st x 1
Raikkonen	2nd x 5
Bottas	2nd x 2
Verstappen	2nd x 1
Ocon	2nd x 1
Leclerc	3rd x 1
Stroll	3rd x 1



Ferrari

HOW MUCH CAN FERRARI RECOVER IN 2021?

The most illustrious team on the grid endured its worst season in 40 years last term – and it accepts a full-blooded revival is going to take time

LUKE SMITH

PHOTOGRAPHY  **motorsport**
IMAGES

As Ferrari began to come to terms with the severity of its plight in the early part of 2020, there was a “strange” atmosphere at the team, says Charles Leclerc. “We realised the reality of things was quite a lot worse than what we expected,” he recalls, harking back to the end of pre-season testing as the limitations of the SF1000 car and Ferrari engine became painfully clear to the whole paddock. That set the tone for Ferrari’s worst season in Formula 1 for 40 years as the Prancing Horse slumped to sixth in the constructors’ championship, and scored just three podium finishes.

Fast-forward 12 months, and the mood in the red camp is markedly improved. After coming to terms with its drop in performance, Ferrari began to plot its rebuild and revival, knowing there would be no magic bullet to quickly catapult itself back to the top. But with the status of

being F1’s most famous team comes expectation. Ferrari might not be ready to fight for the championship again, yet the bare minimum will be for it to return to the front of the midfield and show signs that its recovery is well under way, otherwise 2021 will be deemed a failure.

Plenty has changed over the winter at Ferrari. Carlos Sainz Jr has arrived to refresh the driver line-up, replacing four-time world champion Sebastian Vettel after two outstanding years with McLaren. A restructuring has taken place within the various technical departments in a bid to simplify and streamline processes under team principal Mattia Binotto’s stewardship, all intended to put Ferrari back on the path to the front.

“Last year was a big, big disappointment,” admits Binotto. “We know that we cannot repeat such a bad result. We know that we need to do better in 2021. I’m not saying that we will win. I think that we need to be



“I’M NOT SAYING THAT WE WILL WIN. WE NEED TO BE REALISTIC, BUT OUR WILL TO WIN IS OUR COMMITMENT”

realistic, but our will to win is our commitment.”

By the time Sainz makes his Ferrari debut in Bahrain, 10 months will have passed since it was announced that he would be joining the team. The exit of Vettel puts an end to any awkwardness or lingering frustration after seeing Leclerc become the new darling of the tifosi, and helps inject some fresh life into the team as Sainz finally gets his long-awaited chance with a true F1 powerhouse.

Sainz spent the winter getting up to speed with Ferrari, completing tests in its 2018 and 2019 cars to help understand the team’s processes and to get to know his new race crew. Although Binotto thought it would take time for the Spaniard to get fully integrated at the team, he’s impressed with how he has assimilated through testing.

“Carlos is fitting very well, not only at the track but outside of the track,” says Binotto. “He’s very well integrated, I have to say, also with

Charles. It’s very encouraging, so I’m very happy.”

Sainz always craved stability through the early days of his F1 career with Toro Rosso and Renault, and really flourished when he found it at McLaren on a multi-year deal. He’s already feeling at home at Ferrari, getting a feeling he hopes can bring out the best in him on track. “The first couple of months have been very good,” he says. “I’ve found the stability. The team has welcomed me in a really nice manner, and I’m feeling really comfortable.”

In the months that followed Ferrari’s announcement, Sainz faced a barrage of questions over whether he regretted his decision in light of the team’s struggles. He told Autosport late last year that he found such suggestions “annoying”, and hailed his confidence that if any team is capable of turning things around, it’s Ferrari.

The freeze in the technical regulations for 2021 makes it hugely challenging to turn things around short-term, yet the Ferrari SF21 offers a number of steps forward on last year. The biggest weakness last year was Ferrari’s power unit, which was significantly down on performance following the controversial private settlement with the FIA over its 2019 engine.

Ferrari said it took a “systematic” approach to improving its power unit, and was encouraged by the initial findings when running the



Charles Leclerc noted an improvement in power during the tests

SUTTON

“OUR OBJECTIVES WERE TO INCREASE THE AERODYNAMIC CHARGE LOST TO THE REGULATIONS AND REDUCE DRAG”

engine on the dyno at Maranello ahead of pre-season testing. Once the cars hit the track, its encouragement was justified, with Binotto believing the team has lost its great weak spot from last year.

“When we were here last year in Bahrain for the race, in quali, we were very slow on the straights,” explains Binotto. “We didn’t enter into Q3, and we were very distant from pole. Now if I look at the data, I think at least on the speed, on the straight, the speed is all right. There does not seem to be such a disadvantage as it was last year. We know it’s not only power – it’s the drag of the car as well, as we often said last year. But let me say that [fixing] both contributed in improving our speed on the straights. Today we feel it is not a disadvantage anymore.”

Both Leclerc and Kimi Raikkonen of Ferrari customer Alfa Romeo also noted the power unit improvements, while the numbers supported the growing confidence: on day one of testing alone in Bahrain, Leclerc went 3km/h (1.9mph) faster in the speed trap than he managed in qualifying last year.

Leclerc’s enthusiasm extended to much of the SF21 itself, where a great deal of focus has been placed on the rear end of the car through a token spend for development. Head of chassis Enrico Cardile says Ferrari wanted to make a “radical change” at the rear of the car in a bid to cure much of the instability that blighted its drivers last year. “At the rear we created a new transmission and suspension,” explains Cardile. “This, along with the work done by our power unit engineers,



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gave us a much more tapered rear end compared to the SF1000.

“Aerodynamics was one of the areas impacted by the changed regulations, intended to reduce the capacity of developing vertical downforce, making sure the tyres remain intact. This is why, when we started working on the car’s aerodynamics, we gave ourselves two objectives: increasing the aerodynamic charge lost due to the regulations; and reducing drag.”

The reduction in drag combined with the improved power unit has cured the SF1000’s major weaknesses. Leclerc was left pleased with the step forward, explaining that it matched up with the expectations the team had coming into the season: “The data that we have seen on-track is correlating with what we had back in Maranello before these tests, so this is already positive. But to give a feedback or a feeling on the



Ferrari is unlikely to challenge Red Bull in a year of revival

SUTTON



Carlos Sainz Jr has integrated into Ferrari well since his arrival over the winter

HOW WILL LECLERC AND SAINZ FARE AS TEAM-MATES?

When Charles Leclerc ascended to a Ferrari seat for what was only his second Formula 1 season, the team seemed to underestimate how rapid he would be from the word go. An expectation that Sebastian Vettel would remain its leader and act as more of a mentor to his new young team-mate was quickly dispelled. Leclerc almost won his second race with the team, and then outclassed his four-time world champion colleague across the course of their first season together.

As frustration between the drivers bubbled and occasionally boiled over on track, Ferrari began to gravitate around Leclerc. It paved the way for a new long-term contract and, ultimately, Vettel's departure. Leclerc became the future.

The arrival of Carlos Sainz Jr therefore raises questions about what role he will play within the team. Is he going to be allowed to push Leclerc in the same way Leclerc did Vettel? Or is his role more as an abiding number two intended to support Maranello's new star?

Team principal Mattia Binotto is clear that the drivers will be given equal treatment: "There is not a single individual that counts more than the team itself. Something that we discussed all together, to become world champions, first we need to beat all the other cars and the other drivers. Only by the time that eventually we have the fastest car and we have the fastest drivers may they fight between them."

It's a situation that suits Leclerc. "I am here in F1 to fight against the best, and I think Carlos is extremely talented," he says. "We'll just push each other to perform better every time we are on track. There's no clear number one or number two."

A repeat of Sainz's 'bromance' with Lando Norris at McLaren might be hard to expect, but the early working relationship has been good. "He's a great guy," adds Leclerc. "I've never spent as much time as I did with him before the start to the season with other team-mates. So yeah, we are getting on very, very well."

It's a further sign of the changing atmosphere at Maranello. Greater harmony between team-mates should help Ferrari's on-track fortunes, but the more telling sign of how good relations are will come in how the inevitable frustrations are handled during the heat of the season.

car now in those [hot] conditions is very, very difficult."

'Correlation' has been a big buzzword throughout pre-season for Ferrari as it seeks to fully understand where it went wrong with the SF1000. The fact that the team is happy with its initial findings is good news at least in-house, but is no guarantee that it will be able to haul itself back even to the front of the midfield. The crowded fight to be the best of the rest was something in which Ferrari played only a bit-part role last year, but it really must pull clear of this if it is to deem 2021 a resounding success. The carryover of the cars from last year naturally tempers expectations, yet with no limits on power unit development, and given the facilities at its disposal even in the first year of the budget cap, it is surely best placed to make a big stride forward this year.

But the three days in Bahrain didn't offer a super-convincing testing display to generate great excitement or fervour around Ferrari. The impressive showings from McLaren and AlphaTauri in particular through testing meant that they were gaining the spotlight in relation to the midfield fight as the chequered flag fell. Ferrari may have progressed, but its rivals were hardly standing still.

Nevertheless, the green shoots of recovery at Maranello are encouraging. The team has made clear that its view is long-term, meaning the SF21 won't be developed a great deal as it puts attention firmly on the new regulations for 2022. Last year may have been sobering, but it has also bred a certain degree of humility and unity.

"It's very difficult when you are not performing as you're expecting," adds Binotto. "As Scuderia Ferrari, the ambition and objective is for the maximum, to be the best. But the team remains united. It continues to improve. We are now at the start of a new season. You've got different cars, so you've got new hope. It's normal that the atmosphere is better."

The hope will be that 2021 offers some kind of step forward, but every member of the team at Ferrari will be aware that, barring a freak race or shock result, it is likely to face another winless season. This year is about recovery. By accepting that, and by getting new thrills out of the close midfield tussle, Ferrari can still make 2021 a fruitful year, before the real chance to become a major force arrives again. ❧



Aston Martin

CAN VETTEL BOUNCE BACK AT ASTON MARTIN?

A poor final season at Ferrari and a troubled Bahrain test don't bode well for the four-time champion, but he's optimistic about his new surroundings

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

 PHOTOGRAPHY  **motorsport**
IMAGES

“It could be worse,” says Sebastian Vettel, just as 2021 Formula 1 pre-season testing ends. He’s right, of course, but the start of Aston Martin’s second F1 era got off to a pretty inauspicious start. It’s currently impossible to say exactly where the team sits in the latest pecking order because it completed so little running over the Bahrain test, but this was the team that had the third-fastest car in 2020. And, thanks to the carryover requirements of the new campaign, much of that package remains in action in 2021.

But a second impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was the 50% reduction in pre-season testing time. That had already made Vettel’s task of getting up to speed with a new team difficult, even before Aston lost almost nearly a third of the three-day test to a gearbox problem on day two, and then a turbo-boost-pressure issue as the final hours approached, both dramas occurring during Vettel’s allocated running.

There are four other established F1 drivers making new starts in 2021, but of Daniel Ricciardo, Sergio Perez, Fernando Alonso and Carlos Sainz Jr, only the last-named encountered a visible on-track reliability issue during testing (and his Ferrari team-mate Charles Leclerc caused one of the event’s three red flags due to his squad spotting a telemetry combustion anomaly, ordering him to pull over), with his transmission problem late on the final day. Vettel, alone of the ‘new’ starters, and who is with a new team for the first time since 2015, lost serious track time. He ended up with the lowest lap count of all the 2021 race drivers, on 117 (AlphaTauri’s Pierre Gasly led the way on 237). And, of course, his 2020 campaign was worse, probably the weakest of his 13-year F1 career so far.

“One hundred laps!” replies Vettel when asked how far behind he is compared to where he’d expected to finish pre-season testing. “Obviously I would have liked to just get more mileage. That’s the main thing.

“The last day [before the turbo problem struck] was very busy and

I tried to make use of the track time, which I felt I did, and it was very good for me and I learned a lot of things. So now it’s obviously [important] to remember all these things, give feedback and remember going forward. This is the key. I’m just short on mileage, and with that we have a lot of tyre sets that we didn’t use because we didn’t run. Overall, it’s probably 100 laps that I’m short of, then probably something similar for Lance [Stroll] – we both didn’t get what we wanted. But it’s not a big deal, it’s what it is, and we’ve got to move on.”

Vettel’s assertion is understandable, especially in the context of Aston’s strength as Racing Point last year. But when considering the reduced pre-season, it piles outside pressure upon how successful the latest chapter in his career will ultimately be. Coping with that understanding is now part of Vettel’s 2021,





Sebastian Vettel managed only 117 laps in testing – the least of any 2021 race driver

but before then there are more fundamental tasks he has to tick off as he settles into life with his new squad.

“[It’s about] just getting to know the people,” he explains. “It’s one thing to understand what they mean, [when we have] lots of different things to talk about. Then [getting to know] the car and how the steering feels different, because it’s a different unit. Obviously, every F1 car has power steering, but every power steering is set up slightly differently, and gives you a different impression. Ultimately when you drive you have the wheel in your hands and that’s the feedback you get.”

Then there’s Aston’s power and aerodynamic philosophy, both of which are different to what he previously experienced at Ferrari and before that at Red Bull. Vettel refuses to be drawn into comparisons between the feel of the Mercedes powerplant, which has dominated F1 since his own championship-crushing era was ended in 2014, “out of respect to different manufacturers”.

On the aero side, Vettel is again naturally wary of disclosing too many details, but his fate is now tied to the low-rake concept Mercedes has pursued, and to which Racing Point/Aston successfully switched last year. To the team’s credit, it navigated the switch to a completely new design philosophy without major drama and reaped its benefits.

“It’s been very interesting to me, let’s put it that way,” Vettel says, coyly. “It’s not like there’s only one thing. It’s not like you have a high-rake car and you just drop the rake, and you are in a Mercedes, and [if] you are in a Mercedes and you increase the rake, and you drive a Red Bull. It’s not like that. It’s much, much more complex. There’s a lot more elements that have to come together.”

These elements could well be a central point to how the first-season

story of the Aston/Vettel combo plays out. This is because of the theory that the 2021 rear-floor rule changes have possibly hurt Mercedes’ low-rake concept more than the high-rake approach pioneered at Red Bull and widely adopted elsewhere. The Black Arrows were rather all over the place when it came to rear grip during testing, and although Aston’s reliability problems meant it did not do any real performance running – Stroll’s 1m30.460s on the soft C5 tyres ended up as the ninth-best lap across the 10 teams as a result – the negative impact on low-rake design theory could well apply to Aston too.

“OVERALL, IT’S PROBABLY 100 LAPS THAT I’M SHORT OF. BUT IT’S NOT A BIG DEAL. WE’VE GOT TO MOVE ON”

Then there’s the new Pirelli rubber. Since the Italian company became F1’s sole tyre supplier in 2011, the championship has been dominated by two drivers: Lewis Hamilton and Vettel. The new rubber is heavier and requires additional understanding as a result – a factor that adds to the piling up of costs from Aston’s testing time loss.

As a champion in F1’s Pirelli era, Vettel has long since proved that he can cope with the challenges posed by the varying constitutions of the fragile rubber. But, along with his need for additional understanding of Aston’s steering approach, and getting to know the low-rake concept >>

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and Mercedes engine, all of these factors blend together concerning the ultimate F1 differentiator: pace.

In his final year at Ferrari, Vettel failed to make it through to Q3 at 14 races, ending the year 13-4 down against Leclerc in the squad's intra-team qualifying competition. He played down the impact of Ferrari's rear-handling deficiencies at the Aston team launch earlier this month, but it was clear that Vettel could not match Leclerc's car confidence across the campaign. Therefore, it would be logical to expect the handling impact of the rear-downforce cuts to be something he must overcome if he is to shine again against the clock – and let's not forget that this is F1's fourth-highest pole position scorer – at his new squad.

Aston must also now address a growing concern over its recent reliability, considering Sergio Perez suffered two costly retirements either side of his Sakhir Grand Prix win (where Stroll was third) as 2020 ended. But however tough its Bahrain test was, it has so far been impressed by its new hire. Vettel started work with his new squad as soon as 2021 got under way, quickly pointing out ways to improve his in-car comfort, but both sides know the more complex adaptations will naturally take longer.

"He's settling in well with the team," says team boss Otmar Szafnauer. "His feedback is very detailed and very precise. The engineers get very good feedback from him. He's got a great work ethic and he pursues every single little bit of performance that we can go after. For that reason, it's evident why he's won all those races and championships."

"MAYBE IT'S THE AGE, BUT 10 YEARS AGO I WOULD FINALLY PANIC NOW. WOULD IT HELP? PROBABLY NOT"

The Aston/Vettel story is off to a less-than-ideal start, but that doesn't necessarily diminish its potential given the Racing Point package's previous pace and his immense experience. After a bumpy start to life in green, Vettel the leader will need to help boost the recovery once the real racing starts.

"I'm not too preoccupied," Vettel concludes on Aston's testing issues. "Maybe it's the age, maybe it's the experience, but probably 10 years ago I would finally panic now. But then again, if I were to panic now, would it help? Probably not. We still got some running. And for me the laps [in the morning on the final day] were super-useful. So, it could be worse. It could be better, but it could be worse."

"It's about remaining calm, doing one thing at a time and moving forward when it's time to. Even the people that have no trouble at all and did lots of laps [in testing], I don't think you can acquire all the information about the new cars, the new tyres, the changes over the winter that might have been on top of that, in just one and a half days in the car. It will naturally take a little bit of time to get up to speed, but for sure there's some people who need more time, some less."



Vettel points out power steering set-up differs from team to team

HOW ASTON'S AMR21 COMPARES TO RACING POINT'S RP20



Since Sebastian Vettel has replaced Sergio Perez in Aston Martin's line-up for 2021, and Nico Hulkenberg's super-sub skills have not yet been called upon, there's only one driver who can compare the green team's new machine with the 'pink Mercedes' it ran in 2020. Lance Stroll is about to embark upon his third season racing with the rebranded squad and, thanks to the changes on the other side of the Aston garage, he's uniquely placed to comment on how the AMR21 compares to the RP20.

Due to the windy conditions in Bahrain throughout testing, Stroll says it was "hard to get a good read on the balance", but he remains optimistic.

"The car does feel good," he adds. "We did lose a bit of [downforce] load for sure, so did everyone with the floor cut etc. But the balance felt good and yeah, I was comfortable in the car. It's hard to really get a proper feel for some of the changes we've made to the rear end. With these 20-25km/h winds [in testing], where you feel the headwind, you just feel a lot of grip, and where you feel the tailwind you feel no grip."

Given the similar aerodynamic philosophies the Aston design shares with Mercedes', it will be interesting to see if both teams are visibly struggling for rear-end grip – as the world champion team was throughout testing – when the racing gets under way. If that does prove to be the case, and Aston's lack of qualifying simulations in testing means this is difficult to predict, then Stroll and Vettel will have to work together to help improve the situation.

"He's very knowledgeable when it comes to the behaviour of the car, what he wants from the car, and just his comments are very wise," Stroll says of his new team-mate. "He has a lot of experience and is a very talented driver. It's still early days though. We'll probably be able to relate to each other's comments and give our feedback and have a much better idea about what we're both talking about."



COATES



SBLOXHAM

McLaren

HOW McLAREN IS GOING BACK TO THE FUTURE WITH MERCEDES

Great Scott! The old partners have got the band back together, even if it won't be quite the same as it used to be. So is McLaren about to (Mc)fly?

LUKE SMITH

PHOTOGRAPHY



motorsport
IMAGES

In the six years that have passed since McLaren last enjoyed Mercedes power, the British team has undergone a transformative, sobering process. The hope fuelled by Honda's Formula 1 return in 2015 gave way to the harsh reality of how far behind the times McLaren had fallen, forcing an overhaul at the very top of the team. Tough decisions were taken, including a move to become a Renault customer from 2018, but those big calls paid off as it clambered back up the F1 pecking order.

Unlike the last time McLaren entered a season with a new engine supplier, this is no longer a team in crisis. As we saw through 2020, it is now capable of fighting at the front of the midfield, scoring podiums, and even challenging for victories on occasion. And McLaren has a masterplan to return to the top.

The latest step in that plan was taken 18 months ago when McLaren announced that it would be switching to Mercedes engines from 2021, rekindling the partnership that yielded titles for Mika Hakkinen and Lewis Hamilton under the old works deal. The switch was initially planned for the new regulations in 2021, but their delay had no impact upon the agreement, meaning that even with the cars' development being frozen for this year, the changeover took place.

It represents the start of a new era for McLaren. It is a significantly different agreement to the former Mercedes partnership, when it served as the German manufacturer's works operation between 1995 and 2009. This is a sheer customer deal, to the extent that there is not a single Mercedes logo on the 2021 McLaren, the MCL35M (the final 'M', standing for Mercedes, is the only recognition it gets). But it is



Daniel Ricciardo had his first taste of a McLaren-Mercedes in the Bahrain tests



nevertheless a step McLaren believes can return it to the top table in F1 as the series prepares to enter a new era.

“We have everything we need now, whether that’s drivers, team principal, technical director, power unit, sponsor partners, investors, the resources, the CapEx [projects], but it’s going to take more time to gel,” says McLaren Racing CEO Zak Brown. “If you look at the two more recent dominations: Mercedes, it took them a little bit of time to build that momentum to get there, then once they got there, they’re hard to knock off the top of the mountain. Before that, it was Red Bull. It took them a little bit of time to get there, too. So this is a momentum business. I think we have good momentum. But we still have a long way to go.”

The puzzle pieces Brown mentions have gradually been drawn into

“THIS IS A MOMENTUM BUSINESS AND WE HAVE GOOD MOMENTUM. BUT WE STILL HAVE A LONG WAY TO GO”

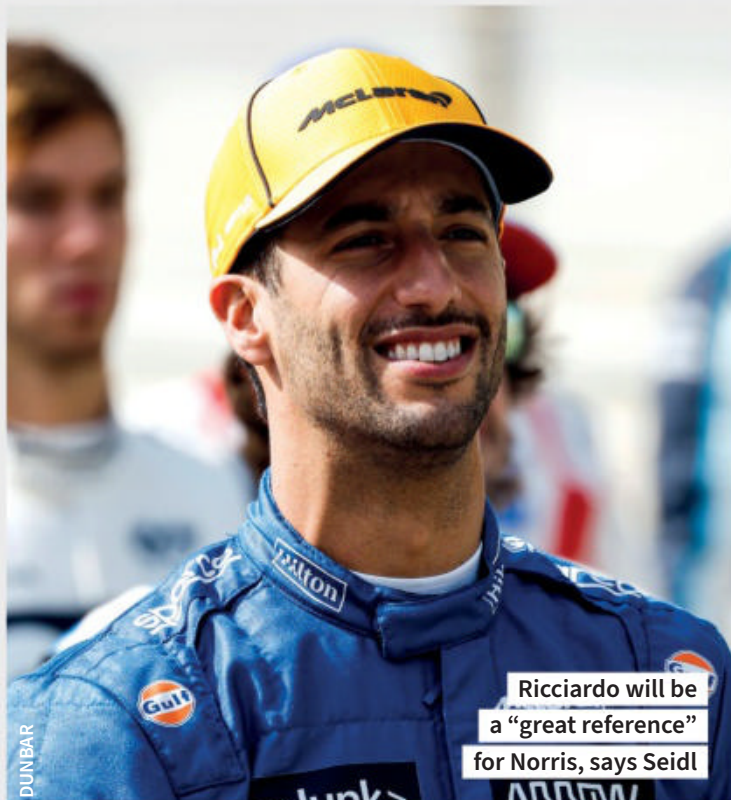
place since his arrival at the end of 2016. Ex-Porsche Le Mans/WEC boss Andreas Seidl has proven to be an excellent leader for the team since becoming principal in 2019, while James Key has excelled as technical director. A fresh injection of investment was announced last December from US group MSP Sports Capital, allowing McLaren to proceed with plans to update its facilities, including a new wind-tunnel at its Woking base. As F1 moves into the budget-cap era in 2021, McLaren has the right tools at its disposal.

The signing of Daniel Ricciardo for 2021 acted as a big statement from McLaren. Within 48 hours of Ferrari announcing that it had snared Carlos Sainz Jr away from Woking off the back of his breakout year in 2019, McLaren was able to confirm Ricciardo as his replacement, bringing race-winning experience back to the team.

McLaren first courted Ricciardo when he was deliberating an exit from Red Bull in 2018. Talks went well, but he ultimately signed for Renault. This time around, any doubts he previously bore had dissipated, prompting him to sign a three-year contract. It’s a huge show of faith in McLaren and a sign of the progress the team has made.

“When I talked to McLaren a couple years ago, back in 2018, there were still quite a few moving parts,” explains seven-time GP winner Ricciardo. “I don’t think Andreas was there yet, James Key wasn’t. And I think ultimately, not only the results weren’t quite there on track yet, but they were still trying to figure out their own structure. »

WHAT RICCIARDO BRINGS TO McLAREN



Ricciardo will be a "great reference" for Norris, says Seidl

As strong as Carlos Sainz Jr and Lando Norris were at McLaren, the arrival of Daniel Ricciardo brings a very different dimension to the team. Not only does the Australian bring the experience of working with major operations at Red Bull and Renault, he also knows what it takes to win grands prix, acting as a perfect addition amid McLaren's revival.

"He is the reference we were missing the last two years," says team principal Andreas Seidl. "He has shown in the past that he can win races if we give him the right material, which is important for us to make the next step as a team."

Seidl added that Ricciardo would be a "great reference" for Norris, who now has the chance to go up against a proven top-liner. But Norris is also finding that he can contribute a lot to Ricciardo's knowledge and toolkit in the early phase of his time at the team.

"In the first few days [of testing] he was listening on my radio and listening to my comments, and him learning from me and my comments about the car," says Norris. "But [on the last day] it's more of him really adding on, because he feels more comfortable and can give more feedback, and steer it in bit of a better direction and start chipping in with his experience and knowledge that he has."

Ricciardo began to regain some of his best form towards the end of his time at Renault, famously winning a tattoo bet with team principal Cyril Abiteboul. But it took time for him to properly settle in and get up to speed. The early signs at McLaren have been good. Even with the restrictions and challenges posed by the COVID-19 world we live in, Ricciardo feels he is gelling well with his new surroundings.

"I spent a fair bit of time at MTC in February, so I feel like I got that process done, as far as figuring out not only names of people in the team but how they operate," says Ricciardo. "[Testing] has just been really good, just to get in the car and drive. They're certainly a professional outfit. I think they've got some really good processes in place. They're well-structured and pretty efficient. It's been good. I'm enjoying my time here."

They've really established that now, and I'm basically just fitting in the puzzle, as opposed to trying to put it all together."

Ricciardo may bring some star power to the team, but new team-mate Lando Norris has quietly been one of F1's most consistent performers in his first two seasons. After a breakthrough podium in Austria last July, Norris managed to run Ferrari-bound team-mate Sainz close throughout 2020, and played a key role in McLaren's charge to third in the constructors' championship.

Norris enters his third season with greater experience and maturity, boosting his confidence, an area that has traditionally been a challenge for him. "I came in with a better plan this year than I did the last two years," says Norris. "I feel more confident and more ready."

McLaren's previous two changes of engine supplier were blighted by a number of issues in pre-season testing. The misery of its first runs with Honda is well-known, but even 2018 pre-season testing proved troublesome as it adjusted to life with new partner Renault.

The Mercedes switch did not come without its challenges, one being that McLaren had no choice but to use its development tokens to accommodate the new power unit. While its rivals carried over the majority of components, McLaren found itself designing an "essentially new" car. "The number of new parts on the MCL35M is about the same as when we built the MCL35," says production director Piers Thynne. "The back of the chassis and gearbox bellhousing around the engine have changed significantly to adapt to the new power unit. Changing power unit greatly alters the architecture of the car."

Yet 2021 testing went by without a hitch. Even with just three days of running before the season opener in Bahrain, McLaren was able to get



The Bahrain tests went well as McLaren adapted back to Mercedes power

up to speed swiftly with its new power unit. Technical director Key admitted it was a “challenge” working with such a small window to bed in the new engine, but stayed coy on the performance, saying the Mercedes was “quite reasonable” through testing.

Norris echoed Key’s comments, but could not hide a big smile when asked about the gains he had found with the Mercedes engine: “Altogether, it’s been a smooth operation. The bit for me is understanding all the new switches and ways of working. On the whole, it’s that little step forward in a lot of areas, but some areas still need some work. At the moment it’s looking good, and we’re happy with how things have gone. We have to wait until qualifying to really unlock the full potential and see what this baby’s got.”

The Mercedes move could offer McLaren an important gain if it wishes to escape the crowded midfield fight this year. Testing pointed towards another close tussle with Aston Martin, Alpine, Ferrari and AlphaTauri, the last-mentioned catching Norris’s eye in particular. But McLaren’s testing form drew praise from Lewis Hamilton, who was excited by the prospect of his former team becoming a force once again.

Still, McLaren has its eyes firmly on the long game. It might want to keep up its recent trajectory, rising from ninth to sixth to fourth to third in the past four years, but it also knows

it cannot place a heavy focus on this year given the upcoming regulation change. It’s a juggling act of developing the car enough to be competitive this year, without sacrificing the attention it needs to give to 2022.

“I think for our journey, it is important to have a good season this year, to keep this positive momentum up,” reckons team boss Seidl. “But at the same time, it’s important to not lose sight of the big picture. Over the next years, we do not want to simply close the gap to the teams in front of us, we want to be in a position again to fight for race wins. And in order to do that, it is important to use the new regulations in 2022, which are a big change, as an opportunity as well.”

In a year when so much has changed to give McLaren a better and brighter future, more of the same from last season would be considered a successful 2021 at Woking. It will want to snare a podium or two where possible, lead the midfield, and be in position to pick up the pieces should either Red Bull or Mercedes drop the ball.

It’s bound to be a transitional year with so many changes, then. But with the arrivals of both Ricciardo and Mercedes, it could also be one that marks the beginning of an exciting and potentially lucrative new cycle for McLaren. ❧

“WE HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL QUALIFYING TO REALLY UNLOCK THE POTENTIAL AND SEE WHAT THIS BABY HAS GOT”



Norris is feeling more confident as he heads into a crucial third year

SUTTON



Andreas Seidl has made a strong impact since arriving as team boss

SBLOXHAM

Alpine

WHY ALONSO'S EYES HAVE RETURNED TO HIS FIRST MOTORSPORT PRIZE

Fernando Alonso reckons he's driving better than ever right now. So the quest for a 'triple crown' can wait

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

PHOTOGRAPHY ALPINE AND  **motorsport**
IMAGES

One particular Fernando Alonso cliché was on full display during his 2021 test-ending race simulation. His run of 17 laps on the C4 tyres, followed by 10 on the harder C3s, was relentlessly consistent. For lap after lap, he circulated the Bahrain track with metronomic precision, never once deviating from the 1m37s bracket on the red-walled rubber, then did likewise on the yellow-coloured mediums, getting down to the 1m36s as the fuel in his Alpine A521 burned off.

Finally, the session drew to an end. It had been dominated by Max Verstappen's duel with Yuki Tsunoda over testing's top time, but Alonso's run to the flag felt significant – it was the first public long run of his Formula 1 return, and Daniel Ricciardo was doing likewise for McLaren. The electric-blue Alpine and the papaya-orange McLaren weren't competing, but the drivers at their respective wheels are central to each other's current stories.

Alonso is returning to F1 from two years sampling motorsport's wider delights, and he is doing so with Alpine, the squad that Ricciardo opted to leave – announced before the 2020 season had begun – for Alonso's most-recent F1 team. Both squads are on the up after years of trying, but both have been discarded by two of the championship's best drivers. Soon, it will be clear who made the right call.

There's a Damoclesian element hanging over F1 2021, one that should have already dropped: the delayed rules reset. And it's this potential to change F1's pecking order that has led Alonso and Ricciardo to their respective new homes. But in the case of the former, in 2021 it's all about coming back home.

"They are very different – and that's a good sign!" Alonso replies when asked how different 'Team Enstone' is now to the organisation he left (for the second time) at the end of 2009. "We have very talented people in the team. Some of the mechanics – there are still some from my last time, so that's also a good touch of the old days as well. And a good atmosphere that we all want to repeat the success we have had in the past."





Can he inspire a return to such scenes this time?



Into the blue: brand change to Alpine has led to an all-new look

COATES

F1 2021's car-carryover requirements have effectively set the pecking order up along similar lines to how 2020 ended (although testing showed that fluctuation in each 'class' is clearly possible). So, the success that Alonso and Alpine are ultimately targeting must come down the line, wrapped up in how the team's challengers perform from 2022 onwards. But for now, it must continue to maintain the momentum it found in 2020, particularly from the three podiums it scored – Enstone's first since the 2015 Belgian Grand Prix (as Lotus).

As Renault in 2020, Alpine managed to reverse its 2019 slide by introducing a development package on the eve of the delayed campaign that significantly improved traction, which in turn increased its drivers' confidence. It made a set-up breakthrough at the 70th Anniversary GP at Silverstone that Ricciardo called hitting the "sweet spot", but just missed out on the coveted third place in the constructors' championship, ending up third in 'class' (fifth in reality) and 21 points behind 'winner' McLaren, 14 adrift of Racing Point.

The A521 attracted significant attention at the Bahrain test thanks to its bulbous engine cover. This is a reaction to mandated 2021 floor and diffuser changes, with Alpine sacrificing optimum centre of gravity positioning by moving the car's engine-cooling architecture higher up to create extra space between the sidepods and the floor – a unique attempt to mitigate the downforce loss of the new rules.

Alpine executive director Marcin Budkowski joked that he was "a bit surprised by the amount of body-shaming on our car" during what was a smooth test overall for the rebranded squad. Like Red Bull, Alpine opted to give Alonso and Esteban Ocon a full day each in the car before they shared duties on the final day, with the former making his public F1 return on the test's middle day, and closing it out with Alpine's only lengthy race simulation during the final evening.

Budkowski explained that Alpine tried to "fit six days of testing into three", and said "we accomplished all of it without any significant problems". The team racked up 396 laps, the fourth highest of all the teams. Its primary goal was to assess how the aero tweaks worked.

Alpine's test programme did not include engaging in any of the late-day qualifying simulation runs under the lights, when conditions were at their best for fast times. Alonso's 1m30.318s on the C4 tyre stood as its best lap overall, good enough for eighth out of the 10 teams. It was an understated three days for the team and, based on a combination of its best long-run averages and final place in the one-lap pecking order, it appears that at this stage it's firmly in the midfield fight – just behind McLaren and AlphaTauri, adrift of Red Bull and Mercedes.

Getting Alpine to the front for a return to the Renault glory days of 2005-06 is Alonso's aim. After his deal was announced last July, he attended three races to watch his new/old team in action and was embedded in its operations remotely for the other events. He conducted a filming day in Renault's 2020 car and ran a private test programme in its 2018 machine alongside its academy drivers late last year.

An FIA intervention meant he could take part in the post-2020 season 'young driver' test in Abu Dhabi (which was essentially opened up to non-2020 race drivers), and he continued his preparations in Alpine's simulator, although this was interrupted by his February cycling accident. The knock-on effect of that incident, in which Alonso suffered a jaw fracture, and the current restrictions on travel to the UK, meant he could not attend Alpine's launch event and was only able to get back into the simulator a few days before testing kicked off. Alonso will complete the 2021 season before having further surgery to remove two titanium plates, but that seems unlikely to slow him down.

"He's got huge experience in the sport and a huge amount of knowledge and interaction with the engineers," says Budkowski of Alonso's worth to Alpine. "So that's going to be very helpful in preparing the season. He's on top form; he's completely unaffected by his health issues at the beginning of the year."

Alonso is rekindling a relationship at a team that knows him well – his legend is integral to its own. In that way he has an advantage over rivals such as Ricciardo or Carlos Sainz Jr, who are starting afresh. >>



Alonso redefined the 'young driver' test in Abu Dhabi last year

SUTTON

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Alonso also has his famous reputation – it’s not just on track where he is unyielding in expecting his best, and the best of others.

“I can see a driver in a great shape, first of all from physical point of view, [with] strong motivation – really pushing,” says Davide Brivio, Alpine’s new racing director. “I think it’s very positive for the team to have this type of driver that tends to stimulate everybody, pushes everybody, to give the maximum.”

Alonso said in Bahrain that he does not “fear any particular challenge”, as could be seen from his triple crown quest, which he has had to pause. That was where his intention for the latest chapter in

“IT’S VERY POSITIVE TO HAVE THIS TYPE OF DRIVER THAT STIMULATES EVERYBODY TO GIVE THE MAXIMUM”

his remarkable career was planned, as he felt “after Le Mans [which he won twice and took the World Endurance Championship title alongside his Toyota team-mates in the 2018-19 superseason], in the car and all the things that I tried, I thought that [as I was] at my best, maybe Formula 1 was the place to be”.

“The main thing, or why I’m here and I came back, was because I felt that I was at my best in the last couple of years. I felt that I was driving better than ever, and I had to make a decision on what was the next challenge. I have time in the future to rethink some of the challenges that were not completed. I felt that I had something to do here again.

“[But] to win races, to win championships, I think you need a few more things than just your motivation or your beliefs. You need the



package, luck, momentum – it is something that we want to build with the new Alpine name and with the team. I cannot guarantee that, but we will fight for those wins and those championships in the future if we do the things that we have in our heads.”

The Alonso/Alpine force are far from alone in targeting a return to former glory in modern F1, with the midfield packed with teams that last won championships in the mid-to-late 2000s. What this combination has over rivals is at least a possession of historical proof of being able to reach success together at the highest level.

The path to getting back to world-title heights starts now, with 39-year-old Alonso’s relentless nature returning to the championship where he became a superstar. ❧

HOW ALPINE’S 2020 MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE WILL WORK

Although much of Formula 1’s new season will feel familiar thanks to the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been plenty of off-season changes. Renault, like its midfield rival Racing Point becoming Aston Martin, has undergone a complete rebrand, and will go racing as Alpine in 2021.

The team’s livery has changed to reflect Alpine’s heritage as a successful French rallying and sportscar marque, and it has taken a different approach to the required rear floor and diffuser changes compared to the rest of the grid. This resulted in a bulbous engine cover that drew comparisons with the Ligier JS5 (that are perhaps fairer when considering the lowered version of the 1976 car’s airbox).

But during the pre-season, one big change consistently needed explaining: how does Alpine’s team management structure work?

The overall Alpine division is headed by CEO Laurent Rossi, and the marque’s F1 entry is a direct bid to increase awareness of its A110 road car through the successes of ‘Team



Davide Brivio (left) and low-airbox Ligier JS5

Enstone’, one of F1’s most-storied squads. Reporting to Rossi are executive director Marcin Budkowski and racing director Davide Brivio, the Italian hired over the winter from the successful Suzuki MotoGP team.

Budkowski enjoys a strong reputation in the F1 paddock, while Brivio turned around the MotoGP fortunes of both Yamaha and Suzuki, successfully harnessing the capabilities of teams based across borders on both occasions. But neither has been made Alpine’s team principal, along the lines of how Cyril Abiteboul ran the squad over the past seven seasons. Abiteboul’s departure, says Budkowski, was “a surprise and a shock”.

The decision not to have a team principal in 2021, however, is a deliberate change to how the team has previously operated. “It’s a different structure to the one you’re used to,” says Budkowski. “In terms of responsibilities, I’m continuing to run Enstone and all the departments that are involved in the race team there. And then there is the racing side of it – [activities] at the track, and the driver management – which lies with Davide.”

But where does Fernando Alonso fit in? Brivio says there is “no number one driver”, but Alonso’s experience and record means that Alpine has a special tool in its kit when it comes to the quest for renewed F1 success.



AlphaTauri and Haas

THE ROOKIES OF F1 2021

*This year the grand prix grid welcomes three newcomers:
Yuki Tsunoda, Nikita Mazepin and Mick Schumacher*

STUART CODLING

New faces have arrived in Formula 1 only sparingly over the past few seasons, thanks to tighter superlicence requirements and certain older drivers disobligingly refusing to take their leave. But this year there's almost a glut of rookies, if three can be considered as such. To some extent, though, this influx isn't particularly surprising.

One thing that can be relied upon in F1 is that vacancies will eventuate owing to the ruthless up-or-out ethos of Red Bull's young driver programme; and this season the floundering Haas team has decided its previous line-up amounted to dead wood. Taking the axe to Romain Grosjean and Kevin Magnussen, both of whom had arguably had their time in F1, has enabled Haas to forge closer ties with Ferrari and attract new investment in one hit. The three newcomers are therefore all doing a job before turning a wheel in anger.

On the face of it, Yuki Tsunoda — third in F2 in 2020 — is a left-field choice for the second AlphaTauri seat alongside Pierre Gasly. But in the wider context of the Red Bull Junior Team finding itself temporarily short on F1-qualified drivers it actually rates, Tsunoda is releasing Red Bull from a Gordian knot of its own making. At Haas, F2 champion Mick Schumacher is in essence acting as a figurehead for a wider transfer of brainpower and personnel from Maranello as Ferrari downsizes for the budget cap, while Nikita Mazepin brings a bag of roubles in the form of sponsorship from his father's fertiliser company.

In promoting Tsunoda rather than holding on to Daniil Kvyat, who returned respectable if not outstanding results last season, Red Bull has at least one eye on the 2022 driver line-up across its teams. It's also looking to break the cycle of having to fill gaps with drivers it has previously tossed on the scrapheap, such as Alex

Albon (plucked from Formula E)
and Kvyat himself (rescued

from Ferrari's simulator). The mismatch between the rate at which new talent comes through the system and the speed with which Red Bull decides its drivers aren't good enough is why the senior team has had to recruit an outsider, Sergio Perez, this season. The conveyor belt of talent has ceased to deliver when vacancies arise.

Putting Tsunoda through an experience cycle now makes sense because it will enable Red Bull's other highly rated new talent, Juri Vips, to gain seat time after his 2020 plans were derailed by COVID-related cancellations. But for those, it might have been Vips putting his hand up for the AlphaTauri seat this winter.

This is not to undersell Tsunoda's potential at all. The 20-year-old Japanese might enjoy Honda backing, but he has earned his promotions, veritably rocketing up the ladder. Arriving in Europe in 2019 as the Japanese Formula 4 champion, he established himself as a contender in both the Euroformula Open and the FIA F3 Championship despite his lack of experience at that level — or, indeed, with Dallara's then-new F3 chassis. He may not have won those series but he merited promotion to F2, where he showed both speed and a propensity for self-improvement.

Helmut Marko, who superintends Red Bull's young driver programme with an iron fist, is a huge fan — to the extent that Tsunoda has leapfrogged Nobuharu Matsushita, Honda's previous favourite, in the pecking order. Adaptability, a capacity to learn, and a willingness to identify and eliminate his weaknesses are what have earned Tsunoda his F1 shot, as well as a competitive turn of speed. In F3 he got on top of the quirks of the Pirelli tyres quickly, and in F2 last year a maturity emerged that suggested he had got over a tendency to become a slave to the red mist.

Marko publicly set Tsunoda the target of finishing fourth in F2 as a prerequisite for a move up the ladder. While that might have seemed a tall order — Matsushita had toiled so long in the category that he was virtually part of the furniture, and even the eventual champion Mick Schumacher had required a second year to get »



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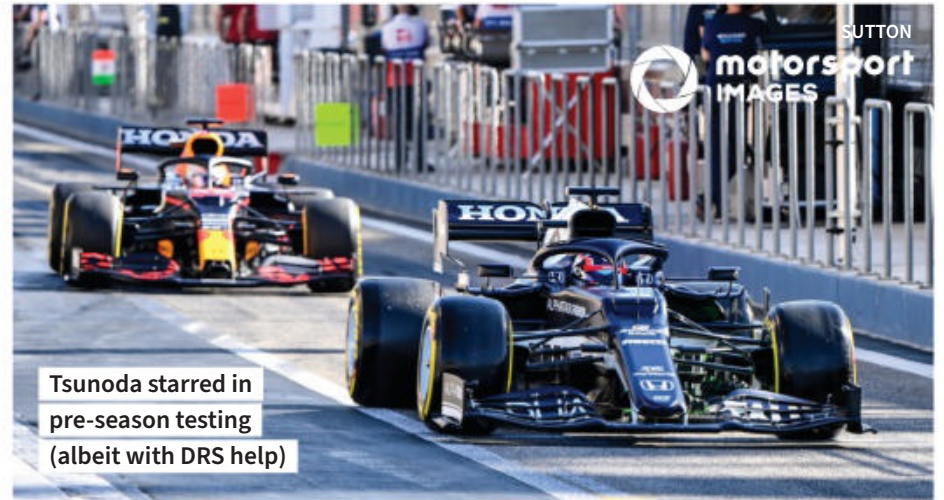
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up to speed — Tsunoda claimed three victories on his way to third. The only reservation hanging over his full-season performance was an occasional tendency to underachieve in the reversed-grid sprint races.

Swapping Tsunoda for Kvyat has had an unintended consequence: at 159cm, Tsunoda is 23cm shorter than the driver he replaces and 18cm adrift of team-mate Pierre Gasly. AlphaTauri is having to make modifications to the car's pedal box to accommodate him; fortunately, changes related to driver fit are excluded from the token system.

Tsunoda recorded the second-fastest time on the final day of the Bahrain test, but keen-eyed observers pointed out that he was opening his DRS substantially earlier than would be permitted during normal running conditions. Nevertheless, he was pretty tidy given a number of issues, including those with his pedals, and he acknowledged that he



Tsunoda starred in pre-season testing (albeit with DRS help)

“I’VE NEVER SAID THAT CARRYING THE FAMILY NAME IS PRESSURE. I’M VERY HAPPY TO CARRY IT BACK INTO F1”

faces a learning curve in terms of grip, particularly on the softer rubber.

By contrast, the two Haas rookies face a season-long slog in a car that will have no development resources allocated to it, since the team has decided to focus everything it has on the 2022 rules reset. While this may pay off for Haas in the long term, it could come at a cost in terms of driver confidence, particularly since one of them has demonstrated that patience is not his strong suit.

Having a season to learn the ropes while expectations are tempered will suit Schumacher just fine. While his famous surname has opened many doors, it has also invited unwelcome comparisons with his father, who registered an instant impact in F1 after making rapid progress to the category. By contrast Mick has been a slow-burn talent at senior level, generally getting on top of each series in his second year. He learned in European F3 not to overdrive in pursuit of results but, having performed the necessary mental reset, he faced a new obstacle: innuendo.

After registering just one podium finish in 2017 and two more in the early phase of 2018, he embarked on a winning streak from mid-season, registering eight victories and four other podiums. Naturally some of his rivals chafed at this turnaround and began tossing around suggestions that Schumacher was enjoying benefits that weren't necessarily available to others, although no allegations were ever formalised via an official protest.

Rene Rosin, boss of Prema, which ran Schumacher to the F3 and F2 titles, says the keys to Mick's successes are consistency, an ability to

integrate with and get the most out of a team, and a rigorous work ethic — traits you can easily trace from his father. Schumacher himself has said that regardless of the prospect of toiling at the tail of the field this season, he intends to “work my ass off”. This was an unusually forthright comment from a driver who comes wrapped in the support mechanisms that also shielded his father from media attention. Indeed, Fort Knox is less well-guarded than Schumacher, who has been coached in the art of speaking without saying anything of note by his protective inner circle, which includes his father's longtime ‘fixer’ Sabine Kehm and Ferrari spin doctor Luca Colajanni. He needs it because, like many offspring of famous sportspeople, he faces the challenge of establishing his own identity while showing due respect to his forebears.

“I have never said that carrying the family name is pressure,” says Mick, “and I am pretty sure I will never say that because I am very happy to carry that name back into Formula 1.”

Another subject Schumacher has been called upon to swerve diplomatically is that of his team-mate Nikita Mazepin, a 22-year-old Russian who will race under a neutral flag owing to sanctions against his country as a result of state-sponsored doping activities. Mazepin's father Dmitri attempted to buy the Force India F1 team in 2018 via Uralkali, his mining and fertiliser production company, but was thwarted by Lawrence Stroll's consortium.

Instead, some of those monies have rolled in the direction of Haas. Daubing the car in the colours of the Russian Federation has proved controversial, but no more so than Nikita's behaviour both on and off-track: in 2016 he served a short ban after punching Callum Iott in the face, and he earned penalties in the 2020 F2 finale for two separate instances of dangerous conduct. He has bridges to build off-track, too, having alienated a large segment of F1 fandom through his role in a sordid video that appeared on social media late last year.

While public opinion concerning Mazepin's lifestyle away from the track is unlikely to change, on track he can at least let his driving perform the heavy lifting of advocacy; and it's in this arena that he urgently needs to transform the perception that he is a makeweight with a propensity to lose his temper. Second place in GP3 in 2018 remains the highlight of his single-seater career so far, making him pretty much the least-qualified of this year's rookies — this despite a great deal of testing in recent F1 machinery, including private sessions with Mercedes. 🏆



Schumacher Jr shares rigorous work ethic with his father



Mazepin enters F1 in the shadow of questionable on and off-track behaviour

Politics

THE NEW FIGURE LOOKING AT THE BIGGER PICTURE

Stefano Domenicali has his own vision for the future of Formula 1. But for grand prix racing's new boss, it doesn't revolve around his own ego

JONATHAN NOBLE

PHOTOGRAPHY



Stefano Domenicali
returns to F1 after
running Lamborghini

Formula 1's new CEO has yet to set foot inside the organisation's London offices, thanks to coronavirus travel restrictions. But that hasn't stopped Stefano Domenicali setting the political tone for the season and the years ahead.

Domenicali has arrived at F1's top job with much of the series' short-term infrastructure headaches out of the way (a new Concorde Agreement has been signed, new governance is in place, and a fresh era is coming from 2022), but there remains plenty of bigger-picture stuff that needs sorting over the next few months. Decisions that need to be made soon are going to be critical to the long-term health of the sport. F1 especially needs to lay out its vision for future engine regulations, because with those hangs the fate of manufacturer involvement and the shape of grand prix racing over the next decade or so.

Against that backdrop comes the mission to ensure that F1 remains attractive to fans. It's made big inroads under Liberty Media's regime — it has embraced social media and enticed new audiences with ideas such as the Netflix *Drive to Survive* series — but there is much more to do.

F1 faces ever-increasing challenges to attract eyeballs from other entertainment platforms — just look at the way gaming is getting ever bigger — so must adapt to the fast changing world. For that, it needs to draw in the younger audience. "As always in life, the things that are too stable will become old," admits Domenicali. "I need to make sure that the foundations we have made are taken in the right direction."

Ongoing expressions of interest from new countries that want to





host races, new manufacturers who have half an eye on entering F1, and potential teams wanting to join the grid have left Domenicali encouraged that the series is in a good place.

The ex-Ferrari team boss clearly sees F1's future wedded strongly to car makers. And that's why he is so determined to make sure that the 2025 engine rules are such that they become a no-brainer for them. That means making sure that F1's future power units are cheaper — he has vowed to be “very, very aggressive” on this front. But Domenicali is also determined to prove that electrification is not the only future option for the roads, and that hybrid development and the use of sustainable fuels will be viable alternatives.

Furthermore, F1 needs to push hard on its environmental targets, in becoming carbon-neutral from 2030 at the latest. “I am positive to say that we are attacking the right points, which will be fundamental to keep the interest in our platform, also from the technological point of view,” he says.

Despite the obvious focus on nailing future regulations to keep the manufacturers interested, Domenicali is clear that keeping fans happy is just as important. For that, he wants to ensure that drivers remain at the heart of the show. He laid out his vision to them in a summit ahead of pre-season testing in Bahrain.

The attraction of grand prix events in the post-COVID world needs to be ramped up too. Races need to entertain; spectators need to get closer to their heroes. “We need to give something that has to have a

‘wow’ effect,” reckons Domenicali.

But there is a fine balancing act to achieve. F1 cannot just try to attract the casual fan by turning grands prix into music festivals. Going too far down that road risks turning the sport into something that turns off its life-long followers.

It's a consideration that Domenicali is aware of: “We don't have to make the mistake of not attracting the real fans, the passionate ones, that are living F1 every day. So the mix of having new fans versus the traditional one is an objective that we need to have.”

There are hints too of a shift in the sport's business model, in that predecessor Chase Carey's determination to expand the calendar as much as possible — to maximise on race-hosting fees — may be counter-productive. While the big bucks of countries paying for races adds to F1's bottom line, it comes at the cost of burned-out personnel, extra strain on teams and a season that is perhaps too diluted. Better, maybe, to focus on a better-balanced schedule of races that deliver top value rather than cram the year with extra-cheap deals that don't bring much more.

“We need to decide what is the right balance in terms of number of races,” agrees Domenicali. “What are the areas that we need to strategically invest in for teams, interest for broadcast, for media, for sponsors, and decide what would be the right way to go, knowing that the 23 races is in the top end of the scale of what we are doing today?”

Domenicali's approach to the job in hand will be more akin to Carey's in being collaborative with teams, rather than using the confrontational divide-and-conquer tactics employed by Bernie Ecclestone. But one big difference from the way things were run under Carey is that Domenicali is coming at it from a motor racing background.

For all Carey's strengths as a negotiator and businessman, he had little knowledge of the way F1 teams' mindsets operated, especially their intense focus on self-interest when it came to rule changes. As a former Ferrari boss, Domenicali understands things from the perspective of teams, and his experience as CEO of Lamborghini means he has a good grounding of business and what car makers want too.

For him, there is no desire to be the godfather at the heart of the paddock as Ecclestone was often viewed. He wants to be judged not by what he does, but by how the sport develops. “I want to be humble, as always,” he says. “I don't want to sell carpets. I want to make sure that this platform is fantastic, is great, is emotional, is full of passionate people and with the right technology.

“I want to see once again the right dynamics in terms of what we are delivering in terms of sport, in terms of technology, in terms of relations with the organiser, with the media, with the broadcaster, with the newcomers, and with the traditional fans.

“I think that all these areas are priorities for me to focus on.”

“I WANT TO BE HUMBLE, AS ALWAYS. I DON'T WANT TO SELL CARPETS. I WANT TO MAKE SURE F1 IS FANTASTIC”



Calendar

ALL THE RACES...

1 BAHRAIN GP

Sakhir
28 March
UK start time: 1600

2 EMILIA ROMAGNA GP

Imola
18 April
UK start time: 1400

3 PORTUGUESE GP

Algarve
2 May
UK start time: 1500

4 SPANISH GP

Barcelona
9 May
UK start time: 1400

5 MONACO GP

Monte Carlo
23 May
UK start time: 1400

6 AZERBAIJAN GP

Baku
6 June
UK start time: 1300

7 CANADIAN GP

Montreal
13 June
UK start time: 1900

8 FRENCH GP

Paul Ricard
27 June
UK start time: 1400

9 AUSTRIAN GP

Red Bull Ring
4 July
UK start time: 1400

10 BRITISH GP

Silverstone
18 July
UK start time: 1500

11 HUNGARIAN GP

Hungaroring
1 August
UK start time: 1400

12 BELGIAN GP

Spa
29 August
UK start time: 1400

13 DUTCH GP

Zandvoort
5 September
UK start time: 1400

14 ITALIAN GP

Monza
12 September
UK start time: 1400

15 RUSSIAN GP

Sochi
26 September
UK start time: 1300

16 SINGAPORE GP

Marina Bay
3 October
UK start time: 1300

17 JAPANESE GP

Suzuka
10 October
UK start time: 0600

Dutch GP returns for first time since 1985



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18 UNITED STATES GP

Austin
24 October
UK start time: 2000

19 MEXICAN GP

Mexico City
31 October
UK start time: 1900

20 SAO PAULO GP

Interlagos
7 November
UK start time: 1700

21 AUSTRALIAN GP

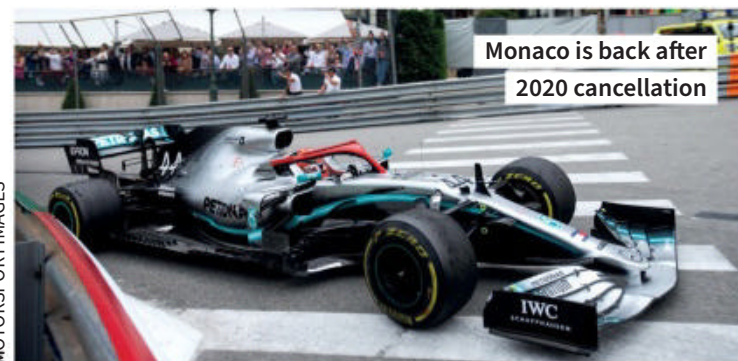
Melbourne
21 November
UK start time: 0600

22 SAUDI ARABIAN GP

Jeddah
5 December
UK start time: 1600

23 ABU DHABI GP

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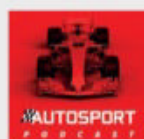


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F1 2021

TEAM BY TEAM

*Autosport's technical expert and title-winning engineer is your
guide to the 2021 Formula 1 season's runners and riders*

TIM WRIGHT

ILLUSTRATIONS CAMILLE DEBASTIANI

MERCEDES

CAR MERCEDES W12 ENGINE MERCEDES M12



STARTS 227 | FIRST GP FRANCE 1954 | WINS 115 | POLES 126 | FASTEST LAPS 84 | 2020 1ST

It was strange to see Mercedes struggle on each day of testing in Bahrain, especially as this was not the bulletproof team we have come to expect. The first sign of trouble came very quickly on day one, when the barriers were erected across the front of the garage due to a gearbox problem after only a couple of laps with Bottas at the wheel. Almost all of the four-hour period was taken up while a replacement gearbox was installed, leaving Bottas to complete a handful of laps with the car fitted with aero rakes before the lunch break, so there was little indication of how the car was handling.

World champion Sir Lewis Hamilton appeared for the afternoon session, but he was clearly not at one with the W12. Like many others he outbraked himself into Turn 1, and had some lurid slides in Turns 4 and 11. There was the unusual sight of the car beached in the gravel at Turn 13 after the tail wind caught Hamilton out.

There was much speculation following the launch of the W12 as to what was the big secret withheld regarding the floor area. When it was finally revealed as scallops along the outer edge of the floor behind the bargeboards, it was likened to a range of spaghetti, but clearly a lot of windtunnel work had gone into this area and around the rear wheels in a bid to claim back the downforce lost through the new rules. I'm not sure Mercedes fully understands why this is not working, and even Bottas admitted that the car had a loose and unforgiving rear end.

Although Bottas ended up fastest on day two, it was clear that Mercedes was not a happy camp, and it was left to trackside chief Andrew Shovlin to admit that this had not been the start the team had planned and that it is some way behind Red Bull. I have a feeling that Mercedes may find itself further back than that, but it's not wise to rule out it finding the answer.



#44
LEWIS HAMILTON



#77
VALTTERI BOTTAS

1ST	2020 POSITION	2ND
36	AGE	31
266	STARTS	156
AUSTRALIA 2007	FIRST GP	AUSTRALIA 2013
95 WINS	BEST FINISH	9 WINS
98 POLES	BEST QUALIFYING	16 POLES
53	FASTEST LAPS	15

Lewis Hamilton

The newly knighted seven-time world champion yet again starts as the clear favourite for honours in 2021, despite the travails of Mercedes in testing. He only has a one-year deal with the team to span this season, so is his intention to eclipse Michael Schumacher's record of seven crowns and hang up his helmet? Whatever, apart from his post-COVID below-par finish to 2020, he last season showed no signs of losing any of his remarkable powers.

Valtteri Bottas

Only someone who comes from a nation where people jump into icy lakes for recreational fun could happily take the role of team-mate to the seemingly invincible Hamilton for so long. The Finn says he's undergone 'extreme' winter training – presumably that means something even less pleasant than icy immersion. Perhaps he needs to. His up-and-down form and the rise of George Russell means this season is crucial for his future.

RED BULL

CAR RED BULL RB16B ENGINE HONDA RA621H



STARTS 303 | FIRST GP AUSTRALIA 2005 | WINS 64 | POLES 63 | FASTEST LAPS 68 | 2020 2ND

Red Bull is the only 2020 race-winning team to name its car as a B version of its predecessor, which on the face of it says that not much has changed. Nothing could be further from the truth, and the team reported that it had improved the areas that held it back at the start of 2020.

Verstappen drove the entire first day of the Bahrain test. At times when the car was back in the garage there were sounds of air tools in action as bits were removed, adjusted or added to the floor, the team obviously working through a programme to find the ultimate set-up.

Despite a half-spin in the morning, Verstappen established himself at the top of the times by the end of play. The RB16B, with its high-rake set-up, looked very stable on all parts of the track. As we have come to expect, it was running a little more downforce to cope with the faster twisty sections, especially sector two,

where it frequently set purple times. Being team-mate to Verstappen is a tenuous seat, but I hope that at last Red Bull has found the perfect foil in Perez. He was entrusted with day two testing and slowly became familiar with his new car and engine. Despite a scary moment when the engine cover self-destructed on the front straight as he pulled out to pass Latifi, he ended up in eighth place, his times set only on the hardest tyre.

Day three was when we expected the times to tumble, especially as the weather improved. Perez carried on the development during the morning, working through pitstop practice with a team recognised as the fastest in the pitlane. He then handed the RB16B back to Verstappen, who concentrated initially on longer runs on the harder tyres before launching into qualifying mode. It was fascinating watching him not only set fastest lap after fastest lap but also responding to the rapid times set by Tsunoda.



#11
SERGIO PEREZ



#33
MAX VERSTAPPEN

4TH	2020 POSITION	3RD
31	AGE	23
191	STARTS	119
AUSTRALIA 2011	FIRST GP	AUSTRALIA 2015
1 WIN	BEST FINISH	10 WINS
3RD	BEST QUALIFYING	3 POLES
4	FASTEST LAPS	10

Sergio Perez

This is the year when we will find out whether Pierre Gasly and Alex Albon really were a bit lame at Red Bull, or whether Verstappen is just on another planet. In Perez's only previous year in a big team – 2013 at McLaren – he didn't look so great, but then neither did team-mate Jenson Button. He's now an F1 race winner, of course, and one of the most respected drivers on the grid. Can that translate to supporting Verstappen?

Max Verstappen

The Belgo-Dutch firebrand had a strong finish to 2020 with victory in the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, and an equally good start to 2021 with his form in the Red Bull RB16B in Bahrain testing. Combined with Mercedes' problems, that appears to put Verstappen in the best position he's ever been on the eve of a season. If this is the case, there's only one question: how does he handle a title battle? With only one year in cars pre-F1, he's never been involved in one...

McLAREN

CAR **McLAREN MCL35M** ENGINE **MERCEDES M12**



STARTS 880 | FIRST GP MONACO 1966 | WINS 182 | POLES 155 | FASTEST LAPS 157 | 2020 3RD

Although McLaren arguably had the most work to do over the winter, with the substitution of the outgoing Renault engine for a Mercedes powerplant, the team was the first to launch its 2021 contender. The car itself, as you would expect, looked similar to last year's, as the nose layout had already been given track time at the end of 2020. But, as some of McLaren's rivals have also claimed, the team has identified areas that needed improving and was quite bullish before the Bahrain test that the targets had been achieved. It also turns out that McLaren had pulled a fast one by finding a way around the changes to the size of the strakes under the diffuser by extending what is essentially the gearbox shroud. There were mutterings initially from other teams about this until they realised that this was quite legal. Ricciardo had been transferred

from the Renault team to partner Norris, and it remained to be seen whether this was a wise move for the Australian. On track in Bahrain, the car did indeed look impressive in the hands of Ricciardo. It was quick and reliable from the start, and he was quickest in the morning session on the first day ahead of Gasly and Verstappen. That big smile of his showed that he was happy with his new steed. Norris continued the impressive progress of the MCL35M during the afternoon, and ended up just 0.2s behind Verstappen in second place overall. The team was happy with progress, concentrating on finding a good balance and reliability with its new engine package. The progress continued, with Ricciardo quickest again on the second morning, and Norris finishing the day 0.3s adrift of the pacesetter Mercedes of Bottas. This was an encouraging start for McLaren.



#3
DANIEL RICCIARDO

5TH	2020 POSITION	9TH
31	AGE	21
188	STARTS	38
BRITAIN 2011	FIRST GP	AUSTRALIA 2019
7 WINS	BEST FINISH	3RD
3 POLES	BEST QUALIFYING	3RD
15	FASTEST LAPS	2

Daniel Ricciardo
In this era of drivers staying at teams for longer periods than the Stone Roses took to make any records, the permasmiling Italo-Perth swashbuckler is a refreshing throwback to Carlos Reutemann-style team-hopping. You could cynically suggest that, in exchanging Renault for McLaren, it's like for like. But the improvement curve in Woking is stronger under its new management style. Has the skills to properly lead the team further forward.



#4
LANDO NORRIS

Lando Norris
There was nothing wrong with his speed in his rookie season in 2019, it was just his race performances that waxed and waned. Last year, the diminutive Anglo-Belgian addressed his weak area, notably with his storming late charge to the podium in the Austrian GP opener. Norris finished the season just eight points adrift of the highly regarded Carlos Sainz Jr. There's no question that Ricciardo is expected to lead McLaren, but Norris will surely run him close.

ASTON MARTIN

CAR ASTON MARTIN AMR21 ENGINE MERCEDES M12



STARTS 5 | FIRST GP NETHERLANDS 1959 | WINS 0 | POLES 0 | FASTEST LAPS 0 | 2020 4TH (AS RACING POINT)

With much pomp and ceremony for the arrival of Aston Martin, we were expecting great things following a solid season in the team's previous guise as Racing Point. But that soon became a crashing disappointment in Bahrain testing as a lack of running due to gearbox and electrical gremlins left both drivers at the bottom of the times on day three. Perhaps Aston needs to draft in a Q to develop gadgets, as he does for James Bond. The colour scheme will take some getting used to, following the vibrant pink we've become familiar with. I hesitate to say that green cars are regarded as unlucky – the early Lotuses weren't so bad... It fell to multiple world champion Vettel to start the testing. The first few laps showed that he wasn't exuding much confidence, the car looking skittish and suffering instability on certain parts of the circuit due to the high winds.

Stroll took over for the second session and some progress had been made, although the car still did not look well balanced, but he managed to set the fourth fastest time. The team did not manage to break through the 100-lap mark, which was obviously a worry. Day two did not improve the feeling in the team. A Mercedes gearbox gremlin meant that Vettel only managed 10 laps before the barriers were wheeled across the garage entry. Stroll was back in for the afternoon and at least the car ran for the rest of the day, with the Canadian ending up an encouraging third, just under 0.2s slower than Bottas. Electrical problems blighted running throughout day three. Despite the drivers racking up 136 laps between them, they ended up slowest. They were obviously not chasing quick times as they continued to catch up with development sorely missed over the three days.



#5 SEBASTIAN VETTEL



#18 LANCE STROLL

13TH	2020 POSITION	11TH
33	AGE	22
257	STARTS	78
USA 2007	FIRST GP	AUSTRALIA 2017
53 WINS	BEST FINISH	3RD
57 POLES	BEST QUALIFYING	1 POLE
38	FASTEST LAPS	0

Sebastian Vettel

The financial largesse of new Aston Martin chairman Lawrence Stroll has allowed the four-time world champion to replace Perez who, as a result, we all thought was the unluckiest driver in the world... until Red Bull flicked Albon. At times last year, Vettel looked like a 1980-spec Jody Scheckter, going through the motions in a rubbish Ferrari. Now he's out of that cauldron, he has an opportunity for a fresh start, but must outperform Stroll Jr.

Lance Stroll

For all the brickbats directed the way of someone who drives for a team owned by their dad, there are glimpses of immense talent: last year, that came with a superb pole on a treacherous track at the Turkish GP. And there's the paradox. Despite having the best of everything throughout his career, with endless testing and preparation, it's when improvisation is needed that he shines most brightly. Expect more of the same in 2021.

ALPINE

CAR ALPINE A521 ENGINE RENAULT E-TECH 20B



STARTS 400 | FIRST GP BRITAIN 1977 (AS RENAULT) | WINS 35 | POLES 51 | FASTEST LAPS 33 | 2020 5TH

The rebranded former Renault team has a striking colour scheme showing an allegiance to both France and the UK. To complement this, we have seen the return of Fernando Alonso, retained to hopefully emulate his 2005-06 title successes.

There was much derision in some quarters at first sight of the bulbous engine cover, which was likened to the Ligiers of the mid-1970s. It later transpired that in order to make the lower engine cover slimmer and aid airflow to the rear wing and diffuser, certain radiators had been relocated higher up in the airstream from the engine inlet. Interestingly, the aero rake that Alpine ran on day one was positioned just behind the bulge on the engine cover, so maybe the team wanted to confirm this decision, because the car probably hadn't had much windtunnel running in this configuration.

Esteban Ocon was entrusted with

the first day's running and quickly showed that the car had pace and reliability, amassing 129 laps and ending up with the third fastest time.

There was always going to be speculation over the fitness of Alonso, who took over on day two. But, as he has reported recently, he has been at his fittest during the past two years. Quickly on the pace, he looked as though he had never been away from F1 and continued the impressive start for the team, ending up second fastest in the morning session. It looked as though chasing quick times was not on Alpine's programme as Alonso had all but matched Ocon's lap tally by the end of the second day, with 128 completed.

The car certainly appears to be working well, and hasn't been giving either driver worrying moments, so it could be that the team's battle will again be with McLaren, but maybe both will find the AlphaTauris to contend with.



#14
FERNANDO ALONSO



#31
ESTEBAN OCON

OUT OF F1	2020 POSITION	12TH
39	AGE	24
311	STARTS	67
AUSTRALIA 2001	FIRST GP	BELGIUM 2016
32 WINS	BEST FINISH	2ND
22 POLES	BEST QUALIFYING	3RD
23	FASTEST LAPS	0



Fernando Alonso

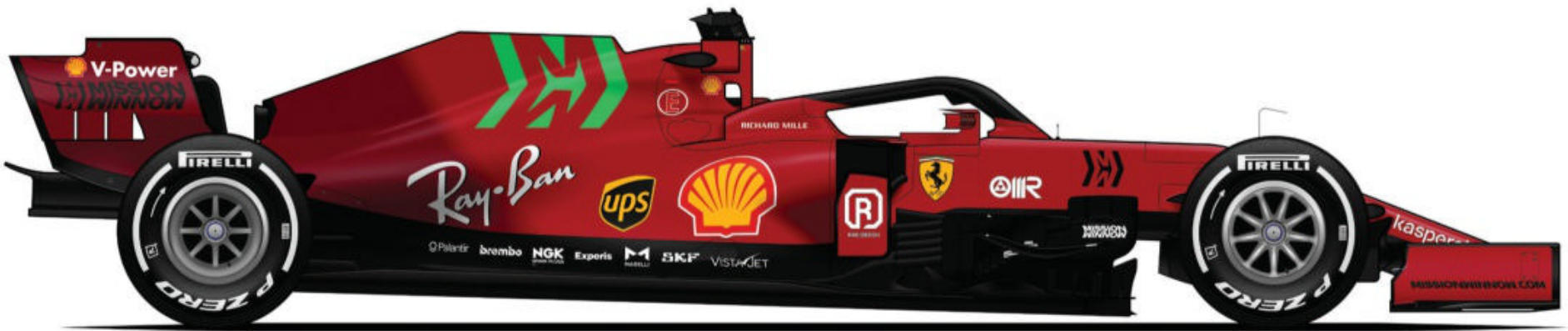
The domino effect of Ferrari ditching Vettel, Sainz deserting McLaren and Ricciardo spurning Renault ended with this recent Dakar Rally, Indy 500, Le Mans and WEC exponent returning like the prodigal son to the rebranded Alpine. Apart from being knocked off his bike outside Lidl, Alonso's return seems to be going very well. But with this being the only team with Renault engines, will he compare his motor to Paul Rivett's old Clio Cup car?

Esteban Ocon

With the rise of George Russell, Ocon has faded a little from talks of Mercedes' future, despite still being part of its stable of young talent. Although overshadowed by Ricciardo in 2020, he has a great chance to show what he can do against Alonso this season. Not just that, but this charming Frenchman is the perfect fit for Renault's 'retro' Alpine rebrand. Now he needs to prove he's more of a Prost-in-waiting than a Jabouille or Arnoux.

FERRARI

CAR FERRARI SF21 ENGINE FERRARI 065/6



STARTS 1008 | FIRST GP MONACO 1950 | WINS 238 | POLES 228 | FASTEST LAPS 254 | 2020 6TH

We all know how desperate last year was for the Prancing Horse, but the rhetoric was that the team had identified certain areas that needed improving, including of course the engine. A new gearbox and rear suspension plus reworking of the engine ancillaries has resulted in a slimmer rear end, allowing a better flow to the rear wing and diffuser.

The addition of Sainz to join Leclerc looks competitive, but they need a car to match their talent and certainly this did not look likely as Sainz struggled with the balance on the first morning. He really looked out of sorts as he familiarised himself with his new steed. Watching Ricciardo go quickest with the McLaren team he had just left must have added to his woes.

The engine has definitely improved, and some of the aero problems have been addressed, and this prompted chief Mattia Binotto to declare that straightline speed is now not an issue.

But the chassis did not, at least on the first day, look as if it has kept up with developments. Even Leclerc struggled, especially under braking at Turn 1, and several times missed the apex. Some kind of a mechanical failure stopped the Ferrari at the end of day one, causing the first red flag.

Perhaps understanding the new rear end became the overnight focus, as day two looked more competitive with Leclerc continuing the driving. He racked up plenty of laps, including a race distance lapping consistently in the 1m36s and 1m37s, which must have given the team some cheer.

At the beginning of day three Leclerc used the cooler air and soft tyres to put in the fastest time, which stood almost until the lunch break. Sainz continued after the break, looking far more composed, indicating that Ferrari was starting to find a good set-up that suited him. He set the third fastest time overall on the softest rubber.



#16
**CHARLES
LECLERC**



#55
**CARLOS
SAINZ JR**

8TH	2020 POSITION	6TH
23	AGE	26
59	STARTS	118
AUSTRALIA 2018	FIRST GP	AUSTRALIA 2015
2 WINS	BEST FINISH	2ND
7 POLES	BEST QUALIFYING	3RD
4	FASTEST LAPS	1



Charles Leclerc

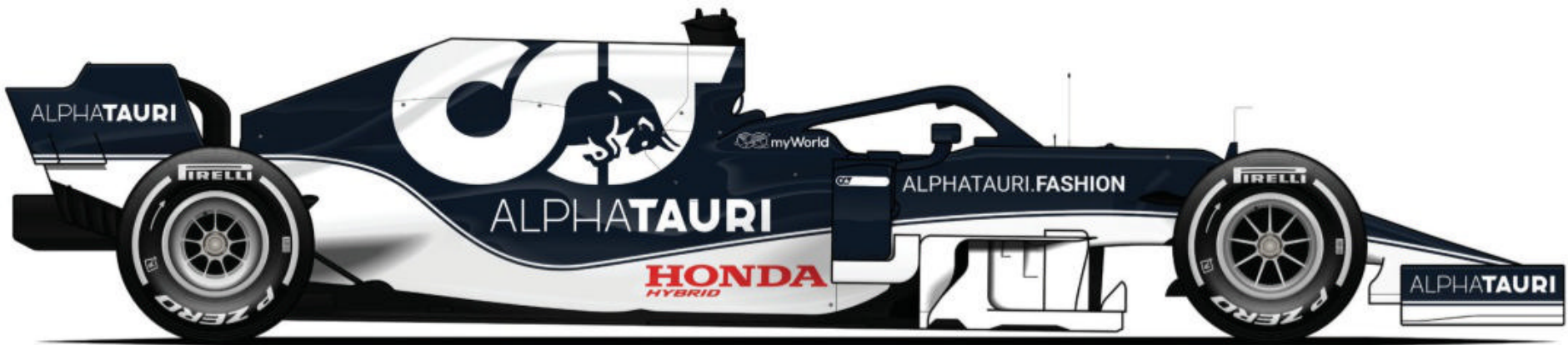
To continue the analogy we used with Vettel, this superstar was last year reminiscent of Gilles Villeneuve in the useless 1980 Ferrari, dragging it further up the order than it had any right to be, but sometimes overreaching and getting involved in daft incidents. Testing suggests that fortunes have turned for the better at Maranello, but it would be unwise at this point to expect the car to allow him to repeat the results of his breakout 2019.

Carlos Sainz Jr

After winning the 1992 World Rally Championship with Toyota, Carlos Sainz went to the sport's glamour Italian marque – and bombed. His son will be hoping his move from McLaren to Ferrari doesn't echo dad's fortunes with Lancia... Over recent seasons, Sainz has become recognised as one of F1's premier young talents. All he needs to do to keep that up is shadow Leclerc, and hope for further Prancing Horse improvements in 2022.

ALPHATAURI

CAR ALPHATAURI AT02 ENGINE HONDA RA621H



STARTS 285 | FIRST GP BAHRAIN 2006 (AS TORO ROSSO) | WINS 2 | POLES 1 | FASTEST LAPS 1 | 2020 7TH

From the start of the Bahrain test, the AlphaTauri looked like it meant business. On track, in the hands of Gasly, it looked stable and planted, especially in high-speed corners.

There had been rumblings at the beginning of the test from some quarters as to how AlphaTauri had spent its two development tokens. A completely new nose and front-wing assembly were obvious, but the outboard front suspension has also been redesigned to use parts from big-brother team Red Bull.

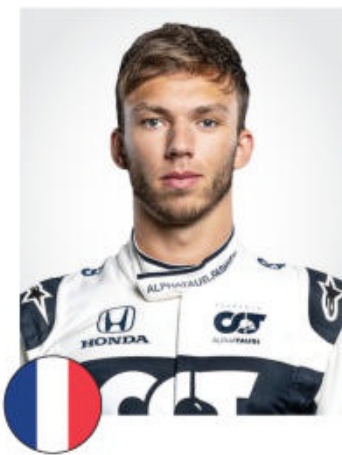
Like Alfa Romeo, the paint scheme was subtly changed, with the nose now in deep blue, but the car is more obviously an evolution of last year's winning design. At one stage the team ran a nose with two bulbous camera pods, presumably checking the inner-shoulder temperatures of the front tyres.

There was much speculation as to why AlphaTauri has taken on

Tsunoda who, although part of the Red Bull stable, showed only glimpses of pace in Formula 2 and beat some more established drivers to the seat. But when he took over for the second session, he immediately looked comfortable with the car and was just half a second off the time set by his experienced team-mate. There were a couple of off-track excursions and a spin, but this is forgivable when trying to find the limits of a new package. Between the two drivers, the team managed 111 laps on day one.

Gasly was again ultra-competitive and reliable on day two, and ended up in second place, a fraction behind the Mercedes of Bottas.

But the final day belonged to Tsunoda as we witnessed some incredible laps in the last half an hour, during which he went fastest overall ahead of Verstappen at one point. That was quite some calling card for the young Japanese, who was less than 0.1s off the best time of the test.



#10
PIERRE GASLY



#22
YUKI TSUNODA

10TH	2020 POSITION	3RD IN F2
25	AGE	20
64	STARTS	0
MALAYSIA 2017	FIRST GP	N/A
1 WIN	BEST FINISH	N/A
4TH	BEST QUALIFYING	N/A
2	FASTEST LAPS	N/A



Pierre Gasly

The power of great sport to not only entertain but move was never better displayed in F1 2020 than with his underdog Italian GP triumph. And Gasly – a sensitive, decent soul – played that to perfection with the post-race photos of his quiet reflection on the podium. From his miserable early 2019 at Red Bull, he's flourished into the very fine F1 driver he always should have been, but perhaps being in a smaller team is a better fit for him.

Yuki Tsunoda

He's by far the least experienced of the three F1 rookies – when Tsunoda made his car racing debut in F4 in Japan, Mazepin had already taken part in a pukka F1 test... But he is almost certainly the most exciting talent of the trio. It was arguably a premature move for Honda and Red Bull to place him in F2 last season, but he proved an absolute star. And his form in F1 testing has set tongues wagging that Japan may at last have its first grand prix winner.

ALFA ROMEO

CAR ALFA ROMEO C41 ENGINE FERRARI 065/6



STARTS 148 | FIRST GP BRITAIN 1950 | WINS 10 | POLES 12 | FASTEST LAPS 14 | 2020 8TH

With an uninterrupted driver pairing of Raikkonen and Giovinazzi, it remained to be seen at the start of testing whether the Sauber-run team could lift itself into a more competitive position relative to 2020. Alfa Romeo has benefited from a revised Ferrari engine this year, so had the chassis managed to recoup the ground lost to the mandated aero changes? The team's development tokens were spent on a new nose and front-wing mainplane, while retaining the heavily loaded inboard flap arrangement. Apart from a slightly changed colour scheme, the car does not look much changed from last year's C39.

On the first day Raikkonen seemed to be struggling with the balance, with many off-road excursions. The 2007 world champion did confirm that the engine was stronger than in 2020, and that seemed to help him to fourth fastest overall, but the car

was not in any way balanced.

Following the sandstorm in the middle of the day, Giovinazzi seemed much happier in the afternoon, despite the poor track conditions. The team racked up 131 laps on day one, which was encouraging for both Alfa Romeo and Ferrari.

Great progress was made with the car over the three days, and it was good to see both drivers able to set competitive times, especially Giovinazzi on day two with a 1m30.760s and Raikkonen on the final day in fourth place on a 1m29.766s, just 0.8s adrift of the table-topping Verstappen. On that last day, Raikkonen racked up a marathon 166 laps, equivalent to almost three race distances.

This will be very encouraging for a team which, apart from Raikkonen's spat with Sainz Jr, has been quietly chipping away with what looks to be a much more forgiving package than last year's.



#7
KIMI RAIKKONEN



#99
ANTONIO GIOVINAZZI

16TH	2020 POSITION	17TH
41	AGE	27
329	STARTS	40
AUSTRALIA 2001	FIRST GP	AUSTRALIA 2017
21 WINS	BEST FINISH	5TH
18 POLES	BEST QUALIFYING	7TH
46	FASTEST LAPS	0



Kimi Raikkonen

Considering he had his first F1 test when Yuki Tsunoda was just four months old, Raikkonen has done a terrific job to keep himself motivated while battling at the wrong end of the field. He is now entering his third season since his return to Sauber/Alfa, where he began his F1 career, and remains a great barometer for teammate Giovinazzi. Last year, the Italian narrowly had the edge in qualifying, so can Raikkonen, now 41, reverse that?

Antonio Giovinazzi

Like Ocon, this chap from out in the sticks in the Puglia 'heel' of Italy is a terrific bloke and proved that you can get to F1 without eyewatering levels of family wealth. Unfortunately for him, the trick will be to stay there. He definitely looked better in 2020 against Raikkonen than he did in 2019, but needs to take another step forward to justify Ferrari's faith in keeping him at the pinnacle, those trademark first-lap burns from the stern notwithstanding.

HAAS

CAR HAAS VF-21 ENGINE FERRARI 065/6



STARTS 100 | FIRST GP AUSTRALIA 2016 | WINS 0 | POLES 0 | FASTEST LAPS 2 | 2020 9TH

With both drivers being rookies, this was a bold move by Haas. The 2020 line-up of Romain Grosjean and Kevin Magnussen has waltzed happily away for a new life in the States, anticipating actually being able to contend for good results and perhaps even wins in IndyCar and IMSA respectively. Although the Haas looks completely different to its VF-20 predecessor in its controversial new colour scheme, that's misleading and the feeling was that not a lot will be expected of reigning FIA Formula 2 champion Schumacher and his fellow F2 graduate Mazepin.

The debutant duo shared the opening day of Bahrain testing, with both getting used to the extra power, downforce and braking capabilities compared to their previous F2 cars. It was certainly a baptism of fire given the windy and sandy conditions but, apart from the occasional off-road

excursions, both drivers acquitted themselves well. Mazepin, who has considerably more experience of driving F1 cars than Schumacher, including several tests with Force India from 2016-18, was comfortably the fastest of the pair.

Haas was one of the teams not to give either of its drivers a whole day of testing, but this was due to the physical demands of driving. Both performed long runs with pitstops and simulated qualifying using the softest Pirellis available, but neither was able to break into the 1m30s.

I suspect this is going to be a frustrating year for the team. Schumacher has a reputation for not being a great qualifier, but brings a cerebral approach to races and usually makes progress; Mazepin can be very fast but does get involved in incidents. But with the wealth of experience in the management and engineering staff, both drivers will grow in confidence.



#9
**NIKITA
MAZEPIN**



#47
**MICK
SCHUMACHER**

5TH IN F2	2020 POSITION	1ST IN F2
22	AGE	22
0	STARTS	0
N/A	FIRST GP	N/A
N/A	BEST FINISH	N/A
N/A	BEST QUALIFYING	N/A
N/A	FASTEST LAPS	N/A



Nikita Mazepin

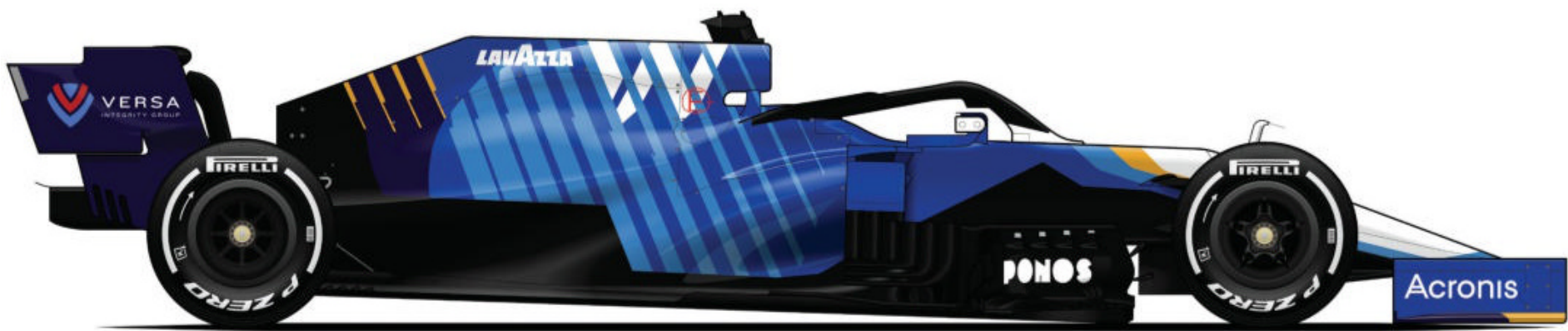
In some corners of social media, the Russian's arrival in F1 has been even less welcome than a wishy-washy liberal in the Kremlin, owing to his antics away from the track and some rather bruising racing on it. Yes, his path has been smoothed by his cash, but it shouldn't be forgotten that he fought at the front of a very competitive F2 season. What counts against him is that he has no experienced team-mate to learn from, which he really needs.

Mick Schumacher

While his dad lined up alongside veteran evergreen crazy diamond Andrea de Cesaris for his GP debut, Schumacher joins the fray alongside a driver with an identical number of F1 starts to his own: zero. It will be a struggle, and people may say he's more like his unfairly maligned uncle Ralf than Michael. But here is a very hard-working driver who will chisel away at it. He's never been an overnight sensation, but he always gets there.

WILLIAMS

CAR WILLIAMS FW43B ENGINE MERCEDES M12



STARTS 744 | FIRST GP SPAIN 1977 | WINS 114 | POLES 128 | FASTEST LAPS 133 | 2020 10TH

Williams took the strange decision not to run either of its race drivers at the start of the Bahrain test, giving the whole first day to reserve Roy Nissany. Maybe he's very good at feedback and giving a direction for a decent set-up... For a team that has struggled so much recently, I would have put Russell in to assess the new package.

As it was, Nissany plugged away, keeping it on the black stuff and presumably working through a large programme, but the car didn't look as if it had made a big step forward, which is what's needed. It was reliable though, and he managed a decent total of 83 laps.

Latifi was entrusted with day two, and had a strange half-spin under braking at Turn 1, right in front of Leclerc who was exiting the pits. Latifi was caught out by the windy conditions, and had a lurid sideways moment in Turn 7 that took his front

tyres down to the canvas as he locked everything up. At least he kept it out of the barriers. He recovered to set seventh fastest time on soft rubber and take his lap count up to 132.

Russell was finally installed for the last day and there was hope that we would finally see the true potential of the car. Given his experiences driving the Mercedes W11 last year, he would have been able to give the Williams designers and management plenty of information on areas to improve.

The car looked better, or maybe it was just the superior track conditions. Russell worked his way through a huge programme with a race distance, and then into a tyre programme including the softest C5. His fastest lap put him sixth, just behind Hamilton and in front of Ricciardo in the McLaren. We do know that George is very good when it comes to qualifying, and I hope that he wasn't wringing the car's neck to produce that time.



#6
NICHOLAS LATIFI



#63
GEORGE RUSSELL

21ST	2020 POSITION	18TH
25	AGE	23
17	STARTS	38
AUSTRIA 2020	FIRST GP	AUSTRALIA 2019
11TH	BEST FINISH	9TH
15TH	BEST QUALIFYING	2ND
0	FASTEST LAPS	1



Nicholas Latifi
In his rookie F1 season last year, this lofty Iranian-Italian-Canadian didn't really do anything spectacular, but neither did he do anything particularly wrong either. He was 100% outqualified by Russell, but so too was Robert Kubica the year before... Latifi now has the opportunity to build on that and continue to grow his reputation. And, if he can outshine Russell on the odd occasion, he'll prove he deserves to keep his place in F1.

George Russell
With his sensational Mercedes debut in last year's Sakhir Grand Prix under his belt, and the anticipation that he will be promoted to the top table full-time in 2022, Russell's third year with Williams has the feeling of Rangers FC's post-liquidation trog back through the lowly Scottish leagues until they arrived in the Premiership again. One thing's for sure: he'll drive that Williams as fast as it can go, but must eliminate the odd error.



Trackside view

KARUN CHANDHOK'S VERDICT ON F1 TESTING

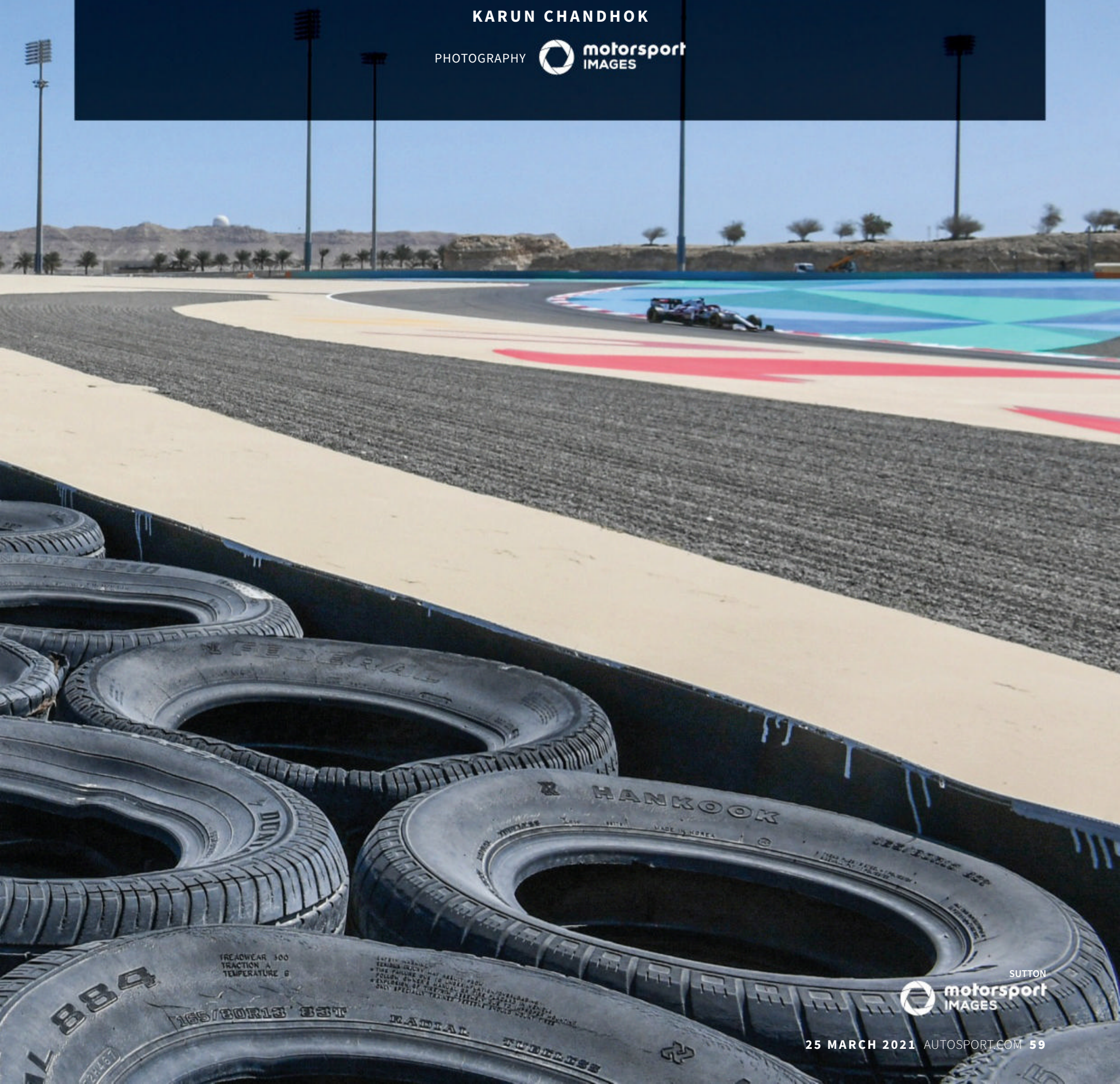
A fast Red Bull, a tricky-handling Mercedes and a midfield that's too close to call... This looks promising, reckons our man in the desert

KARUN CHANDHOK

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COATES

For the past few years, I've been heading to Barcelona to watch pre-season testing, and it's something I always enjoy. After a winter of no Formula 1, it's nice to not only go and watch cars from the side of the track, but also spend time with people in the teams as we all play the usual guessing game of 'who's hot and who's not?'

Normally, of course, we're all freezing in the paddock at Barcelona while having these conversations, so it was nice to be in the sunshine of Bahrain for a change. The circuits are quite different in terms of layout – Barcelona has more long-radius corners with high speeds, therefore putting a larger emphasis on aerodynamics. The Sakhir circuit is traction limited with some big braking zones, although it does have some high-speed corners in the middle sector.

In Spain, the mornings until about 1100 are a bit of a write-off because the track temperature is too cold for the teams to do any meaningful running. After that, however, the conditions tend to be pretty consistent. Conversely in Bahrain, the track temperature earlier in the day was nearly 20 degrees more than at the end of the day, which posed a different problem in terms of comparisons. Running in the heat seemed to be about 1.5 seconds slower than later in the day. Add in the strong winds and sandstorm we had on the opening day, and we get an extra layer of complexity when trying to work out the pecking order.

CHANGES IN THE FIGHT AT THE FRONT

For the first time in this V6 hybrid era that began in 2014, Red Bull appears to have hit the ground running as a realistic challenger to Mercedes for the opening race. I think the whole sport would love

to see the two teams slugging it out in a title battle and, for that to happen, Red Bull and Max Verstappen needed to build on their run of form towards the end of 2020. The early signs are that they have.

The RB16B has quite a radical change to the rear suspension to help with the airflow around the rear of the car while maintaining the high-rake concept. From trackside, it appeared that Max was able to attack the corner entries in the medium and slow-speed corners, where he had the confidence to brake and turn with plenty of aggression. The rear of the car seemed to have the stability that it lacked last year.

This, of course, will be helpful for Sergio Perez as well. As a new driver coming into the team, he would want a car that's confidence inspiring and not edgy – something his two predecessors in the second Red Bull seat didn't have the luxury of. The team also did a lot of mileage, and seemed to get through its programmes without a hitch.

Honda also talked about the fact that it's not backing off in its final year of F1 (for now) and seems to have made a decent step, although that's something that all four engine manufacturers are claiming, so it may be a net zero across the board.

Mercedes seemed to have an uncharacteristically shaky start to its 2021 campaign. We've got so used to the cars being wheeled out of the truck and covering race distances with ease and pace. So when it had a gearbox issue within a few laps of the first morning, that caught everyone by surprise. Later when the car did get running, it really didn't look good out on track.

At lunchtime on day two both Red Bull and Mercedes personnel joked with me that they seemed to have swapped cars! The Red Bull was reliable and stable, while the Mercedes seemed to lack rear-end stability on corner entry. By the time we got to the second evening,



“RED BULL AND MERCEDES PEOPLE JOKED WITH ME THAT THEY SEEMED TO HAVE SWAPPED CARS!”



however, the car started to show some indications of being the fast and solid Mercedes again. Clearly the team needs to work a bit harder than usual to find its sweet spot, but the Brackley squad is too good an operation to be held down for too long.

By the morning of day three, Valtteri Bottas looked like he was back driving the Mercedes of recent years. When I was watching at the entry of Turn 13, where Lewis Hamilton actually spun earlier in the test, the Finn was able to carry a huge amount of entry speed, with the rear of the car fairly well planted. He was mainly doing heavy-fuelled, long runs at that point. Lewis drove in the faster evening session, but

on the shorter performance runs with the soft tyres the car didn't look as good as the Red Bull, and Mercedes was unable to extract the peak performance that you would have expected to see.

Mercedes is heading in the right direction and I have no doubts that it will be battling for the championship all the way through. But the knock-on effect of not starting half a second ahead of the opposition like it did last year is that it will now be in a development war with Red Bull, taking potential brain power and resources away from the big rule change coming in 2022. Under the new cost cap model, this will be a big juggling act for both teams. »



Chandhok impressed by the new McLaren after a decent test

MIDFIELD ORDER STILL CONFUSING

The midfield battle looks really hard to read, as usual. AlphaTauri and McLaren seemed to be slightly ahead of Alpine, Aston Martin and Ferrari at the test, but I think this order could come down to which cars suit a particular track, and also which drivers are able to extract more performance out of their cars in qualifying.

The AlphaTauri looked like a very stable and driver-friendly car throughout the test. Right from the first morning both drivers could hustle the AT02 and push hard, despite the dusty track and strong winds. Last year AlphaTauri had a very good midfield car, but it took Daniil Kvyat two thirds of a season to get up to match Pierre Gasly's pace, which cost the team points.

The squad is very aware that it has a young rookie and therefore needs to have a car with a wider operating window, rather than chase higher peak downforce that could make it edgier to drive. It certainly seems to have done that when you watch trackside.

Early in the test, Yuki Tsunoda wasn't always on the same line through Turns 6 and 7, but the car seemed forgiving enough even in the crosswinds for him to carry decent speed through the apex. On the final day, the team clearly wanted to practise some back-to-back runs on new tyres, to prepare for qualifying, and he did a good job, posting the second fastest time of the test. There were a few lock-ups and scruffy bits as you would expect from a rookie, but on the whole I think that the team and Honda will be very pleased with how he's adapted to F1 so far.

McLaren seems to be in very good shape and will be a real contender for third-best team again. The mood in the camp seems buoyant, with good reliability from the renewed Mercedes partnership all through the test. The car looked very stable over the bumps and quite benign in the crosswinds on the opening two days. The drivers looked like they could push when they wanted to on the softer tyres, but also get a good and consistent balance in the whole range of temperatures.

When it comes to one-lap pace, based on everyone's 2020 form, I do think McLaren has probably got the best driver pairing of the midfield



It's not easy being green. First test as Aston Martin was not trouble-free

teams. That could come to be crucial in this battle, where a few tenths could be the difference between being fifth or 14th on the grid. Having drivers who can deliver those special qualifying laps could be more valuable than some performance upgrades given how tight the battle is.

Early on in the test, the Alpine looked very good on the kerbs in Turns 6 and 7 and also on corner entry into the slow-speed corners such as Turns 8 and 10 (a bit like the Renault last year). As the test wore on, the track gripped up, of course, and everyone's pace improved, but Alpine seemed to slip marginally behind McLaren and AlphaTauri. It seemed to have a touch more mid-corner understeer in the medium and fast corners than the other two, costing the drivers a bit of time when it came to releasing the steering lock and picking up the throttle.

When I was watching on the first day with the high crosswinds, Esteban Ocon seemed to have more snappy moments when changing direction in the middle sector across the wind than other drivers, which could suggest the Alpine is more wind sensitive, but it could also have been because it was early in the test and the car wasn't yet dialled in.

Aston Martin was the team that most of us struggled to gauge. Before a single car ran on track, I was pretty sure that it was going to be the third best team. It may still be in that position come the race weekend, but the test certainly didn't go as smoothly as it would have liked.



“VETTEL MANAGED THE LOWEST NUMBER OF LAPS ACROSS THE THREE DAYS OF ALL THE RACE DRIVERS”

Lance Stroll seemed to have more understeer in the car than the McLaren or AlphaTauri that were running around at the same time on the same tyres on day three. For example, his time off the throttle at Turn 13 waiting for the front end to bite was audibly longer than Lando Norris by a car length or two, and that trend seemed to continue at the other corners I got to during the final morning.

Sebastian Vettel managed the lowest number of laps across the three days of testing out of all the race drivers, which is not what he needed as he a) needs to rebuild his confidence and b) learn all about his new team and car. Andy Green and Tom McCullough lead a very good trackside engineering team, which will be working very hard to help Seb work through this process, but the first few races could be tricky.

There are high expectations for the Silverstone-based team with the Aston Martin takeover and the influx of an impressive portfolio of

sponsors. The opportunity to take the 2020 Mercedes rear end without wasting tokens should be a real benefit, and I'm really intrigued to see where the team is when we get to qualifying for the opening GP.

One of the biggest talking points coming into this season was whether we were going to see a Ferrari recovery in 2021. The team was talking up the dyno figures from its new power unit last year, but the first real evidence we were going to get of the recovery was from testing. The early signs don't suggest that it is going to be back challenging the Mercedes and Red Bull, which is where a team as big and well-funded as Ferrari should be.

Out on track neither Carlos Sainz Jr nor Charles Leclerc looked like they ever had a happy balance in the car. The ride quality over the bumps didn't look as good as the AlphaTauri's or McLaren's. But the bigger question revolves around the power they can produce when they turn it all up for qualifying and the race. If Ferrari is going to be at the front of the midfield pack then it needs to have outdeveloped its rivals in the power game. Only time will tell if that's the case.

THE BATTLE AT THE BACK

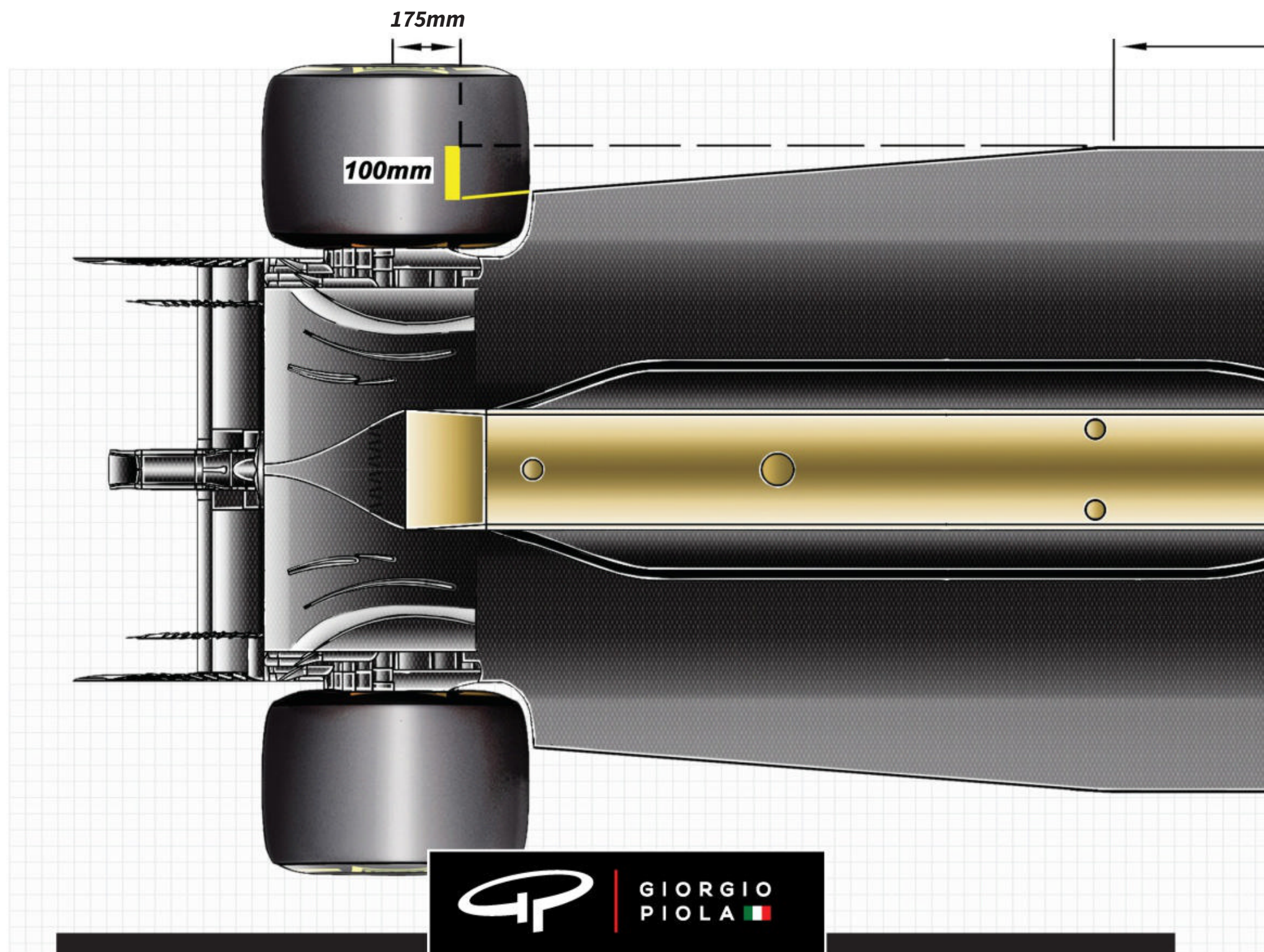
The Alfa Romeo looked like a very balanced car whenever I watched it on track. It obviously lacked the outright speed of the AlphaTauri or McLaren, but both drivers looked like they had a very consistent car with which they could metronomically thrash out long runs. The team felt that the new Ferrari power unit has given it a boost, which will be enough to get ahead of Williams again, something it didn't always manage last year.

The new era of Williams properly starts this season but to a large extent it's still a transitional year. Dorilton Capital has done well thus far to invest in the infrastructure back at base but, with the lead times involved in seeing results in F1, it will only see the fruits of that investment from 2022. The race drivers had to give up a day to Roy Nissany, which wasn't ideal for them, considering the already limited opportunities of track time, but at least they both know the team well from last year and don't need to get used to a whole new world like Vettel or Ricciardo.

Haas has been very open about the fact that 2021 isn't a year it's going to focus resources on, with the big regulation change coming for 2022. The two rookie drivers will have a lot to learn and good, solid people such as chief race engineer Ayao Komatsu will be good for them. The critical thing will be to stay out of trouble on the opening laps of the races and be there to pick up the low hanging fruit on days when we have an unusual race, such as at Monza or Istanbul Park last year.

GUESSTIMATING THE ORDER

If I had to take a guess at a pecking order from that test, I would say Red Bull and Mercedes on top, ahead of AlphaTauri and McLaren, closely followed by Aston Martin, Alpine and Ferrari, with Alfa Romeo, Williams and Haas a step behind them. The teams have had two weeks to analyse the data and tweak their cars before the opening GP, so this will probably change but, either way, I think we're in for a closer championship than we've had in recent times! 🍀

GIORGIO
PIOLA 

Technical analysis

THE TECH WAR OF F1 2021

This year's carryover designs initially pointed to a continuation of F1's 2020 pecking order. Now it appears that the required aero tweaks may shake things up

JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE AND GIORGIO PIOLA

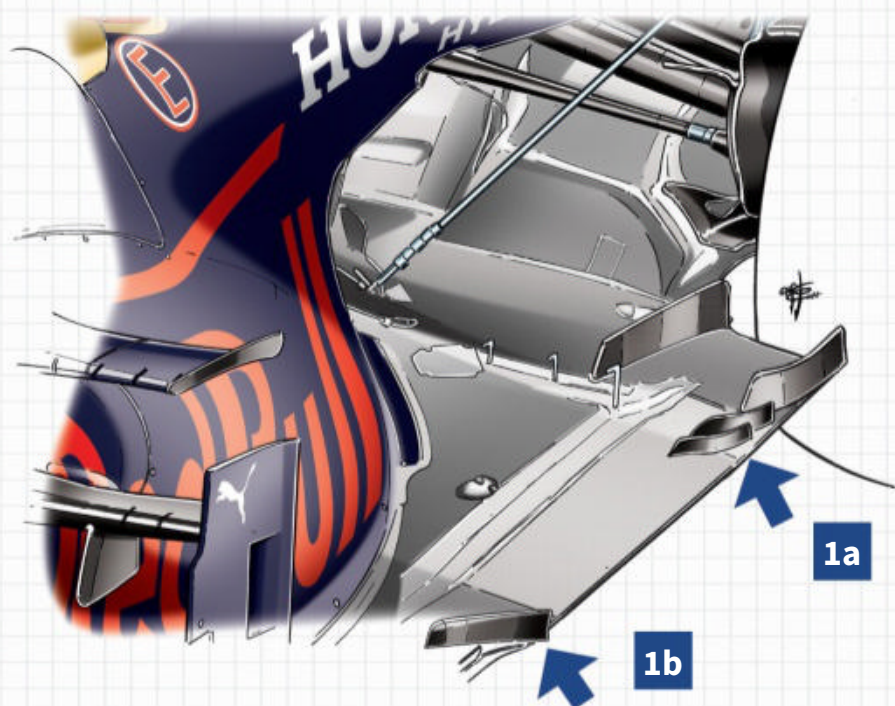
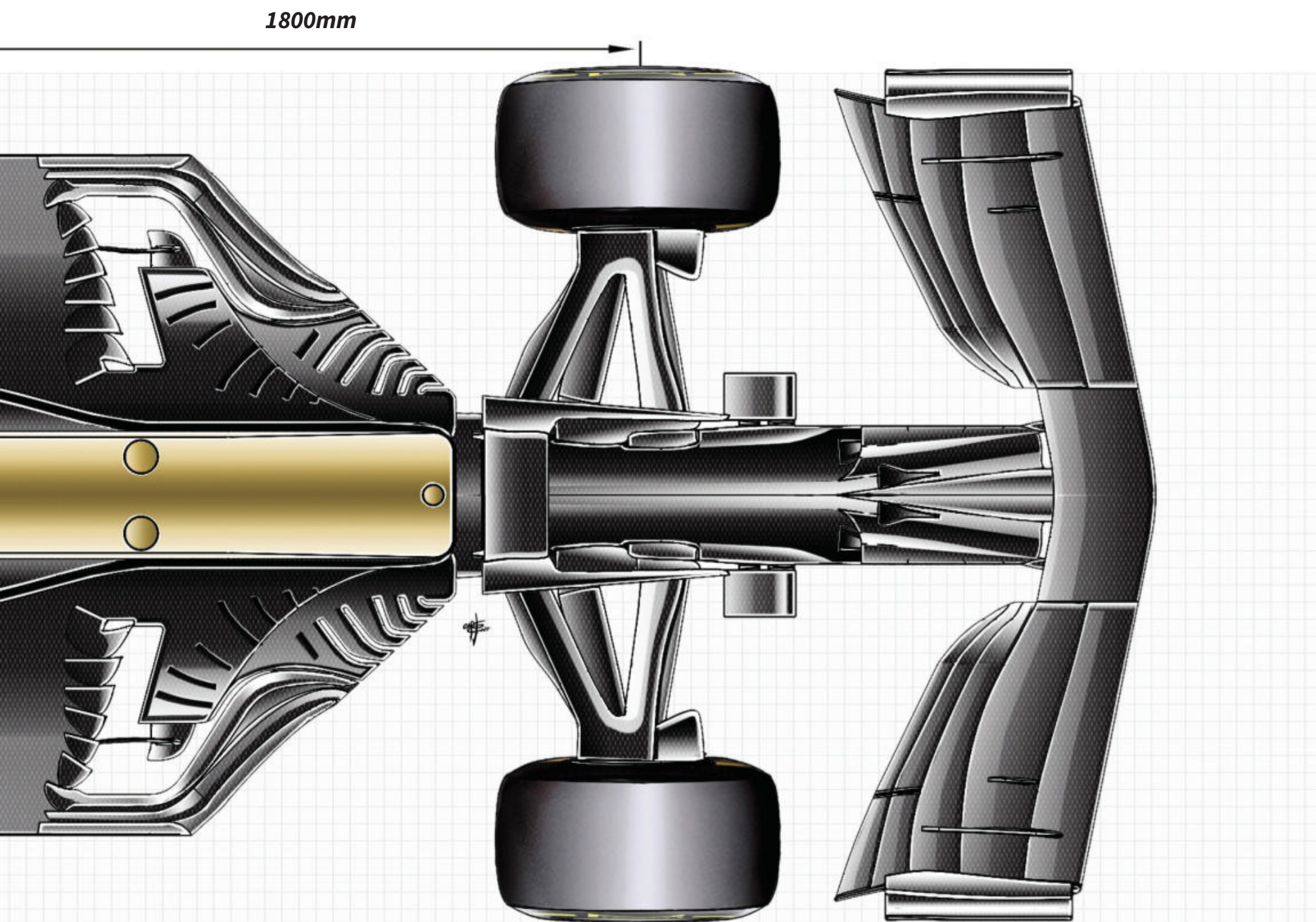
When the decision was made to shove Formula 1's technical overhaul and return to true ground-effect cars back a year, the suggestion was that 2021 would end up as something of a holding year. But, following the condensed pre-season testing at the Bahrain International Circuit, it seems that the mandated technical changes to the aerodynamics have actually thrown some of the teams a loop. Instead of the 2020 carbon copy that many had been wary of, testing suggested that 2021 may actually offer one of the closest-fought seasons in years.

The biggest changes involve the floor, and the introduction of a triangular exclusion zone ahead of the rear wheel to strip the

cars of some of the aerodynamic tools that teams used to improve the underbody downforce. The slots along the floor's edge are gone, and the diffuser and the brake-duct winglets situated at the rear of the car have also been trimmed back to culminate in a suggested 10% downforce reduction.

Of course, some of the teams have already found ways to claw that back and, despite predictions that 2020's cars will be the fastest for some time, testing times hint at the possibility of the 2021 machinery getting close to last year's pace, if not surpassing it.

Testing's biggest story was the *Freaky Friday*-style reversal in fortunes for Mercedes and Red Bull. The Brackley squad's W12 looked skittish at the rear end, and Valtteri Bottas explained that



it felt “snappy and unpredictable”, while the Red Bull looked particularly stable. The original-grade RB16 was a difficult beast to tame, but the B-spec version suggests that Red Bull has sedated its bucking bronco and found a potent turn of pace.

Then there’s the midfield, which looks even more tightly compressed than last year. McLaren and AlphaTauri enjoyed an excellent weekend in the desert, while the Alpine A521 also looked to be a competitive prospect. Ferrari’s ailments from 2020, according to team principal Mattia Binotto, have been largely cured, but the team still finds itself within the midfield pack. Aston Martin endured iffy reliability but should still factor in the fight, while Alfa Romeo looks to be knocking on the door.

One interesting aspect of the current floor rules is that there seems to be no singular consensus of how best to approach them. Despite (or because of?) the loss of the various tools previously available, the teams have got creative with overcoming those challenges – and that’s what we like to see.

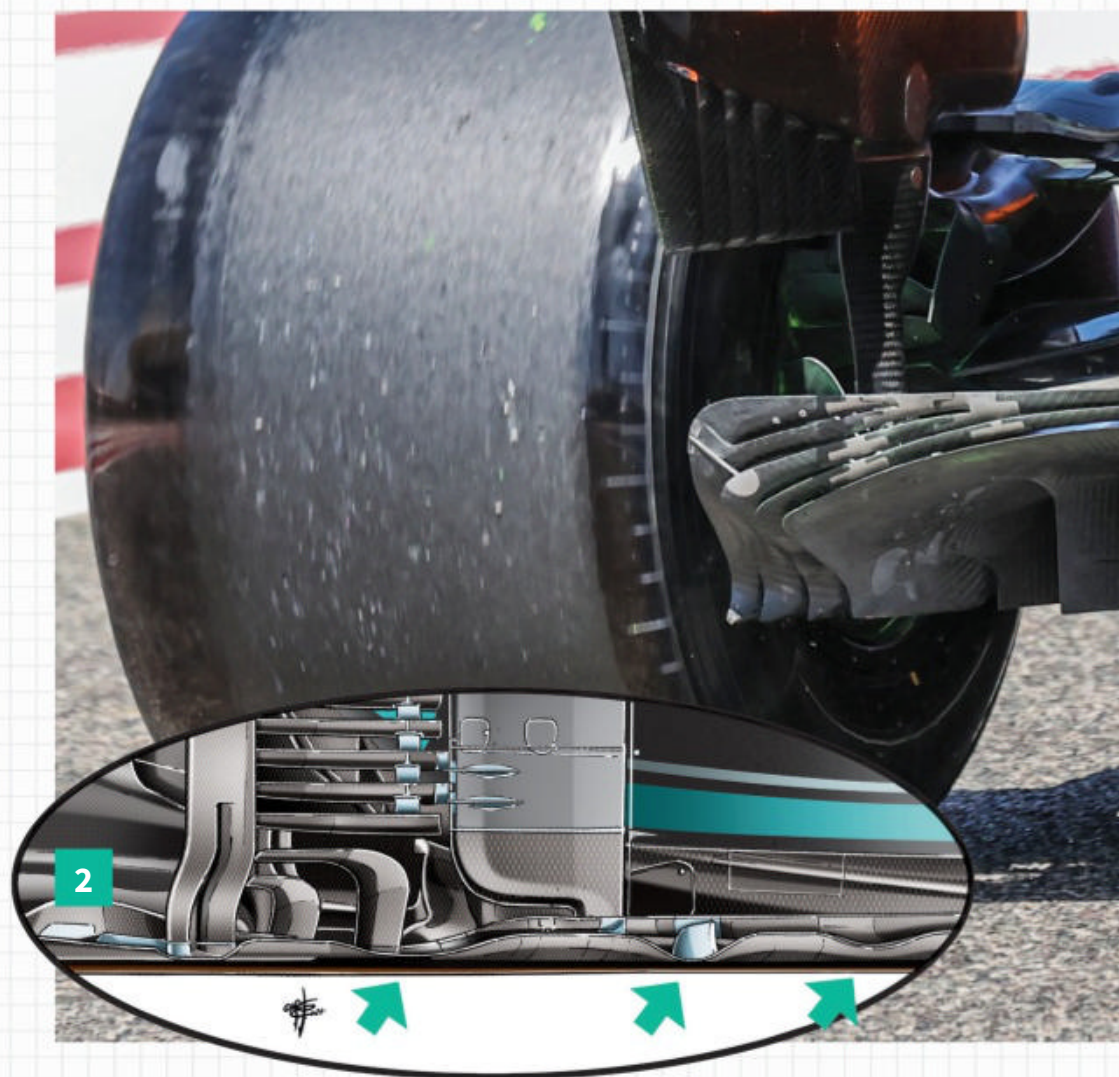
MERCEDES VERSUS RED BULL – A TRUE TITLE SCRAP?

As tantalising as the prospect of an actual title fight can be, Mercedes boss Toto Wolff says that the team has found the hair in the soup. Be that as it may, the Red Bull camp is particularly happy with the way pre-season testing went, and the purveyors of caffeinated fizz have certainly looked energised over the sojourn in Bahrain.

Red Bull introduced an updated rear suspension package on its RB16B, placing its tokens on updating the rear of the car, including the gearbox casing, to dial out the waywardness that plagued the team in the early part of last season. It has persevered with the split-end upper wishbones to open up the passage of airflow at the rear, placing the suspension components as high up as possible to improve its interaction with the diffuser.

In front of the rear tyres, the team has introduced a number of fins – three in the rear corner (**1a**), which appear to be placed to assist with sealing off the diffuser. Further forward, a much larger fin (**1b**) has also appeared to aggressively turn airflow outwards, and the slight overhang in its interaction with the lip towards the front of the floor should also help to compartmentalise the clean underbody flow and any turbulence attempting to enter.

The changes at the rear have also helped the team to open up some of the floor space on top, allowing Red Bull’s »

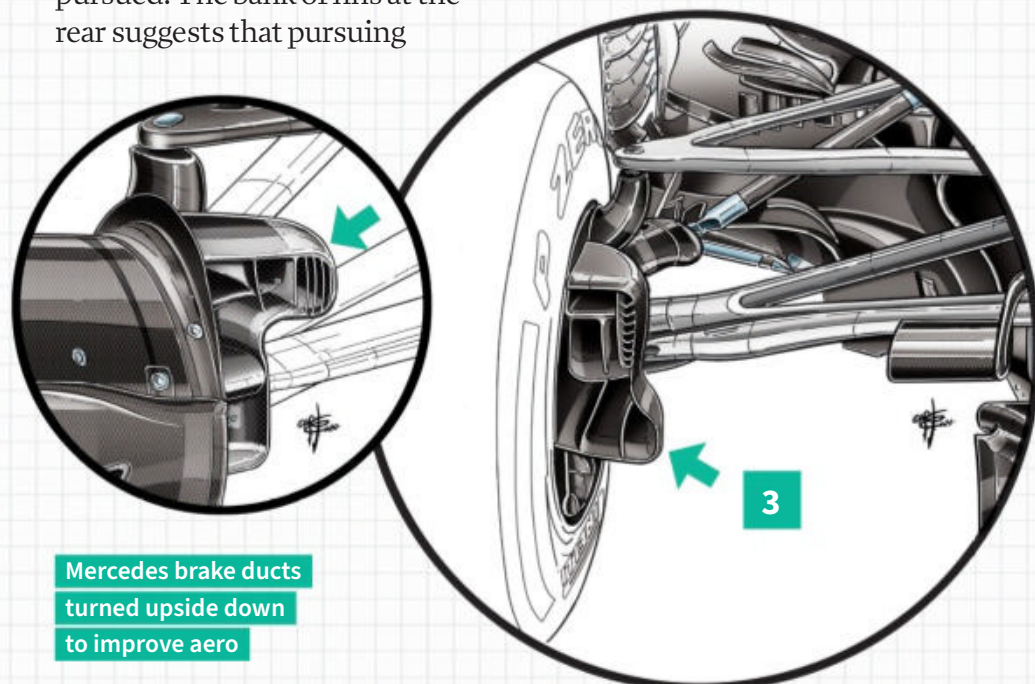


aerodynamicists to help build the right levels of pressure to allow the underside to work its magic.

Mercedes, meanwhile, has a completely different approach to the redefined floor formula. Both it and Red Bull took great pains to hide their new floors; neither team was willing to unveil theirs early and hand rivals a chance to develop their own adaptations. Nonetheless, there's nothing to hide in testing – to some degree at least – and Mercedes eventually had to show its scalloped floor in public.

Teams have been using scrolls in this area for years, helping to add a little extra downforce by increasing the possibility for airflow to expand underneath the car, particularly when the car is in yaw during cornering. One theory behind Mercedes' use of five miniature scrolls (**2**) is that, much in the same way as a diffuser uses internal fences to ensure that it remains more effective by reducing the chance for airflow to mix and create turbulence, breaking up the scroll does so too.

It also features a square cut-off before the floor tapers in, which should introduce a tip vortex that can help to seal the floor, an addition that numerous teams have pursued. The bank of fins at the rear suggests that pursuing



Mercedes brake ducts turned upside down to improve aero



the outwash path is still in vogue to extricate dirty airflow away from the diffuser zone. At the front, Mercedes also flipped its brake ducts (3) upside down, which should interact better with the front-wing geometry.

McLAREN AND ALPHATAURI PUSH THE LIMITS

The constructors' championship positions between third and seventh could, theoretically, fall in any order. If McLaren continues its progress, having enjoyed a successful test, there's every chance that it could repeat that feat from 2020.

You'd have forgiven McLaren for enduring a few teething problems during the Bahrain test, as switching to a new engine supplier and adapting a car to fit it is hardly the work of a moment. But the MCL35M showed no signs of that being the case.

The team was also responsible for one of the more high-profile tech finds of the Bahrain prelude, having found a workaround to the new diffuser restrictions. The FIA had made the decision to trim the fences within the diffuser by 50mm to reduce its overall effectiveness, pairing that with the floor-size reduction to inhibit downforce.

McLaren, however, found a way to embed the fences in the central part of the diffuser (4), dropping below the 50mm cut-off to find extra performance. It seems that, by shallowing out the centre part of the diffuser, McLaren has found a space to fit those added fences in. The area that the fence height applies to is from 250mm either side of the centreline of the car, and so it seems that the design is very much legal – in fact, the other teams have reached that consensus too.

AlphaTauri also impressed in testing, as the AT02 looked to be a very benign-handling car that also proved to be reliable. Logging 422 laps – the joint most with Alfa Romeo – the Italian team has started 2021 in a surefooted manner, culminating in rookie driver Yuki Tsunoda setting the second-quickest time of the test, a tenth off Max Verstappen's 1m28.960s headline time.

The team put its tokens onto its new nose, opting for a more tapered design without the thumb-tip crash structure used in recent seasons. Although the team therefore could not use tokens to change the »

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front of the chassis and introduce the entire Red Bull front-suspension package, which uses a double-bulkhead arrangement to fit a continuous lower wishbone, it has taken the Red Bull concept from last season and adapted it for its own purposes.

AlphaTauri can buy in Red Bull's 2020 suspension without using any tokens, as it is already a homologated component, but must use it in a way that does not require any changes to the chassis. It modified the position of its steering arm, although steering geometry can be changed free of tokens, so long as it doesn't affect the inboard part of the suspension. It has ditched the split upper wishbone for a more conventional conjoined version, but has seemingly followed Red Bull's lead in introducing the split lower wishbone, although it seems that the two legs connect within the wheelhub.

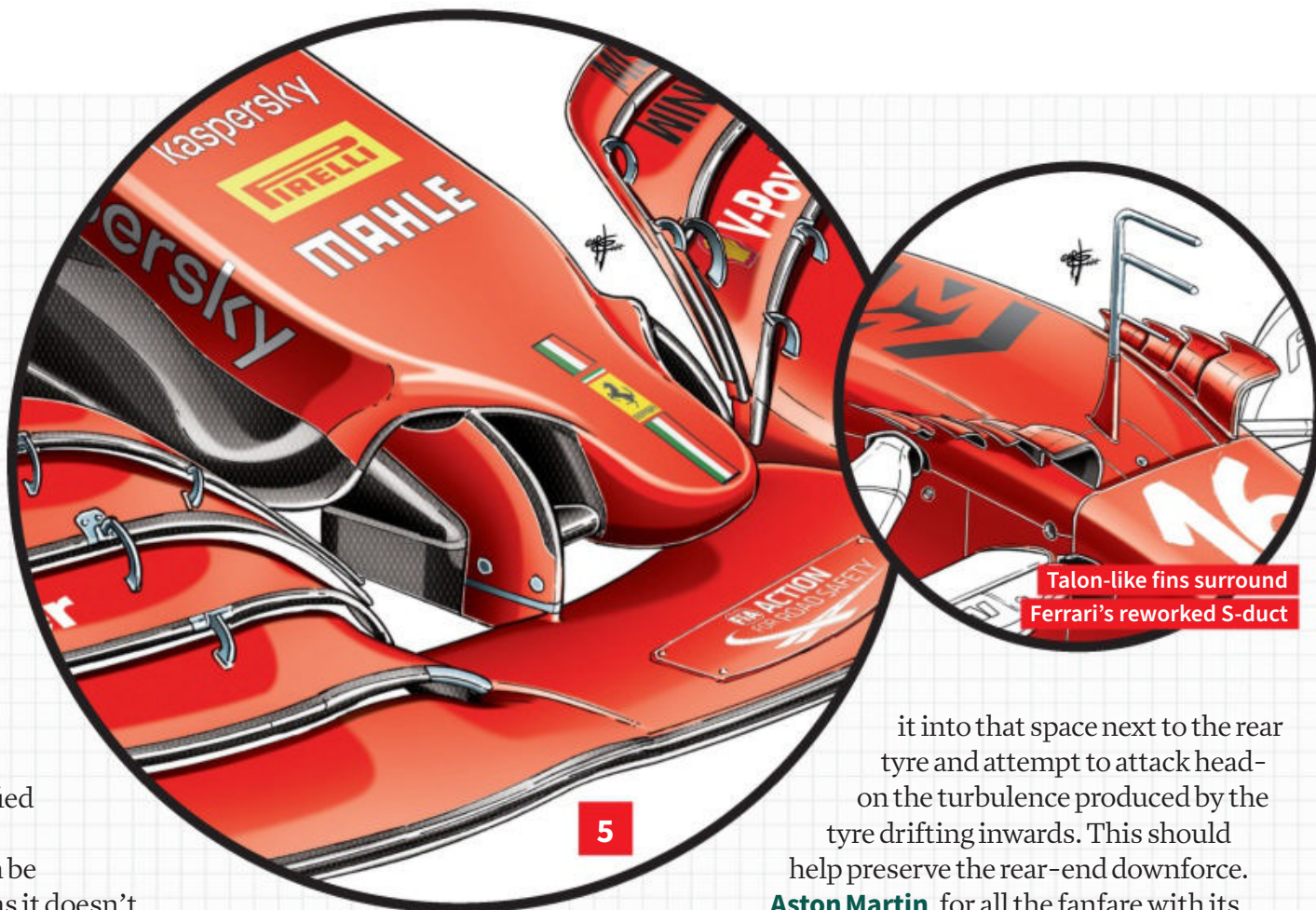
THE REST OF THE MIDFIELD FIGHT

Now dressed in its striking new blue livery, **Alpine** also looked strong – if a little under the radar at times. One of the most talked-about aspects of the car was its large air-intake assembly, and Alpine spent its tokens on fixing up the rear part of the A521. By reducing the size of the sidepods, Alpine crammed some of its cooling solutions within the airbox to draw comparisons to the Ligier JS5 – helpfully fuelled by the similar colour schemes. In truth, the previous Renault RS20 engine cover had been pretty massive, but was masked slightly by the black colour scheme, but the 2021 car has taken that a step further.

Alpine executive director Marcin Budkowski quipped that he was “surprised by the amount of body-shaming” of the 2021 car, but explained that the team found more gains by slimming down the sidepods and, even though there was the danger of upsetting the car's centre of gravity, the aerodynamic benefit offsets that.

Ferrari logged a lot of laps too and, although the team had put a lot of effort into redefining the rear end in tandem with its engine, it also made a number of changes at the front, reshaping the nose without the use of any tokens. Moving the mounting pylons (5) further inboard opened up the cape section alongside the nose, also assisted by the more gradual transition to the tip of the crash structure.

But the team also found a space at the rear to place a series of fins on top of the floor ahead of the diffuser. These direct airflow slightly outwards, and this can guide



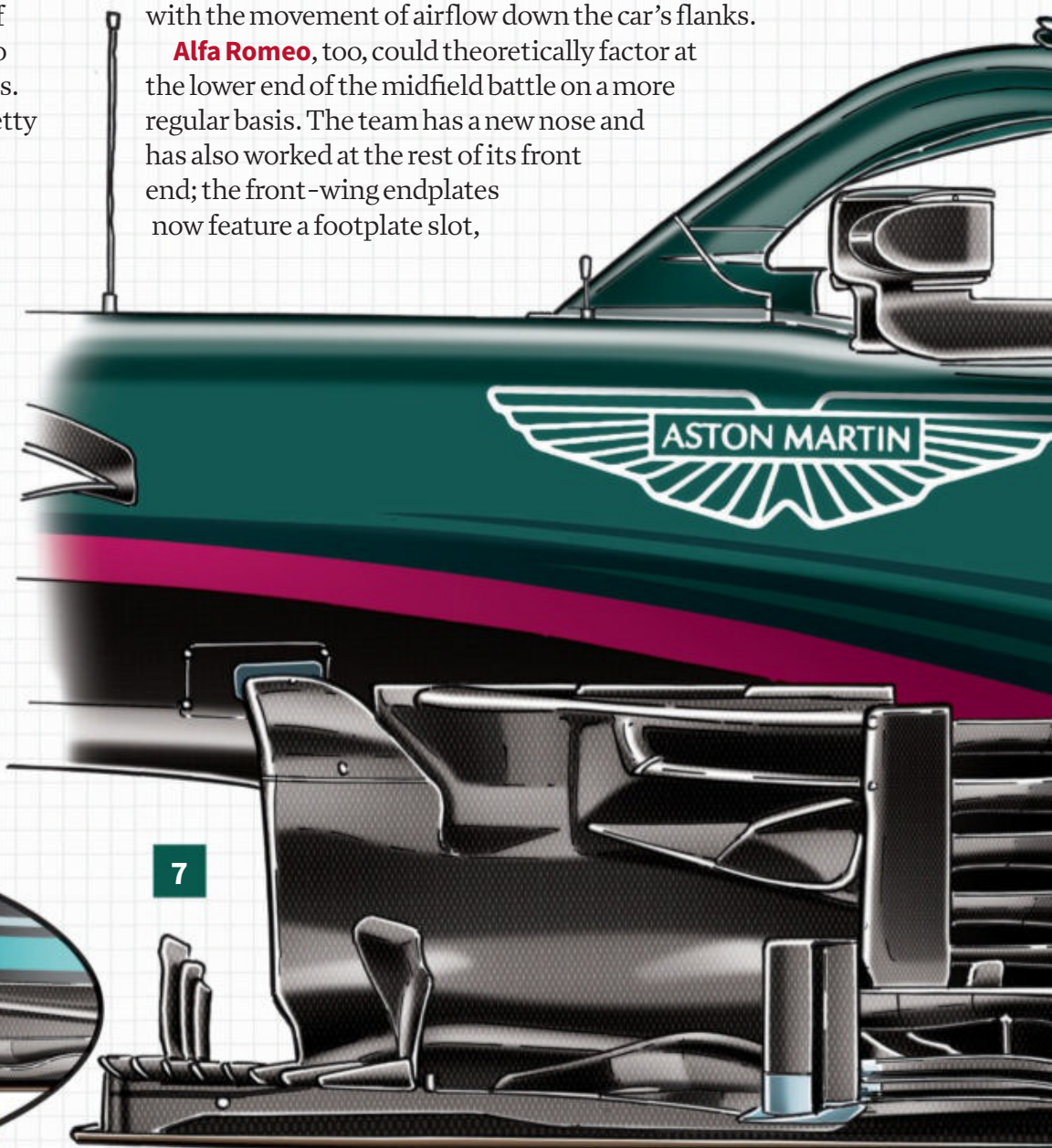
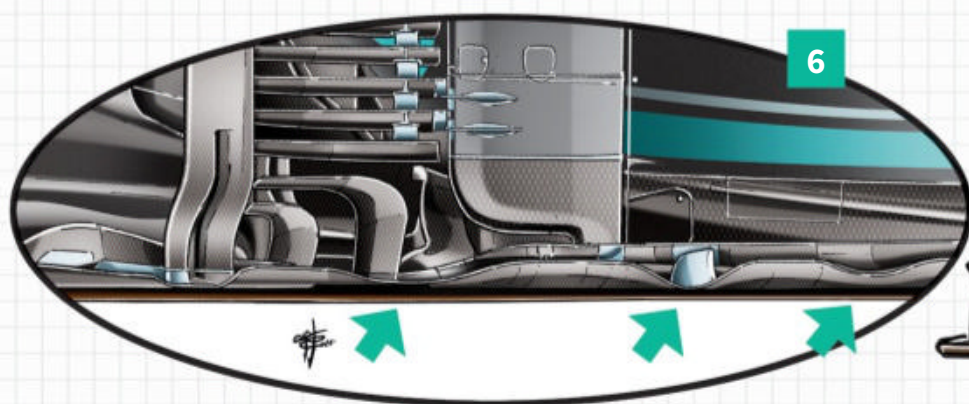
it into that space next to the rear tyre and attempt to attack head-on the turbulence produced by the tyre drifting inwards. This should help preserve the rear-end downforce.

Aston Martin, for all the fanfare with its green livery, endured a tricky weekend at the

Sakhir circuit. Gearbox and turbo-boost issues plagued Sebastian Vettel, although Lance Stroll was able to put some healthy mileage on the AMR21. It, like Mercedes (6), opted for an aggressive approach towards the front of the floor (7), although was in a less-rippled formation compared to that of its engine supplier.

The team has also poured a lot of resource into its redefined bargeboard package over the winter, given its transition to the higher-mounted inlets ahead of the new season. Like many, it has opted for the Venetian blind-style array of winglets mounted to the sidepods, which should provide a slight downforce boost and help with the movement of airflow down the car's flanks.

Alfa Romeo, too, could theoretically factor at the lower end of the midfield battle on a more regular basis. The team has a new nose and has also worked at the rest of its front end; the front-wing endplates now feature a footplate slot,



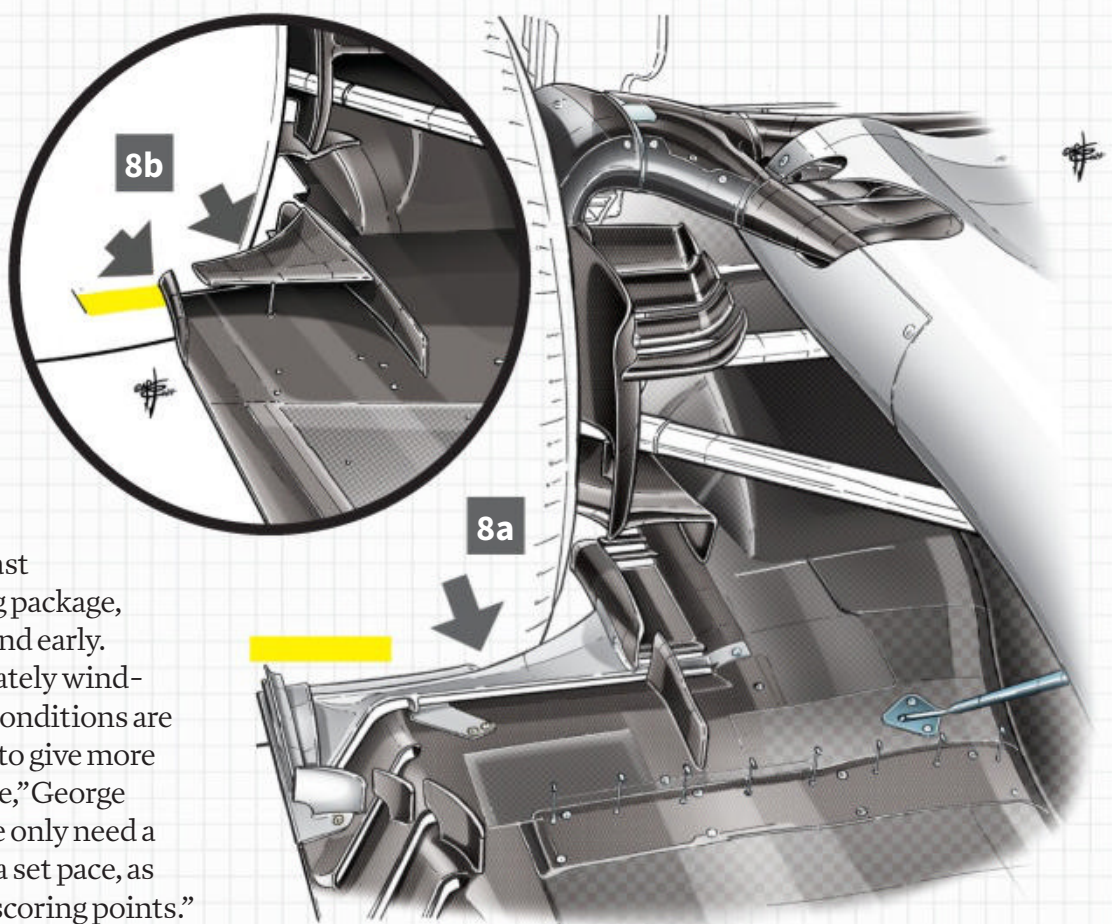
looking to add to the effective surface of the endplate and improve its outwash capability. Although Kimi Raikkonen's Sunday best lap was on low fuel, the Finn says his first impressions of the C41 are much better than last year's car, so the team should, theoretically, move forward a bit.

THE BATTLE AGAINST THE WOODEN SPOON

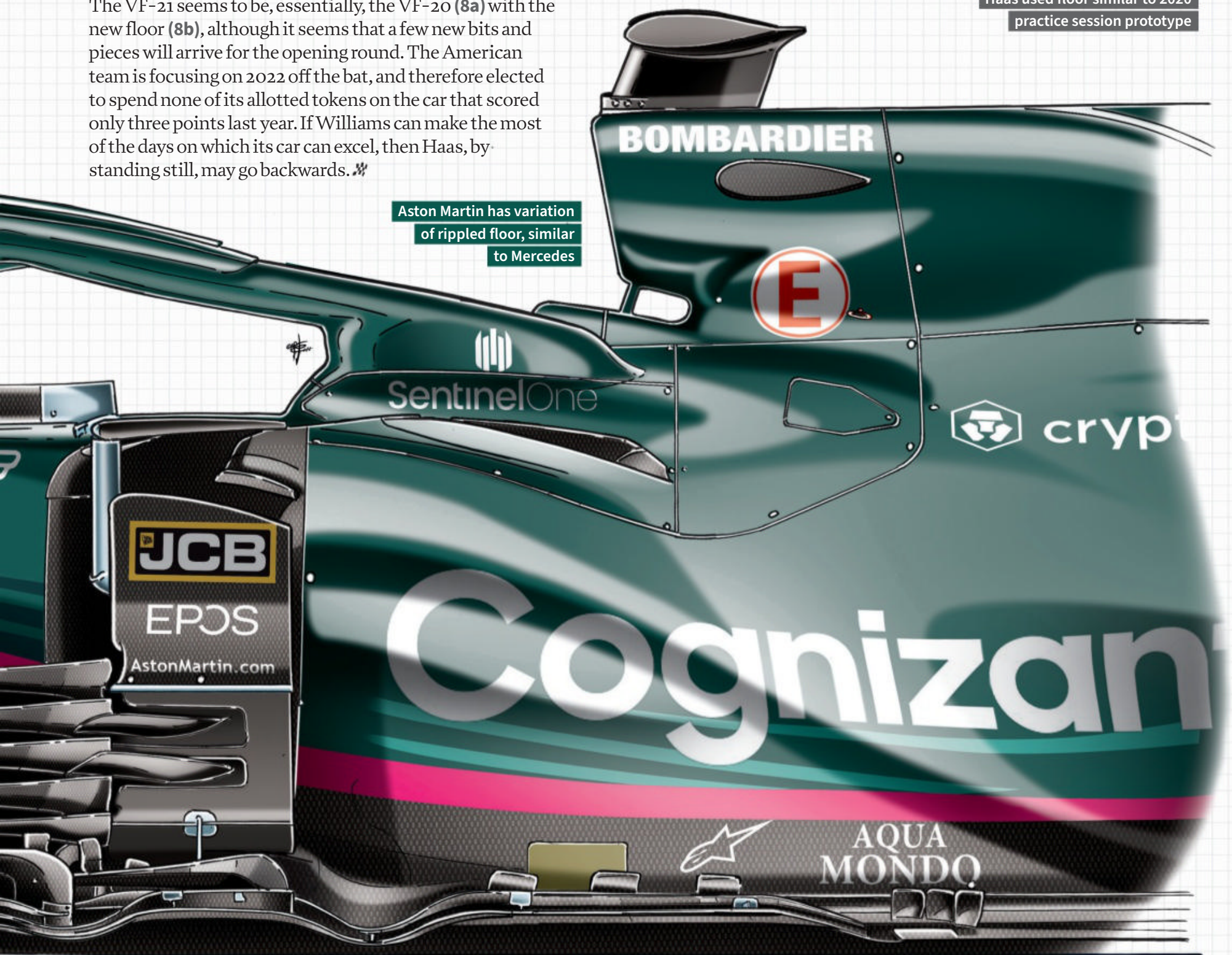
Williams looks in better nick this season, after putting its tokens into the car's internal components to slash weight, so the team now has ballast to play with. Its bargeboard array looks more complex than last year's, and Williams has also redefined its front-wing package, as it seems to be focusing on controlling the air nice and early.

The team has admitted that it has created a deliberately wind-sensitive car to extract more performance when the conditions are more serene. "We've opted to go down a bit of a route to give more downforce at the expense of being a bit more sensitive," George Russell explained. "Ultimately, we recognised that we only need a couple of [good races], and if we were consistently at a set pace, as we probably were last year, we consistently won't be scoring points."

Haas, meanwhile, has done very little with its 2021 package. The VF-21 seems to be, essentially, the VF-20 (8a) with the new floor (8b), although it seems that a few new bits and pieces will arrive for the opening round. The American team is focusing on 2022 off the bat, and therefore elected to spend none of its allotted tokens on the car that scored only three points last year. If Williams can make the most of the days on which its car can excel, then Haas, by standing still, may go backwards. ❄



Haas used floor similar to 2020 practice session prototype



Aston Martin has variation of rippled floor, similar to Mercedes

i FORÇA BARÇA!



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Don't settle for your only experience of authentic Spanish food being a stroll around a foreign supermarket. The Mercat de la Boqueria is where you'll find a true taste of Spain and Barcelona. If you're staying in an apartment or camping near the circuit, this is where you'll want to shop for authentic Spanish ham and meats, fresh fruit and veg, and delicious fish. It claims it's the 'best market in the world'... and there's only one way to find out.

4. Palacio del Flamenco

If Barcelona had a soundtrack, it would be flamenco. The genre became popular in Spain in the 18th century, with 'tablaos flamencos' taking off in the 20th century. Here, dancers and musicians would improvise and use the dance to express themselves, and they later evolved into cafés for the public to gather and enjoy. Palacio del Flamenco is one of the best venues you can gather for dinner and an authentic show – but be sure to book early to avoid disappointment.

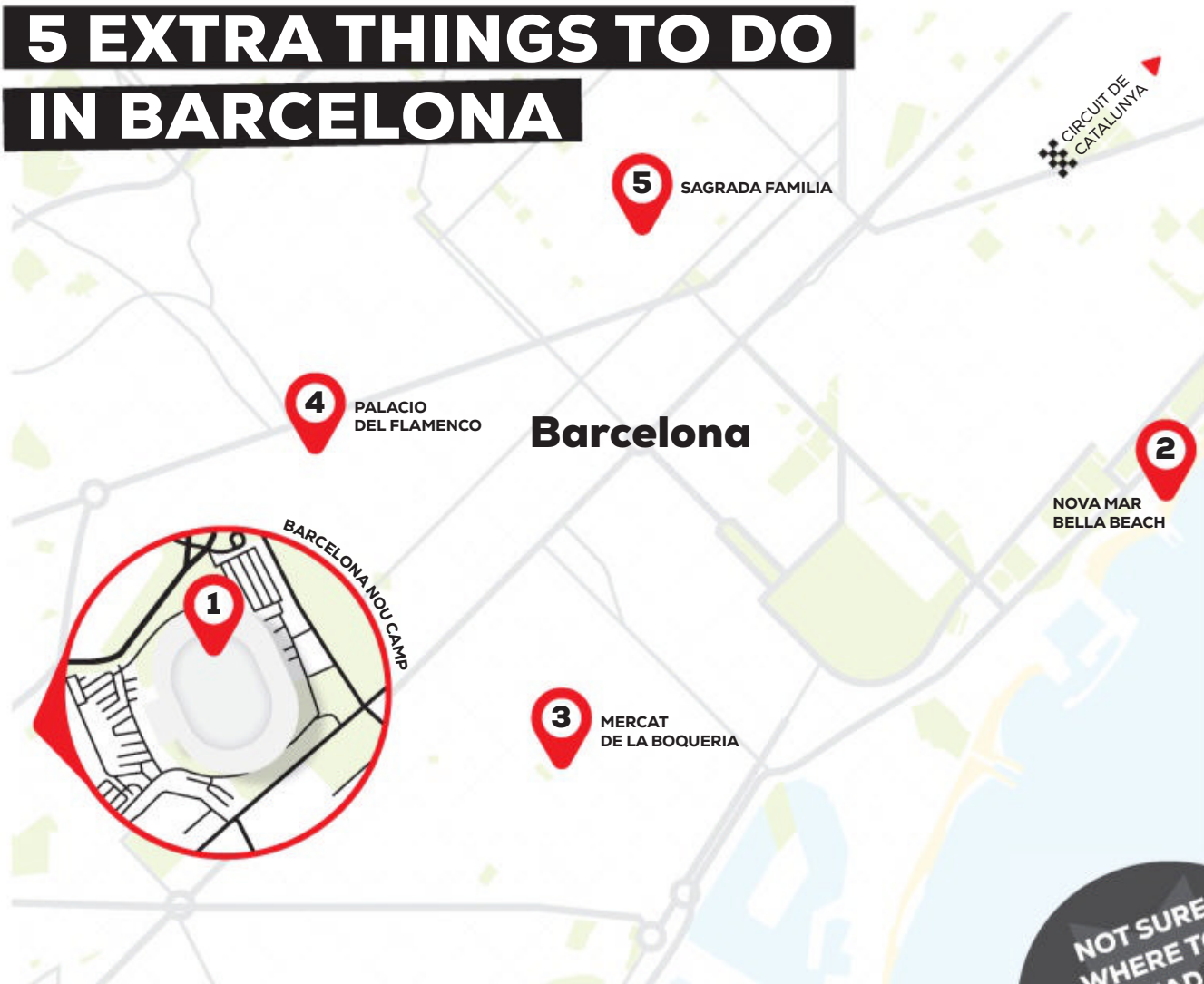


1. Camp Nou

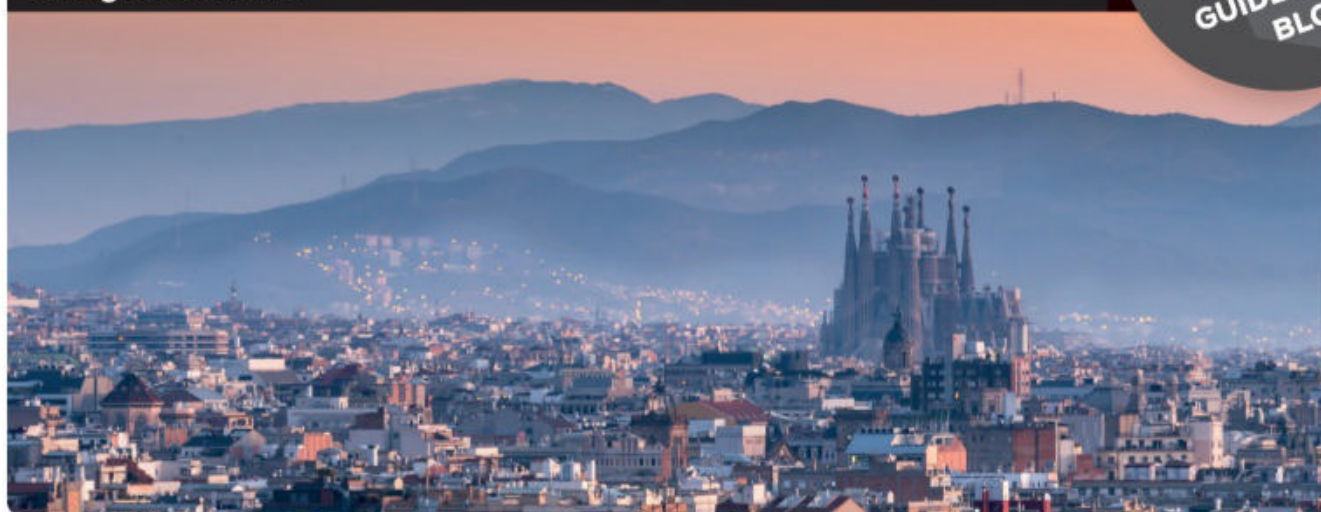
FC Barcelona are hailed as one of the world's all-time great football clubs. And they play in an arena fit for that title. The 100,000-capacity stadium is the biggest in Europe, and has been the stage for some of the sport's greatest matches.

Tours of the ground include visits to the changing rooms, to see where the likes of Lionel Messi get psyched before a match, and a walk along the pitch – including the chance to get the manager's view from the first team dugout. Football aficionados will enjoy perusing the museum, which showcases the countless trophies the team has won over its 120-year history.

5 EXTRA THINGS TO DO IN BARCELONA



5. Sagrada Familia



It's hard to go more than five minutes in Barcelona without stumbling across one of Antoni Gaudi's architectural masterpieces. But La Sagrada Familia is surely a grand attraction. Towering over the city, the unfinished basilica has been 138 years in the making, due to be completed in 2026. It's one of the sights to remember of any trip to Barcelona, but if you're after that perfect photo, head to the rooftop bar at nearby Hotel Ayre, where you can enjoy a drink while admiring the intricate designs.

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SEASON
PREVIEW

Zhou's time to shine

China's man-most-likely for F1 is entering his third year of F2 this weekend, and has stiff competition from within the Alpine junior stable.

Time to get cracking, then

TOM HOWARD

PHOTOGRAPHY



**motorsport
IMAGES**

Facing a make-or-break, career-defining season at the age of 21 seems absurd, but that prospect awaits Guanyu Zhou as his quest to become China's first Formula 1 driver reaches a crucial stage. This weekend, on the Bahrain Grand Prix undercard, he kicks off his third season in the FIA Formula 2 Championship and, by his own admission, this is realistically his last in the category.

"To be honest, I feel this is going to be the last year [in F2], and I'm sure I can do well if I manage to put everything together," he offers. "The key is to have a good year in F2 and that should open quite a lot of doors for me."

Those doors, he hopes, will be of the F1 variety. Zhou's story is an interesting one, and the UNI Virtuosi driver is well placed for F1 should he be in the top three overall come the Abu Dhabi F2 season finale in December. He already has the backing of the Alpine F1 team as its official test driver for a second year, and is well entrenched in the team's academy system. "It [the test driver role] is quite important," he says. "In the previous years I got a lot of time in the simulator, and to be driving a two-year-old [F1] car gives me more preparation, so when I have the opportunity to go up I am more than ready."

It has been some journey to this point for a driver known to many simply as 'Joe'. He claims to feel 'half-English', having been whisked away from his native Shanghai, China to Sheffield, UK aged 12 to pursue his F1 dream. This came off the back of being spotted as a rising star at the Shanghai Kart Club by former HRT and Caterham F1 test driver and touring car star Ma Qing Hua.

A decade on, Zhou has progressed through the Formula 4 and Formula 3 ranks and now finds himself within sight of the ultimate goal, and perhaps a successful season in F2 could be the final check box. Since his debut F2 season in 2019, he's witnessed Nicolas Latifi (Williams), last year's F2 champion Mick Schumacher (Haas), Nikita Mazepin (Haas) and Yuki Tsunoda (AlphaTauri) graduate from F2 to the promised land.

After finishing seventh overall in his rookie F2 year, sixth last season came as a disappointment, but it could have been so much better had mechanical issues not struck at the worst possible moments. "Last season was actually pretty eventful and a little bit stressful," Zhou recounts. "We didn't get to show our full potential as we had technical issues with the engine and the gearbox so we had some DNFs due to those problems. One of them [at the Red Bull Ring] I was leading, and the other was in a podium position going for the win [at Monza]. We lost so many points, and at the end of the day it was a tight championship. It was a year in which I learnt a lot about myself."

Even so, everything seems to be in place for Zhou to shine in 2021

in the familiar surroundings at UNI Virtuosi, but it won't be easy. The championship is stacked with talent, and features drivers of the calibre of Ferrari Driver Academy duo Robert Shwartzman (Prema Racing), who won more races than last year's champion Schumacher, and Marcus Armstrong (DAMS). Carlin's new Williams-affiliated signing Dan Ticktum will also pose a threat. Then there's the battle within at the Alpine Academy: arguably Zhou's biggest challenge is seeing his fellow proteges Christian Lundgaard (ART) and reigning F3 champion Oscar Piastri (Prema) to convince the Anglo-French F1 squad that he's the one for the future.

"It's going to be a very important year," he declares. "I think this year again will see the top 10 drivers be super-strong and close together. I'm ready to hit my target of challenging for the title. All of us [at the Alpine Academy] are very good drivers. I think it's going to be quite a close fight, to be honest. Obviously I'm hoping we don't take each other out in the races, but we will definitely be racing hard against each other."

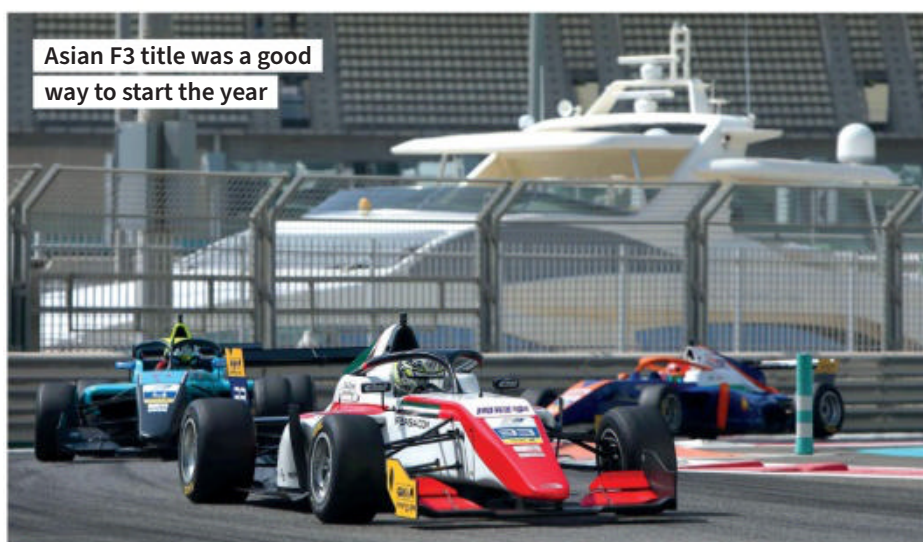
Is there any extra pressure from the high-flying Piastri joining the academy's F2 ranks? "Not really," he responds. "At the end of the day we are trying to do our jobs. If you do your job right I'm sure you can finish ahead of them, so it's all about putting all the small details together for yourself and I'm sure the results will come."

If overcoming his rivals on track wasn't difficult enough, he will also have to master the championship's new three-race weekend format, featuring reversed grids in the two Saturday sprint races. "You have to be consistent," he says. "You have to make sure that you put the car in the top 10 for qualifying, even if you don't have a car good enough for >>





If Zhou can graduate he'd become China's number one in F1



Asian F3 title was a good way to start the year

pole. In this championship you can go pretty well if you have good racecraft, you can stay there with the guy that has had the perfect weekend and hang in there in the points. It opens up opportunities if you can be consistent. I think that's definitely going to be the key. If you have a DNF, especially in race one with the new format, you've pretty much ruined your second race as well."

Winning the Asian F3 title last month has not only boosted his confidence, but also earned Zhou crucial superlicence points that will ensure wherever he finishes in F2 this year, he will meet the criterion of 40 points for the all-important F1 paperwork. But while that was a case of thinking ahead, he maintains that his full focus is on this year. "The main target was to get these points for the superlicence, and I have that

"His one-lap pace is there and his race pace is there, too. He's ready to win, for sure"

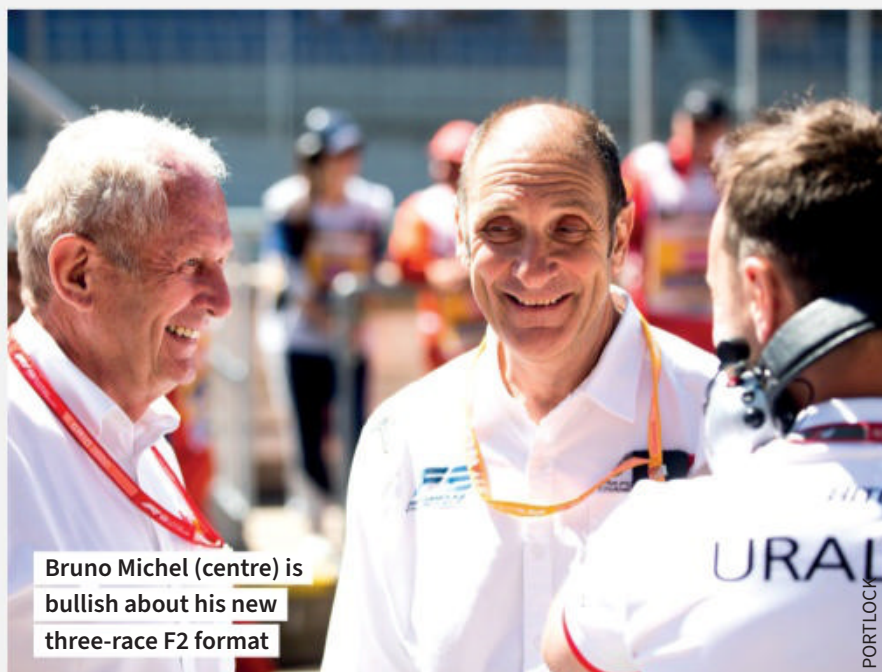
now and I'm just fully focused on F2," he says. "There is no pressure for taking points, but I have to show myself and be really fast, and show what I'm capable of doing."

Virtuosi team boss Andy Roche has witnessed his driver grow into a future F1 star over two years at his Norfolk-based team, but admits that



SUTTON

MICHEL: NO "FUNNY GAMES" WITH NEW FORMAT



Bruno Michel (centre) is bullish about his new three-race F2 format

Formula 2 boss Bruno Michel is adamant that teams and drivers won't "play funny games" with the radical new race weekend format, and says it would be "stupid" for someone to try to manipulate the system, which is one of the biggest changes in the category's history.

Motivated by reducing costs in a difficult economic climate, the championship will continue to host 24 races, but spread across eight events instead of 12, meaning there will be three races instead of two per weekend. Friday's qualifying session will determine the starting order for the first sprint race on Saturday and for Sunday's feature, but with the top

10 inverted for the opener. As before, the fastest driver in qualifying will claim a bonus of four points. A reversed top 10 of the results from the first sprint race will set the grid for Saturday's second sprint race.

The changes have been dubbed "interesting" by many drivers in the paddock, with some suggesting that qualifying on pole may not be the best strategy.

"I'm quite confident it is going to be a success," says Michel. "We have been looking at that very carefully, and if people are thinking that some teams might play funny games by losing positions voluntarily, I think it is completely impossible and if they



Academy colours will switch from Renault yellow to Alpine blue

this year he has to deliver. “This year is hugely important to him,” he says. “He really impressed me at the [pre-season] test. He seemed a lot more laid-back and up for it. It’s his last chance, to be honest with you, to win that championship – he can’t stay another year, can he? He needs to get it done.

Could Zhou race in F1? “Definitely, without a doubt,” fires back Roche. “His one-lap pace is there and his race pace is there, too. He’s ready to win, for sure.”

Should Zhou succeed in all those challenges this year, graduation to F1 is not a given, such is the difficulty of breaking into motorsport’s pinnacle. It can all come down to timing and opportunity. But now is definitely the time for Zhou to make the most of *his* opportunity. 🏁

do that it would be stupid. I don’t see any reason why a driver would have no interest to be on pole position or to be overtaken at some point. I completely doubt there will be anything like this, but of course it is going to have an impact on the strategies of the teams and drivers over a race weekend.

“The most important thing we have in the new format is the feature race is going to be on Sunday just before Formula 1, which was not possible in the past, and that is something that is very important for our awareness.”

These new format changes were drafted with the assistance

of F1 organisers, who will be closely monitoring the rollout. To add further spice to the mixing pot, and keep drivers and teams on their toes, Pirelli has introduced brand new hard and medium-compound tyres for this season. The new hard tyre will make its debut this weekend in Bahrain alongside the 2020-spec soft, following a rollout during pre-season testing that proved to be the talking point of the session. Drivers observed that the hard tyres had much less grip and were much more complicated to manage, which will be a key factor in races this season.



Zhou has raced in Europe since he was 12 and says he feels ‘half-English’

ENTRY LIST

NO	DRIVER	TEAM
1	Robert Shwartzman (RUS)	Prema Racing
2	Oscar Piastri (AUS)	Prema Racing
3	Guanyu Zhou (CHN)	UNI-Virtuosi Racing
4	Felipe Drugovich (BRA)	UNI-Virtuosi Racing
5	Dan Ticktum (GBR)	Carlin
6	Jehan Daruvala (IND)	Carlin
7	Liam Lawson (NZL)	Hitech Grand Prix
8	Juri Vips (EST)	Hitech Grand Prix
9	Christian Lundgaard (DNK)	ART Grand Prix
10	Theo Pourchaire (FRA)	ART Grand Prix
11	Richard Verschoor (NLD)	MP Motorsport
12	Lirim Zendeli (DEU)	MP Motorsport
14	David Beckmann (DEU)	Charouz Racing System
15	Guilherme Samaia (BRA)	Charouz Racing System
16	Roy Nissany (ISR)	DAMS
17	Marcus Armstrong (NZL)	DAMS
20	Gianluca Petecof (BRA)	Campos Racing
21	Ralph Boschung (CHE)	Campos Racing
22	Matteo Nannini (ITA)	HWA Racelab
23	Alessio Deledda (ITA)	HWA Racelab
24	Bent Viscaal (NLD)	Trident
25	Marino Sato (JPN)	Trident

CALENDAR

NO	VENUE	DATE
1	Sakhir (BHR)	27-28 March
2	Monte Carlo (MCO)	21-22 May
3	Baku (AZE)	5-6 June
4	Silverstone (GBR)	17-18 July
5	Monza (ITA)	11-12 September
6	Sochi (RUS)	25-26 September
7	Jeddah (SAU)	4-5 December
8	Yas Marina (ARE)	11-12 December

SEASON
PREVIEW

Can Marquez regain his crown in 2021?

The six-time world champion is unable to contest the first two grands prix, but he remains the essential benchmark and nobody can rule against him taking another title

LEWIS DUNCAN

PHOTOGRAPHY GOLD AND GOOSE



Such is the otherworldly aura that radiates from Marc Marquez that, even after he sat out almost an entire season, and will miss the first two races this year, we start a new MotoGP campaign seriously considering his title prospects.

The last time we saw the six-time world champion on his factory Honda, he was pulling out of the Andalusian Grand Prix last July as he conceded defeat to his recently broken right arm. Three operations later, Marquez's arm has healed to a point where he can ride again, but on Monday he confirmed that the opening double-header at Losail, comprising this weekend's Qatar GP and next week's Doha GP, will take place without him.

The world championship needs Marquez back, to provide a reference to the rest of the grid, which will in turn allow it the chance to

prove that the results we saw in 2020 were no accident. But the world championship that Marquez will return to has taken on a wildly different complexion to the one he left. Nine riders won grands prix last season, the campaign won by Joan Mir on the factory Suzuki. In Marquez's absence, more riders were able to realise what they are capable of.

Suzuki started 2020 believing it could fight for the championship with its new bike, but few predicted that would come to pass. Now it starts 2021 on what is largely its title-winning bike with the target on its back.

COVID-19-enforced cost-saving measures mean all but KTM and Aprilia will contest the 2021 season with their 2020 engines. Aprilia can continue development because it's still a concession manufacturer, while KTM's allowance was a compromise for losing its results-based concessions last season >>



Marquez failed to make the start of Andalusian GP





Consistency was key to Mir's 2020 crown, scoring the most podiums but just one win

courtesy of its three grand prix victories.

Mir has maintained throughout this winter that Marquez will surely be favourite for the title if he comes back in good time and is fully fit. But the make-up of this season remains a mystery. MotoGP is hopeful of a full 19-race schedule, but the COVID-19 situation worldwide remains in flux, and already the US and Argentinian GPs have been postponed. They surely won't be the last to lose their slots either.

Consistency carried Mir to his maiden crown last year. He scored the most podiums of any rider in 2020, despite only one of those being a win, and it's this trait that the rest of the field will need to get on top of to take the fight to Suzuki.

Suzuki's pre-season was under the radar. Neither Mir nor Alex Rins are completely sold on Suzuki's new chassis, which wasn't

as strong as the 2020 version under braking, and so both will likely start the year on the older one. Mir admitted that he felt only "70%" ready to start the season, but Rins is convinced that, come the Qatar GP this weekend, Suzuki will be up there, just as it was on MotoGP's last Losail visit in 2019.

Suzuki's title defence took on an interesting note during the off-season when talisman team boss Davide Brivio departed for Alpine in Formula 1. All is calm within Suzuki as it moves forward with its new management committee, made up of seven high-profile figures from the race team. But Rins and Mir will be evenly matched, and there could be disruption in their stable dynamic with Brivio's absence.

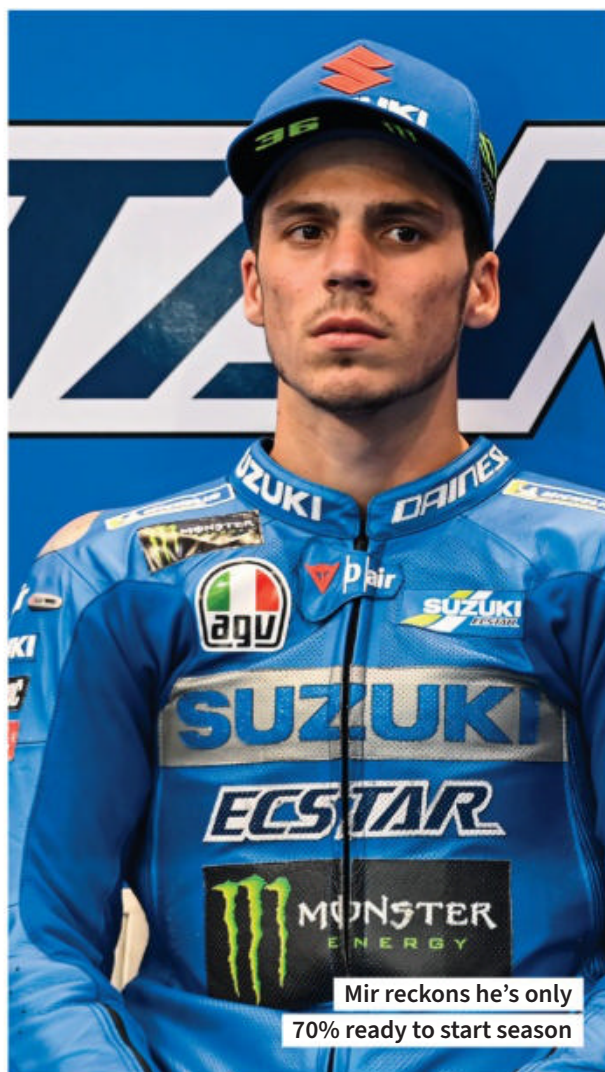
Harmony is something that must be had at Yamaha this year after a difficult 2020. The use of the adjective 'difficult' seems odd given

that the Japanese marque won half of last year's races. But the factory team's new line-up of Maverick Vinales and Fabio Quartararo ended the season dejected as the inconsistent 2020 M1 demolished their title hopes.

Yamaha promised during the off-season that its new chassis would be closer in spec to Franco Morbidelli's 'A-spec' M1, essentially the 2019 frame, which he rode to three victories and runner-up in the championship for Petronas SRT. After initial uncertainty about the feeling of the new chassis, it was praised as being a step forward over the 2020 version, with better turning. Yamaha rounded out the test 2-3-4 on combined times and displayed strong race pace. Vinales, who led the Yamaha charge, feels the 2021 bike is "ready" to race.

"I felt very comfortable on it from the first lap, which is always a good sign, and





“Key to Yamaha’s title challenge will be how both Vinales and Quartararo deal with the bad days”

also the lap times come quite easy,” says Vinales of the new chassis. But both Vinales and Quartararo are cautious. Yamaha has always gone well in Qatar, and it always performs strongly in testing, when there is an abundance of Michelin grip on the circuit. The problems tend to come during race weekends when there’s also Moto2 Dunlop rubber down, as well as on low-grip tracks.

“The bike feels really, really good because the track has a lot of grip,” warns Quartararo. “So, I think we will struggle in Portimao... tracks where there is low grip I think we will struggle.”

The inability to develop its engine will leave Yamaha once again defenceless in a straight line against Ducati and Honda, but Vinales in particular focused a lot of time in testing to perfect the M1’s starts to ensure he can get out front from the off and ride his own lines.

The most crucial element of Yamaha’s title challenge will be how both Vinales and Quartararo deal with the bad days, which they often didn’t do so well in 2020. Yamaha’s bringing of “substantial” updates to Morbidelli’s older bike suggests this time it’s spreading its eggs across all of its baskets.

What Valentino Rossi gets up to in his >>

APRILIA’S MOST IMPORTANT YEAR



Few would have predicted that, of the two manufacturers allowed to build all-new bikes for 2021, Aprilia would be the one to impress. This year is Aprilia’s seventh since it returned to MotoGP, and it has very little to show for the toil it has put in.

In 2022 Aprilia will break away from the Gresini squad it has partnered since 2015 to become a standalone factory entry. It will need to build its own team of on-track mechanics for that. It’s also looking into the prospect of supplying a team with bikes in 2022. With all that, and the opportunity afforded to it to close the gap to the leaders, it’s no wonder that CEO Massimo Rivola reckons 2021 is Aprilia’s “most important” year in MotoGP.

Aleix Espargaro, who has tested the 2021 RS-GP since last November, has enthused over the new bike, noting its better acceleration courtesy of its new aero package and redesigned engine; the elimination of chatter through the bike’s better harmonics; and the fact that Aprilia can play with weight balance now that it comes under the minimum 157kg limit.

Espargaro ended Qatar testing sixth overall and displayed encouraging

long-run pace. This wasn’t dissimilar to how testing ended for Aprilia in 2020 but, one issue aside, it had no major mechanical dramas this time – that wasn’t the case in 2020, in testing or during the season.

The bike still needs to be improved in the corners, Espargaro feeling that the RS-GP has become heavy in the turns, and that power is still lacking. And what effect Aprilia’s decision to put Lorenzo Savadori on the other bike, over Bradley Smith, will

“FROM THE BOTTOM OF MY HEART I THINK WE DESERVE A GOOD YEAR”

have on its crucial test team remains unclear, as there’s no indication that Smith will continue in this role in 2021 despite Rivola’s keenness. But overall, things are looking good. “From the bottom of my heart I think we deserve a good year, we deserve to do maybe not the definitive step, but we deserve to fight with the best bikes, with the best riders on the grid,” says Espargaro. “We struggled a little last season, but this year the bike looks better.”





“Perhaps the ‘beautiful’ atmosphere Rossi now finds himself in can end that win drought dating back to 2017”

new surroundings is largely inconsequential to this. His focus remains upon trying to stay competitive enough to justify extending his MotoGP career as he enters his 26th season of grand prix racing (and 22nd in the top tier). He’s starting the year more buoyantly than he ended the last one, and perhaps the “beautiful” atmosphere the 42-year-old now finds himself in can end that win drought dating back to 2017.

At Ducati the drought is one of titles, and its youthful new line-up is gunning for its first in 14 years. Jack Miller’s unofficial lap record in the Qatar test was backed up by excellent race pace, and the Australian is exuding all the confidence offered by his branding as the pre-season favourite. “I enjoy it a lot,” he says. “It hasn’t really happened to me ever in MotoGP, so it’s a fantastic feeling.

But the biggest thing is to keep our feet on the ground, keep working towards the goal.”

If Miller is to be a true title contender, he must improve his consistency. He scored four podiums in 2020 with Pramac, one fewer than the season before, and has been without a win since 2016. Consistency will also be the key for his team-mate Francesco Bagnaia, also stepping up from Pramac.

Although there were flashes of brilliance for Bagnaia in 2020, such as leading the Emilia Romagna GP and his San Marino GP podium, his season was blighted by way too many crashes, the Italian falling out of four of the final five rounds. That form simply won’t be acceptable at the factory team, not least because there will be four other fast Ducatis on the grid.

Johann Zarco and rookie Jorge Martin

— who was the top debutant in testing — line up at Pramac, while last year’s Moto2 championship 1-2 Enea Bastianini and Luca Marini will ride for Avintia. All of them will be hoping to prove their worth for factory seats in the near future.

In Marquez’s own backyard the challenge looks fiercer than it has for a few years. Pol Espargaro’s adaptation to the Honda RC213V following four years at KTM was remarkable during pre-season testing. After just four days, he was only 0.7 seconds off the pace on combined times with a qualifying run that certainly wasn’t representative. His long-run pace on used rubber was also encouraging, comparable to that of the Yamahas and Miller on the Ducati.

Much still has to be done before he is fully adapted to the bike, particularly its critical front end, but Espargaro feels he has things “under control” for the start of the season. He’s under no illusion about the task facing him in jumping onto the grid’s most difficult bike and taking on this generation’s greatest talent: “I feel this chapter of my career is an adventure — something to improve myself and at the same time discover within myself who I am, how fast I am.”

Espargaro believes the RC213V is the bike best-suited to his aggressive riding style, but it seems that Honda’s year without Marquez allowed it to build a machine slightly more tameable than its predecessors. Alex Marquez’s double podiums in his rookie



**Youthful rider line-up
set on ending Ducati's
14-year title drought**

Pol Espargaro has adapted well to Honda's machine



Oliveira says KTM "hit a wall" in testing

season were proof of this, but a crash-strewn pre-season that left him with a fractured foot has somewhat hidden the younger Marquez brother's potential coming into the season.

But with Marquez Jr, his LCR team-mate Takaaki Nakagami and Espargaro, Honda should no longer need to rely on just one of its horses for top results.

KTM, on the other hand, may already be feeling the loss of its prized asset Espargaro. Fears of 'super engines' were bandied about last year by its rivals, and scepticism reigned when the marque's motorsport boss Pit Beirer said that it hadn't radically redesigned its engine over the winter.

But it really seems that it hasn't. The RC16 was 10km/h (6mph) down on the top Ducati through the Qatar speed traps in testing. And to add to that, testing in general was underwhelming. Double race winner Miguel Oliveira was its top rider in 16th overall, 1.3s off the pace, while 2020's top rookie Brad Binder was 1.5s down after a crash-filled test.

As Oliveira noted, KTM had "hit a wall" in Qatar. But the blame has largely been laid at the door of the circuit, the Losail track's nature preventing the RC16 from making the most of its key strength in braking, and especially turning with the front brake. But if we look at last year, KTM often struggled at places where it hadn't tested, while its Qatar test last season was similarly average. So, things should be better for the opening two race weekends.

"I believe things are a lot worse on paper than they are in reality, or at least what they will be on the race weekend," says Binder. "We know this layout doesn't suit us, but we have good ideas and I'm sure we're going to get much closer to the front."

At the time of writing, Marc Marquez's return date still isn't set in stone. But it's going to happen a lot sooner than anyone expected, which will unsettle some on the grid. Of course, there is no guarantee that the Marquez we get back will be the same after such a long layoff.

And the game has changed since he's been away. The grid is arguably more competitive than it has ever been, and there are more riders capable of winning GPs. How Marquez reacts to the greater threat when he returns will not only decide his prospects of a seventh premier-class title, but it may well define how MotoGP championship battles shape up going deeper into the decade. For reigning champion Mir, how he stands up to Marquez's attempts to reclaim what was his will forever define his 2020 title. 🏆

NEXT WEEK

QATAR GP REPORT 1 APRIL ISSUE

Marquez won't be on the grid, so it's wide open – just like the 2020 season.

ENTRY LIST

NO	RIDER	TEAM AND BIKE
5	Johann Zarco	Pramac Ducati
89	Jorge Martin	Pramac Ducati
9	Danilo Petrucci	Tech3 KTM
27	Iker Lecuona	Tech3 KTM
10	Luca Marini	Avintia Ducati
23	Enea Bastianini	Avintia Ducati
12	Maverick Vinales	Yamaha
20	Fabio Quartararo	Yamaha
21	Franco Morbidelli	Petronas Yamaha SRT
46	Valentino Rossi	Petronas Yamaha SRT
30	Takaaki Nakagami	LCR Honda
73	Alex Marquez	LCR Honda
32	Lorenzo Savadori	Aprilia
41	Aleix Espargaro	Aprilia
33	Brad Binder	KTM
88	Miguel Oliveira	KTM
36	Joan Mir	Suzuki
42	Alex Rins	Suzuki
43	Jack Miller	Ducati
63	Francesco Bagnaia	Ducati
44	Pol Espargaro	Honda
93	Marc Marquez	Honda

CALENDAR

NO	RACE (VENUE)	DATE
1	Qatar GP (Losail)	28 March
2	Doha GP (Losail)	4 April
3	Portuguese GP (Algarve)	18 April
4	Spanish GP (Jerez)	2 May
5	French GP (Le Mans)	16 May
6	Italian GP (Mugello)	30 May
7	Catalunya GP (Barcelona)	6 June
8	German GP (Sachsenring)	20 June
9	Dutch TT (Assen)	27 June
10	Finnish GP (Kymi Ring)	11 July
11	Austrian GP (Red Bull Ring)	15 August
12	British GP (Silverstone)	29 August
13	Aragon GP (Motorland Aragon)	12 September
14	San Marino GP (Misano)	19 September
15	Japanese GP (Motegi)	3 October
16	Thai GP (Buriram)	10 October
17	Australian GP (Phillip Island)	24 October
18	Malaysian GP (Sepang)	31 October
19	Valencia GP (Ricardo Tormo)	14 November

RACE CENTRE

SEBRING 12 HOURS • WORLD OF SPORT



Bourdais keeps Cadillac out of the wall and in Victory Lane

Losing a rear-wing element gave Sebastien Bourdais a late headache he didn't need, but the evergreen Frenchman kept his cool to claim what was already an unlikely win

GARY WATKINS

PHOTOGRAPHY



motorsport
IMAGES



LEVITT

The Cadillac parked nose-first in the wall at Turn 1 midway through the eighth hour didn't look like a potential winner of the Sebring 12

Hours. It had been a lap down since the opening hour and had just been sideswiped by one of the other Caddys. But just over four hours later, as last weekend's race drew to a climatic finish, the JDC-Miller MotorSports Caddy was at the front of the field. Sebastien Bourdais hung on to claim an unlikely victory together with fellow Frenchmen Loic Duval and Tristan Vautier.

A win for a team that might be described as the minnow of the IMSA SportsCar Championship's Daytona Prototype international field never appeared to be anything other than a long shot until the closing stages, and even then there was a big question mark against the Minnesota-based team's DPi-V.R.

The winning car had spent the majority of the race languishing a lap down on the DPis squabbling out front. It fell out of the lead battle early in the opening hour when Duval sustained nose damage when he was tagged by Jimmie Johnson in the second-string Action Express Racing Cadillac. Vautier's subsequent hit from Felipe Nasr in the lead Action Express car as he left the pits shortly before the race hit the three-quarter mark looked much worse. And it felt much worse, too.



"It was such a big hit that it took me four or five seconds before I thought I should try to restart the car," said Vautier. "I didn't think it was going to. The steering wheel was a bit off, but sometimes you kind of get lucky. We knocked a few diveplanes off, but to be honest we had a bit of oversteer [beforehand], so it kind of balanced it. I pretty much had a normal stint after that."

The JDC-Miller Caddy got a new nose at its next scheduled pitstop, and its missing lap back during the sixth safety car of the race during hour 10. Sixth and last of the DPis on the lead lap after the penultimate yellow later in the hour, Bourdais began a charge that took him to the front of the field

in the space of 16 laps. The winning DPi-V.R finally looked like a competitive proposition.

"When I jumped in the car and the temperatures kept cooling off, we really had a strong package," explained Bourdais. "As good as the car was, I thought things were under control."

Bourdais ducked out of the lead for his final stop with a shade under 40 minutes to go. He was back in front after the pit sequence was complete prior to one last safety car. The Frenchman, for all his confidence in the car under him, couldn't have predicted what happened next.

The top element of the Cadillac's rear wing fell off. A big moment at the fast



Turn 17 180-degree right-hander followed, but somehow he managed to keep the car not only on the track, but still in front of the following Harry Tincknell aboard the solo Mazda RT24-P.

“When something like that happens, you normally stuff the car,” said Bourdais. “I started to play with the rollbars and the balance. Every corner that was coming I thought, ‘How am I going to do this one?’ The flipside was the car was very fast down the straightaways but, honestly, I have no idea how it worked out.”

Work out it did: Bourdais crossed the line just under a second and a half clear of Tincknell to claim a second Sebring win and a third for Cadillac in the DPi era. It was a good job for Cadillac that the JDC-Miller team was able to haul the car back onto the lead lap, because otherwise its hopes of another victory would have been over. By the time Bourdais began his charge after the penultimate yellow, the other three DPi-V.Rs – which were all quicker than the winning car over the race duration – were either out of the race or out of contention.

The lead Action Express car had taken pole with Pipo Derani, as well as the 30 points that went with it, but the Brazilian and team-mates Felipe Nasr and Mike Conway endured a difficult race that ended in the 10th hour with gearbox failure.

Derani’s bid for a fourth Sebring victory had started to come off the rails

“Every corner I thought, ‘How am I going to do this one?’ I have no idea how it worked out”

in the opening hour after an incident on the entry to Turn 17 with Renger van der Zande in the Chip Ganassi Racing Caddy. The two drivers blamed each other for the incident. “Too wild,” said van der Zande. Derani pointed out that he was fully alongside his rival. That was true, but the Ganassi driver was left with nowhere to go as the Heart of Racing GT Daytona class Aston Martin with Ian James at the wheel took the racing line. It was probably a racing incident, and no blame was apportioned by race control.

Van der Zande came through the incident without issue, but the Action Express car damaged the steering against the wall and the left-rear suspension against the Ganassi car. Nasr was more fortunate when he clouted Vautier and his car got into a tankslapper as he tightened his line to avoid the car exiting the pits, and got into the worst of the notorious Turn 1 bumps.

The Ganassi car in which van der Zande was partnered by Kevin Magnussen and Scott Dixon was very much in the running in the closing stages. The last-named was leading the race late in the 10th hour when he got a late call to come into the pits. As he dived across the track he was hit by Connor De Phillippi’s Rahal BMW GT Le Mans car, damaging the nose and the steering at the cost of two laps.

Fifth place was poor reward for a car in which van der Zande set fastest lap. This was another one that got away for Ganassi on its second race back in the top flight of the IMSA series.

The second Action Express car, a joint venture with Hendrick Motorsports, crossed the line in third position, only a couple of tenths behind the Mazda, but it had long been known that the car would be bumped down to behind the last of the DPis for a drive-time infraction. The team had violated a rule that forbids a driver from doing more than four hours in any six-hour period. That was with Simon Pagenaud, who shared the car with Johnson and Kamui Kobayashi.

Kobayashi had propelled the car up from fifth at the final restart in what was a futile charge. That showed that the car did have the pace to win, at least in the hands of the Japanese driver and Pagenaud. Johnson, who’d crashed the car heavily in qualifying and then blotted his copybook again early on, was the better part of a couple of seconds off during his two and a bit hours in the car.

Mazda may have finished second, but the Multimatic-run RT24-P wasn’t quite >>

SURPRISE CLOSE FINISHES IN LMP2 AND LMP3



A 2.6-second margin of victory for PR1/Mathiasen Motorsports revealed little about the battle for LMP2 honours at Sebring. The team’s ORECA-Gibson 07 shared by Mikkel Jensen, Ben Keating and Scott Huffaker (above) led for more than 60% of the race, and more tellingly enjoyed an advantage of a clear lap for three quarters of the way.

But the final safety car of the race allowed the Daytona-winning Era Motorsport ORECA shared by Ryan Dalziel, Kyle Tilley and Dwight Merriman to make a fight of it over the 20-minute dash to the flag. Era got back onto the lead lap at a time when the PR1/Mathiasen ORECA was beginning to struggle. But Jensen had the measure of Dalziel over the final laps.

“It got more exciting than we wished it would be,” said Jensen, who will be part of Peugeot’s line-up in the World Endurance Championship next year. “We had been leading for more than a lap for eight hours, but we lost the balance and that was my worst stint.”

It could have been much worse, however, for PR1/Mathiasen. Keating started the car from the pitlane, and was then required to take a drive-through for doing so, after a suspension issue was diagnosed in the warm-up. A rear upright needed changing and the car missed the formation lap.

CORE Autosport had languished even further down the order in LMP3, the better part of three laps at one point, but its Ligier-Nissan JSP320 came through in Colin Braun’s hands to overhaul the two similar Riley Motorsports cars that had sat at the top of the order for much of the way. The CORE entry, which Braun shared with a pair of bronze-rated drivers in team boss Jon Bennett and George Kurtz, was in the lead with an hour to go, and took the honours ahead of the Riley car shared by Jeroen Bleekemolen, Dylan Murry and Jim Cox by 2.7s.



as competitive a proposition as at the rescheduled edition of the 2020 race won by Tincknell, Jonathan Bomarito and Ryan Hunter-Reay back in November. Tincknell, full-season partner Oliver Jarvis and Bomarito claimed the Endurance Cup points on offer at four and eight hours, but didn't quite have the pace of the frontrunners, despite an unchanged Balance of Performance compared with last year.

"We were actually the slowest car, six or seven tenths off the fastest guys today," reckoned Tincknell. "Maybe we didn't quite ace the set-up, but we were good strategy-wise, even though we had problems with the radio. I had no communication with the pits at the end and was having to work everything out for myself."

The Meyer Shank Racing Acura driven by Oliver Pla, Dane Cameron and Juan Pablo Montoya was bumped up to third when the #48 Action Express car was demoted. They were never truly in the hunt with a car that Cameron reckoned was "a little bit off on the balance". He and his team-mates were "kind of hanging on," he said. The team even had a go at tweaking the set-up early doors to try to find some speed.

The WTR Acura should have had a decent shout of following up on its Daytona win in January and reprising its 2017 Sebring victory, though it ended up only fourth in



the final classification. Filipe Albuquerque, who shared the car with Ricky Taylor and Alexander Rossi, clouted one of the Vasser Sullivan GTD Lexuses after four hours and the car wasn't quite right thereafter, reckoned Taylor.

"We instantly lost pace and we weren't exactly sure why," he explained. "There was some damage to the intercooler, but we put a new nose on the car and they're never exactly the same. It's one of those things that we are going to have to jump into when we tear the car apart."

The WTR Acura wasn't quite a match for the Action Express and Ganassi Cadillacs in

the beginning, but Taylor was hopeful that the track would have come to the WTR Acura. "We were probably three to five tenths off the #31 [Action Express] and #01 [Ganassi] Cadillacs," he said. "The cooler conditions had brought us closer in night practice, but whether we would have closed up enough to make a race of it, I don't know."

There were a lot of unanswered questions after the 69th running of the Sebring enduro. And perhaps the biggest one was how JDC-Miller managed to win the thing. Or rather, how Bourdais kept his Caddy on the track. ❧

PORSCHE TAKES UNLIKELY GT DOUBLE

Porsche hit a century of class victories at Sebring with a GT Le Mans and GT Daytona double, but for the majority of the race the smart money was on it finishing the day stranded on 99 wins. The German manufacturer was at the sharp end of the GTD battle throughout, but in GTLM it led only a handful of laps, yet crucially the one on which the chequered flag was waved was among them.

The Proton Competition-run WeatherTech Racing Porsche 911 RSR shared by factory drivers Mathieu Jaminet and Matt Campbell plus Cooper MacNeil came out on top in the dash to the flag, though admittedly there was a slice of good fortune involved. Jaminet was running third behind race leader Antonio Garcia's Chevrolet Corvette C8.R and the Rahal BMW M8 GTE of Connor De Phillippi when the top two came together at the hairpin.

Garcia spun and sustained a puncture, while De Phillippi was

adjudged to have caused the accident and was handed a drive-through penalty. That allowed the Porsche back into a lead it had briefly held for 22 laps in hour nine, and crucially to stay there over the remaining six.

The Porsche had stayed in the mix through MacNeil's two stints, but it always looked an outside bet for the win, even with a power-boosting increase in engine air-restrictor diameter for this race. That changed when De Phillippi

launched the BMW he shared with Bruno Spengler and Philipp Eng up the inside of Garcia four laps after the race went green for the final time. "We've been lucky to be in the right place at the right time," said Jaminet, who described the move from the BMW as "optimistic".

Garcia finished fourth in the Corvette he shared with Jordan Taylor and Nicky Catsburg – a poor reward for the race's fastest GTLM car, doubly so because its crew had to fight back from going a lap down

as a result of a couple of wrong pit calls and a spin.

The second BMW completed the GTLM podium in the hands of John Edwards, Jesse Krohn and Augusto Farfus, nearly 90s behind its sister car. It wasn't quite on the pace of the best of the Rahal cars, and was delayed by a flash refuelling fire with a couple of hours to go.

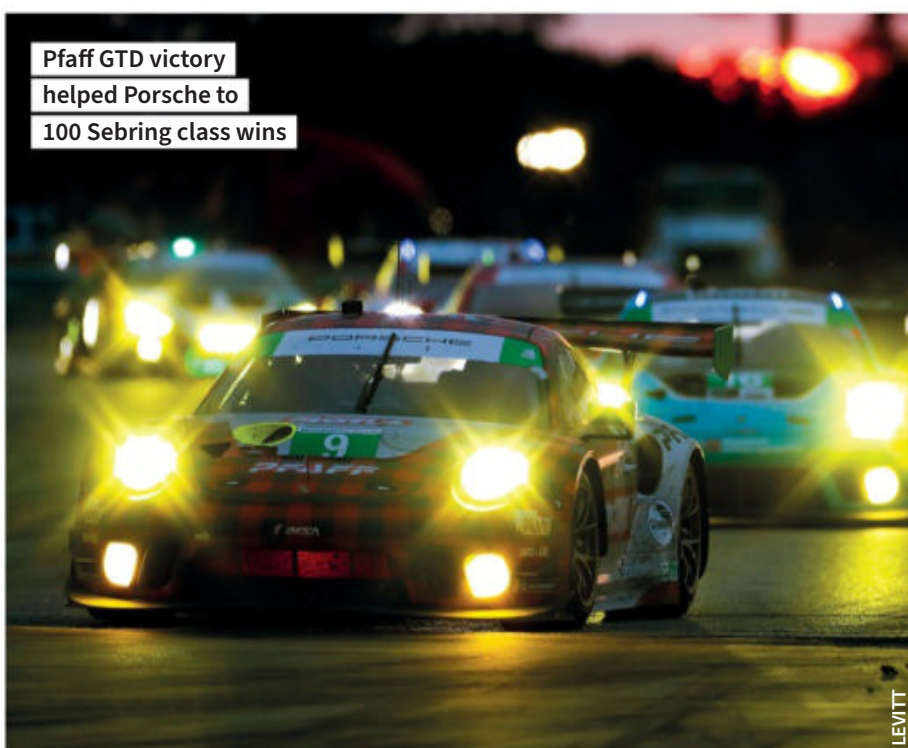
The Corvette driven by Nick Tandy, Tommy Milner and Alexander Sims trailed home fifth, four laps down on the winning Porsche. An electrical problem cost the car power in the early laps, and a subsequent attempt to fix it by refastening a coil connector cured the issue for just a couple of laps.

The Pfaff Motorsports squad dominated the GTD class for GT3 machinery with its 911 GT3-R driven by Laurens Vanthoor, Zach Robichon and Lars Kern. It led nearly half of the race on the way to a 2.1s victory over the Wright Motorsports Porsche of Pat Long, Jan Heylen and Trent Hindman. ❧



RESULTS SEBRING 12 HOURS, IMSA SPORTSCAR ROUND 2/13, SEBRING (USA), 20 MARCH, 349 LAPS – 1305.26 MILES

POS	DRIVERS	TEAM	CAR	CLASS	TIME	GRID
1	Loic Duval/Tristan Vautier/Sebastien Bourdais	JDC-Miller MotorSports	Cadillac DPi-V.R	DPI	12h01m01.418s	6
2	Oliver Jarvis/Harry Tincknell/Jonathan Bomarito	Mazda Motorsports (Multimatic)	Mazda RT24-P	DPI	+1.435s	4
3	Olivier Pla/Dane Cameron/Juan Pablo Montoya	Meyer Shank Racing	Acura ARX-05	DPI	+2.614s	5
4	Ricky Taylor/Filipe Albuquerque/Alexander Rossi	Wayne Taylor Racing	Acura ARX-05	DPI	+5.318s	2
5	Renger van der Zande/Kevin Magnussen/Scott Dixon	Chip Ganassi Racing	Cadillac DPi-V.R	DPI	-2laps	3
6	Ben Keating/Mikkel Jensen/Scott Huffaker	PR1/Mathiasen Motorsports	ORECA-Gibson07	LMP2	-5laps	9
7	Dwight Merriman/Kyle Tilley/Ryan Dalziel	Era Motorsport	ORECA-Gibson07	LMP2	-5laps	10
8	Cooper MacNeil/Mathieu Jaminet/Matt Campbell	WeatherTech Racing (Proton)	Porsche 911 RSR	GTLM	-15laps	24
9	Connor De Phillippi/Philipp Eng/Bruno Spengler	BMW Team RLL	BMW M8 GTE	GTLM	-16laps	22
10	Jesse Krohn/John Edwards/Augusto Farfus	BMW Team RLL	BMW M8 GTE	GTLM	-16laps	23
11	Antonio Garcia/Jordan Taylor/Nicky Catsburg	Corvette Racing (Pratt & Miller)	Chevrolet Corvette C8.R	GTLM	-16laps	20
12	Tommy Milner/Nick Tandy/Alexander Sims	Corvette Racing (Pratt & Miller)	Chevrolet Corvette C8.R	GTLM	-19laps	21
13	Jon Bennett/George Kurtz/Colin Braun	CORE Autosport	Ligier-Nissan JSP320	LMP3	-20laps	16
14	Jim Cox/Dylan Murry/Jeroen Bleekemolen	Riley Motorsports	Ligier-Nissan JSP320	LMP3	-20laps	17
15	Gar Robinson/Spencer Pigot/Scott Andrews	Riley Motorsports	Ligier-Nissan JSP320	LMP3	-20laps	15
16	Oliver Askew/Stevan McAleer/Austin McCusker	Forty7 Motorsports	Duqueine-Nissan D08	LMP3	-21laps	14
17	Lance Willsey/Joao Barbosa/Yann Clairay	Sean Creech Motorsport	Ligier-Nissan JSP320	LMP3	-21laps	18
18	Zach Robichon/Laurens Vanthoor/Lars Kern	Pfaff Motorsports	Porsche 911 GT3-R	GTD	-29laps	36
19	Jan Heylen/Patrick Long/Trent Hindman	Wright Motorsports	Porsche 911 GT3-R	GTD	-29laps	25
20	Ian James/Roman De Angelis/Ross Gunn	Heart of Racing Team	Aston Martin Vantage GT3	GTD	-29laps	32
21	John Potter/Andy Lally/Spencer Pumpelly	Magnus with Archangel	Acura NSX GT3 Evo	GTD	-29laps	35
22	Christina Nielsen/Katherine Legge/Bia Figueiredo	Team Hardpoint EBM	Porsche 911 GT3-R	GTD	-29laps	33
23	Frankie Montecalvo/Zach Veatch/Robert Megennis	Vasser Sullivan	Lexus RC F GT3	GTD	-30laps	28
24	Aaron Telitz/Jack Hawksworth/Kyle Kirkwood	Vasser Sullivan	Lexus RC F GT3	GTD	-36laps	27
25	Robby Foley/Bill Auberlen/Aidan Read	Turner Motorsport	BMW M6 GT3	GTD	-36laps	29
26	Kenny Habul/Maro Engel/Mikael Grenier	SunEnergy1 (Gradient)	Mercedes-AMG GT3 Evo	GTD	304laps-accident	31
27	Pipo Derani/Felipe Nasr/Mike Conway	Action Express Racing	Cadillac DPi-V.R	DPI	292laps-gearbox	1
28	Jimmie Johnson/Kamui Kobayashi/Simon Pagenaud	Action Express Racing	Cadillac DPi-V.R	DPI	+1.641s (drive-time penalty)	7
29	Rob Ferriol/Earl Bamber/Trenton Estep	Team Hardpoint EBM	Porsche 911 GT3-R	GTD	-69laps	34
30	John Farano/Gabriel Aubry/Timothe Buret	Tower Motorsport by Starworks	ORECA-Gibson07	LMP2	266laps-accident	12
31	Rodrigo Sales/Niklas Krutten/Matt Bell	WIN Autosport	Duqueine-Nissan D08	LMP3	265laps-withdrawn/accident	19
32	Madison Snow/Bryan Sellers/Corey Lewis	Paul Miller Racing	Lamborghini Huracan GT3 Evo	GTD	255laps-gearbox	30
33	Rasmus Lindh/Daniel Goldburg/Mateo Llaena	Performance Tech Motorsports	Ligier-Nissan JSP320	LMP3	177laps-exhaust/electrics	13
34	Daniel Morad/Michael De Quesada/Billy Johnson	Alegra Motorsports	Mercedes-AMG GT3 Evo	GTD	91laps-accident	26
35	Stephen Simpson/Franck Perera/Tim Zimmermann	GRT Grasser Racing Team	Lamborghini Huracan GT3 Evo	GTD	91laps-accident	37
36	Steven Thomas/Tristan Nunez/Thomas Merrill	WIN Autosport	ORECA-Gibson07	LMP2	90laps-gearbox/electronics	8
37	Jim McGuire/Wayne Boyd/Guy Smith	United Autosports	ORECA-Gibson07	LMP2	-16laps (skid-plank penalty)	11



Winners' average speed 108.617mph. **Fastest lap** Nasr and van der Zande 1m46.151s (126.865mph); **LMP2 Huffaker** 1m48.474s (124.127mph); **GTLM Garcia** 1m55.642s (116.434mph); **LMP3 Braun** 1m56.166s (115.908mph); **GTD Long** 2m00.808s (111.454mph).

POINTS DPI 1 Rossi/Albuquerque/R Taylor 688; 2 Tincknell/Bomarito/Jarvis 680; 3 Duval/Bourdais/Vautier 645; 4 Cameron/Montoya/Pla 634; 5 Johnson/Kobayashi/Pagenaud 609; 6 Magnussen/van der Zande/Dixon 574. **LMP2** 1 Keating/Jensen 382; 2 Huffaker 382; 3 Merriman 350; 4 Tilley/Dalziel 350; 5 Aubry/Farano 326; 6 Buret 326.

LMP3 1 Kurtz/Bennett 378; 2 Braun 378; 3 Murry/Cox 346; 4 Bleekemolen 346; 5 Robinson/Pigot 330; 6 Andrews 330.

GTLM 1 Garcia/J Taylor/Catsburg 697; 2 MacNeil 656; 3 Farfus/Krohn/Edwards 653; 4 Sims/Tandy/Milner 647; 5 Spengler/De Phillippi/Eng 636; 6 Jaminet/Campbell 376. **GTD** 1 Heylen/Long/Hindman 649; 2 Engel 626; 3 James/De Angelis/Gunn 608; 4 Kern/Vanthoor/Robichon 604; 5 Habul/Grenier 591; 6 Read/Auberlen/Foley 540.

NEXT REPORT

MID-OHIO 20 MAY ISSUE

Can Mazda go one spot better and make it three different winning manufacturers in the opening three rounds of the 2021 campaign?

Van Gisbergen is now unbeaten in six races to dominate points picture

Injured van Gisbergen stuns to make history

AUSTRALIAN SUPERCARS
SANDOWN (AUS)
20-21 MARCH
ROUND 2/12

Shane van Gisbergen put in a heroic performance to score a clean sweep in the three Australian Supercars races at Sandown just a fortnight after breaking his collarbone.

The Kiwi's campaign was left hanging by a thread on 6 March when a mountain biking crash left him with a broken collarbone and a damaged AC joint. He underwent surgery that same day to start an aggressive recovery process that included two hours per day in a hyperbaric chamber.

Van Gisbergen's Holden Commodore was modified with a lower, longer steering column to limit the vertical movement required to drive the car. But even then, there were serious doubts he'd be able

to race, with Garth Tander put on reserve by Triple Eight just in case.

Wanting to test his fitness as quickly as possible, van Gisbergen drove straight over the high Turn 2 kerb on his first out-lap in Saturday practice. It was sore but bearable.

He was reasonably quick across the two practice sessions but stumbled when it came to qualifying for Saturday's opening race. He was bundled out of the second portion of the new three-part qualifying format, now modelled on the Formula 1 system, as he slumped to 17th on the grid. He was quick to point out the team had simply missed the tyre window and his injury had nothing to do with it. What followed on Saturday evening was one of the greatest races in the history of Supercars.

For much of the 36-lap heat, the focus was on a fascinating battle at the front between Chaz Mostert, Cam Waters and

Jamie Whincup. Mostert pitted early to get a big undercut and jumped Waters and Whincup when they stopped together on lap 19. As Waters and Whincup desperately tried to use their superior tyre condition to get past Mostert, while also having their own scrap for position, van Gisbergen ran longer than anyone on his first tyre set and only pitted with 11 laps to go. That gave him the best tyre condition for the sprint home and let him close on the leaders as Mostert kept the field backed up.

With two laps to go, Mostert, Waters and Whincup effectively went three-wide for the lead into Turn 1. By the time they got to Turn 2 Waters was in first and van Gisbergen had mugged both Whincup and Mostert to pop up into second. He then chased Waters down over the next lap before easing past him into Turn 1 on the final tour. Nobody in Supercars history had ever won a single-driver race at Sandown from that far back — let alone nursing a broken collarbone.

Inclement weather on Sunday helped lighten the load on van Gisbergen's shoulder. This time he nailed qualifying, taking poles for both the second and third races. After an exciting battle with Mostert in wet conditions early in the second race, van Gisbergen was able to pull away as the track dried to score a second win. He then completed the hat-trick with a lights-to-flag victory in a wet finale ahead of impressive Erebus rookie Brodie Kostecki.

Van Gisbergen has now won five straight races this season, his streak extending to six if you include last year's Bathurst 1000.

ANDREW VAN LEEUWEN



Blaney pounces as Larson hits tyre trouble

NASCAR CUP
ATLANTA (USA)
21 MARCH
ROUND 6/36

Kyle Larson had the speed to earn his second NASCAR Cup Series victory of the 2021 season, but he could not make his tyres last, and Ryan Blaney took advantage to break his duck for the campaign instead.

Larson dominated last Sunday’s race at Atlanta Motor Speedway, taking both stage wins and leading 269 of the 325 laps at the wheel of his Hendrick Motorsports Chevrolet. He easily held onto his lead during a final round of green-flag pitstops, but that set up a 56-lap run to the finish with no cautions, which was a stretch for the tyres on the abrasive surface at Atlanta.

Blaney, who raced in the top five for most of the distance, remained no more than two seconds behind Larson as the race drew to an end, and his Team Penske Ford had been particularly strong on long runs. The longer into the run, the closer Blaney got to Larson and, with eight laps to go, Blaney got to the inside of Larson in Turns 3 and 4 and came out the leader. He ended up pulling away to a more than two-second advantage over Larson at the finish. The fifth Cup win of his career all but assured Blaney a berth in the 2021 playoffs.

“You never know when cautions are going to come out, when they’re not,” said Blaney. “We fired off after the last green-flag stop, it was going to be over a 50-lap run. I did need to save a little bit.

“I knew our strong area of our car was not the short run. Larson would drive away, but we could just kind of maintain with everybody else. After 15, 20 laps we’d start coming forward. Towards the end of the longer runs, we’d really start coming forward. We made a big step on that.”

Blaney’s crew chief Todd Gordon said of the long-run finish: “I was foaming at the mouth, excited about it. As you looked at it,



later in the runs we were running guys back down. Excited to see a 56-lap run.”

Larson (pictured below) won each of the first two stages, beating Kyle Busch in the first and Blaney in the second – by a clear nine seconds. But Busch dropped out of contention when he was given a penalty for pitlane speeding.

Alex Bowman had run second in stage two before being cleared by Blaney, and he eventually finished third to make it two Hendrick Chevrolets in the top three. Denny Hamlin led the opening part of the race in his Joe Gibbs Racing Toyota and he eventually took fourth from recovering team-mate Busch, Hamlin maintaining his series lead. Austin Dillon, Chris Buescher, William Byron, Martin Truex Jr and Kevin Harvick (who recovered from a flat tyre early in the race) completed the top 10.

Reigning champion Chase Elliott failed pre-race inspection, started from the back, raced into the top 10 and then suffered engine failure to put him out of the race.

JIM UTTER



WEEKEND WINNERS

AUSTRALIAN SUPERCARS

SANDOWN (AUS)

Races 1, 2 & 3 Shane van Gisbergen
Triple Eight Racing (Holden Commodore ZB)

AUSTRALIAN S5000

SANDOWN (AUS)

Heat 1 James Golding
Garry Rogers Motorsport
Heat 2 Kaleb Ngatoa
Team BRM
Final Joey Mawson
Team BRM

NASCAR CUP

ATLANTA (USA)

Ryan Blaney
Team Penske (Ford Mustang)

NASCAR XFINITY SERIES

ATLANTA (USA)

Justin Allgaier
JR Motorsports (Chevrolet Camaro)

MICHELIN PILOT CHALLENGE

SEBRING (USA)

Robin Liddell/Frank Depew
Rebel Rock Racing (Chevrolet Camaro GT4.R)

SUPER TC2000

BUENOS AIRES (ARG)

Agustin Canapino
Chevrolet YPF (Chevrolet Cruze)



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RAW Motorsport has taken over the running of the popular Citroen C1 Racing Club

LOW-POWERED SALOONS ARE ALL CHANGE FOR 2021

ONE LITRE RACING CLUB/CITROEN C1s

A new contest for one-litre cars and new organiser for the highly popular Citroen C1 Racing Club series are among the changes for 'miniature' saloon racing in 2021.

The One Litre Racing Club has been created by motorsport enthusiasts Paul Rowland and Allen Rowell after being approached by the British Automobile Racing Club to help fill the timetable on the 28-29 August weekend of the 2CV 24 Hour race.

Teams of two to four drivers can compete in the 45-minute qualifying session and three-and-a-half hour race, which will take place on the Saturday ahead of the 24-hour contest, and will be open to a wide range of one-litre cars. Regulations are due to be finalised soon.

"The regulations are going to be very loose – we want it to be the spirit of one-litre racing," says Rowland, who has raced 2CVs and C1s for a number of years. "We're expecting it to be full, truthfully. We got an entry within four hours of us going live, and a lot of people are waiting for the regs to be published. If we got 25 cars on the grid we wouldn't be upset, but we do believe it appeals to such a wide audience."

Rowland says that, should the uptake be strong, a

second race could be held later in the season. "We want it to be fun, competitive and serious – that's the three things we're trying to get," he added.

Meanwhile, the C1 series has been taken over by Robin Welsh's RAW Motorsport in the wake of the death last year of Meyrick Cox, an integral part of the previous organising committee.

"Having worked in motorsport for many years, including the BMW Compact Cup, I decided to put my knowledge of how championships were run to good use," said Welsh, who was the winner of the inaugural C1 24-hour race at Rockingham in 2018. "When I found out the C1 Club was seeking new ownership, it seemed like the perfect opportunity."

Welsh confirmed that the series will concentrate on its endurance format, having previously trialled sprint races, and that he intends to keep budgets low. "We are not interested in the fastest car, it's all about racing other drivers," he said. "It's the team that's important, friends all together having a great time."

Following the cancellation of the opening round of this year's series at Croft, the first round will be the 24-hour race at Silverstone on 28-30 May.

STEFAN MACKLEY & PETER SCHERER

WRC visited the Cheshire circuit back in 2019



Oulton to host opening BRC round

BRITISH RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

The opening round of the 2021 British Rally Championship will be held at Oulton Park and will run alongside the Motorsport News Circuit Rally Championship.

The Cheshire venue previously played host to the World Rally Championship in 2019, and will welcome BRC competitors to the Neil Howard Stages on 31 May.

The asphalt event will be the first of seven scheduled rounds this season for the BRC after the 2020 campaign was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Oulton has been added just a week after a revised calendar was published.

“The BRC prides itself on being a progressive series with each event in the calendar offering a unique characteristic, and the Neil Howard Stages is certainly going to provide a very different start to the 2021 season for our championship contenders,” said BRC manager Iain Campbell.

“We have been working hard on delivering a calendar worthy of the ‘British’ title, and it’s clear in the past 18 months or so we all have to step outside of our comfort zone. The opportunity to get the season under way in May is very appealing. I’m very excited to see how the BRC goes at Oulton.”

SMALLEY STAYS WITH ELITE IN GINETTA GT4

GINETTA GT4 SUPERCUP

Ginetta GT4 Supercup frontrunner Adam Smalley will continue in the series with Elite Motorsport this year after a strong conclusion to his rookie season in 2020.

Smalley took seven podiums from the final eight races last year, and narrowly missed out on third in the standings. It will be his fourth season with Elite, with which he won the 2018 Ginetta Junior title and raced in the Ginetta GT5 Challenge in 2019. He is part of a three-car line-up for Elite in the GT4 Supercup, alongside Ginetta Junior runner-up Josh Rattican and Tom Emson, who also continues for another year.

“I feel that I gained a lot of momentum last season and I really think that we can build on that to be in strong contention for the title,” said Smalley (below). “Having been part of Elite Motorsport for the past three seasons, I have built an excellent connection with them as well as all the people around me to maximise not only my own performance, but the team’s as well. I’m really excited to see what we can do in 2021.”

Also on the GT4 Supercup grid will be former Mini Challenge and Renault UK Clio Cup racer Luke Reade. He contested the final two events of last season, taking a best finish of sixth, and now plans a full campaign with Rob Boston Racing. “I gained a great deal of experience in my outings last season,” said Reade. “I have still got some learning to do, but I am with the right team to do it.”

First member will drive Supra GT4 during 2021 season



Young GT driver scheme launched

BRITISH GT

Toyota squad Speedworks Motorsport has launched a new scheme to promote UK drivers under the age of 25 into its British GT Championship team.

Speedworks boss Christian Dick explained that the Toyota Gazoo Racing UK Young Driver Programme would be “for initially one young driver – and, moving forward, hopefully more”, with the successful candidate slated to drive the team’s GR Supra GT4 in 2021.

They will be mentored by Toyota’s reigning World Endurance champion Mike Conway,

and have access to the state-of-the-art driving simulator at Toyota Gazoo Racing Europe’s Cologne HQ.

“We have an excellent relationship with TGR-E and believe this new initiative can help to discover and develop British GT stars of the future,” said Dick. “We have spent a lot of time evaluating potential drivers to become the first member of the programme, taking into account not only their pace and performance inside the cockpit but just as importantly their work ethic, attitude and media skills away from the car to ensure we make the right choice.”

JAMES NEWBOLD



JEP/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Deletraz and Campbell set to race F1 cars

MONACO HISTORIQUE

Former grand prix racer Jean-Denis Deletraz and Porsche factory driver Matt Campbell are set to be part of an 11-car Formula 1 attack by the GPX squad on the Monaco Historique extravaganza in April.

Deletraz will drive a 1980 ATS-Cosworth D4 in the Gilles Villeneuve race for F1 machinery built between 1977-1980, and Campbell a Shadow-Cosworth DN5 in the Niki Lauda event for 1973-77 cars at the Monaco Historique Grand Prix on 23-25 April.

Deletraz has driven for GPX Historic in the past, while Campbell moves over from the sister Spa 24 Hours-winning GPX Racing team with which he will compete in this year's GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup.

Deletraz, who contested three grands prix for Larrousse and Pacific in 1994-95,



Tom Pryce presses on in Shadow DN5 in period

MOTORSPORT IMAGES

said he is hoping for a good result in the ex-Marc Surer ATS, which he also raced in the Masters Historic F1 race on the support bill of the 2019 British Grand Prix. "The ATS has a lot of high-speed understeer, which I don't think will be a problem at Monaco," he explained. "But the car is good under braking and has excellent traction."

GPX Historic boss Bastien Leguay said that Campbell would "help us make a connection between our modern and classic operations at GPX" by racing the Shadow at Monaco.

"Matt is very passionate about old

racing cars and has done a bit of historic stuff at home in Australia," he added. "He was very keen to race at Monaco."

Deletraz is also likely to race another GPX car, the unique Amon AF01, in the Niki Lauda race. Julien Andlauer, a Porsche 'young professional' who was part of the winning GPX line-up at this year's Dubai 24 Hours, was confirmed in the team's March 761 for Monaco as Autosport closed for press. A pair of Arrows A3s and a Hesketh 308B are also in GPX's Monaco entry.

GARY WATKINS

Martin wins on Tasman Cup Revival Series return

F5000

Returnee Grant Martin broke the New Zealand Formula 5000 Tasman Cup Revival Series' Leda monopoly when he won both scratch races at Hampton Downs' series finale last weekend in his Talon MR1A.

The Auckland — sidelined since last season — dusted down the US-built Graham McRae design to face the largest field in this term's COVID-19-affected programme.

Runaway points winner for

the second year, Michael Collins was again favourite in the Hey family's ex-McRae Leda GM1, but driveshaft failure on the final lap of Saturday's heat halted him as he challenged Martin.

He shot from the back of the grid to harass Martin to the flag in Sunday's feature finale at the Northern Waikato venue.

Shayne Windleburn (Lola T400) won his third rolling start handicap leg of the series on Sunday morning, while Frank Karl (ex-Mike Walker



Martin held off Collins to win both races

FAST COMPANY/SMITH

McLaren M10B) scooped Pre-'71 honours at the Paul Fahey Legends of Speed meet.

Welcome debutants were Bruce Kett in his Lola T332 — acquired from Ian Riley —

and Terry Honey's ex-Kipp Ackerman McLaren M10B entrusted to Tom Alexander, while Chris Watson also gave his Gardos a rare outing.

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Blockley's F3 Chevron B17 to hit the track again after repairs

HISTORIC F3

The Chevron B17 raced by British privateer Ken Sedgley in the latter part of the 1970 Formula 3 season is set to return to racing almost four years after it was damaged in the Derek Bell Cup race at Goodwood's 75th Members' Meeting.

Acquired by Jim Blockley to augment the Brabham BT21B in which he won the 2014 1000cc Historic F3 title, then loaned to preparer Ewen Sergison, the semi-monocoque Chevron carried Blockley to third at Goodwood in 2016, behind Brabham drivers Andrew Hibberd and Peter Thompson.

Jeremy Bennett of Nemesis Racing has rebuilt the chassis for the Cotswolds

stalwart and taken the opportunity to return it to Alexis Mk17 graduate Sedgley's original yellow livery.

When F3 became a 1600cc class for 1971, the Chevron was modified to take a Lotus twin-cam engine for Chesterfield motor trader and Formula Libre exponent John Finch. It was subsequently hillclimbed in Scotland, before F4 veteran David Pullen returned it to MAE power.

Blockley, 73, is awaiting medical treatment, but hopes to be fit to test the B17 in the summer, and also to drive the ex-Russell Spence Ralt RT3/84 in which he won three Monoposto titles, the last in 1992, at Castle Combe in June.

MARCUS PYE



IN THE HEADLINES

MURRAY WALKER TRIBUTE

Various UK circuit operators plan to pay tribute to commentary legend Murray Walker this year by playing the famous Fleetwood Mac *The Chain* Formula 1 theme tune. The music was synonymous with Walker's F1 commentary on the BBC and it is proposed that it is played at the first race meeting at each of the British tracks, following Walker's passing earlier this month.

PETER BROWNING 1936-2021

Former British Racing & Sports Car Club executive director Peter Browning has passed away at the age of 84. Browning began his motorsport involvement as a timekeeper before later progressing to head up British Motor Corporation's competition department. He then moved to the BRSCC, where he played a key role in creating the Formula Ford Festival. Browning also had spells in charge of Marlboro's UK motorsport sponsorships and as MG Car Club's competition secretary.

FARMER RETURNS TO RACE

British GT race winner Mark Farmer is set to come out of semi-retirement and get back behind the wheel at Easter, sharing a Studebaker at the Donington Park Masters meeting with Adrian Willmott. "I tried to leave racing alone, and have been out for 16 months, but we have now got a Capri V6 for the Peter Auto Series and the Studebaker," said Farmer, who tested the car last week.

MOWLE TESTS LOTUS 81

Former GT racer Lee Mowle tested a Lotus 81 (below) at Donington Park last week in preparation for the Monaco Historique. More used to his Mercedes GT3 in GT World Challenge Europe and British GT, Mowle has some experience of single-seaters. "I raced the Classic Team Lotus 79 at Suzuka, without any testing, so was determined to try this car before going to Monaco," said Mowle, who raced Andrew Beaumont's Lotus 18 grand prix car in Monaco in 2018.



Extra Equipe races amid entry surge

EQUIPE CLASSIC RACING

Equipe Classic Racing is set to have its largest-ever presence at a race meeting after buying additional track time for its Brands Hatch season opener amid strong competitor interest.

The popular historic racing organiser was due to have six races at the MG Car Club event on 24-25 April but, after spaces for its Equipe GTS races filled, it opted to put on two extra contests for the pre-'66 small-engined Appendix K machines. Alongside the four GTS races, there will also be two Equipe Libre and two Equipe 50s and Pre-'63 grids.

"Our biggest grid is GTS and, over the last couple of years, we've had reserves at most races," said Equipe Classic Racing partner John Pearson. "Because Brands is the smallest

track – it only has 34 spaces – we sold out our first two GTS races in just under an hour. By the end of the weekend – entries had opened on the Friday – we had 20 reserves.

"We managed to get some extra track time. Even then, we've got four GTS races and they're all 80 per cent full. This will be our biggest meeting ever, including the 3-Hour Relay.

"We've got about 230 entries across the eight races. We're really chuffed with that and we're still five weeks away. There's still lots of people who will turn up because we know they book late.

"There are a lot of people who can enter multiple races because people are thinking, 'if I'm going to travel all that way, then I want more than one race in a day.'"

STEPHEN LICKORISH

Junior Saloon racers get *Top Gear* appearance

JUNIOR SALOON CARS

The Junior Saloon Car Championship will feature on the BBC's *Top Gear* on Easter Sunday when a fleet of Junior Citroen Saxo drivers takes on the show's presenters in a series of races at Castle Combe.

Double champion Lewis Saunders and his title rivals Alex Solley and Charlie Hand are among the JSCC racers taking part in the contests as they try to catch each of the programme's presenters – Paddy McGuinness, Freddie Flintoff and regular GT racer Chris Harris – in a sportscar bought for a restricted budget.

"The idea came from someone at *Top Gear* and they got in touch with the BARC," explained championship coordinator Dave Beecroft. "The premise was the youngsters had to beat the presenters. They had three sportscars and we set off behind them.

"For us as a championship, it was a great



opportunity to promote junior racing in the UK and it was a great opportunity for the youngsters themselves. You don't get that chance to show your championship in front of six million viewers very often! It goes out over the Easter weekend and is just over a week before our scholarship.

"It was very interesting to watch how something like that was put together. I haven't seen the end result yet – I'm looking forward to watching it."

Hand, who had a close battle with

Harris (both pictured above), added:

"That was so much fun for us all and great experience-wise for all of the Junior drivers. It also gave the Junior Saloon Car Championship some good publicity as they talk about it during the programme."

Beecroft said that, even before the programme airs, interest is strong for this season. "You can't buy a JSCC car now, you've got to build one," he said. "I think we will hit 30 cars at some point this year."

PETER SCHERER & STEPHEN LICKORISH

CCRC encouraged by interest in early opener

CASTLE COMBE

The Castle Combe Racing Club has been "encouraged" by the number of entries for its season opener at the start of next month.

The club is one of four organisers to run meetings over the Easter weekend, the first opportunity for non-elite motorsport to take

place in England this year. The CCRC's annual Howard's Day season-opener is set for Easter Monday and features just the club's four categories.

A compact timetable has been created to enable competitors to easily travel to the meeting, as overnight leisure stays will still not be allowed at this point. Despite lingering coronavirus

restrictions, a total of 88 entries had been as Autosport went to press, including 28 for the Hot Hatch division, with entries from non-CCRC members welcome.

"Under the circumstances for starting up in 2021, with a lot of uncertainty and ambiguity, we're encouraged," said CCRC chairman Ken

Davies. "We're optimistic about the rest of the year – it's an early meeting, so I think it bodes well for the rest of the season.

"A half-past-nine start is a real luxury and, if all goes well, it's a 4.30pm finish. Everybody should be able to do it in a day quite easily with no overnight stays."

STEPHEN LICKORISH

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HAWKINS

CSCC gets rare Brands Hatch GP event in support of GTWCE

CLASSIC SPORTS CAR CLUB

The Classic Sports Car Club is set to get the rare opportunity to compete on the Brands Hatch Grand Prix Circuit this year after being chosen to provide support races for the GT World Challenge Europe event.

The GT series was originally due to visit Kent on the 1-2 May weekend, but this was postponed amid continued COVID-19 restrictions. It has now been handed a new date of 28-29 August, when the CSCC was set to be in attendance.

Instead of the usual mix of international and national support series, circuit operator MotorSport Vision has elected to allow the CSCC to keep track time on the date of its original meeting.

"We've got seven support races on the

GP circuit, which is as many as we've ever had as a club," said CSCC director David Smitheram. "We're going to have to combine some series – we're expecting to have some rammed grids, with 46 cars plus reserves!

"It's a great opportunity and it means a lot. They could've gone to another club but did the honourable thing by saying, 'We're having your weekend but will give you some of the time back.'"

The CSCC intended its original Brands event to feature commemorative Special Saloons and Modsports races in tribute to the series' representative Ricky Parker-Morris, who died earlier this year. The plan is still for this to be the case at the restructured meeting.

STEPHEN LICKORISH

Clio ace Polley moves to Hot Hatch

HOT HATCH

Two-time 750 Motor Club Clio 182 champion Ryan Polley will switch to the club's Hot Hatch category this year, driving a Honda Civic Type R EP3.

Polley first took the Clio 182 title in 2019 and then won it again last year, winning six of the nine races he started. He has now sold his Clio and bought Tony Perfect's

Class B-winning Civic, which will be eligible for Class A of the restructured championship.

"The Civic is much more advanced," said Polley, whose father Stephen won the previous incarnation of the Hot Hatch Championship in 1999 – the year Ryan was born – driving a Toyota Starlet.

"It's got a limited-slip diff and much more [set-up]

adjustment. It's got about 50bhp more than the Clio and it's not that much heavier either so it should be quite a bit faster."

Polley is due to test the Civic at the 750MC's pre-season trackday at Silverstone next weekend. "I'd like to think we could be winning races by the end of the year," he added.

MARK PAULSON

IN THE HEADLINES

REDLINE'S PORSCHE DRIVERS

Former Lamborghini racing regular Jake Rattenbury and ex-Audi TT Cup and one-time British Touring Car driver Josh Caygill will both join Redline Racing for the Porsche Carrera Cup GB this year. Rattenbury won two world Lamborghini class titles in 2014 and 2015 before making his Carrera Cup debut in the Brands finale last year, while Caygill had been due to race in the series last year before the COVID-19 pandemic put those plans on hold.

JONES TO MX-5 SUPERCUP

Formula Vee regular Alex Jones has swapped his Bears GAC machine for a Mk3 Mazda MX-5 for this season. Jones, who contested one Vee event last year at Oulton Park, taking a best result of 10th, plans to race in the MX-5 Supercup in 2021.

MORE CALENDAR TWEAKS

The British Racing & Sports Car Club has added three events to its 2021 schedule after a number of postponements. Its Mazda categories have a new date at Snetterton on 31 July, while the club has extra visits to Oulton Park on 14 August and Cadwell Park on 23-24 October. Meanwhile, the British Automobile Racing Club has cancelled its planned May visit to Knockhill amid uncertainty over Scottish restrictions, but several of its championships are set to appear at Knockhill Motor Sports Club events later in the year.

MICKEL IN BIG LEGENDS GRID

Five-time Legends champion John Mickel (below) is among the latest batch of drivers to register for the series this year, taking the total to 30. Also signing up are 2000 champion Robin Fountain and frontrunner Jack Parker. "I genuinely think this year's grid is going to be one of the absolute best we've ever enjoyed as we head into our 27th season of Legends Cars racing in the UK," said championship owner Phil Cooper.



STYLES

THE NEVER-ENDING QUEST FOR SAFETY

Motorsport is always about advances, and this is never more true than with driver and car safety across club motorsport

STEFAN MACKLEY



W

hen Romain Grosjean's Haas speared into the barriers at the Bahrain Grand Prix last year, and erupted into a ball of fire reminiscent of motor racing from the 1970s, it was more than luck that saved his life.

In reality, it was the culmination of decades of research by the FIA and the national racing ASNs to encourage advances in technology that prevented the Frenchman from suffering serious injury or worse. That Grosjean was able to walk away from such a ferocious accident is testament to the never-ending quest to improve safety.

And while the latest specification of fireproof overalls, helmet construction and vehicle crash structures that helped save Grosjean's life are now at the pinnacle of the sport, most of that same technology could be commonplace within sections of club motorsport by the end of the decade. "It [safety] is constantly evolving and I'm sure there will be many lessons being learnt from some of the recent accidents we've seen at the top level of the sport," says Christopher Tate, chairman of Motorsport UK's Safety Committee, when speaking at ASI Connect earlier this month.

"It's not just the dramas of a Romain Grosjean fire, it's also about what we learn from somebody hitting a tree in a forest. We have to keep an eye on a great, broad spectrum of the sport, but yes, the

safety developments are coming and they are coming all the time."

The trickle-down effect means that life-saving technology first introduced in Formula 1, such as the frontal head restraint (FHR), is now mandatory among the national racing scene. And while initially drivers may have been reluctant to use it, you'd be hard pressed now to find many who would choose to race without one.

The halo is another well-publicised safety device that faced stern opposition from teams and drivers before it was introduced to F1 at the start of 2018, but has proved its worth more than once and has already been integrated into feeder series such as FIA F2 and FIA F3. The British Formula 4 Championship, which is also an FIA-certified series, will likely have the halo on its next generation of car for 2022 but the difficulties, and cost, of retro-fitting the halo to older chassis mean that in most single-seater series it's unlikely to be widely implemented in the immediate future.

That's an example of the unfortunate conundrum faced by UK club motorsport. For most drivers spending their hard-earned cash on a hobby, just completing a season can be a difficult task. And while greater safety equipment is available, from a practical point of view not everything can be introduced because the increased costs to the competitor would quite literally mean the end of national motorsport. It's something of a difficult juggling act



Halo and other safety devices helped save Grosjean's life



New safety devices are being filtered into club motorsport on a regular basis

for governing body Motorsport UK to master.

“One of the challenges for us as Motorsport UK is to try and make sure we can come up with practical safety solutions which are cost-effective,” says John Ryan, Motorsport UK’s sport, safety and technical director. “Not everyone has got unlimited budgets, and it’s trying to make sure we get the maximum safety benefit per pound that we can and trying to make sure we balance the risk against safety. There’s always going to be a risk with motorsport, of course, but we need to try and minimise the obvious accidents, and we need to learn from accidents – that’s a very important part of developing new safety systems.”

That certainly isn’t to say that no new safety advances are being made and brought into national motorsport, with all aspects from personal protection to car design constantly being looked at. But with UK motorsport as safe as it is, what else is there to come in the next few years?

The interior of the cars is certainly one area of immediate focus, with stronger rollcages, greater side protection and the introduction of safety nets. “With regards to the rollcages, they do constantly develop with the additional reinforcements,” adds Ryan. “One of the obvious things is actually on the front windscreens. As they have become more raked in production vehicles, the front roll-hoop

becomes a weaker area, and that’s an area in particular where windscreen reinforced pillars, where you’ve got an extra pillar from the A-pillar coming down to the floor, are required.

“Door bars is an obvious one as well with T-bone accidents, but in particular when you look at rally accidents. Hitting objects such as trees makes it really important to have that side protection. We look a lot at front and rear protection, but the side protection is paramount and the FIA have certainly developed more with the side protection foams etc in the World Rally Car, and they start to work their way down to the lower formulas.”

Whereas focus always has, and still does, remain on ensuring that drivers are as safe as possible in an accident, a new area of motorsport safety is gaining traction: avoiding accidents altogether. “It’s [collision avoidance system] certainly the technology we need to be looking at, and I would say collision notification systems is probably the first step for us,” says Ryan. “So if a car, let’s say, spun off on the track and it was not in vision initially, they could send a message to a car maybe through the transponders. The FIA are looking all the time to try and increase the so-called electronic marshalling systems using technology to our benefit.”

While Grosjean’s crash and other spectacular accidents are the ones that gain the mainstream media attention, Ryan is also keen to stress that all accidents, no matter how serious or small, need to be looked into. With that in mind, data recording has become a crucial aspect even on a national level. “Trying to get feedback from accidents, it’s not always about how people have been hurt or killed, but it’s the actual potential, and it’s very important we try and record that data,” he says. “We’ve used ADRs [accident data recorders] in the past, and we are looking in the future for lower cost instant data recorders which are like a very small chip. And the use of cameras, it all helps to get that data together and to try and make the sport safer.”

It’s not just the drivers who Motorsport UK needs to ensure stay safe, but the hundreds of men and women who make up the ‘orange army’ and marshal at all motorsport events in the UK. With electric vehicles becoming ever more present, learning how to deal with them in a safe manner is just the latest training that marshals have been receiving.

“The way we train, prepare and support our marshals is one of the considerations that Motorsport UK has put an enormous amount of time and effort into,” says Tate. “But I would also say when we talk about what is the future of safety in motorsport, we are moving towards more electric motorsport. For instance, when Formula E started that was an entirely new level. There’s a lot yet to be done and it’s a continuing process.”

“IT’S TRYING TO MAKE SURE WE GET THE MAXIMUM SAFETY BENEFIT PER POUND THAT WE CAN”





ANOTHER FORMULA 1 HIT DELIVERED ON DEMAND



NETFLIX SERIES DRIVE TO SURVIVE

Season three of the Netflix Formula 1 series *Drive to Survive* was released last Friday to much fanfare. It comprises another 10 episodes, with slightly longer run-times than the previous two series. All 10 teams gave access once again and accommodated the film crew, despite the pressures and limits forced by the COVID-19 pandemic, making the creation of such

a comprehensive show an achievement in itself.

The access comes across better than ever. Unlike the first two series, in which episodes tended to centre on a single team, there's far better integration this time around. Although certain events or teams take priority – episode nine in Bahrain, for example, is based on Romain Grosjean's accident and Sergio Perez's comeback victory – there's a nice smattering of voices across each instalment. It helps make the series more cohesive and offers a proper storyline through the F1 season, as well as ensuring that viewers get to know most of the drivers in the paddock.

The best moments come, as in the first two seasons, when it grapples directly with a driver's emotions and mindset. After a fairly sluggish opening two episodes, the series bursts into life when focusing on Valtteri Bottas (or should that now be Bottass, thanks to his scantily clad appearance?) and his place at Mercedes alongside Lewis Hamilton. It's a strong insight into Bottas's true character and inner steel, portraying

him in a way we've rarely seen so clearly before.

By name and by nature, *Drive to Survive* has always played heavily on the danger side of F1, making Grosjean's crash a natural focus point. This is the high point of season three, featuring some previously unseen camera angles. Although the sequence of his escape drags on a little long, it draws in all of the emotions of the moment perfectly. Grosjean is brutally open with the Netflix crew about the fiery shunt, with the presence of his wife, Marion, only enhancing the interview.

Diehard F1 fans will continue to find small inaccuracies here and there, such as with the explanation of what DAS is, the use of 'Scenario 7' in pre-season testing, and in some of the editing. The sensationalising of events does feel forced in places, particularly in the episode focusing on the 'rivalry' of Lando Norris and Carlos Sainz at McLaren.

The ordering of the season gets a little confusing at times, too. Those slow first two episodes do little to really draw in viewers who may not already be F1 fans. It would perhaps have been better to try to start in punchier fashion, such as with Grosjean's accident, to lure people in and build the series from there. The crash itself arguably also deserved the focus of an entire episode, rather than being paired with Perez's story of the following weekend.

Nevertheless, season three of *Drive to Survive* once again does a sound job of catering for allcomers. Complex issues such as Racing Point's 'pink Mercedes' and the brake-duct copy saga are explained in a way that those without a basic F1 knowledge can understand. This accessibility has been the real secret to why the series has been such a success over the years.

Thankfully, the presentation of the characters



remains at the very heart of the series. Haas team boss Guenther Steiner is perhaps the most toned-down he's yet been, but nevertheless delivers some wonderful one-liners. Daniel Ricciardo and Norris also stand out, showing their true colours.

F1 obsessives will also take plenty from the series. Those taking issue with some of the inaccuracies should really treat *Drive to Survive* as an accompaniment to other season reviews, rather than the definitive reflection of how the year played out.

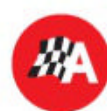
Season three of *Drive to Survive* has continued to build upon a successful format and remains a hit with viewers. Three days since its release, the series remained at #1 in the UK on Netflix, which in the absence of raw viewing figures is as ringing an endorsement as it gets.

LUKE SMITH

FINISHING STRAIGHT



youtube.com/AUTOSPORTdotcom



Limited to just three days of pre-season testing in Bahrain this year, Formula 1 teams faced a much smaller window than usual to get up to speed before the new campaign. But it still gave enough time for an early pecking order to emerge. It was good news for Red Bull and Ferrari, less so for Mercedes and Aston Martin.

Go to bit.ly/TestingLessons

WHAT'S ON

INTERNATIONAL MOTORSPORT

Bahrain Grand Prix

Formula 1 World Championship
Round 1/23

Sakhir, Bahrain

28 March

TV Live Sky Sports F1, Sun 1555

TV Highlights

Sky Sports F1, Sun 2000, Channel 4, Sun 2030

FIA Formula 2

Round 1/8

Sakhir, Bahrain

27-28 March

TV Live Sky Sports F1, Sat 1015, 1630, Sun 1140

Mugello 12 Hours

24H Series

Round 2/8

Mugello, Italy

26-27 March

NASCAR Cup

Round 7/36

Bristol, USA

28 March

TV Live Premier Sports 2, Sun 2000

NASCAR Truck Series

Round 5/22

Bristol, USA

27 March

NLS

Round 1/8

Nurburgring, Germany

27 March

TV Livestream on Motorsport.tv, Sat 0715, 1010

MotoGP

Round 1/19

Losail, Qatar

28 March

TV Live BT Sport 2, Sun 1730



FINISHING STRAIGHT



FROM THE ARCHIVE

A pre-war photo this week... as in the poisonous war that is about to break out between McLaren duo Alain Prost and Ayrton Senna. We'd love to have heard

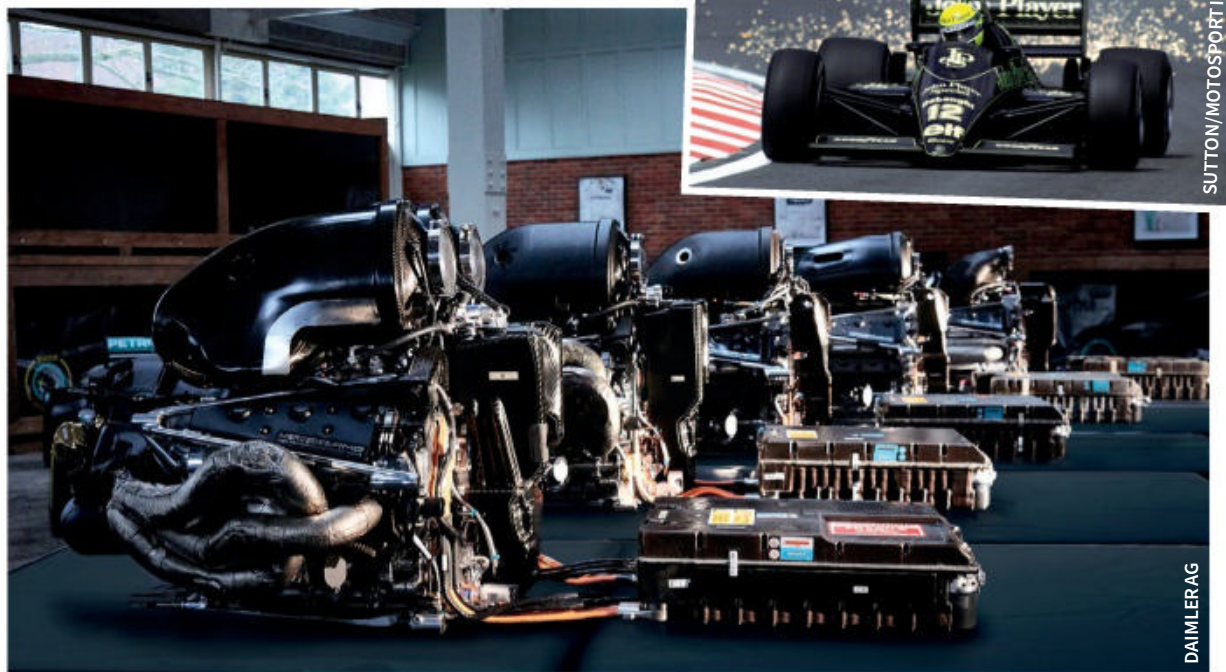
this conversation on the grid at Imola before the restart of the 1989 San Marino Grand Prix, following Gerhard Berger's fiery crash at Tamburello. The pair had a pact that whoever led into the first

corner would not be challenged by the other on the opening lap. At the restart, Prost got a better start and led... only for Senna to pass him at Tosa. Their lives – and F1 – would never be the same again.



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IN DEFENCE OF...

TURBO-HYBRID F1

Formula 1's V6 turbo-hybrid engines still get some flak. The points of attack usually concern the sound ("they're too quiet"), the cost, or the argument that everything is going electric, so what's the point of keeping a formula that includes an internal combustion engine?

Firstly, the cars really aren't *that* quiet. They're not as loud as the preceding V8s, but those 2.4-litre engines weren't actually that nice to listen to. The V10s of the pre-2006 era – and, of course, the V12s before that – did sound magnificent and would get our vote for audio sensation. But the current cars are reminiscent of the first F1 turbo era of the 1980s (inset, above) and few fans criticise that period for the sound of the machines.

The cost of the engines was certainly high when the hybrids replaced the V8s for 2014. Given the direction of the automotive industry, F1 probably had to go that way. Allowing F1 to fall further behind would have resulted in decreasing manufacturer interest and, eventually, increasing calls for it to cease due to social/environmental concerns.

The delay of new chassis/aero rules, cost

cap and the engine freeze also show that F1 has *finally* responded to escalating budgets.

As for the need to go all-electric, Formula E (and Extreme E) is there already, and it's too early to commit to one solution. Hydrogen power and, more relevant to F1's case, synthetic fuels are also avenues worth pursuing.

"We've heard lots of talk about moving to fully electric road vehicles," said SCE managing director and former Ricardo engineer Steve Sapsford in one of ASI Connect's forums last week. "That's fine, but one of the things none of this deals with is the cars that are on the road already. There's a fantastic opportunity for renewable and sustainable fuels to be applied in all forms of racing, reducing carbon emissions, and to show the world that there is an alternative alongside electrification that deals with all the cars that are out there now."

The current engines are the most fuel-efficient (and reliable) in history, and provide an opportunity for F1 to stay relevant in the coming years. Are they really all that bad?

KEVIN TURNER



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Autosport, ISSN number 0269946X, is published weekly by Autosport Media UK Ltd, 1 Eton Street, Richmond, TW9 1AG, United Kingdom. Airfreight and mailing in the USA by agent named Air Business Ltd, c/o Worldnet Shipping Inc., 156-15, 146th Avenue, 2nd Floor, Jamaica, NY 11434, USA. Periodicals postage paid at Brooklyn, NY 11256. Subscription records are maintained at Autosport Media UK Ltd, 1 Eton Street, Richmond, TW9 1AG. Air Business Ltd is acting as our mailing agent.

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Seymour Distribution Ltd, 2 East Poultry Avenue, London, EC1A 9PT.
Tel: +44 (0) 20 7429 4000.
 Printed by William Gibbons & Sons Ltd, 28 Planetary Road, Willenhall, Wolverhampton WV13 3XT.
 ISSN 0269-946X. Autosport is published weekly by Autosport Media UK Ltd, 1 Eton Street, Richmond, TW9 1AG.

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