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15 APRIL 2021

F1 2021

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Hamilton won in Bahrain but there are hurdles
to overcome if he is to keep beating
Verstappen and Red Bull

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The technical challenge threatening Mercedes' domination of F1

It might seem rather dramatic to claim that Mercedes needs to fix its latest Formula 1 contender, particularly as the W12 won the one race it has started so far. But, as Mercedes and Alex Kalinauckas show in our cover article on page 18, this year's campaign will be different.

Mercedes has invariably had the upper hand on raw pace since the start of the turbo-hybrid era. Ferrari arguably had the edge in the early battles of 2018, but a combination of Sebastian Vettel errors and stellar performances by Lewis Hamilton put the (then) Silver Arrows ahead in the points even before Mercedes showed its development prowess. This is the first season since 2013 that Red Bull, with arguably a stronger team-lead-driver combo than Ferrari and Vettel ever were, has started the season not only on the pace but setting it.

Thanks to the restrictions on development – plus the new rules for 2022 that teams have to prepare for under a cost cap – it also means that Mercedes won't find it easy to simply develop itself back to the front. In Hamilton's words, it will have to be "smarter". And the next opportunity to see that will come at Imola this weekend (p11).

Elsewhere, we look ahead to the continuing Penske-Ganassi battle in IndyCar (p28), assess one of the great grand prix duels that is often overlooked (p42), and Matt Kew reports from Rome's dramatic Formula E double-header, where Mercedes also won (p48)...



Kevin Turner

Kevin Turner
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NEXT WEEK
22 APRIL

Emilia Romagna GP
All the key moments
from the second F1
contest of 2021

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NATIONAL SUPPLEMENT

We test McLaren's
720S GT3, talk to
a winner-turned-
team boss and
assess Super Lap
Scotland in the
first National
special of 2021.

Albon was 12th fastest of the 19 drivers who took part in the two-day Hockenheim test



ALBON AND PAFFETT ON TRACK IN REBORN DTM

DTM

The new GT3 era of the DTM has begun. Two days of official pre-season testing took place last week at Hockenheim, featuring 19 drivers across four manufacturers. Among them were Red Bull Formula 1 refugee Alex Albon, having his first ‘public’ outing in the AF Corse Ferrari he will race, and two-time champion Gary Paffett, whose deal to return to the series in a Mücke Motorsport Mercedes was confirmed on the eve of the test.

Paffett has been absent from the DTM since clinching his second title in 2018. The 40-year-old Briton, whose last race was in the Kyalami 9 Hours in November 2019, initially didn’t have the new-look series on his agenda, but was left impressed by some top driver and team signings during the winter. After receiving a phone call from Mercedes customer racing boss Stefan Wendl in late February, he concluded a deal to race for the factory-supported Mücke team.

“After the DTM finished effectively in its old format last season, I wasn’t the only one

who didn’t know what was going to happen to it,” he said. “If it was going to survive, how it was going to continue as a series, I didn’t know.

“I didn’t have ambitions and plans to come back, but as the series took shape over the winter and they started to get more interest from different brands and we saw some top drivers being announced, it looked more interesting.”

Albon, who as a Red Bull F1 reserve will have to miss some DTM rounds, for which he will be replaced by Nick Cassidy, joined Red Bull Junior Liam Lawson in the Ferraris. The Anglo-Thai has very little experience in sportscars, although had enjoyed a preliminary test in the 488 GT3 at Spa.

“GT racing in general is different,” he said. “Eau Rouge was definitely not as flat as I thought it would be. But it’s a learning curve and I’m building up to it. I do enjoy it – it’s a different challenge and a completely different driving style. To begin with, a lot of it was just overdriving because you kind of have this muscle memory of how to do some corners and how to drive, and it’s almost like restarting that process.”

Mercedes, which has the biggest presence of any manufacturer in the DTM this year, dominated testing at Hockenheim. It monopolised the top six spots on the final day of running, with Lucas Auer leading the way in his Winward AMG GT3 from the HRT car of Vincent Abril and GruppeM runner Daniel Juncadella. HRT’s Maxi Gotz was fastest on the opening day. But series partner AVL Racing is still far from finalising the balance of performance between the five manufacturers confirmed so far (including McLaren, which was absent from the test).

Fastest Audi driver was Mike Rockenfeller from Abt team-mate Kelvin van der Linde. Quickest BMW contender was Marco Wittmann with Walkenhorst Motorsport.

For series chief Gerhard Berger, the presence of a multitude of manufacturers provided a refreshing change following the Audi-versus-BMW duopoly in 2020. “The DNA of DTM will not change at all, what is changing is the technical regulation,” he told Autosport as part of the #ThinkingForward series of podcasts. “Maybe the cars look

SILVERSTONE BACKS VACCINE PASSPORTS

FORMULA 1

Silverstone has joined a number of UK sporting bodies in backing the use of 'vaccine passports' and COVID-19 testing in order to welcome capacity crowds.

After being forced to run its F1 races behind closed doors last year and cancel its MotoGP round, Silverstone is planning to welcome spectators back for its summer events, including the British Grand Prix.

The current government guidelines allow for up to 10,000 people to attend large outdoor sporting events from 17 May. But Silverstone has joined sporting bodies including the Premier League, the



SUTTON/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

RFU and Wimbledon in calling for the use of vaccine passports for full crowds.

The joint letter addressed to Prime Minister Boris Johnson said that plans to cap attendances at 25% of capacity would "still be insufficient to end sport's COVID financial crisis".

The bodies said the push for unrestricted crowd numbers "includes

investigating how a COVID certification arrangement could reduce and then safely remove the requirement for social distancing".

More than half of UK adults have received their first COVID-19 vaccine, but the passport proposal has met opposition from UK lawmakers who fear it could create a two-tier society.

LUKE SMITH

Top to bottom: Rockenfeller topped Audis; Paffett out in Merc; Wittmann in BMW



DTM



DTM



DTM

even better because it really looks like a Mercedes, a BMW, an Audi, which was missing before. We were dealing always with two or three manufacturers [during the Class 1 era] and it was not good enough for the fans and for the participants."

RACHIT THUKRAL



SUTTON/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

New role for tech boss Allison

FORMULA 1

Mercedes has reshuffled its Formula 1 technical department, with technical director James Allison set to move into a new role and step away from day-to-day responsibilities.

Allison, who joined the team at the start of 2017, is to become Mercedes' chief technical officer from 1 July, and will take charge of longer-term strategic planning. His change of position has opened the door for current technology director Mike Elliott to step up into the technical director role.

Allison said he felt that it was the right time for him to move into a new

position, rather than stay on and prevent others being able to grow.

"I firmly believe that people have a shelf life in senior roles in this sport, and I have chosen to step away from my role as technical director in order to pass on the baton at the right time for the organisation and myself," he explained. "I have enjoyed four and a half wonderful years as technical director, and it has been a special privilege to lead the technical effort of the team in that time."

In his new role, Allison is set to focus more on the future technical regulations instead of working on improving the performance of the current car.

JONATHAN NOBLE

Hulkenberg ready to sub at Aston Martin

FORMULA 1

Nico Hulkenberg has joined Aston Martin as its new Formula 1 reserve driver for the rest of the 2021 season following his supersub appearances last year.

Following his exit from Renault at the end of the 2019 season, Hulkenberg was entered in three grands prix with the Aston team in its former Racing Point guise last year after its drivers contracted COVID-19.

The German replaced Sergio Perez for both Silverstone events, where he failed to start one race but finished seventh in the 70th Anniversary Grand Prix. He then finished eighth at the Nurburgring, despite only

replacing Lance Stroll from qualifying onwards.

Those performances furthered calls for Hulkenberg to make a full-time return to F1 in 2021. He was unable to land a seat, and his new role means he plays back-up to Stroll and Sebastian Vettel.

“First of all, it’s great to get this deal signed up with plenty of notice — last year, I didn’t have quite as much time to prepare before jumping in the car,” said Hulkenberg.

“I’m really pleased to once again work with this team, with whom I have driven many times during my career [including five seasons when it was named Force India]. Obviously, I’m hoping that Sebastian and Lance enjoy uninterrupted seasons this



DUNBAR/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

year [we’re not sure he’s telling the truth there — ed], but the team knows it can rely on me to step in and do an excellent job, and I’m fully prepared to take on that challenge.

“It will also be interesting to help develop the team, and I’m really looking forward to pulling great lap times

out of my arm sleeve.”

Hulkenberg is expected to dovetail the role with an unofficial support position for Mercedes, which would call on him for weekends where designated reserves Stoffel Vandoorne and Nyck de Vries are racing in Formula E.

LUKE SMITH

Ferrari and Porsche save GTE Pro until end of 2022

WEC

The future of the GTE Pro division is safe, at least through to the end of the 2022 World Endurance Championship. Beyond that, all bets are off.

Ferrari and Porsche, the two manufacturers remaining in the class following Aston Martin’s withdrawal, have committed to racing on into next season. Both will continue with their existing two-car programmes in 2022, the season before they move into the prototype ranks with a Le Mans Hypercar and LMDh contender respectively.

A Ferrari spokesman said the marque will “continue in GTE in 2021 and 2022”, while his Porsche counterpart promised

“the same programme as this year”. But for 2023 Ferrari has said its “focus will be on the LMH programme”, while Porsche called a continuation of the factory GT campaign in the WEC “a different topic because we will be racing with our LMDh and in the current planning there will be a works team [for LMDh]”.

No Ferraris or Porsches would almost certainly mean the end of a professional class running to GTE rules. The question is whether the rulemakers — the Automobile Club de l’Ouest and the FIA — decide that they need a home for factories or teams with all-pro line-ups in the WEC as well as a healthy top prototype class packed with manufacturers. And the likes of Porsche and Audi are likely to make their LMDh

machinery available to customer teams.

The ACO and the FIA are keeping their powder dry on their plans for the category. “The future remains open, but the decision will not be imminent and LMGTE cars will compete in the WEC until at least the end of the 2022 season,” they said in a joint statement. “A longer-term strategy will be discussed and decided at the FIA Endurance Committee meetings later this year.”

A switch to GT3 rules in line with the IMSA SportsCar Championship in North America, which is replacing its GTE-based GT Le Mans class with GT Daytona Pro in 2022, might not necessarily be the way forward for the WEC. Ferrari has expressed hopes for some kind of “GT plus category”, while Porsche has insisted that it views the GT3 category as customer racing.



SBLOXHAM

motorsport IMAGES

● Michael Christensen will come back into the Porsche factory fold for the Le Mans 24 Hours WEC round in August. The Dane will renew his partnership in the #92 Porsche 911 RSR with Kevin Estre, who this season is sharing with Neel Jani. Frederic Makowiecki will again drive #91 alongside Gianmaria Bruni and Richard Lietz. The pair of additional drivers will also contest the Portimao 8 Hours WEC race in June.

GARY WATKINS



BTCC It's a page of (mainly) Hyundai magic... BTCC star Tom Ingram has shown off the livery of the Excelr8 Trade Price Cars i30 N he will race this season. And, as you'd expect, it's looking not too dissimilar to the Speedworks Toyota he formerly raced. Ingram's association with his personal backer, pasty giant Ginsters, means 'the side of his i30N depicts intricate wood-carved illustrations portraying unmistakeable Cornish scenes'. We can't see the one of wealthy Londoners buying second homes in Falmouth though. Meanwhile, Ciceley Motorsport has been unveiling the colours of its brand-new BMW 330i M Sports, to be raced by Adam Morgan and Tom Chilton. They bear allegiance to Car Gods, the custom detailing products range of the team's title sponsor, car-care giant Tetrosyl.

Hyundai commits to new Elantra for title bid

WORLD TOURING CAR CUP

Hyundai will switch to the new Elantra N TCR for this season's World Touring Car Cup, and has added multiple race winner Jean-Karl Vernay to its line-up.

Frenchman Vernay, who switches from the Team Mulsanne Alfa Romeo squad, joins Hyundai's former series champions Gabriele Tarquini (2018) and Norbert Michelisz (2019), and Luca Engstler. Michelisz and evergreen

59-year-old Tarquini, who won the very first WTCR round in the outgoing Hyundai i30 N, will once again represent Italian squad BRC. Vernay joins the German Team Engstler operation run by Engstler's father Franz. His new berth was occupied by Nicky Catsburg until the Dutchman stepped back from WTCR competition partway through 2020.

The Elantra has already made its competition debut, with



Bryan Herta Autosport running two machines in the opening round of this year's IMSA-run Michelin Pilot Challenge.

Hyundai motorsport boss Andrea Adamo said: "We have included our four Customer

Racing drivers and the teams at every stage of the development of the Hyundai Elantra N TCR, so they have each been able to gain a lot of experience with the car, which they can immediately use when they start racing."

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At last: Marquez is back

MOTOGP

Six-time MotoGP world champion Marc Marquez will make his long-awaited return to racing at this weekend's Portuguese Grand Prix following a nine-month absence.

Honda star Marquez has been out of action since last July. He broke his arm in an accident during the Spanish Grand Prix at Jerez and, after surgery to his right humerus, made an unsuccessful comeback at the same circuit the following weekend for the Andalusian GP. Since then, the 28-year-old Spaniard has undergone

two further operations. The latest was in December, when an infection from his second surgery was also discovered, explaining his slow recovery to that point.

Although he was cleared last month to train with bikes again, Marquez was advised not to race in the opening Qatar rounds of the 2021 season despite two successful private outings at Barcelona and the Algarve Circuit on an RC213V-S street bike. Doctors have now cleared him to race at the Portuguese venue, where he has never ridden a MotoGP machine, and where his rivals raced last November.

News of Marquez's return was met with widespread positivity from the MotoGP paddock. Honda has previously stated that it would not pile any pressure on Marquez's shoulders upon his return, noting in February that what Marquez expects of himself is most important.

With 17 rounds remaining, Marquez is 40 points off championship leader Johann Zarco. Therefore, a title challenge cannot be wholly ruled out, especially considering he came from 37 points down after six races in 2017 to win his fourth crown.

LEWIS DUNCAN

BTCC veteran Collard switches to Mercedes

GT WORLD CHALLENGE

Rob Collard is switching teams for his second full season of sportscar racing after nearly 20 years in the British Touring Car Championship. The Briton will drive a Ram Racing Mercedes in the GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup after contesting the series last year, as well as winning the British GT Championship, with the Barwell Lamborghini team.

Collard will again race in the Pro-Am Cup, in which

he finished third last year and won the class at the Spa 24 Hours. He will share a Mercedes-AMG GT3 with Ram regular Callum Macleod and Sam De Haan, who finished second with the team to Collard (right) and Sandy Mitchell in British GT last year. Ricky Collard will again drive with his father at Spa.

Collard Sr said he is "massively excited to be part of a what looks like a really strong team".

The Belgian WRT Audi squad has confirmed its

GTWCE line-ups ahead of this weekend's season opener at Monza. Dries Vanthoor and Charles Weerts will defend their GTWCE Sprint Cup title at the wheel of the lead WRT Audi R8 LMS GT3, while Kelvin van der Linde will join them for the enduros in a line-up of all-factory drivers. Van der Linde will drive with Benjamin Goethe in the sprints. Briton Frank Bird has also joined WRT's three-car line-up for both legs of the GTWCE.

GARY WATKINS



Heady days of 1981 for Sutton (inset), with Vatanen's Escort in flight on Sanremo Rally



David Sutton 1940-2021

OBITUARY

David Sutton, who masterminded Ari Vatanen's victory in the 1981 World Rally Championship, died last week. He was 81.

Known affectionately as 'Sooty', Sutton started his career behind the wheel, but soon understood that his strength lay in preparing and funding cars for some of the sport's biggest names. When Ford withdrew from the world championship at the end of 1979, much of the hardware from Boreham was shipped west into Sutton's Acton workshop in London. It was from there that those famous Rothmans-liveried Escort RS1800s emerged.

Vatanen won three WRC rounds on his way to the 1981 title. "David was the most amazing man," said Vatanen. "I tested his patience sometimes when I wasn't always finishing rallies. But he never lost his temper. He was always the man with the big, wide smile. If I crashed, maybe the smile would disappear for a little time, but then it would be back with him telling me everything would be

better on the next rally. That 1981 season was like my whole career in miniature. We would go from the most incredible highs to some deep lows. But it was incredible to win the title with David."

Vatanen's co-driver, current Motorsport UK chairman David Richards, recalled: "It was a genuine David and Goliath story, but we did it. Ari and I have an awful lot to thank David for."

Sutton ran Audi UK's rally programme from new premises in Daventry from 1982. A British title with Stig Blomqvist followed, and there were few drivers of that era who weren't familiar with Sutton's team and his perfectly prepared cars. A second world title also came when Sutton turned his hand to Group N cars and ran a Subaru Impreza for Martin Rowe to win the 2003 Production WRC crown.

While Sutton and his wife Jill divorced in later life, the pair will always be remembered as a great team working together. Autosport sends its condolences to Jill and all of David's family and friends.

DAVID EVANS

SHH, DON'T TELL ANYONE: JAGUAR STAYS FOR GEN3

FORMULA E

Formula E teams' championship leader Jaguar has become the latest manufacturer to sign up for the forthcoming Gen3 regulations, but you weren't necessarily to know it.

Team director James Barclay was happy for Autosport to report a commitment that lasts until the end of the 2025-26 season, but any official statement will wait.

Two Formula E high-ups wanted to correct speculative reports that Jaguar had missed the elapsed 31 March deadline to register, and the manufacturer did attend the 6 April meeting of the Technical Working Group to gain access to FIA Gen3 data.

The public confirmation will come later when Jaguar outlines its broader motorsport plan. This follows the 'Reimagine' plan, whereby it and sister company Land Rover will offer electric variants of all their road cars.

Barclay told Autosport: "What I can confirm is that we have signed the Gen3 registration. We have done it. At this point in time, we have nothing more to say. More news on our motorsport plans will follow."

Of the TWG meeting, he added: "It's really the first stage where we get the first information on the car. It gives us enough to start our understanding of the packaging of the car."

Jaguar is the fifth manufacturer to sign up to the new rules that will create 470bhp and 120kg-lighter cars, following Mahindra, DS Automobiles, Nissan and Porsche.

MATT KEW

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IN THE HEADLINES

NEWGARDEN ON TOP AT INDY

Two-time IndyCar champion Josef Newgarden led the way in last week's two-day Indianapolis 500 test. The Team Penske Dallara-Chevrolet star cut a lap at 226.819mph to head Takuma Sato's Honda-powered Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing car. Impressively, Sato's fellow two-time 500 winner Juan Pablo Montoya was third on his return to IndyCar action with Arrow McLaren SP. Sato's RLLR team-mate Graham Rahal set the fastest lap not assisted by a tow.

GLICKENHAUS OUT OF SPA

Glickenhauss will skip the opening round of the World Endurance Championship at Spa on 1 May. Marque founder Jim Glickenhauss has stuck to his promise not to race his two new Pipo-engined 007 Le Mans Hypercars until the team has completed a 30-hour endurance run. That is now scheduled for Motorland Aragon in Spain in early May.

HAWKEY LOSES ELMS DRIVE

Porsche Carrera Cup GB pro-am class champion Esmee Hawkey has lost her drive with the Iron Lynx Ferrari team in the European Le Mans Series. The 23-year-old Briton was named as the bronze-rated driver in its all-female 'Iron Dames' GTE line-up alongside Rahel Frey and Michelle Gattling, but she has now been reclassified as a silver. Iron Lynx has alleged that her management team provided "incorrect information" to obtain bronze status.

SKELTON JUMPS TO LM CUP

Ex-British Formula 3 frontrunner and British F4 race winner Josh Skelton is switching codes this season. The Cumbrian, who is managed by sportscar veterans Guy Smith and Andy Meyrick, will compete in the European Le Mans Series-supporting Le Mans Cup, which starts at Barcelona this weekend. Skelton will share a Cool Racing Ligier LMP3 car with French teenager Antoine Doquin.

DYNAMICS APPRENTICE

Newbury-based 21-year-old Luke Harris has become the third winner of the Halfords BTCC Apprentice of the Year, meaning he will join the team of mechanics for the Dynamics-run Honda Civic Type Rs of Gordon Shedden and Dan Rowbottom. Harris was one of nine Halfords Autocentres apprentices battling it out for the role.



PIKES PEAK Bentley is developing the most extreme version of its Continental GT3 yet for a factory assault on the Pikes Peak hillclimb in June. The new car, developed in conjunction with M-Sport and British Time Attack operation FastR, will be entered under the Bentley Motorsport banner for the famous Colorado event and will run on emissions-reducing biofuel. Rhys Millen, son of former course record holder Rod, will drive the car in the Time Attack 1 class.

Farfus gets full-time Aston seat

WEC

Long-time BMW factory driver Augusto Farfus will contest the full World Endurance Championship at the wheel of an Aston Martin in 2021. The Brazilian will drive series stalwart Paul Dalla Lana's GTE Am entry after undertaking two races, the Le Mans 24 Hours included, with him last year.

The Brazilian's slimmed-down commitments with BMW have given him time to undertake a full WEC campaign across the six races aboard friend Dalla Lana's Vantage GTE. Farfus's only confirmed programme with his employer of the past 14 seasons in 2021 is in the four IMSA SportsCar Championship enduros with the Rahal GT Le Mans squad.

Farfus, who won the Intercontinental GT Challenge with BMW last year, and Dalla Lana will be joined by silver-rated driver Marcos Gomes in the Prodrive-run

Vantage. The stalwart of the Brazilian Stock Car Championship joins the team after making his Le Mans debut last year with the HubAuto Ferrari squad.

"The WEC is the pinnacle of sportscar racing and a full season is a goal for any driver," said Farfus, who contested five of the eight WEC rounds with the MTEK BMW squad over the 2018-19 superseason. "I really enjoyed driving the Vantage with Paul last year at Spa and Le Mans."

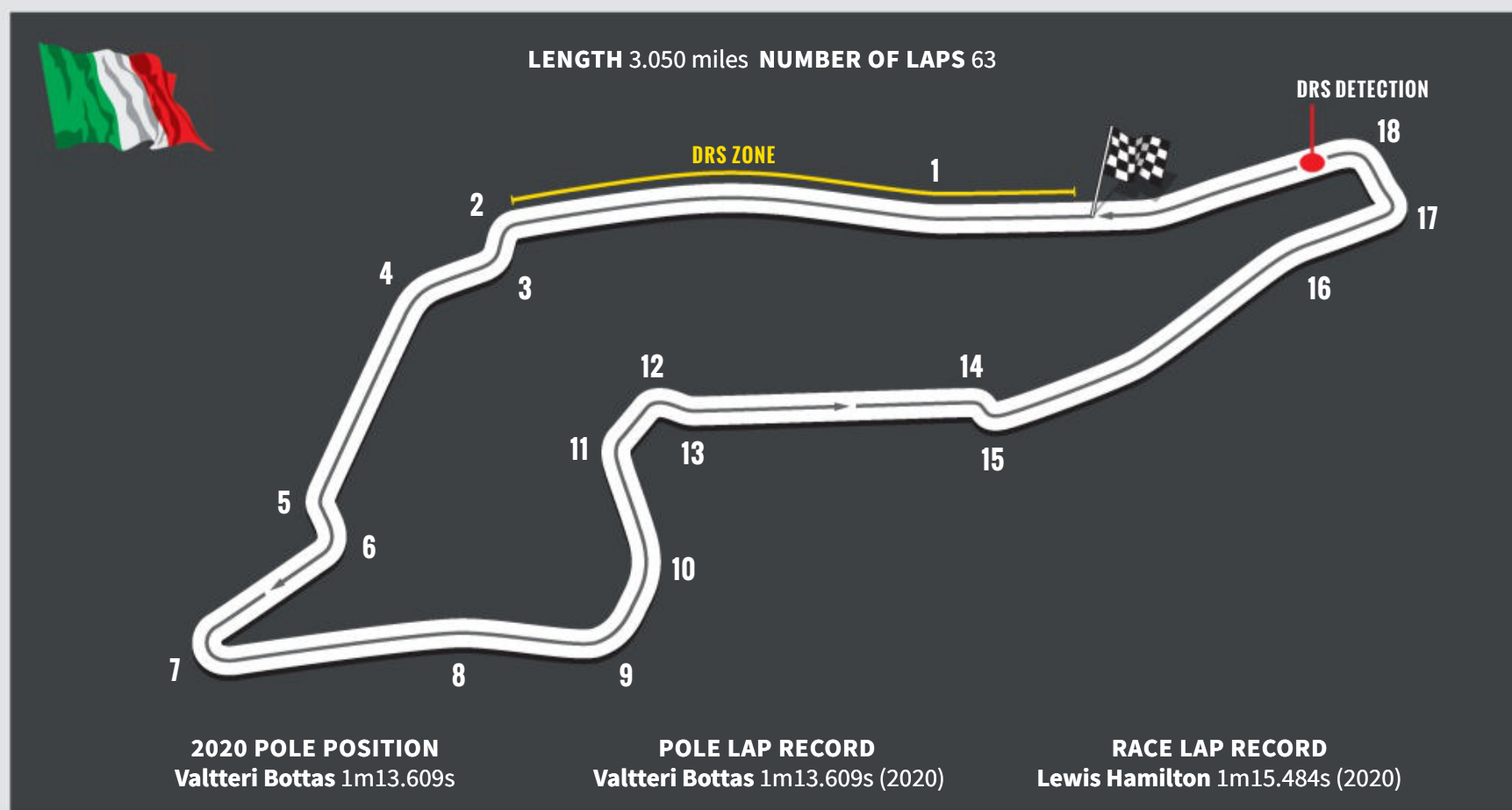
Gomes, 36, described racing in the WEC as a "long-held ambition". "Le Mans last year was an amazing experience, and now to get the opportunity to compete in a full season and to do this with Aston Martin is a dream come true," he said.

Dalla Lana's entry was initially made under the Aston Martin Racing banner, but has been changed to Northwest AMR in deference to his medical property company.

GARY WATKINS



F1 EMILIA ROMAGNA GRAND PRIX PREVIEW



UK START TIMES

Friday 16 April

FP1 1000 FP2 1330

Saturday 17 April

FP3 1000

QUALIFYING 1300

Sunday 18 April

RACE 1400

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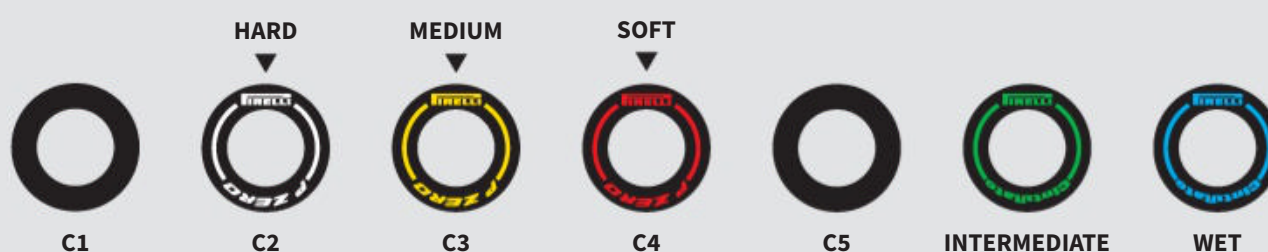
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CHAMPIONSHIP POSITIONS

Drivers

1	Hamilton	25
2	Verstappen	18
3	Bottas	16
4	Norris	12
5	Perez	10

Constructors

1	Mercedes	41
2	Red Bull	28
3	McLaren	18
4	Ferrari	12
5	AlphaTauri	2



RACE STATS

Previous Imola winners

2020	Lewis Hamilton	Mercedes
2006	Michael Schumacher	Ferrari
2005	Fernando Alonso	Renault
2004	Michael Schumacher	Ferrari
2003	Michael Schumacher	Ferrari
2002	Michael Schumacher	Ferrari
2001	Ralf Schumacher	Williams
2000	Michael Schumacher	Ferrari
1999	Michael Schumacher	Ferrari
1998	David Coulthard	McLaren



Best results at Imola

Alonso	1st x 1
Hamilton	1st x 1
Raikkonen	2nd x 1
Bottas	2nd x 1
Ricciardo	3rd x 1
Leclerc	5th x 1
Perez	6th x 1
Sainz	7th x 1
Norris	8th x 1
Giovinazzi	10th x 1

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Formula 1's European spring

This weekend's Emilia Romagna Grand Prix at Imola should give us a first blossoming of car upgrades as the season resumes after a three-week interlude

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

The second Emilia Romagna Grand Prix represents something reassuringly familiar in the current uncertain climate: it's the start of the European F1 spring. Usually, the teams would be heading to Barcelona after travelling back from Australia via the Middle East and Asia, but 2021 had just one initial flyaway. The Bahrain season opener was a thriller, with notable themes at the front of the field immediately emerging. But, as well as those motifs likely continuing this weekend, the Imola event is significant in its own right.

The return to Europe, combined with the three-week gap since Bahrain, means there's every chance that the teams will take this opportunity to tweak their 2021 machines with update packages within the limits of this season's design-carryover rules. In the pack behind the leaders, Alpine has already acted, opting to bring an aerodynamic upgrade to this weekend's event at Imola after confirming "some of the weaknesses of our package" in Bahrain, according to team executive director Marcin Budkowski.

But while the physical changes will be apparent when the cars take to the track tomorrow (Friday), there will be additional unseen elements of progress that the teams will be eyeing this weekend.

Red Bull needs Sergio Perez to make an impression in the lead fight. He was dropped to the back through no fault of his own in Bahrain, but would have started outside the top 10 even without

"The challenging layout means there's every chance a dull affair could be enlivened very quickly"

what is now described as a formation lap electrical issue by the team. He fought back impressively, but that just won't be possible this weekend if he qualifies down the order again, given that passing will be a rare event should the race run uninterrupted.

The 2020 Emilia Romagna GP showcased exactly why Red Bull needs two cars in the lead fight, as Mercedes was able to put Lewis Hamilton onto a strategy that would have likely got him back ahead of Max Verstappen even without fortuitous virtual safety car timing, using its 2-1 advantage to great effect. In that race, Hamilton triumphed despite it being a weekend where Valtteri Bottas had an edge, right up until he ran over a chunk of Ferrari.

If, as Mercedes expects (see page 18), Red Bull and Verstappen lead the way again in qualifying, then it will be interesting to see which of the Black Arrows drivers is the nearest challenger.

Hamilton looked more at home in the troublesome W12 in Bahrain, where Bottas also compromised his race with a slow first lap, but the Finn can look back on F1's last visit to Imola for inspiration.

Although Ferrari has taken a significant step forwards compared to its 2020 nightmare, it seems as if the Italian team will need its drivers to deliver their own brilliance this weekend. Charles Leclerc shone at Imola last year with a performance similar to the one he produced in Bahrain, qualifying higher than the car deserved and then hanging on in the race. Imola's tight-but-rapid nature means he won't necessarily slide backwards this time around if can get another lofty grid spot.

Another home-hero squad for this weekend is AlphaTauri, which lost the chance for an impressive 2020 result at Imola to a radiator weld failure on Pierre Gasly's car. The Frenchman put in another impressive qualifying display in Bahrain, but ruined it by clattering Daniel Ricciardo early in the race. This weekend, he gets the chance to reinforce his team's potential at a track where he was very fast last year, while the momentum gathering around Yuki Tsunoda will increase if he impresses again at this tricky track.

With Aston Martin seeming to have gone from podium chasing with Perez at Imola last year to a likely struggle to make Q3 and the points in 2021, largely thanks to the rear floor changes that have also hampered Mercedes, McLaren was best of the rest in Bahrain. This weekend offers the perfect chance for the Woking team to solidify its progress at Imola, where last year it was unexpectedly at the back of the fluctuating midfield scrap and in a weekend of 'damage limitation' on its way to seventh and eighth.

Alfa Romeo is another team out to show that its Bahrain pace and progress were not a one-off, while Haas will be hoping its drivers can keep their cars pointing the right way across the weekend...

At Williams, a George Russell redemption story is waiting to be written given his embarrassing safety car crash at Imola in 2020, but he'll need to ace qualifying as he did last year and in Bahrain last time out, plus race as strongly as he did nearly six months ago to be in points contention if something unexpected occurs.

That's what Imola offers. It's a fearsome track, with many bumps to test the drivers, as well having an unusual anti-clockwise layout. A straightforward race will mean a certain one-stopper because the pitlane time is so high, but the challenging layout (with close gravel traps at most corners hopefully putting the tedious track limits debate on ice for a while!) means there's every chance that a dull affair could be enlivened very quickly.

But overtaking will still be very difficult, even with a longer DRS zone this year. So, if it's close – from the off or late on as things shake out – it'll likely be tense. 🏁



P18 WHAT MERCEDES MUST DO TO FIX THE W12

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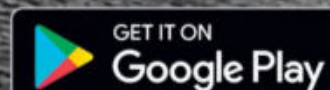
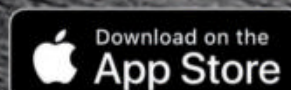
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Rediscovering racing

Driver-turned-DJ Jaime Alguersuari was left pretty bruised by his premature exit from Formula 1. He's decided to go karting again, with the emphasis on having fun

JAMES NEWBOLD

A decade has now passed since Jaime Alguersuari's world came tumbling down when he was dropped by the Toro Rosso Formula 1 team. He was once F1's youngest ever driver, the reigning British Formula 3 champion who was plucked from Formula Renault 3.5 midway through the 2009 season aged 19 years and 125 days. But he was ruthlessly axed from the Red Bull scheme aged just 21 after a 2011 season in which he'd outscored his more experienced team-mate Sebastien Buemi and showed signs of maturing into one of F1's comingmen.

After two years as a Pirelli F1 tester, a season of ADAC GT Masters and Formula E, Alguersuari called it a day in 2015 aged 25, inviting critics to crow that he'd had 'too much too soon', with little consideration given to the mental impact of having your dream career advanced and abruptly curtailed ahead of time.

Now rebooted as a successful DJ, performing under the stage name Squire, Alguersuari is set to release a new album later this year. But the music industry has been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic that has gripped the world over the past year, with no concerts or touring bringing his orbit to a shuddering halt. Seeking something else to keep him motivated, the Spaniard has come full circle and is now planning a racing comeback in the KZ1 shifter division of the world karting championship.

"I had many ideas of how I could be happy disconnecting

"I struggled a lot, after F1. I did not want to hear about it. I didn't watch any F1 races"

from the music business for a while, because at the moment there's not much we can do," he says. "I've been testing go-karts and having sensations that I didn't feel for a very long time. When I started racing, I was smiling inside the helmet and it was just driving for pure love. Now when I'm back on a go-kart, I have the same feelings and I thought, 'Why shouldn't I be back in a situation where I'm competitive and I feel like inspiration back to my life?' For me it's about closing an emotional circle which was not really closed, because the way I stopped racing was not what I wished for."

Alguersuari admits that after losing his F1 drive he was "never motivated" by other series and "talked many times" to Virgin FE team-mate Sam Bird about his thoughts of quitting.

"My passion was lost for racing – after what happened in 2011

I never got that back and my head was in another area of my life: music," he explains. "I did not feel any series was really appealing [other] than obviously a competitive car in F1. I didn't feel like there was a sense of racing because I was not really enjoying it.

"For me racing is not just about money, it's to smile, for fun, giving the very best of you. It's how I felt when I was in Toro Rosso and that's the same mentality I had when I started to make music. If you don't understand why you're doing things, you're not going to deliver.

"I struggled a lot, after F1. After I retired, I did not want to hear a word of racing. I didn't watch any F1 races because it was difficult for me to accept what happened. But now I've come through all of that. Time makes it easier."

Now aged 30, Alguersuari has "a very different approach to racing now than when I was 20", with fun the primary objective behind his return to competition. "Of course you still always want to win and be competitive," he says, "but I've been in the best pressure school possible with Helmut Marko, so I've learned a lot in there and how to deal with that. In the end, the only pressure that matters is the expectations that you put into yourself. I don't have any goals – the only goal is to have fun.

"If I'm not at the level that I expect, to be in the top 10 of the best world go-karting drivers, I won't do a proper comeback. I can feel I have the speed and have those feelings that drove me to perfect my driving. If I don't have that feeling inside me, I would not even try at all."

Alguersuari isn't making any predictions over what will follow, insisting that it's "very early days at the moment". He currently has no plans of following sportscar ace Ben Hanley's example of using karting as a springboard back into car racing, but isn't writing off the idea altogether.

"I have to take it step-by-step, do a couple of races and see where I am," he says. "I don't know where this can lead into. I have a karting international licence and if that drives me into something else in the future, then why not?"

Even so, Alguersuari doesn't anticipate that racing will once again replace music as his main activity: "Hopefully I don't have time to continue the racing project because the pandemic is over and we can be back to normal activity." Yet nothing in his racing journey has been straightforward.

"I never expected to enter F1 so young and I never expected to go out on my best ever moment of my technical and professional development," he says. "You never know in life what can happen."

Those who were quick to write Alguersuari off as a wasted talent may yet be proven wrong... ❄

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YOUR SAY

Pitting another race against the main event on Sunday will devalue Sunday's win completely. It will be known forever more as 'Saturday's grand prix'

COLIN FOX

Sprint races will devalue Formula 1

On the subject of sprint races in Formula 1, I have just seven words for Liberty Media: if it ain't broke don't fix it. Going down this route will devalue the sport of F1 and lose a generation of fans. No good will come out of this ridiculous experiment.

If they are intent on making the spectacle better for trackside fans and TV broadcasters, make it a two-day event with one two-hour practice session on Saturday morning followed by qualifying in the afternoon.

Pitting another race against the main event on Sunday will devalue Sunday's win completely, as the youth of today will see no difference between each race. It will be known forever more as 'Saturday's grand prix'.

Colin Fox
Ireland

Silverstone Syd's successor

Graeme Innes-Johnstone (Your Say, 8 April) mentions the Romain Grosjean incident in Bahrain last year. First on scene was the doctor's car. Why not an experienced fire marshal like Silverstone Syd in his Jaguar, with 300 litres of highly effective fire extinguishant on board, as we used to have?

George Copeland
Wokingham, Berks

Fire needs a more effective response

Grosjean's accident posed obvious questions, as we watched a couple of marshals running about with hand-held extinguishers. Why no sign of fast pick-up trucks with mounted foam cannon? Why no air crash style silver-suited rescuers?

Steve Singleton
By email

PICTURE OF THE WEEK




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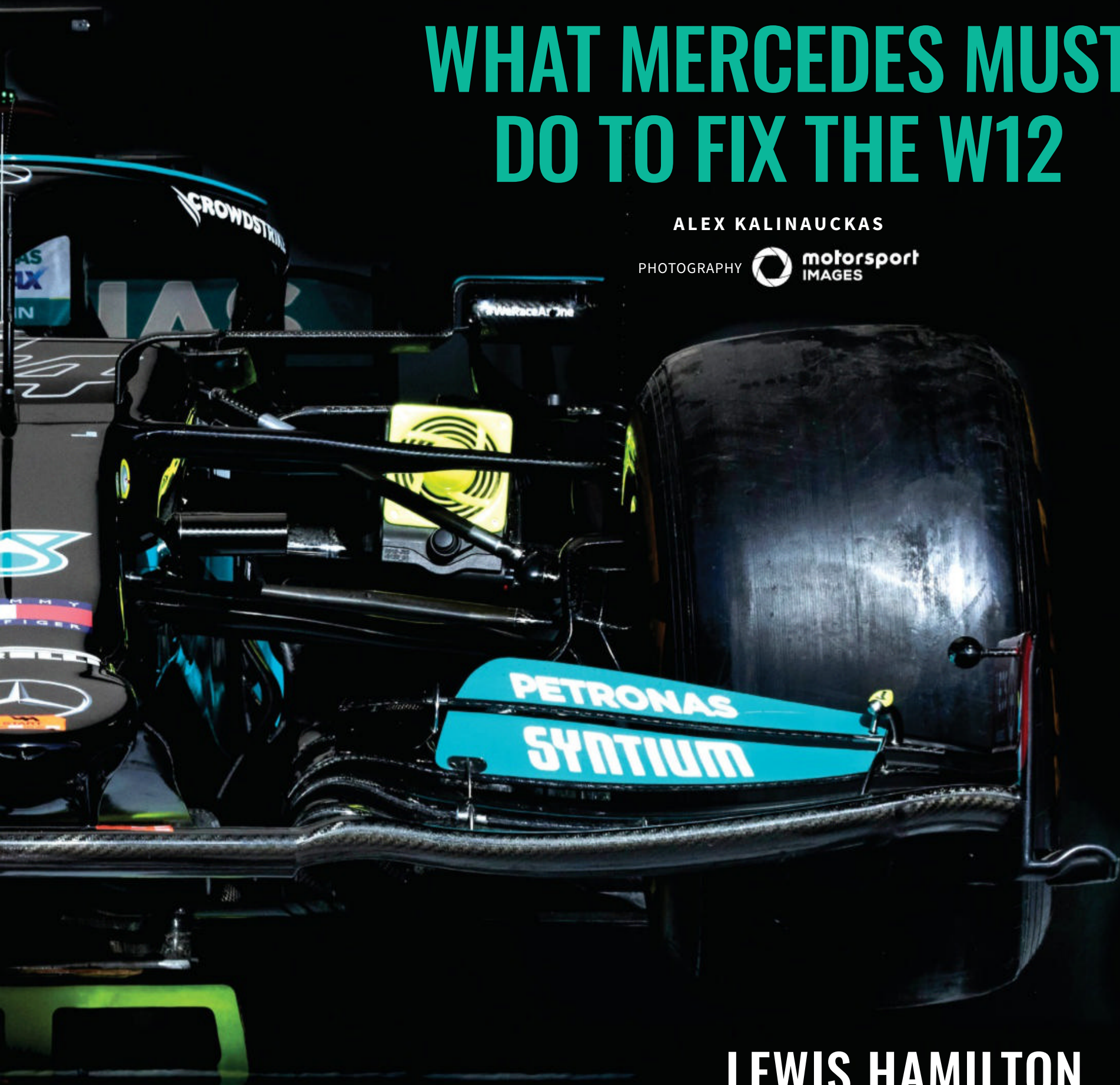
WE'VE GOT TO

DO DO CATCH UP

WHAT MERCEDES MUST DO TO FIX THE W12

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

PHOTOGRAPHY  **motorsport
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LEWIS HAMILTON

DO DO DO BETTER

“WE’VE GOT A CAR THAT COULD WIN A CHAMPIONSHIP...”

That’s what Mercedes thinks of its W12, the successor to what may well go down as one Formula 1’s best ever cars. But in 2021, Mercedes’ assessment comes with many caveats, despite the team currently leading the constructors’ championship ahead of Red Bull.

Even with a three-week gap since the season-opening race in Bahrain, the situation as F1 sets up at Imola for round two is well known: Red Bull has the season’s fastest car so far, and Mercedes is under pressure. That stress exploded into scenes of joy when Lewis Hamilton unexpectedly beat Max Verstappen in the desert darkness, but such celebrations only came after the hard work the world champion squad had logged between testing and the first race.

Mercedes was significantly hampered by its reliability issues and needless missed track time in testing, but it nevertheless made massive strides. This contributed to race one victory, but Verstappen’s Bahrain pole margin of 0.388 seconds (which could have been greater had he not damaged his floor earlier in qualifying) showcased the pure pace gap facing the Black Arrows.

Continuing his assessment of the W12, Mercedes trackside engineering director Andrew Shovlin says: “We’ve got a car that could win a championship if we make some clever decisions with it, do some good work with it and operate well over the year.”

So, based on what we saw in Bahrain, here are 10 key changes Mercedes will surely be considering if it is to keep the team’s remarkable F1 success streak alive with the W12.

MERCEDES MUST...

SOLVE THE LOW-RAKE PROBLEM

It’s well known that, compared with the development upgrades allowed between seasons in normal years (and particularly when contrasted against the major regulations overhaul coming for 2022), the tweaks to car designs this year are tiny. But over the winter, Mercedes went out of its way to highlight how the rule changes — mainly the triangular cuts to the rear floors allied with the reduced diffuser strakes — could still have a major impact on car performance. Now that testing and race one have passed, it’s plain to see why.

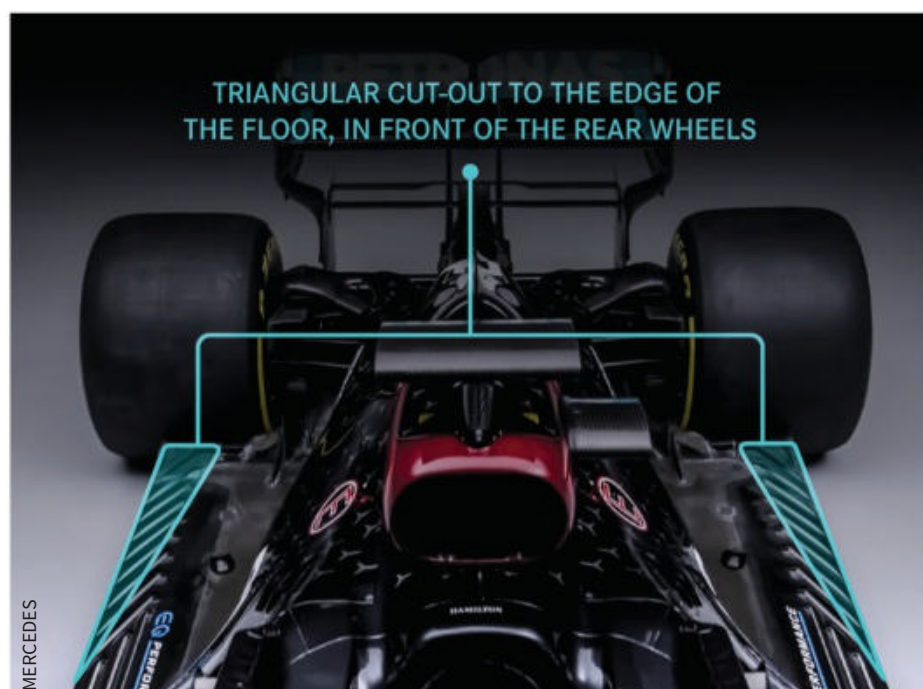
“We’ve probably suffered more with the change of regulations than the cars with the higher rake, and the Red Bull has followed that concept for many years,” says Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff. “So, it’s maybe more difficult for us to recover some of the lost downforce.”

Mercedes’ low-rake aerodynamic philosophy, which has been a key part of its recent success, has clearly been hurt more by the floor changes than has the high-rake concept that Red Bull pioneered in the pre-turbo-hybrid era. That has taken a hit too, but the low-rake approach has possibly lost up to one second more.

Mercedes’ particular struggles are reinforced by the only other team that uses the low-rake concept. Racing Point (now Aston Martin) went from high-rake to low-rake with its ‘pink Mercedes’ RP20 last year, and it paid off handsomely. In Bahrain, Aston slipped back to having the seventh fastest car in 2021 after being third fastest last season, with the team railing against the impact the floor changes have had.

Red Bull’s high-rake concept in contrast to low rake of following Aston Martin





But both Mercedes and Aston are stuck with this aerodynamic approach. And even if they wanted to go the other way, suspensions are now homologated in the 2021 regulations.

“Whether or not it’s high-rake or low-rake, we can’t do anything about that now,” says Shovlin. “What we certainly can’t do is suddenly say we’re going to lift the rear of our car 30mm and work with that, because that would write off the season. We would lose so much in doing that. To recover it, it’s just not practical.”

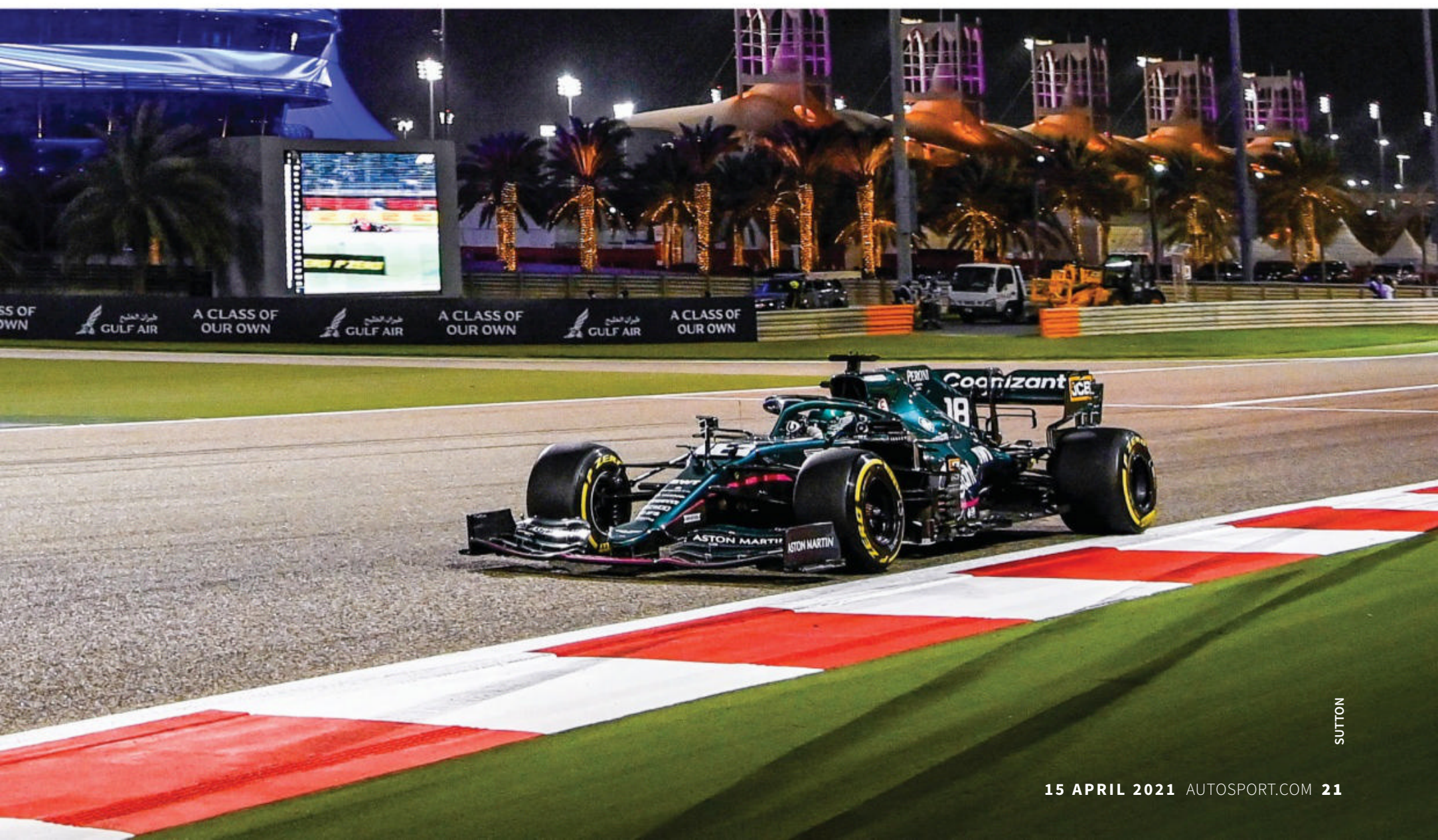
Mercedes cannot raise its rake because that would have a severe knock-on effect for the rest of the W12, particularly around the front wing. The suspicion is that as the floor cutouts have removed the lengthy enclosed holes the teams were allowed to add before this year (which Mercedes used to seal the floor to act as an extended diffuser), their absence prevents the floor working as well as it did with the low-rake approach when it comes to boosting downforce. In comparison, the high-rake method did this by creating greater diffuser volume, and how it channelled the air disturbed by the rear wheels.

But while Mercedes cannot just switch rake philosophy, it may

“WHAT WE CERTAINLY CAN’T DO IS SUDDENLY SAY WE’RE GOING TO LIFT THE REAR OF OUR CAR 30MM”

be that it can at least improve the situation by further altering the scrolls on the floor edge that appeared in testing. Aston introduced an extra bank of fins to its floor for the Bahrain race – minor tweaks that Mercedes may also consider to reduce the impact of the lost floor space and its various slots and holes.

The team could also make a significant breakthrough on its work with the new Pirelli tyres. If it can find a way to improve the different deformation characteristics new compounds inevitably introduce when it comes to the aerodynamic impact of the front wheels (as well as adapting the same impact at the rear), then it could recover downforce. And that simply means performance improvements. >>





MERCEDES MUST...

SOLVE ITS HIGH-SPEED CORNER GAP TO RED BULL

“We don’t really have any strengths relative to [Red Bull],” says Shovlin. “We’ve had a lot of years where we’ve been able to rely on straightline speed or high-speed cornering or interconnecting corners. But you look at it and we weren’t taking any time out of them [Red Bull] anywhere.

“There were a couple of corners where they really took chunks out of us in qualifying: the high-speed [Turns 5/6/7] and also Turns 9/10 – they were very strong there. And that’s really the main thing. In qualifying we’re just bang on their pace in our best corners and they’re quicker in the others.”

Shovlin’s explanation is tied into the impact of the new floor rules on the rake debate. The RB16B is able to keep a significantly more consistent balance through these corners – it was particularly noticeable how the Red Bull remained poised and flowing through Bahrain’s tricky Turns 9/10 complex. Here, the drivers must turn and slow from the first high-speed left into the much slower second, all after hitting a big bump on the way in. This part of the Bahrain track is infamous for minor errors and tyre-torturing lock-ups, but Verstappen looked utterly in control.

The theory is that the RB16B is able to maintain its handling balance through such turns because the high-rake approach keeps the downforce-generating pressure better with the floor changes.

The next two venues that F1 visits – Imola and Algarve Circuit – feature high-speed sequences, double-apex turns and the high-to-low speed corners where Mercedes lost out in Bahrain. So perhaps this is why the team, says Shovlin, is hoping to “find circuits that do suit us more” as it works to address the W12’s high-speed shortcomings. That said, those two venues don’t have Bahrain’s abrasive surface, so Mercedes may find its rear handling improves as a result.

BAHRAIN PACE OVER THE PAST DECADE			
YEAR	POLE TEAM (DRIVER)	GAP	EVENTUAL CHAMPION (DRIVER)
2012	Red Bull (Vettel)	0.098s	Red Bull (Vettel)
2013	Mercedes (Rosberg)	0.254s	Red Bull (Vettel)
2014	Mercedes (Rosberg)	1.062s	Mercedes (Hamilton)
2015	Mercedes (Hamilton)	0.411s	Mercedes (Hamilton)
2016	Mercedes (Hamilton)	0.519s	Mercedes (Rosberg)
2017	Mercedes (Bottas)	0.478s	Mercedes (Hamilton)
2018	Ferrari (Vettel)	0.166s	Mercedes (Hamilton)
2019	Ferrari (Leclerc)	0.324s	Mercedes (Hamilton)
2020	Mercedes (Hamilton)	0.414s	Mercedes (Hamilton)
2021	Red Bull (Verstappen)	0.388s	-



MERCEDES MUST...

GAIN AT LOWER-SPEED VENUES

If Mercedes cannot match Red Bull at high-speed venues, then it must gain as much as it can at tracks where the corners are tighter and the average speeds lower. This is a rather extraordinary switch for the turbo-hybrid era, where previously Red Bull had to wait for tracks such as Monaco and the Hungaroring to bring its chassis strengths into play, with Mercedes’ power prowess pulling it clear at medium and high-speed circuits.

The current 2021 calendar must always be read with a degree of scepticism – matched with hope – that it will take place as planned within the pandemic’s continuing awfulness. But as it stands, Imola and the Algarve Circuit will be followed by the Spanish Grand Prix at Barcelona before F1 heads back to the first venue not featured in 2020: Monaco.

The near-laboratory status Barcelona has for F1 teams means it will be interesting to gauge the W12’s progress there, but Monaco is an altogether different circuit. And it’s one where Mercedes’ rivals in recent years have done rather well. Were it not for a slow Red Bull pitstop in 2016, Mercedes would have just one win from the past four Monaco GPs – the 2019 success that remains one of Hamilton’s best drives. Mercedes is now the challenger and, with the Monaco course’s tight nature allied to its low average speed, there is every chance that this represents Mercedes’ best chance to win again based on the Bahrain showing. But the formbook *could* be different when/if F1 gets there.



“IN QUALIFYING WE’RE JUST BANG ON THEIR PACE IN OUR BEST CORNERS AND THEY’RE QUICKER IN THE OTHERS”

MERCEDES MUST...

USE THE EARLY CALENDAR GAPS WELL

The planned 2021 calendar is unbalanced. As it stands, up to the summer break following the Hungarian Grand Prix, there is a run of 11 races in 18 weekends, which is followed by 12 in 15 from Spa to Abu Dhabi. The biggest non-summer-break gap is the three weeks that have followed Bahrain to this weekend, after which there is another two-week gap before the Portuguese GP.

As well as pushing F1 personnel extremely hard, the more rapid run of events in the season’s scheduled second half will test the teams’ capacity for making car improvements. It simply removes the amount of time available to work through the data collected at

each race. The teams do have considerable computing power and resources to aid this, but there’s simply no substitute for time.

In 2021, the teams can’t just upgrade their way out of trouble with new parts. All will therefore have to work as efficiently as possible, using the extra gaps in the season’s first half as best they can. But Mercedes has already proved that it can significantly improve the performance of what it already has.

“There was a lot of work being done in the 10 days in between [testing and the Bahrain race],” summarises Wolff. “We found the path forward that makes the car more predictable.” »



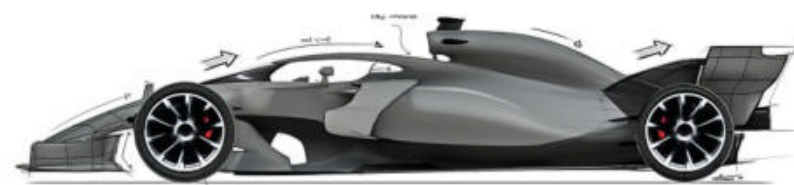


MERCEDES MUST...

NAIL THE 2022 SWITCHOVER TIMING

The season's compact nature may even make things easier for the teams when it comes to the unseen but vital element of the current campaign: competing in 2021 while working in tandem on the 2022 designs. Here, the early breaks between races may make it simpler for squads to choose putting more resources into the current cars before fully turning their base's attention to 2022, and leaving the race teams to maximise what they can during the second half.

Mercedes essentially did this last year by not developing the W11 from the end of August, but that car was the class of the field. If the team is not in a position to beat Red Bull by the summer break, then it would be a logical call to turn Brackley's efforts fully onto the rules



reset and see what its formidable race operation can still achieve. It's also worth remembering that the dual programmes must be completed under F1's new cost-cap rules, which add an extra layer of complexity and force teams to be ever more efficient.

Red Bull arguably has more to lose if 2021 is close. The team is just as keen to wave Honda off on the highest note as its soon-to-be-former engine builder. Deciding to go all in for this season, while sacrificing resources that could otherwise be spent on the 2022 car, would become an ever bolder call as the year passes, but Red Bull's eight-year wait for a title may be more compelling when weighed against the seven consecutive title doubles Mercedes looks back upon.



ETHERINGTON

MERCEDES MUST...

HARMONISE THE ENERGISING FACTOR OF BEING BEHIND

Mercedes is simply not going to give up its position as F1's benchmark. While it might appear logical to shift resources towards next year once the critical switchover point arrives, the team will not accept defeat in 2021 without a fight, which Wolff is already making clear.

"In a way, there is a feeling within the team that we very much enjoy the new circumstances," he says. "It's theirs to lose, ours to win, because when you have the quickest car, you have got to deliver on that. We have to catch up. We have to deploy our A-game and find more performance."

That fierce competitive spirit, that unwillingness to concede defeat, is the reverse side of the well-used mantra that Mercedes has deployed to avoid complacency during its years of dominance: never resting on its laurels. Remember, this is the team that managed to make a major step with the W11's innovations in a stable rules period. Yes, dual-axis steering and the adventurous rear-suspension layout were added in a year when regular design development was permitted, but such additions still meant that significant performance gains were made with a design philosophy that by 2020 was three seasons old.

So, while there may only be so much Mercedes can do to increase the W12's chances against the RB16B, the team has the people, resources and spirit to find whatever limit 2021 sets and still be very successful.

MERCEDES MUST...

FIND THE W12'S BALANCE SWEET SPOT

During the season opener, Mercedes openly admitted that its package was exactly the same as it had run in testing, with no updated parts on the W12. But the car's handling, although really troublesome in testing, had got better as pre-season running progressed, and it was the same on the Bahrain race weekend.

Come qualifying, Hamilton said he felt that the W12's performance was "a really good step forward", adding: "Coming into this weekend we thought it was double the gap [to Red Bull], and that's really down to some really fantastic work from the men and women back at the factory and people here [at the track]."

With no new parts, we can conclude that Mercedes' progress was down to its team's optimisation skills. The squad has clearly made significant progress on the W12's balance, but neither Hamilton nor Valtteri Bottas are fully happy on that front – it remains too inconsistent. It also seems that the new tyres are a major factor in good car balance in 2021, and it's highly likely that teams currently struggling with this will improve as the year goes on.



COATES

“MERCEDES’ PROGRESS WAS DOWN TO ITS TEAM’S OPTIMISATION SKILLS”



SUTTON

MERCEDES MUST...

ASK IF IT HAS A START PROBLEM

The main reason why Bottas was not in the lead fight in the Bahrain Grand Prix before his long second stop was because he had fallen behind Ferrari's Charles Leclerc on the first lap after making a slower getaway than Verstappen's and Hamilton's.

That makes it three out of three of the most recent races in Bahrain where Bottas has lost positions on the first lap. And slow starts were a regular theme of his doomed title challenge to Hamilton last year. But the world champion also had times where he struggled at the start in 2020, notably at Mugello and Imola.



SUTTON

It's a minor note, but these unpredictable launches (even when one Mercedes is slow away, the other is generally rapid) could become really costly in a close title fight. Had Bottas been right with Verstappen and Hamilton in the opening stints in Bahrain – he improved from 0.2s per lap slower than the Red Bull after battling past Leclerc to just over 0.1s in the second stint – there's every chance that Mercedes could have used the powerful Bahrain undercut to get both cars ahead of a faster rival with its aggressive strategy call. So, perhaps its start procedure needs adjusting considering how costly it could be in a close fight. >>

MERCEDES MUST...

FIND GAINS IN UNREGULATED AREAS

In fine-tuning its existing package within the areas that are strictly regulated in 2021 – the carryover requirements – Mercedes is well aware that it must exploit what it's already got.

“We’re having to look at more subtle areas to do with driveability characteristics,” says Shovlin. “Also, arriving at the circuit with the car well sorted, well balanced. Doing your homework, knowing how long the tyres will run. This championship is going to come down to the fine margins, more than normal.”

An extension of this approach will be about finding performance gains in the areas of the car that remain open for development, such as elements of the nose and non-crash-structure parts of the bodywork.



MERCEDES MUST...

MAKE SURE ITS GUARDED UPGRADES DELIVER

“We have spent our tokens, but we won’t reveal how we used them just yet,” said Mercedes technical director and soon-to-be chief technical officer James Allison at the W12’s launch. “That’ll become clear in good time.”

By not adding anything to its testing package for the first race, it appears as if Mercedes still has something to deploy. There has been speculation that this could be a new nose concept, something that likely would have used up both of the team’s 2021 development tokens.

If Mercedes has gone down this route, it would tie right back in with the required work to claw back downforce with the air coming off the new tyres at the front of the W12 and the heavily analysed areas at the rear.

But even if Mercedes’ closely guarded developments are added elsewhere to the W12, the team must be certain that they are going to deliver the expected performance gains. Here again comes the impact of the cost cap, as Mercedes has already highlighted how it will need to be more efficient and less wasteful by working its resources better. If anything goes wrong with any upgrades this year, it’s much harder to fix with the additional restrictions.

Mercedes feels that the W12 is capable of winning the 2021 title. But if the team is to be successful in its attempt to extend its championship-sweeping run to an unprecedented eighth season, it’s going to have to do things differently this time around.

The Black Arrows squad has demonstrated time and again that it can rise to another level, but in the current era it’s never *really* started on the back foot (see page 27). Everything it tries to improve the W12’s package is critical to the 2021 tale, and the team knows it.

“We’ve got to do better,” says Hamilton. “We’ve got to be smarter.”



“THIS CHAMPIONSHIP IS GOING TO COME DOWN TO THE FINE MARGINS, MORE THAN NORMAL”



OTHER TOUGH STARTS FOR MERCEDES

Although Mercedes currently leads the 2021 Formula 1 constructors' championship after the season-opening Bahrain Grand Prix, things are very different this time. The Black Arrows squad has a 13-point gap over Red Bull, but its rival definitively leads the way on pace.

For the first time since 2014, a non-Mercedes team leads the way in Autosport's supertimes calculations. Supertimes are based on the fastest single lap by each car at each race weekend, expressed as a percentage of the fastest lap overall (100.000%). Red Bull currently tops that chart by 0.436%. That is actually the second smallest gap after a season opener in the turbo-hybrid era – after the 0.326% that separated Mercedes from Ferrari in 2017 – but the swing from post-race one in 2020 is massive. When last season got under way, Mercedes enjoyed a 0.855% gap over Red Bull, its biggest gap since being 1% ahead of Ferrari back in 2016.

Yet while this is the first time that Mercedes has been adrift on pace after a curtain raiser since it took over as F1's benchmark squad in 2014, it has been 'behind'



at the start of other seasons.

In fact, back at the start of the modern 'Mercedes F1 era' in 2014, the team came away from the Australian GP eight points behind McLaren. Despite blitzing the way on pure pace and winning – Mercedes was 0.847% ahead of Ferrari in the supertimes for that event at Albert Park, where Red Bull had been 0.482% ahead of Mercedes the year before – the race had not gone totally Mercedes' way. Nico Rosberg triumphed, but polesitter Lewis Hamilton was forced out after two laps, down a cylinder thanks to a split spark-plug-holding rubber tube. When home hero Daniel Ricciardo was disqualified post-race for his fuel-flow rate

being too high, Jenson Button was figuratively elevated to his final F1 podium and the 15 points he got for that third place, combined with Kevin Magnussen's 18 for second, boosted McLaren ahead. Mercedes was not headed again after taking the points lead at the next round in Malaysia.

Three years later, F1 had changed significantly. Rosberg was gone after winning his title, therefore missing the switch to the more muscular and faster cars that had been introduced for 2017. The change meant Mercedes' advantage was indeed slashed, but it nevertheless stayed ahead through the rule changes, despite Ferrari's Sebastian Vettel winning the season opener, with

Hamilton delayed by Max Verstappen's Red Bull.

A year later, Vettel beat Hamilton home again, despite the Briton also taking pole. That qualifying effort preserved Mercedes' supertimes advantage (by 0.818% over Ferrari), although there is a considerable case that Ferrari had 2018's faster car for much of the campaign and lost the title through a combination of Vettel's mistakes and Hamilton's skill in slightly slower machinery as the campaign ebbed and flowed.

For one final example of Mercedes being 'behind' early in a campaign, we look to 2019, although this is a stretch given that Hamilton won the Melbourne race, where the team had a 0.875% supertimes advantage over Ferrari. It took until the Austrian GP – nine rounds in – before Mercedes lost a race. And yet things should have been far closer than the 140 points it led by going to Austria, after Ferrari had lost a certain win in Bahrain, a likely Baku victory, Mercedes' strategy nearly let Verstappen steal its Monaco triumph, and Vettel lost the Canada win to his controversial defending.

CALENDAR

VENUE	DATE
Barber Motorsports Park	18 April
St Petersburg	25 April
Texas Motor Speedway	1 May
Texas Motor Speedway	2 May
Indianapolis (road course)	15 May
Indianapolis 500	30 May
Detroit Belle Isle	12 June
Detroit Belle Isle	13 June
Road America	20 June
Mid-Ohio	4 July
Toronto	11 July
Nashville	8 August
Indianapolis (road course)	14 August
Gateway	21 August
Portland	12 September
Laguna Seca	19 September
Long Beach	26 September



Reigning champion Dixon (right) and Newgarden will face off once more for Ganassi and Penske respectively as IndyCar again works around Covid-19 challenges

SEASON
PREVIEW

CAN NEWGARDEN TURN THE TABLES ON DIXON?

The titans of IndyCar resume battle this weekend, but a host of other teams and drivers will be hoping to launch their bids for the 2021 title too

DAVID MALSHER-LOPEZ

PHOTOGRAPHY

motorsport
IMAGES

“W

e did everything we could and it wasn't enough. We didn't do a heck of a lot wrong this season.”

Those words came from Team Penske's two-time champion, Josef Newgarden, as he reflected on 2020, a year in which he delivered his most consistent run of performances yet somehow failed to claim a third title. Citing Scott Dixon's season-opening run of three wins — and Penske misfortunes — as a hammerblow, Newgarden continued: “You can't let someone like Scott keep finishing ahead of you and get that much of a run going in the championship. They were taking advantage of every situation that was negative for us. To have one single car doing that and for that car to be Dixon's [is] a recipe for disaster for us and everyone else!”

As he said, he barely put a wheel wrong in 2020, and yet Newgarden was well aware of where he and Penske need to up their game for this season: “I know personally I have improvements to make — in qualifying, and maybe one or two other areas. And as a team we have to make some gains too, like at Texas. Ganassi was at a different level than us in race set-up, and remember [in 2021] we have two races there.

“I think we have to look at the tyre situation too. One of the reasons we finally got that win on the Indy road course was because our car was just so solid on both of Firestone's compounds, where I think our main rivals were good on one and not so good on the other. Well, trying to get that consistency across reds and blacks for all road and street tracks would obviously be ideal because it would be good to widen that gap over Ganassi, who I think had more tyre struggles than we did this year...”

That they did. Take, for example, Dixon's descriptions of Chip Ganassi Racing's struggles at the double-header Harvest Grand Prix on the Indianapolis road course, where he'd run and hid in the second half of the Indianapolis Grand Prix just a few months earlier.

“It was crazy because we had good pace on the Firestone reds in the race but we couldn't hit our own backsides on blacks... and I have no definitive answer as to why,” says Dixon. “We typically have pretty good tyre deg[radation]. But that weekend even our tyre deg was crap: it was OK on reds, but on blacks it was horrendous.”

Asked last month whether he felt the team had addressed those issues in the off-season, the reigning champion started off with a caveat: “We have some ideas. The problem we've faced in recent years is when you do this testing, especially in winter months, the tracks are cold and the conditions are different to what you get [in the season]. And what at least we've found is the tyres are quite sensitive even just to





Alex Palou has joined Ganassi for his second season in IndyCar



ENTRY LIST		
NO	DRIVER	TEAM/ENGINE
1	JR Hildebrand*	AJ Foyt Enterprises/Chevrolet
4	Dalton Kellett	AJ Foyt Enterprises/Chevrolet
11	Charlie Kimball*	AJ Foyt Enterprises/Chevrolet
14	Sebastien Bourdais	AJ Foyt Enterprises/Chevrolet
2	Josef Newgarden	Team Penske/Chevrolet
3	Scott McLaughlin	Team Penske/Chevrolet
12	Will Power	Team Penske/Chevrolet
22	Simon Pagenaud	Team Penske/Chevrolet
5	Patricio O'Ward	Arrow McLaren SP/Chevrolet
7	Felix Rosenqvist	Arrow McLaren SP/Chevrolet
86	Juan Pablo Montoya*	Arrow McLaren SP/Chevrolet
06	Helio Castroneves*	Meyer Shank Racing/Honda
60	Jack Harvey	Meyer Shank Racing/Honda
8	Marcus Ericsson	Chip Ganassi Racing/Honda
9	Scott Dixon	Chip Ganassi Racing/Honda
10	Alex Palou	Chip Ganassi Racing/Honda
48	Jimmie Johnson*	Chip Ganassi Racing/Honda
48	Tony Kanaan*	Chip Ganassi Racing/Honda
15	Graham Rahal	Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing/Honda
30	Takuma Sato	Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing/Honda
45	Santino Ferrucci*	Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing/Honda
16	Simona de Silvestro*	Paretta Autosport/Chevrolet
18	Ed Jones	Dale Coyne Racing with Vasser-Sullivan/Honda
51	Romain Grosjean*	Dale Coyne Racing with Rick Ware Racing/Honda
51	Pietro Fittipaldi*	Dale Coyne Racing with Rick Ware Racing/Honda
52	Cody Ware*	Dale Coyne Racing with Rick Ware Racing/Honda
20/47	Conor Daly*	Ed Carpenter Racing/Chevrolet
20	Ed Carpenter*	Ed Carpenter Racing/Chevrolet
21	Rinus VeeKay	Ed Carpenter Racing/Chevrolet
26	Colton Herta	Andretti Autosport/Honda
27	Alexander Rossi	Andretti Autosport/Honda
28	Ryan Hunter-Reay	Andretti Autosport/Honda
29	James Hinchcliffe	Andretti Autosport/Honda
98	Marco Andretti*	Andretti Autosport/Honda
59	Max Chilton*	Carlin/Chevrolet

* Selected events/part-programme

ambient conditions or UV on the track.”

Regarding where he saw areas for improvement, the six-time champion — about to enter his 21st season at this level — admits that he, like the team, needs to keep evolving: “I think there’s definitely some things I needed to change and apply differently, which I’m pretty cognisant of and have tried to apply to some of our testing thus far, even though we’ve only had two or three days. The preparation that we do as a team set-up-wise, I think, and definitely some driving style things that I think I need to adjust.

“With the team-mates it’s been really interesting. A lot of those things take a lot of time to try and analyse. You’re doing a lot of data mining to make sure you can find specific things, and then you’ve got to test whether those actually really apply.

“The addition of Alex [Palou, IndyCar sophomore entering his first season at Ganassi] and his driving style has been quite different. So even that, at some low-grip circuits, has been really interesting to kind of focus on what works and what’s different, whether it’s a bit of what Marcus [Ericsson] and I do or what Alex does. Having team-mates is always key to try and understand and try and dig deep into how you can change and better yourself.”

Certainly Newgarden has benefited over the past four years from being team-mates with Will Power, who continues to be one of IndyCar’s forces of nature most weekends, but has a few weekends spoiled by the force of his own nature. The 2014 IndyCar champion remains sensationally fast, but the frustrations when bad pitstops or caution periods/closed pitlanes neuter his on-track efforts can cause him to compound the problem with an error, which then makes him mad at himself, which then... You get the picture.

Generally, however, Power’s just unlucky, and last year his issue in the first third of the season was some rough pitstops, the most severe of which saw him sent out into the fray at Iowa Speedway with only three wheels properly attached, which of course meant he ended up in the wall. An off-season shuffle in crew line-ups has left Power extremely confident that, for the first time in a long time, he’ll consistently have pit service to match the gold standard set by Dixon’s and Newgarden’s crews. If that’s the case, there should be fewer mental boiling-point moments. For that reason, he’s Autosport’s tip for the 2021 IndyCar title.

Rookie Scott McLaughlin’s arrival at Penske is addressed in a separate story (see page 32), but the three-time Australian Supercars champion’s rate of progress may also apply pressure to Simon Pagenaud, who has blown hot and cold ever since winning his 2016 championship. At his best, Pagenaud’s one of the best, no question, but his off days — usually in qualifying — can be absolute shockers, and his problems tend to be exaggerated by not only the pace of Power and Newgarden, but also the densely packed times in the chasing field. Pagenaud can be just half a second slower than Power in qualifying and be separated from him on the grid by 12 cars. It’s something he’ll need to address in this, his contract year.

Pagenaud’s qualifying problems bring to mind a remark made by one engineer when describing the difference between set-up



Will Power is our tip for the 2021 IndyCar title

approaches: “Some drivers out there think that if they feel the car’s handling is secure then they’ll get the most out of themselves and will be fast. And yes, sometimes it works out... but only if you have the best car. The quickest guys are prepared to be uncomfortable and deal with the car being tricky on the limit if it means it’s faster.”

It’s difficult to know where Palou might fall on that scale, but we believe that in terms of one-lap pace he should at least be the equal of the #10 Ganassi Dallara-Honda’s previous occupant, Felix Rosenqvist. No less interesting is what Dixon alluded to: that Palou’s driving style is different enough that he may help steer the team in a new direction on set-up when seeking to remedy their qualifying issues on road courses. If that is the case, we can be sure that Dixon will adapt – he always does! – and the whole team could make progress as a result. In other words, Palou could be Ganassi’s

secret weapon in more ways than one. Staying ahead of Dixon on race days is the tricky part, as any number of the Kiwi’s former team-mates can tell you, but it would be far from surprising to see the Spaniard win a race or two this year.

For many the big question is whether the Andretti Autosport team can get back to being title contenders. Ryan Hunter-Reay was the last driver to win it for the team (back in 2012), while Alexander Rossi came close in both 2018 and 2019. But neither made it to victory lane in 2020, and finished ninth and 10th in the points race. Their team-mate Colton Herta, by contrast, finished third through a blend of consistency and searing pace, showing remarkable maturity in only his second full season.

That said, both Rossi and Hunter-Reay have the inherent speed to regain pre-eminence in the Andretti Autosport stable, and it’s understood that both made their... er, let’s say ‘extreme disappointment’ with their pitcrews’ performances in 2020 very well known behind closed doors, hence their revitalisation in the final third of last season.

“I think we’re operating at a really high level right now,” says Rossi. “Testing has been good. I think that the last 20 per cent of last year, things had turned a corner and we had identified a lot of issues and had a lot of tough conversations and made some changes, so I think we went into the off-season with quite a bit of optimism, and we’ve continued that progression all the way through the winter.”

Rossi surely has a championship in him, while Hunter-Reay – with his DHL sponsorship and future with Andretti Autosport rumoured to be hanging in the balance again – still has the pace to beat anyone on a given day. Their 2021 destinies largely depend on the team maintaining the form we saw in the latter section of the 2020 championship. But even then, Herta will have access to the same equipment. 🏆



Alexander Rossi usually shines at Long Beach

A DIFFERENT SORT OF CALENDAR

Andretti Autosport’s pitlane infirmities would surely have cost the team a crack at the 2020 IndyCar championship in any circumstance, but its victory tally – just one, delivered by Colton Herta at Mid-Ohio – was probably kept artificially low by the COVID-19-influenced deletion of all street races in 2020 bar St Petersburg, which AA’s drivers threw away themselves! Alexander Rossi and Ryan Hunter-Reay are usually superb at the temporary tracks such as Long Beach, Detroit, Toronto and St Pete.

They should rejoice, therefore, at the 2021 IndyCar Series schedule as it stands at the moment, with the removal of Iowa Speedway (usually a lock for Penske’s Josef Newgarden), the insertion of the extremely promising-looking 2.17-mile course around the streets of Nashville, and Long Beach’s move to the season finale.

Texas Motor Speedway should also be a strong venue for Michael Andretti’s squad – provided, unlike last year, HPD can get Hunter-Reay’s and Rossi’s engines fired up in time for the parade lap – so a double-header there will be most welcome.

Based on previous form, the second race on the Indianapolis Motor Speedway road course is more likely to play into the hands of Penske, as well as Scott Dixon and Graham Rahal, while Portland brings out the best in all the top teams. Betting on who’ll win there is unwise.

North America is far from out of the woods regarding COVID-19 and its mutant strains, and right now there’s a big fat question mark over the Toronto street race. As a result of new restrictions in Canada, IMSA was recently forced to announce that its round at Mosport Park on 4 July has been scratched for a second year... and that’s

on a permanent road course. Street courses generally take 30 days to build, and the Toronto course around Exhibition Place was set for 11 July. Stay-at-home orders could seriously hurt the track construction schedule there.

Should IndyCar’s trip north of the border be cancelled again, expect a replacement race at one of the other venues on promoter Green Savoree’s roster. The company took a nasty hit last year with the loss of Toronto and Portland, along with crowd restrictions and date moves for Mid-Ohio and St Pete. Schedule-wise, doubling up at Mid-Ohio would make most sense, but that’s 4 July weekend and many people will have family obligations on at least one day. Therefore, back-to-back races at Portland in September would make most sense, providing NBC/NBCSN can find a two-hour window on the Saturday.

SEASON
PREVIEW

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR IN INDYCAR 2021

Rookies arriving with big reputations, veterans who still have the fire and feisty young talent pushing for a breakthrough... IndyCar has it all this year

DAVID MALSHER-LOPEZ



Kiwi Scott McLaughlin arrives
in IndyCar with the best team and
a big reputation from V8 Supercars

THE STAR ROOKIE AT PENSKE

When Robert Wickens took pole position and nearly won his first IndyCar race in 2018, some people were aghast. Was this not an indictment of the level of IndyCar drivers?

No, Wickens is a superb driver with extensive and successful open-wheel experience, who made a

living out of touring car (DTM) racing when his single-seater opportunities ran dry. Getting back in a fast open-wheel car, he took little time to rediscover the outer limits of his abilities; his only self-doubts were the need to exploit the extra grip of the red (softer compound)

Firestone tyres, and how to fuel-save while going fast.

Now Scott McLaughlin, three-time and reigning Australian Supercars champion, appears to have similar potential – but remarkably, with virtually no open-wheel background. Of course, he also faces a

similar learning curve to the one Wickens did three years ago, but the Kiwi star's best sector times in his toe-dipping first IndyCar weekend at St Petersburg last October – and his pace in last year's Spring Training – showed what vast potential he has. So does the fact that

Team Penske, which rarely takes on rookies, shipped him across the Pacific after the combo kicked the opposition Down Under.

As the only newbie taking on all the races on the IndyCar schedule, obviously the IndyCar Rookie of the Year title is a lock, so

GROSJEAN'S FRESH START

"Romain has come into this with the right attitude – pretty excited and dedicated to learning," says Dale Coyne of his latest rookie, ex-Formula 1 driver Romain Grosjean. "He's been a very good student and we expect him to shine often."

"I think he's a bit surprised – in a positive way – at the range of adjustments in IndyCar. It's a spec series, but you can do a lot to the cars to adjust them... It's just that there's only two or three combinations that work in a given session, in given track conditions on a given weekend. So that's when you have to just say, 'This is as good as it gets; now I have to

run what we bring.'"

That is as good an explanation as any of what a former F1 driver has to get used to when switching to IndyCar, but what Grosjean might regard as a limitation is also what attracted him to the series: the gaps between the haves and have-nots are minimal, in terms of car potential. Therefore a man of his obvious talent can expect to shine.

Sure, his first test started inauspiciously, as he wasted little time in throwing the car at the scenery at Barber Motorsports Park. But at Laguna Seca he was on the pace of redoubtable team-mate Ed Jones.

Coyne landed Grosjean

after ex-Super Formula star Alex Palou moved to Chip Ganassi Racing for his second season, and Coyne reckons he may have got the slightly better end of the deal: "I rate Alex as a qualifier but he needed to improve his racecraft. Not just racing wheel-to-wheel but turning in the strong in-laps and out-laps, getting the most out of tyres whether they're junk at the end of a stint or new at the start of a stint."

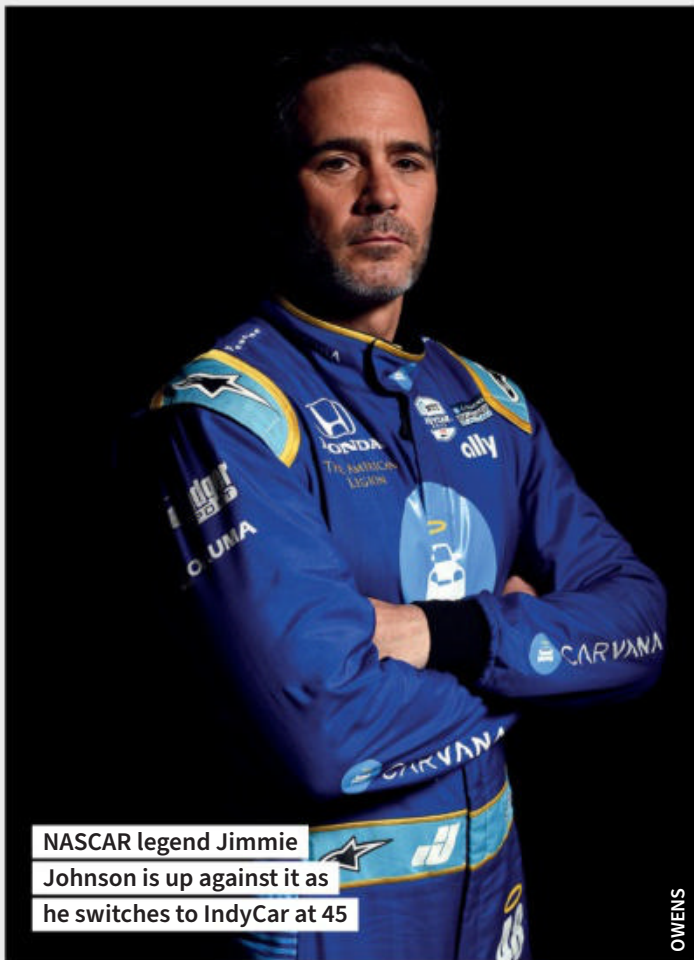
"I don't think tyre management is going to be an issue for an ex-F1 driver, and I think everyone knows Romain likes to have a go when he's racing. He may take it carefully at first, but I think he's going to be aggressive."

From Haas in F1 to Dale Coyne in IndyCar: Romain Grosjean is relishing a chance to shine



McLaughlin's ambitions should and will stretch far beyond that. If he really can sew his best sectors together while the red tyres are at their peak, you can expect to see him make it through to the Firestone Fast Six in qualifying on several occasions.

Jonathan Diuguid, McLaughlin's race engineer, is one of the wisest at understanding what's best for his driver to make him feel comfortable, and that's going to be a confidence booster on the ovals too, where the rookie will have the most to learn.



NASCAR legend Jimmie Johnson is up against it as he switches to IndyCar at 45

OWENS

NASCAR GREAT'S SINGLE-SEATER SWITCH

First, huge kudos to anyone who's got nothing to prove but still wants to lay down a challenge for himself – such as moving into open-wheel racing at the age of 45. Jimmie Johnson will forever be in the NASCAR pantheon because his sheer consistency, pace and race smarts earned him not only 83 Cup wins but also seven championships. He's one of motorsport's golden lights in the 21st century, and perhaps that means none of us should consider a run of indifferent results in an alien discipline to be hurtful to his status.

Can we expect better

than “indifferent”? Maybe... but probably not. In his final pre-season test at Barber Motorsports Park, Johnson was within 1.4 seconds of his Chip Ganassi Racing team-mate Scott Dixon; in the last qualifying session at the same track, the top 23 cars were covered by 0.9s. Now while you still have to commend JJ, and note that he is trimming the margin down with every test, the worry is that there will not be enough test days or race weekend sessions for him to make serious inroads into that deficit, and that may bug Johnson himself, however rational we

know him to be.

“There's so much for Jimmie to *unlearn* – 20 years of stock cars! – that it's almost unfair to expect him to get with it in IndyCar,” says one paddock veteran. “If we had unlimited testing like in the old days, you know Chip would have run him at any and every track this winter, and I bet you he'd be on it from the first round. He'd be tired, but he'd be on it! That's how talented he is. But the way testing is now, it might take him three seasons to show his potential, and by then, obviously age is the problem...” Yeah, it's going to be tough.



Pato O'Ward shone in testing and is expected to contend for the title with McLaren's team

OWENS

ARROW McLAREN SP TO JOIN THE BIG GUNS

Pregnant with latent promise, the progress of Arrow McLaren SP will be one of the most exciting reasons to watch IndyCar this season. Pato O'Ward has led three of the off-season tests, including one on an oval, so he and race engineer Will Anderson are continuing to build the momentum that we watched gather throughout

the 2020 season.

Most remarkable in terms of O'Ward, for those who already knew he was quick, was the lack of mistakes, the maturity to rein it back in whenever he felt he didn't quite have the car to go for the win. The big leap from the team's point of view was that its cars regularly rolled off the truck on or very near

the pace. That was an important quality last year when the duration of race weekends was minimised, and will remain so this year, as all seven road-course races get squeezed down to two-day affairs.

Felix Rosenqvist admits he hasn't quite hit his sweet spot within Arrow McLaren SP's set-up parameters,

which is why he's been a couple of tenths off O'Ward in testing. That's the theory, anyway, and it holds water as Rosenqvist all but matched Scott Dixon in qualifying while he was at Ganassi, and no one is doubting he's a quality driver. But trying to beat a super-confident O'Ward in race or qualifying trim would cause even a

series vet to breathe deep, so how Rosenqvist responds to this challenge will make or break how he's perceived within the paddock.

As Will Power remarked in February: “There's no way Pato is not gonna be a title contender. He's fast, he doesn't make big mistakes and that team is getting better all the time.”

BOURDAIS TO BOOST FOYT

The combination of Sebastien Bourdais and AJ Foyt Racing is going to teach a lesson to any team owner who thinks that being merely ‘good’ is good enough in IndyCar these days. What this team needed was a true ace in the cockpit, and that is precisely what it has in 2021. Bourdais still brings great speed, but he’s far from one-dimensional.

The team’s technical director Mike Colliver says: “[Bourdais’s] wealth of knowledge is a huge help from a couple standpoints. One, he understands mechanically what the car is doing, and secondly, he gives the changes to the car a fair shot. He will go out and run six or seven laps, and maybe the first two laps it doesn’t feel great. Maybe he’ll change something in his driving style or he’ll wait a little longer for the tyre pressures to come up or do a click on the rear bar. And then he comes in and tells you it either worked or didn’t and why.



Four-time Champ Car title winner
Bourdais could take AJ Foyt
back to IndyCar’s summit

OWENS

“His analytical approach combined with his experience is really refreshing. He doesn’t get rattled; he’s very calm and meticulous in the car.”

There’s no denying that the team has made a step forward, to such an extent that Bourdais led the most

recent test at Barber Motorsports Park, once laps using push-to-pass boost were ignored. “The engineering group is really working together well,” adds Colliver. “From the data guys to those doing simulations, the junior engineers, Daniele’s

[Cucchiaroni, performance engineer] knowledge... And Justin [Taylor, Bourdais’s engineer] is doing a great job. Everybody is pulling in the same direction.”

Bourdais adds: “With Barber being the season opener, you want to be cautiously optimistic. I think

we should have a good card to play and be in the mix, which is always encouraging, so I’m looking forward to it.”

Bourdais, 42, has 37 wins to his name. Don’t bet against him adding to that tally, if Foyt’s pitcrew can match the potential of the engineers and lead driver.

VEEKAY’S CONTINUED RISE

Most people who have watched Indy Lights over the past few years will tell you that Rinus VeeKay belongs with Pato O’Ward and Colton Herta in the list

of ‘graduates with great potential’, and last year wasn’t going to shake the faith. The Dutch teenager made an utter mess of the opening round of the

season at Texas Motor Speedway with two crashes, but thereafter only made ‘typical’ rookie errors, and in between drove with flashes of blinding pace.

His pole position and third place on the Indianapolis road course were well deserved, and he is both brave and tenacious.

“If you pass Rinus, you

need to keep looking in your mirrors because if you don’t have the pace to get away, he’ll be right back at you,” says one of his rivals. “He doesn’t give up. He’s a bit wild, but that’s OK.”

Knowing VeeKay’s ability is so high, this throws the spotlight on his team, Ed Carpenter Racing, which last employed a driver of title potential in 2016, when Josef Newgarden entered the final round of the season still mathematically in with a shot at the crown. In the intervening four and a bit years, things have shifted in terms of the relative strength of the teams. So does ECR still have what it takes? If not, it’s going to lose VeeKay, who is as ambitious as he is quick, and could have several suitors by mid-summer.



Rinus VeeKay will be hoping to
turn his potential into results
this year with Ed Carpenter Racing

CANTRELL/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

SCALING A NEW ALPINE PEAK

The hideous chain of decisions that led to Formula Renault competing with Formula Regional for two years has been reversed. Now one massive grid of future stars is getting ready for F1 support action

MARCUS SIMMONS

PHOTOGRAPHY FORMULA REGIONAL BY ALPINE



It's an outbreak of common sense. One team boss declares that "it's more or less like the old Formula Opel Euroseries". Another team manager enthuses that "it's finally sorted that old crap out about the F1 superlicence points. It's taken away a lot of confusion, given clarity and simplified it." And a member of the combined series top brass says "there was a common will — it was obvious".

This weekend, at the Emilia Romagna Grand Prix at Imola, there will be no FIA Formula 2 or F3. Instead, there will be the inaugural event for the newly merged, FIA-endorsed Formula Regional European Championship by Alpine. No fewer than 32 cars (at time of writing) are expected on the grid. That's a massive step forward from 2019-20, where the historic Formula Renault Eurocup and the 'upstart' Formula Regional European Championship sat uncomfortably alongside each other, using the same Tatuus Regional F3 chassis and diluting the marketplace.

The background to that has been documented in these pages before, but just for a quick precis... In 2018, the FIA launched a tender process to operate its new-for-2019 Regional F3 series

in Europe. Renault Sport had the history, the knowhow and the glamorous Monaco Grand Prix support date. Somehow, Italian body WSK, the promoter of Italian F4 and top-level karting, and with long support from the Ferrari Driver Academy, was given the nod. Spurned, Renault Sport decided to continue with its own renegade series anyway. The Renault Eurocup had the numbers, the quality of racing and more strength in depth, yet was always the poor relation when it came to the FIA's F1 superlicence points.

"Even in 2019 I already started to discuss with my ex-boss, Cyril Abiteboul, if it was possible to merge the two championships, and we even started discussions — nothing really formal," says Alpine Racing (formerly Renault Sport) commercial director Benoit Nogier. "After the COVID period in 2020 it became obvious to do it, and we started more advanced discussions with the ACI [the Italian federation under which WSK operates] to define whether we should do it."

The upshot is that the Regional teams ditch their Autotecnica-built Alfa Romeo turbo engines for the Renault Megane RS unit; the Renault teams swap their old Hankook tyres for the Regional Pirellis. And it operates under the Alpine name in line with

CIRCUIT PAUL RICARD



Field lines up at Ricard test, with cars of Finnish team KIC Motorsport in the foreground

“IT WAS TIME TO STOP THIS TWO-PART WORLD AND WORK TOGETHER IN THE SAME WORLD WITH THE FIA”

Renault’s rebranding of its sporting activities from F1 down. The advantages are obvious, continues Nogier. “It’s definitely to have a foot in the FIA system,” he explains. “It’s a long story between the FIA and Renault regarding the single-seater championships. Renault always had its own system and the FIA created something else, and I think it was time to stop this two-part world and to work together in the same world. It’s a definite advantage for us to merge the two championships, to be an official series of the FIA, to work together with the FIA and not against.”

Not only is the grid huge, but the calibre is high too. Of those



VAR is running three F4 graduates, including Italian ace Pizzi (51)

FORMULA REGIONAL BY ALPINE

30-plus drivers, 22 of them have scored a combined total of 114 race wins in FIA-approved F4 competition. On the teams side, it brings yet another face-off between Prema Powerteam (the FRegional dominator) and ART Grand Prix (which carried Victor Martins to the Renault crown last year, its first back in the series). Add in strong Renault regulars in the forms of R-ace GP, Arden International, MP Motorsport and JD Motorsport, and occasional Prema beaters Van Amersfoort Racing, KIC Motorsport and DR Formula from Regional. And the first three rounds support F1 grands prix: after Imola come Barcelona and Monaco. No wonder >>



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MARCO DE MATTEA/DPPI



VAR boss Frits van Amersfoort made that Formula Opel remark, referring to the old F1-supporting series in which his team came to prominence when it ran Jos Verstappen in 1992.

The manufacturer support is critical. Over the past 50 years, no car maker has done more to support young talent than Renault. Arden team manager Ben Salter, who has worked in F1 since 2012, initially with Fortec Motorsport, hopes that can continue. "They've done a fantastic job for young drivers," he asserts. "You've only got to look at them now – they've got Collet, PIASTRI, Zhou, Lundgaard, Martins [in their academy]. That's five drivers in F3 and F2."

Oscar PIASTRI and Martins were both promoted to the Renault (now Alpine) F1 academy thanks to success in the manufacturer's Eurocup, and, says Nogier, that will continue into the new era. "We kept it exactly the same," he says. "The winner of the championship will have the opportunity to enter the academy, and if he decides to go with the Alpine academy we will support him financially a bit more than if he chooses to go alone."

The organisation of the championship is a direct fifty-fifty split, with former Renault Eurocup coordinator Pascal Eyraud continuing in the role alongside his opposite Regional number, Valerio Iachizzi. "Valerio and Pascal are in contact with the teams, and they work really close together," says Nogier. "After that, regarding the different responsibilities, I would say the regulations and communications are from the ACI side, and logically we are in charge of the technical aspect, and providing the parts for the cars and the service."

Such a compromise can bring concerns, with Salter pointing out: "I think at the moment everybody's finding their feet with it all. Personally, I can't see how it can go on being run as a joint venture. You know what happens in all these sorts of situations – eventually one will end up running the whole lot. I just hope it's the Renault side." Van Amersfoort, whose team spent the first decade of the 2000s under the Renault umbrella in the Dutch championship and then the Northern European Cup, says: "Pascal and Valerio do a very good job. Sometimes you nearly switch off your app, because they keep sending information left and right! I must say it's really fantastically organised."



“SOMETIMES YOU NEARLY SWITCH OFF YOUR APP, THEY SEND SO MUCH INFORMATION. IT’S FANTASTIC”

The merger hasn’t been without teething problems. One was born out of the 2020 FRegional season finishing three weeks after FRenault. “The whole transfer went a bit awkward,” reveals van Amersfoort, who is running three rookie graduates from F4 this season. “They knew it was going to change, but they still had a rookie test [a tradition in FRenault Eurocup] at Paul Ricard where we were not invited, which was for us not a problem, but they didn’t run the Hankook anymore [instead running the Pirelli tyres], so they ran the cars in the spec that we are running in now, and it felt a bit like a knife in the back. These guys were testing new guys, juniors for the next year, and we can’t test because we still have an event to go. That felt really a bit shitty, but now it’s all done and we shouldn’t complain, but at the time we felt we were the second fiddle.

“And then after the season we wanted to test too, but there was no time to change the car to the Renault engine, so we had to do our winter testing with the Alfa. Of course that felt a bit funny, because we saw all the other teams running their Renault-spec cars with the Pirelli tyres, and we were still on the Alfa. And then we also had some trouble in getting tyres, because the Renault teams had ended their season earlier, so they ordered a lot of tyres and when we wanted to order they were out [of stock].”

Those Renault teams will claim they needed that extra time to adapt to the characteristics of the Pirelli. Unlike the F1/F2/F3 tyres produced by the Italian firm, the Regional rubber is, says Salter, “more like the old Michelins we used to race on [in Renault’s pre-2019 era]. You’d get a good peak out of them for qualifying, and it was important to get on the tyre at the peak, and then it stays >>

**WANT MORE
THAN F1?**

**OUR JOURNALISTS COVER
ALL MAJOR SERIES**

Cornish talent Quinn
likely to be a leading
light with Arden



FORMULA REGIONAL BY ALPINE

“IT WILL BE A HARD SEASON WITH 32 CARS, BUT WE LOVE TO SEE THAT BECAUSE WE ALL LOVE RACING”

relatively consistent over a race distance. The Hankook was almost too durable, but the Pirelli seems a good tyre.

“The Regional teams switching to the Renault engine and the Renault teams switching to the Pirelli tyre has been the compromise in it all, if you like. But I think learning the tyre is everything – there’s more work in that than there is in learning the engine, that’s for sure. At the end of the day the engine is the engine. You stick it in the back, work out where the power is, and you change gear at that point and off you go. But obviously with tyres you’ve got camber, pressures, springs, there’s a lot more going on with it.”

Van Amersfoort is happy that the Renault engine is a more solid piece of hardware than the Alfa the Regional teams are waving goodbye to. “The good thing is that it seems the electronics of the Renault engine are stronger than the electronics of the Alfa, and I think that’s a little bit of an advantage,” he says. “With the Alfa engine, and this had nothing to do with Autotecnica [which also builds the Abarth powerplants used in German, Italian and Spanish F4], it was just the complete package and we had regular electronic problems with the Alfa. There seems to be less with the Renault.

But the Alfa engine looks much sexier than the Renault. The Renault engine looks terrible, because it’s cast iron, and the Alfa engine had a nice red camshaft cover.”

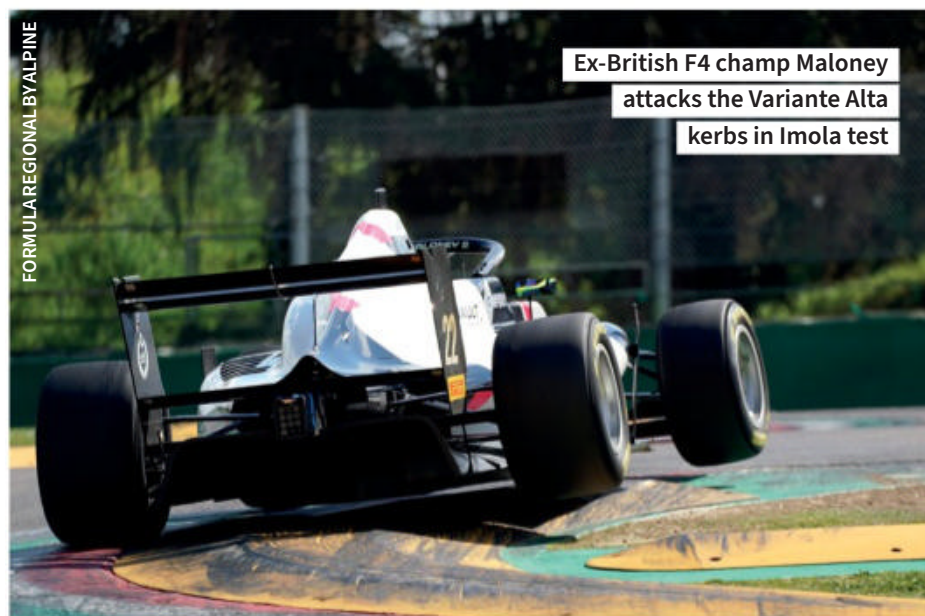
Neither the Renault nor Regional series were polluted by reversed grids, and the very pure Renault sporting format of two races per weekend, with a qualifying session for each, has been retained going into the new era. Two sets of Pirelli tyres are available to each car once qualifying begins on a race weekend, so the usual strategy will be one set for first qualifying/first race on Saturdays, and the other for the second qualifying/second race on Sundays, with the proviso that the format is tweaked a little at the F1 supports due to timetable constraints.

“If you qualify bad on Saturday and race bad, you can then reset, refresh and go again on the Sunday,” says Salter, who will oversee leading second-year Renault racers Alex Quinn and William Alatalo at Arden. “Generally we qualify-race, qualify-race. For a junior-level young driver that helps with the learning. Certainly, when you get to F3, if you have a bad qualifying that’s the weekend dead. At least with us, if you have one bad qualifying you can reset and go again. Even at Imola [this weekend], where we’ve got qualifying-qualifying, race-race, you’ve still got the opportunity to do another qualifying. In F3 and F2, you can have a problem outside of anybody’s control – the driver’s and team’s – and it screws the weekend.”

Once the F1 supports are out of the way, it’s off to Paul Ricard, Zandvoort, Nurburgring, Spa (probably), Red Bull Ring, Mugello and Monza, sharing the card with a smorgasbord of GT championships in a very attractive calendar. It’s been a huge draw for drivers, and that’s vital for the teams that have businesses to run, and their staff who have mortgages to pay.

“Basically it was a nightmare for two years,” says van Amersfoort of the old FRegional. “We lost a lot of money on that championship. The first year Prema was driving circles around us, and the races looked really terrible. Last year it was a bit better. We contracted Pierre-Louis Chovet for it, and in the end we put Dennis Hauger in to bring some extra competitiveness to the team. That paid off, but it wasn’t a successful two years. We never felt that the championship came alive. But I’m happy now to have three drivers, all rookies. So it will be a hard season with 32 cars, but we love to see that because we all love racing.”

“It’s fantastic,” echoes Salter. “We kick the season off at Imola with the only support race; Barcelona we’ll be there with F3; and for the other F1 support race at Monaco we’ll be there with F2. For the drivers it gives them a bit of an insight into the next step, and how F1 teams are. It’s a real shot in the arm for the championship and the drivers.”



Ex-British F4 champ Maloney
attacks the Variante Alta
kerbs in Imola test

FORMULA REGIONAL BY ALPINE

HALF A CENTURY OF HISTORY

Through its Alpine subsidiary, Renault is still very much involved in this level of the sport, but traditionalists would surely have been shedding a tear when Mercedes F1 junior Paul Aron (who is racing this year with Prema) became the last driver to cross the finish line at the end of the swansong Formula Renault Eurocup race at Paul Ricard on 15 November. It ended almost 50 years of history.

The first European Formula Renault contest was a four-round mini-series in 1972 as an adjunct to the main focus, the French championship. But for 1973 the bullet was bitten, the French championship dropped and the whole show ran under the European title. By 1975, the French series was back, but a parallel senior European championship – effectively ‘Formula Super Renault’ – ran until the end of 1977. During this decade, champions included Rene Arnoux, Didier Pironi and Alain Prost. Numerous grand prix support rounds were held, including Monaco, and who could ever forget that Patrick Tambay won a Gallic invasion of Snetterton on 13 May 1973, ditto Pironi at Brands Hatch on 6 October 1974?

Renault then returned to being a solely French affair, until the introduction of the 1.7-litre engine formula for 1989. Over the next few years, Renault importers in the UK, Germany, Spain and the Netherlands began to promote national championships

and, emboldened by this, the Eurocup was (re)born in 1991. For two years this ran as a mini-series of standalone non-championship races, but in 1993 a proper calendar was formalised, and it ran in this format until the end of 2020.

After the switch to two-litre engines in 1995, the series faded a little in the last years of the millennium, but the switch to Tatuus spec cars for 2000 provided the spark that led to its resounding success in the 21st century. A prestige slot on Eurosport’s Super Racing Weekend tour, alongside FIA GT, European Touring Cars and ‘big brother’ Formula Renault V6, was a further attraction. Once Nissan and Renault had become sister companies, FRV6 was dropped, and World Series by Nissan redubbed Formula Renault 3.5. Now Eurocup ran as part of the hugely successful World Series by Renault package. With the demise of that in the mid-2010s, the series mainly featured on the bill of SRO’s GT World Challenge Europe events, and in its new era that relationship continues.

“On one side I’m sad to finish a so beautiful story – we reached 50 years, and that’s a good number,” says Alpine Racing commercial director Benoit Nogier. “But at the same time it’s exciting to start something else. I’m sad to see the last race in Europe for Formula Renault, but I’m happy to start with Alpine.”

EUROPEAN FORMULA RENAULT WINNERS TABLE

DRIVER	WINS	YEAR
Didier Pironi	22	1974-76
Rene Arnoux	15	1973, 75
Victor Martins	15	2018-20
Alain Couderc	10	1973-74
Kevin Korjus	10	2010
Dany Snobeck	9	1974-77
Daniil Kvyat	9	2011-12
Sacha Fenestraz	9	2016-17
James Matthews	8	1993-94
Enrique Bernoldi	8	1995-96
Scott Speed	8	2004
Nyck de Vries	7	2013-14
Max Fewtrell	7	2017-18
Oscar Piastri	7	2019
Patrick Tambay	6	1973
Alain Cudini	6	1972, 76
Alain Prost	6	1977
Michael Ammermuller	6	2005
Kamui Kobayashi	6	2005
Daniel Ricciardo	6	2008
Jack Aitken	6	2014-15
Robert Shwartzman	6	2017
Lorenzo Colombo	6	2019-20



Was this German legend better than Nuvolari?

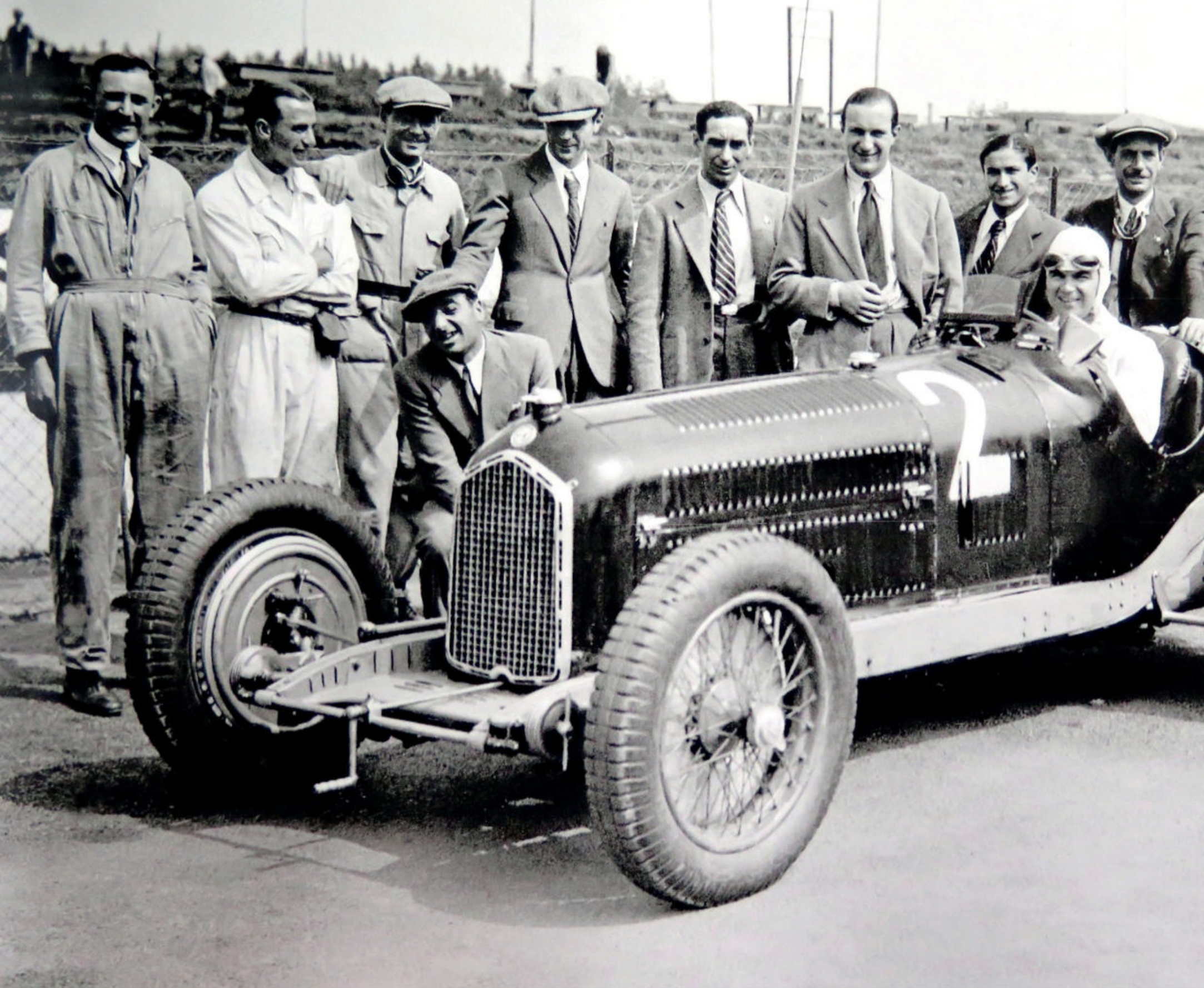
Ninety years ago this week, Rudolf Caracciola became the first non-Italian to win the epic Mille Miglia. We look at how he stacks up to the most famous pre-war ace, one of the drivers he beat that day

PAUL FARNLEY

PHOTOGRAPHY



motorsport
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Caracciola led Nuvolari
in an Alfa Romeo 1-2-3
in 1932 German GP

Rudi Caracciola was the Alain Prost to Tazio Nuvolari's Ayrton Senna — except when it rained and roles were reversed. Their 1932 season spent as rival Alfa Corse males was muddled by prearrangements permitted by the superiority of their machinery. It was perhaps the German, however, who burnished his reputation the more.

For it was he who paused at Monaco rather than seize victory by taking advantage of his team-mate's fuelling problem. It was he who should have won, by order admittedly, the Grand Prix de l'ACF at Reims, only to be gazumped by a disobedient, faster on the day and frustrated Nuvolari. And it was he who obeyed orders at Pescara's Coppa Acerbo and the non-championship Monza GP, though he would win the latter when Nuvolari suffered another fuelling hiccup.

This loyal Mercedes-Benz lieutenant had arrived at the Milanese marque a mistrusted outsider — his cars for the Mille Miglia (he led at Rome after Nuvolari crashed under pressure) and in Monaco were painted German white — but he left it at the season's end an appreciated team man capable of hustling the world's fastest.

For Nuvolari, the newly crowned European champion, held that vital edge still, according to most informed opinions. Animated, his appeal was obvious as he geed his cars as though they were horses. Ten years older than Caracciola and a latecomer to cars due to a long and successful career on motorbikes, he was a genius in a hurry. Teams, he believed, were to do his bidding and not vice versa.

Caracciola, the son of hoteliers from Remagen, and just 25 when he scored a surprise win in the 1926 German GP at Avus, was more measured — belying his family's Neapolitan roots — and less magnetic. The *libretto* to Nuvolari's *aria*, he pulled teams around him. Strategic rather than tactical, his speed stemmed from a style eschewing flashy crowd-pleasing moves. And though he had abandoned plans to study engineering to follow his dream, he was sympathetic to equipment. To underestimate him was to err.

Enzo Ferrari, definitively in Nuvolari's corner — when they weren't verbally sparring — wanted Caracciola as a calming counterpoint while his privateer team stepped into the Corse's shoes in 1933. Nuvolari, incapable of ducking a fight, cared not a jot. Calculating Caracciola, however, sidestepped the issue by forming his own Alfa Romeo-based Scuderia CC alongside the more amenable Louis Chiron.

But what fundamentally altered the parameters of this era-defining struggle was Caracciola's injurious crash — smashed right femur, crushed pelvis — due to brake failure during practice in Monaco in 1933. Out of action for over a year, he was still far from

fit — and mourning wife Charly's death in an avalanche — when he returned to a revitalised Mercedes-Benz team led in speed and competitiveness by outsider Luigi Fagioli — think 'Nuvolari Lite'. By 1935, however, he had regrouped sufficiently to press home advantages provided by car and his number one status, reserved and now reassumed, to win the first of his three European Championship titles.

Meanwhile, Nuvolari's failure to secure a seat in a Silver Arrow until mid-1938 — Achille Varzi had beaten him to the Auto Union punch for 1935, and Bernd Rosemeyer's unanticipated rise promptly sealed off another opportunity there — triggered the handful of overwhelming underdog performances, albeit generally at venues that levelled the playing field somewhat, which secured his legacy forever.

But an unhampered Caracciola — that leg would 'heal' 5cm shorter — had been capable of miracles, too. And his 7.1-litre Mercedes-Benz SSK was the elephant blower in the room in Monaco in 1929 when he battled the nimbler Bugatti of eventual winner 'Williams' until a churn-ing 4m30s refuel. He eventually finished third, and had so frightened the locals that his entry for 1930 would be refused.

Operating as the favoured Mercedes-Benz independent of 1931, his SSKL (when leicht meant 1500kg) being prepared by a factory supposedly withdrawn from racing, he

“What altered this struggle was Caracciola's crash in Monaco in 1933”

established an early lead over the Alfa Romeos — two new works 2.3-litre 8Cs for Nuvolari and Luigi Arcangeli, plus 26 sundry others! — in the Mille Miglia by averaging 95.7mph from the Brescia start to Bologna. This was sufficient for him to cling on grimly through the trans-Appenines twists as night descended — he was just over a minute behind leader Nuvolari at Rome — before reasserting his 130mph authority along the Adriatic coast as a misty dawn broke. Tyre dramas befell others, and it was the mighty Merc that led at Padua (774 miles), Treviso, Vicenza, Verona and upon its triumphant return to Brescia. (The blueprint — minus pacenotes — for Stirling Moss in 1955.)

July's German GP at the Nurburgring did not count towards the maiden European Championship but attracted a quality entry nevertheless: four works Bugatti Type 51s backed by four privateer versions; two works Maserati 26Ms; and Nuvolari, his Scuderia Ferrari 8C now in 'Monza' 'sprint' form. >>

Fagioli's Maserati led briefly but Caracciola, SSKL sitting squarely on capable Continentals in a downpour, moved ahead and, running non-stop, remained there despite the track drying from lap six (of 22) onward and the rain having stopped entirely by lap 13. (The blueprint for Moss in 1961.) Nuvolari and the Bugattis of Varzi and Chiron, giving chase, proved superior to all bar one SSKL — others were driven by Hans Stuck, Otto Merz and Manfred von Brauchitsch — and thus could not better fourth, third and second respectively.

The inaugural European champion, decided over three two-driver GPs of 10 hours' duration, was Italian veteran Ferdinando Minoia, a reward for consistency that belied his 47 years. Few judges, however, looked beyond 'Nivola' and 'Caratsch'. Nuvalari had won the Italian GP at Monza, co-driven by Giuseppe Campari; the Targa Florio; and Livorno's Coppa Ciano. Caracciola was victorious at the Nurburgring's Eifelrennen and the Avusrennen, and had successfully defended his European Mountain Championship (for sportscars). It was nip and tuck.

Caracciola, available now because of the total withdrawal of Mercedes-Benz due to Germany's steepening economic decline, was an obvious candidate to drive Alfa Romeo's Tipo B — the first fully resolved GP single-seater — in 1932. Designer Vittorio

“Politics would get in the way. Nuvolari got first dibs on the Tipo B”

Jano's masterpiece was diametrically opposed to Caracciola's previous mounts — the German reckoned it “as fleet-footed as a ballerina” — but he barely broke stride adapting to it. He was there to get the job done and possessed the tools to achieve it.

Politics would get in the way. Though Caracciola's cars were painted red after his Monaco largesse, he wasn't at the head of the queue for a Tipo B: Nuvolari got first dibs and won the Italian GP; Caracciola third in an 8C 'Monza' commandeered from an injured Baconin Borzacchini.

Following Nuvolari's 'confusion' at Reims, the team made sure orders were followed two weeks later at the Nurburgring: Caracciola's pitstop was almost a minute faster than Nuvolari's, the Italian berating a go-slow crew, and he won his home GP by 31s.

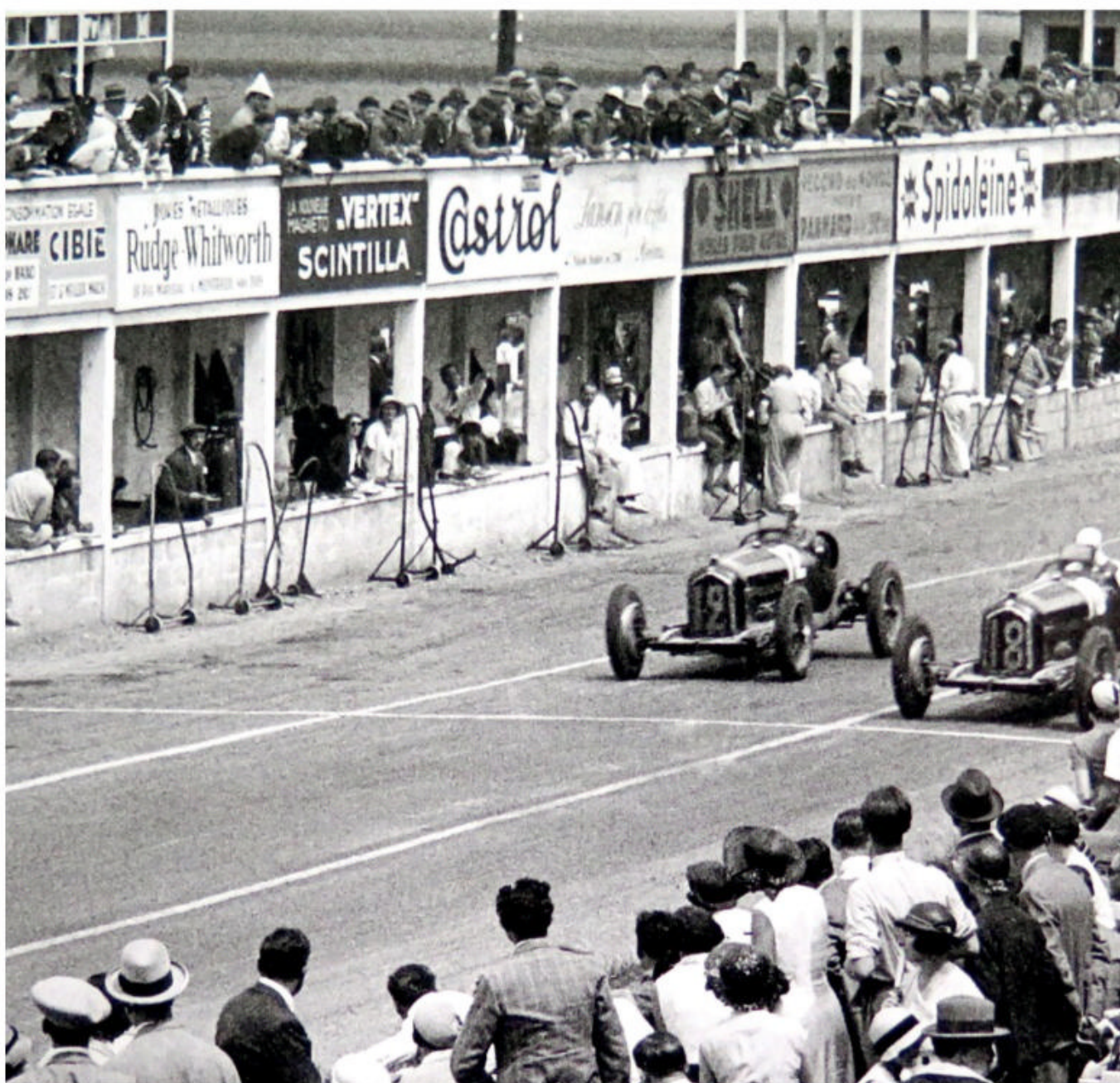
At other times they were kept apart entirely. The works team did not attend the Eifelrennen, and Caracciola won in a lone 8C Monza; and Nuvolari's Tipo B was victorious at the Coppa Ciano in Caracciola's absence. The German in turn



Nuvolari fought on with Alfa Romeo long after the Silver Arrows arrived in 1934

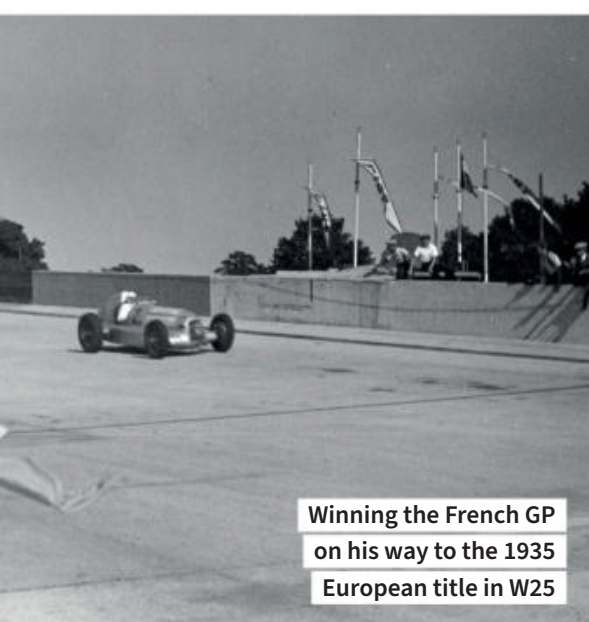


Heroic drive in massive SSK took Caracciola to third at 1929 Monaco GP





Third of six (still a record)
German GP victories fell
to Caracciola in 1931



Winning the French GP
on his way to the 1935
European title in W25



Alfa 'team-mates' at 1932
French GP. Nuvolari (12) won;
Caracciola (18) finished third

romped to a third European Mountain title (for racing cars this time) by winning four of five rounds; Nuvolari's campaign was partial.

They appeared to rub along – Nuvolari composed himself to congratulate Caracciola after the German GP; and the gesture was returned with a silent consolatory hug at Monza – but truly they were bulls in need of separate fields.

Caracciola's primacy at Mercedes-Benz was challenged but never usurped, even though Hermann Lang proved his superior in 1939. Fagioli had left under an angry cloud, and Unterturkheim sought to avoid (not entirely successfully) disruptive influences thereafter.

Auto Union was less proscriptive and Nuvolari, at his wit's end with Alfa Romeo, was the only driver capable of filling the void created by Rosemeyer's death. He adapted quickly to having the engine at his shoulder and ended the 1938 season as its fastest. Caracciola, however, retained his title with four podiums, including one win, from four starts. (He had won thrice and finished second in the other in 1937.)

Both then proved themselves still capable of winning at the highest level in 1939, and neither could stay away when racing resumed post-war.

Despite his greater age and failing health, Nuvolari fared the better. His near misses in the Mille Miglia of 1947 (runner-up in an 1100cc Cisitalia) and 1948 held Italy's radio audience rapt. The latter occasion – Ferrari falling apart around him as stubbornly he continued to press – proved to be a farewell tour. He would contest only three more races – though he never retired formally – and, paralysed by a stroke, and with lungs choked by the sport he had lived and breathed, died in August 1953.

Caracciola's comeback almost ended before it began. A crash – reports suggest he was struck in the face by a bird – while practising a Thorne Special for the 1946 Indianapolis 500 might have killed him but for the protective helmet he was forced by regulation to wear in place of his trademark white linen skullcap. Left comatose for days, once again he faced tiresome months of recuperation.

Tempted back by Mercedes-Benz in 1952, he finished fourth in the Mille Miglia – dicing with Moss's disc-braked Jaguar for a time – and was disappointed to discover that his 'Gullwing' had been of an inferior specification to that of his team-mates'. A fortnight later during the sportscar support race at Berne's Swiss GP, he crashed again – more brake drama – and broke his good leg. He would never race again. Also blighted by ill health, he died of liver failure in September 1959.

You can argue which of them was the better – it's Nuvolari for this writer – but it's impossible to refute that theirs was a closely run thing and that both gave their all for and to the sport they graced. ❧

THE REST OF THE BEST



BERND ROSEMEYER

The outright fastest burst onto the scene in 1935 by almost beating Caracciola to win his second car race. In an Auto Union. At the Nurburgring! He starred in

1936 when Mercedes was cowed into submission, and stood alone against it when it returned stronger in 1937. A handsome darling of the Nazi Party – he had no choice in the matter – his remaining true to a breezy, twinkly self was what endeared him to the public. He was killed at 250mph, record-breaking on a two-lane concrete autobahn in January 1938, when he waved away one risk too many.



ACHILLE VARZI

The ice to Nuvolari's fire – they were team-mates as well as rivals on bikes and in cars – his method was exact and exacting; mechanics were driven to distraction

by his fussiness. When all was aligned to his satisfaction, however, he would stylishly wring a car's neck – front or rear-engined – for however long it took. Sadly a worsening drug dependency blurred that finest of lines, sapped his strength and cost him his livelihood in 1937. He returned and was competitive post-war. And the (rare) accident that killed him in 1948 barely damaged his car.



HERMANN LANG

Mercedes looked far and wide for next-gen drivers – yet found the best on its doorstep: local man Lang had mechanicked for Luigi Fagioli. That blue-collar

back story did not sit well with blue-blooded team-mates, but his was a talent that could not be denied. At his peak in 1939, when only the rain could save Caracciola's blushes, he didn't win that year's European title – no matter what was said or written – but was consistently the man to beat. Deprived by war of his best years, he had enough in his tank to win the 1952 Le Mans 24 Hours.



GUY MOLL

Another shooting star, his single, truncated 1934 season with Scuderia Ferrari was enough to convince Enzo that the French-Algerian might be another 'Nuvolari'.

His win in Monaco was lucky, but at Avus he prevailed in an experimental Alfa Romeo refused by others. He had come within a nose of beating team-mate Varzi at Tripoli and would collect a spin while simultaneously acknowledging a pit signal to let the Italian win at Livorno. Killed chasing the lead at Pescara, a gust of wind reckoned to be a factor in the accident – as would be the case for Rosemeyer's.

★ MAN OF ★ THE MOMENT

How Sergio Perez's career been building up to this year's Mexico City Grand Prix

MEXICO CITY - MEXICO

Autodromo Hermanos Rodriguez

29th - 31st OCTOBER 2021

A product of the Ferrari Driver Academy, Perez grew from his image as the 'Mexican Wunderkind' to a safe pair of hands, and the poster boy for motorsport in Mexico. Podiums in Malaysia, Canada and Italy in his second season with Sauber showcased his potential, and he would appear on the third step at a smattering of races across his tenure.

Given his record, the very fact he could be ousted was shocking. In 191 race starts, Perez has scored points in 116 races, which is a mega record for a driver who spent his career with the evolving Racing Point/Force India, a declining McLaren, and an underperforming Sauber.

But despite growing to become one of the grid's most experienced drivers, 2020 posed challenges he'd never imagined. Ousted from his seat, the first driver to miss races due to COVID, and racing with an uncertain future ahead of him. But that didn't phase him in the slightest.

He scored points in every race of 2020 bar four: the two British races he missed with COVID, and engine blowouts in Bahrain and Abu Dhabi. As the year went on, he went from strength to strength, with a podium in Turkey, a 3rd place cruelly denied by engine failure, and his famous win in Sakhir. He'd proved his worth, and the paddock was listening.

Those performances left Red Bull Racing with no choice but to fit him into their plans. And so, within months, Sergio Perez's world has turned upside down. He won't be watching this season from the sofa, but from the cockpit of one of the grid's most competitive cars, where podiums and wins will be on the cards, if not expected.

That will have been news that rocked Mexico. Since the return of race in Mexico City in 2015, Checo's name has reverberated around the famous Foro Sol baseball stadium. When he returns in November, he will be hoping to repay their dedication with a win, and something to really celebrate.

LAST 5 YEARS

2015: The first race at Autódromo Hermanos Rodríguez in 23 years was won by polesitter Nico Rosberg, who experienced celebrations before the giant crowd.

Perez result – 8th

2016: Lewis Hamilton kept the title race alive in a dramatic race that saw both Verstappen and Vettel stripped of podiums post-race.

Perez result – 10th

2017: Lewis Hamilton closed the door on Sebastian Vettel to secure his 4th World Championship in style.

Perez result – 7th



2018: Verstappen took his second Mexican victory in a row, and celebrated yet another World Championship in Mexico City.

Perez result – DNF

2019: Hamilton was on top as Bottas fell behind in the title race, as Perez gave the home crowd something to cheer about after qualifying in 11th.

Perez result – 7th



GRANDSTAND GUIDE:

WHERE TO WATCH THE MEXICAN GRAND PRIX



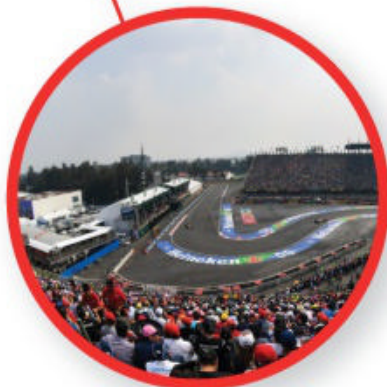
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WHAT TO DO IN MEXICO CITY

- **Day of the Dead:**
The Mexican Grand Prix invariably takes place on the weekend of this traditional celebration. While festivities will take place at the circuit, venture out for a flavour of the parties and parades throughout the city.
- **Teotihuacan:**
One of the world's largest cities in the first half of the first millennium, discover the incredible ancient pyramids and architecture.
- **Museo del Tequila y el Mezcal:**
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Day of the Dead celebrations, Mexico City - Mexico
Autodromo Hermanos Rodriguez

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- Lewis Hamilton secured World Championship here twice
- Weekend fuelled by tequila and tacos

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RACE CENTRE

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BAGNALL



VERGNE AND VANDOORNE FIND REDEMPTION WHEN IN ROME

Their DS Techeetah and Mercedes cars had to be rebuilt after incidents in practice and the first race respectively. Then they seized their chances

MATT KEW

PHOTOGRAPHY



motorsport
IMAGES

The spares department of Spark Racing Technology, builder of the Formula E chassis, did a roaring trade in Rome. A constant queue of mechanics took turns placing orders at the kiosk, located behind the pop-up garages, to receive a variety of replacement carbonfibre trinketry over the counter as their original parts lay strewn across the 2.1-mile circuit.

Among those taking turns to wait in line were the crews of DS Techeetah and Mercedes, forced to repair wrecks caused by an ill-positioned startline and a loose manhole cover. But their efforts would be rewarded. Jean-Eric Vergne recovered from a contentious pile-up to better resemble his double title-winning self, who had gone missing for the better part of a year, and score an unlikely victory last Saturday. The day after, Stoffel Vandoorne bagged a second championship race win to repay his team for burning the midnight oil to offset the mass damage inflicted by dislodged track furnishings that had flicked his Silver Arrow into the wall.

For the second round in succession, practice was marred by an enormous shunt as drivers rehearsed their start procedure. Last time out in Saudi Arabia, Edoardo Mortara was in the wars when a brake-by-wire failure sent his Venturi Racing machine careering into the TecPro barrier. In the Italian capital last weekend, drivers were spared a similar trip to hospital for precautionary checks. But events were no less alarming. Experienced hand Oliver Turvey “completely forgot” the custom for drivers to assemble on the staggered grid after the session and, in the absence of yellow flags, he rounded blind Turn 6 to smash into the static cars of Vergne and BMW Andretti racer Jake Dennis.

For Vergne, who was uninjured despite initial footage airing of him doubled over >>

Vandoorne repaid his team's efforts rebuilding his car with Sunday win

and clutching his neck, the incident didn't come as a surprise. "We knew from the beginning that there was going to be a crash... it's inevitable," he said. "You have 24 cars in the corner that is not even six metres or seven metres wide. It's the same as a karting track. You cannot ask us to be racing and to look clean for the fans because that's impossible in this corner."

With DS Techeetah debuting its new E-Tense FE21 challenger in Rome, the first event after the amended 5 April homologation window, mechanics were required to make a second powertrain change in as many days. Team principal Mark Preston explained: "It was a repeat because they had to do what they did the night before: change over the whole rear end. But in the crash, you've got to be more careful because there are other things that could have been damaged."

The car was repaired and restickered in only 100 minutes to enter second practice. But Vergne wouldn't venture back out as a kerb came free at the Turn 12 chicane and couldn't be fixed, calling time on a delayed session after only 10 minutes of running.

With much of the loss of data and track time to his rivals mitigated by the stoppage, Vergne progressed into the top-six qualifying shootout as Vandoorne ran to his third pole, over Andre Lotterer. And the Porsche driver wasn't hanging around in a bid to net the manufacturer its maiden Formula E win. He attempted a near-immediate pass for first place as the damp race, started behind the safety car, got under way. He dived up the inside of Vandoorne into the 90-degree Turn 7 left-hander and the pair collided, which forced the Belgian down an escape road to rejoin in 13th. Lotterer fell to seventh with a broken front wing to show for his efforts.

That permitted Oliver Rowland – the rapid Nissan e.dams racer had missed out on pole after a wall tap bent the steering – to assume the lead. But he copped the first of many penalties dealt over the weekend for exceeding energy limits – something that surely confused the casual



viewer tuning into BBC 2 amid the coverage of the death of Prince Philip. As a result, 2016-17 champion Lucas di Grassi became the latest beneficiary of a crazed start to the race as he nabbed the lead.

Vergne managed the two uses of the 35kW attack mode boost well to demote di Grassi's Audi. He then felt comfortable to let the Brazilian regain position as he fought to manage energy, confident that the scheduled remaining six laps would be sufficient to repass for the victory. Vergne needn't have planned that far ahead, though.

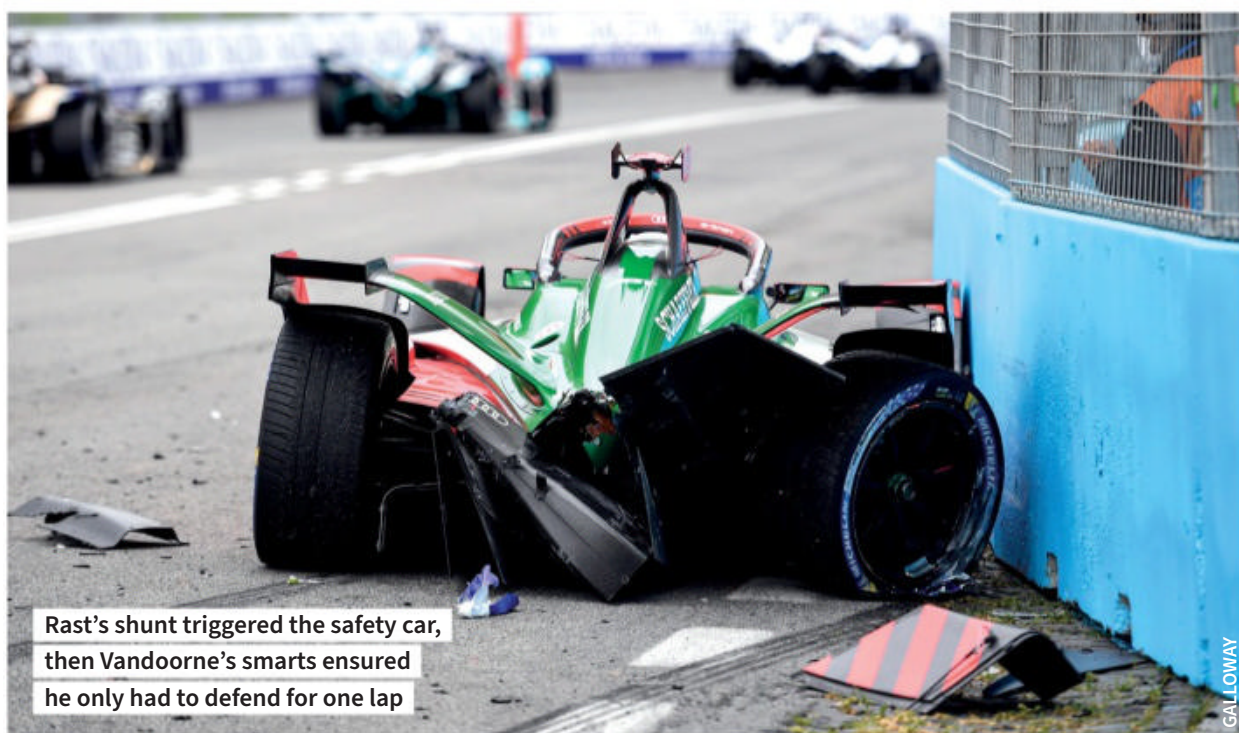
A mechanical failure, yet to be diagnosed by Audi, forced di Grassi to slow for "no reason" on the run to Turn 6, and a first win for the team in almost two years slipped through its fingers.

Still the action wasn't done. The recovering Vandoorne was forced to take avoiding action and he moved off line, where he caught a manhole cover. That jumped the rear into the air and spun him into the wall, where he was collected by Mercedes team-mate Nyck de Vries. "There were no wheels on the ground anymore, I was just a passenger," was Vandoorne's assessment. This triggered a safety car – the garish new Mini Electric Pacesetter enjoyed plenty of screen time – that would last to the flag.

With it, Vergne was assured of his 10th FE win and earned a debut victory for the new DS Techeetah machine. It was a result he hadn't expected at the start of the greasy race, let alone as his car sat in bits in the garage only hours earlier.

"Everything could have gone really south at the end of FP1 when I got this massive crash," he said. "When I was stopped, [Turvey] just came at massive speed and destroyed a little bit the car. In the race, it was really a question of staying alive. Those conditions were very, very tricky. I even went off on the lap to the grid, just trying to feel the track."

As DS Techeetah celebrated its dramatic





GALLOWAY

change in fortunes, 15 yards down the pitlane all hands were on deck in the frenzied Mercedes garage to pull off a two-car rebuild. The team worked with special dispensation until midnight on Saturday, and returned early doors on Sunday to complete the mammoth task ahead of parc ferme coming into place for the 0700 start time of final practice.

The effort was “huge”, reckoned team principal Ian James. “We swapped the power units on both cars as a precautionary measure. There was a fair amount of chassis damage to Stoffel’s in terms of suspension and bodywork. McLaren [Applied] also needed to get the battery out and make sure that was safe. It all takes time. We had an extension to the curfew.”

Persistent light drizzle opened up the oily pores of the new patches of asphalt to create a treacherous track surface in qualifying for race two. Envision Virgin Racing rookie Nick Cassidy mastered the wet-dry conditions to land a brilliant pole ahead of fellow newcomer Norman Nato for Venturi Racing. Once more, however, that advantage would not be held to the end of the opening lap.

After the safety car led the field away yet again, Cassidy bolted into Turn 7, but a suspected software glitch locked the rear wheels the instant he depressed the brake pedal. He spun backwards and down to 10th. The Super GT and Super Formula >>

JAGUAR GETS ITS PIECES IN PLACE



BAGNALL

Stand down, XJR-14. You’ve carried the torch for long enough, but your work is done. The Group C great was the last car to earn Jaguar a double podium on the international stage. Derek Warwick flew solo to take second at Autopolis for the final round of the 1991 world sportscar season, with David Brabham and Teo Fabi teaming up to claim third.

Nigh on 30 years later, the I-Type 5 picked up the baton, Sam Bird leading Mitch Evans to a similar result behind victor Jean-Eric Vergne in the Rome opener. That means the Big Cat slinks out of Italy atop the manufacturers’ points, with Bird and Evans 1-2 in the drivers’ table.

The pair were undeniably aided in their romp from 10th and 12th on the grid to the rostrum in the Saturday race thanks to the late drama for Lucas di Grassi, Stoffel Vandoorne and Nyck de Vries. But that goes some way to masking how proficient they were in passing through the field when many of their rivals got it wrong and crumpled front wings and punctured tyres.

Bird was the unlucky recipient of a race-ending whack from Nyck de Vries in the second bout. The 2019 FIA Formula 2 champion attempted a pass on the inside of Bird on the final lap in a battle for what was 10th place at the time. De Vries lost the rear of his car on the approach to Turn 7 as he crested a bump. While he managed to catch the slide, the errant Mercedes collided with the unsuspecting Jaguar at the apex, also tagging an

innocent Oliver Rowland.

Bird was eliminated on the spot a little bruised. In the impact, he smacked his hand on the steering wheel, and it was visibly swollen as the muted driver turned up for media duties.

Compared to the previous day’s bronze medal, a sixth place for Evans looked a sound but unremarkable end to his weekend. But that’s why it might prove so important in the fullness of time. It was akin to one of those astute 1-0 victories for a champion-elect Premier League team.

Evans had occupied the 12th grid slot again, after managing the difficult moist qualifying conditions nicely. In the race, risks were minimal, well-judged overtakes coming only when necessary. In contrast to his pole and dominant race-winning form of last season, which put Evans on a trajectory to do battle for the title with Antonio Felix da Costa, this was a comparatively subdued outing for the Kiwi, but no less smart as a result.

In Bird, Jaguar has signed a regular race winner who can assist the development of the car much more than any of the previous drivers to have walked through the revolving door for that second seat. In Evans, an ever-present for the team in Formula E, it has a supremely rapid racer, and one who has matured immeasurably to now be considered in that top Formula E class that includes Sebastien Buemi, Bird and da Costa.

That’s a mighty potent combination as Jaguar finally bids to win the electric spoils.

champion's day would get little better when he was later forced into the barrier by Rowland, who clocked a 10-second penalty, after the Brit's attempted pass.

Nato's time out front would also be short-lived. Third-starting Porsche recruit Pascal Wehrlein beautifully handled a slide on the way to pulling off a fine pass up the inside on lap four, with Vandoorne a touch clumsier as he bruised his way into second through Turns 14 and 15.

But Wehrlein's wait for a first Formula E win goes on. A full-course yellow – triggered by di Grassi crashing out as he spun across the nose of a subsequently penalised Sebastien Buemi – stymied his hopes of putting attack mode to good use. That permitted Vandoorne to grab the lead. He then held off qualifying star Alexander Sims – the Mahindra Racing driver had lined up sixth, and caught Wehrlein napping for second place as the green flags were waved.

A final safety car was brought into play after Rene Rast glanced the wall and buckled his Audi's suspension, which then failed and pitched him into the wall out of the final corner. Vandoorne smartly held up the pack at the restart to ensure the timer ticked by to allow for only a one-lap sprint to the finish. This he controlled to secure a fine 0.666s triumph that he classed simply as "redemption".

"Yesterday was a pretty emotional day for us," he continued. "Then I knew in the race that I had the pace to go and win. We were quick when it mattered. The car was very damaged yesterday, and [the mechanics] had a tough job list to get everything ready for today. But the car was perfect again."

Stretching back to the team's 1-2 in the final race of last season in Berlin, and including an utterly commanding display for de Vries in the first Diriyah E-Prix, Mercedes has now won at each of the most

recent three Formula E circuits.

Speaking ahead of the Rome races, James reckoned the team couldn't make the "excuse" of being in its rookie season anymore. But Autosport pre-emptively offered another defence if things in Italy hadn't gone to plan.

Chiefly owing to the pandemic, the series had been confined to racing through parklands, on airfields and in UNESCO World Heritage Sites over recent times. A true street circuit hadn't graced the

calendar of a series that prides itself on racing in the hearts of the most famous cities in the world since the Bern E-Prix in June 2019. Different surfaces, painted white lines, dips and crests plus cracks in the asphalt were all back on the menu in Rome's EUR region for a track that snakes its way past the 'Square Colosseum'. Perhaps Mercedes could have used this as an escape clause should things not have gone its way. But James wouldn't have to consider that for long, as the marque has now proved its electric





Cassidy started race two from pole, only for a suspected software glitch to spin him down the field

prowess in a variety of circumstances.

“Once you’ve come to a proper street circuit and won, that should give you confidence,” said James. “Not only have you got a strong and competitive package on the more traditional circuits, you can also compete on the streets. Hopefully, we can be confident going into pretty much every race now.”

That confidence is something Mercedes Formula 1 boss Toto Wolff – in attendance at the weekend – knows all too well from recent times. It also bodes well for the manufacturer ahead of the next double-header. Later this month, the paddock stops at the Circuit Ricardo Tormo, an inaugural Spanish round for Formula E.

Despite the ongoing threat of the pandemic, few teams admitted to running race programmes tailored specifically to the track when pre-season testing was held at the venue late last year. If said teams are to be taken at their word, it arguably shows a lack of foresight given the state of flux the 2021 calendar has been in for some months now. The Valencia circuit was always likely to make its way onto the schedule in a case of ‘needs must’ for organisers.

Valencia now offers another new challenge as it becomes the first pukka permanent track ever to grace the calendar – adapted and temporary iterations of the Marrakech and Mexico City layouts don’t count. Should Mercedes add to its burgeoning Formula E success there, it really can lay claim to being motorsport’s jack and indeed master of all trades. 🏆

RESULTS ROUND 2, ROME (ITA), 10-11 APRIL RACE 1 (24 LAPS – 50.406 MILES)

POS	DRIVER	TEAM/CAR	TIME
1	Jean-Eric Vergne (FRA)	DS Techeetah / DS E-Tense FE21	48m47.177s
2	Sam Bird (GBR)	Jaguar Racing / Jaguar I-Type5	+0.461s
3	Mitch Evans (NZL)	Jaguar Racing / Jaguar I-Type5	+0.756s
4	Robin Frijns (NLD)	Envision Virgin Racing / Audi e-tron FE07	+1.034s
5	Sebastien Buemi (CHE)	Nissan e.dams / Nissan IM02	+3.142s
6	Rene Rast (DEU)	Audi / Audi e-tron FE07	+3.534s
7	Pascal Wehrlein (DEU)	Porsche / Porsche 99X Electric	+3.918s
8	Alex Lynn (GBR)	Mahindra Racing / Mahindra M7Electro	+5.720s
9	Maximilian Guenther (DEU)	BMW Andretti / BMW iFE.21	+18.296s
10	Tom Blomqvist (GBR)	NIO 333 / NIO 333 001	+19.089s
11	Norman Nato (FRA)	Venturi Racing / Mercedes EQ Silver Arrow 02	+20.045s
12	Oliver Rowland (GBR)	Nissan e.dams / Nissan IM02	+20.270s
13	Nico Muller (CHE)	Dragon Penske Autosport / Penske EV-4	+21.155s
14	Andre Lotterer (DEU)	Porsche / Porsche 99X Electric	+22.987s
15	Nick Cassidy (NZL)	Envision Virgin Racing / Audi e-tron FE07	+23.763s
16	Sergio Sette Camara (BRA)	Dragon Penske Autosport / Penske EV-4	+26.415s
R	Lucas di Grassi (BRA)	Audi / Audi e-tron FE07	21 laps-mechanical
R	Nyck de Vries (NLD)	Mercedes / Mercedes EQ Silver Arrow 02	21 laps-accident
R	Stoffel Vandoorne (BEL)	Mercedes / Mercedes EQ Silver Arrow 02	21 laps-accident
R	Antonio Felix da Costa (PRT)	DS Techeetah / DS E-Tense FE21	20 laps-puncture
R	Jake Dennis (GBR)	BMW Andretti / BMW iFE.21	17 laps-accident
R	Edoardo Mortara (ITA)	Venturi Racing / Mercedes EQ Silver Arrow 02	10 laps-front wing
R	Alexander Sims (GBR)	Mahindra Racing / Mahindra M7Electro	2 laps-puncture/driveshaft
NS	Oliver Turvey (GBR)	NIO 333 / NIO 333 001	repairs not completed

Winner's average speed 61.991mph. **Fastest lap** Evans 1m42.387s, 73.845mph.

SUPERPOLE 1 Vandoorne 1m38.484s; 2 Lotterer 1m38.651s; 3 Rowland 1m38.889s; 4 di Grassi 1m38.903s; 5 Vergne 1m38.947s; 11 Guenther 1m39.751s*.

QUALIFYING Rowland 1m38.491s; Lotterer 1m38.627s; Vandoorne 1m38.963s; di Grassi 1m39.050s; Vergne 1m39.066s; Guenther 1m39.068s; 6 Frijns 1m39.081s; 7 de Vries 1m39.162s; 8 Wehrlein 1m39.241s; 9 Buemi 1m39.348s; 10 Bird 1m39.443s; 12 Evans 1m39.654s; 13 Lynn 1m39.743s; 14 Nato 1m39.762s; 15 Sims 1m39.829s; 16 Sette Camara 1m39.943s; 17 Muller 1m40.057s; 18 da Costa 1m40.079s; 19 Dennis 1m40.456s; 20 Rast 1m48.022s; 21 Blomqvist 1m40.120s*; 22 Cassidy 1m51.081s; 23 Mortara no time; 24 Turvey no time.

RACE 2 (23 LAPS – 48.305 MILES)

1 Vandoorne 46m52.603s; 2 Sims +0.666s; 3 Wehrlein +2.346s; 4 Mortara +5.018s; 5 Guenther +5.305s; 6 Evans +5.671s; 7 da Costa +6.133s; 8 Blomqvist +12.032s; 9 Muller +12.872s; 10 Buemi +14.795s; 11 Vergne +15.676s; 12 Sette Camara +16.009s; 13 Dennis +16.352s; 14 Turvey +17.134s; 15 Lotterer +17.838s; 16 Rowland +21.140s; 17 Lynn +37.697s; 18 Frijns +43.103s; EX Nato +2.078s-exceeded energy limit; R Bird 22 laps-accident; R de Vries 22 laps-accident; R Cassidy 21 laps-accident; R Rast 19 laps-accident; R di Grassi 7 laps-accident.

Winner's average speed 61.828mph. **Fastest lap** de Vries 1m40.771s, 75.029mph.

SUPERPOLE 1 Cassidy 1m52.011s; 2 Nato 1m52.343s; 3 Wehrlein 1m52.630s; 4 Vandoorne 1m54.359s; 5 Guenther 1m54.701s; 6 Sims 1m55.598s.

QUALIFYING Nato 1m56.006s; Cassidy 1m56.860s; Guenther 1m58.274s; Sims 1m58.500s; Wehrlein 1m58.777s; Vandoorne 1m59.105s; 7 Mortara 1m59.497s; 8 Rowland 1m59.512s; 9 Muller 1m59.630s; 10 Buemi 1m59.701s; 11 Bird 1m59.739s; 12 Evans 2m00.128s; 13 di Grassi 2m00.150s; 14 Blomqvist 2m00.205s; 15 da Costa 2m00.557s; 16 Lynn 2m00.943s; 17 de Vries 2m01.229s; 18 Frijns 2m02.038s; 19 Rast 2m02.061s; 20 Vergne 2m04.864s; 21 Lotterer no time; 22 Sette Camara no time; 23 Dennis no time; 24 Turvey 2m01.197s*. * = grid penalty.

CHAMPIONSHIP 1 Bird 43; 2 Evans 39; 3 Frijns 34; 4 Vandoorne 33; 5 de Vries 32; 6 Wehrlein 32; 7 Mortara 30; 8 Vergne 25; 9 Sims 24; 10 da Costa 21.

NEXT RACE

VALENCIA E-PRIX 29 APRIL ISSUE

Who will come out on top as Formula E heads to a permanent race circuit for the first time?

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Rookie's pair lead the Toyota reign in opener

SUPER GT
OKAYAMA (JPN)
11 APRIL
ROUND 1/8

Toyota locked out the top four in a thrilling opening round of the new Super GT season at Okayama, as Rookie Racing duo Kenta Yamashita and Kazuya Oshima took victory. In Rookie Racing's maiden event as an independent team, 2019 champions Yamashita and Oshima scored their first win in almost two years following a lengthy duel between Yamashita and the TOM'S GR Supra of Sho Tsuboi. Yamashita and Tsuboi, in the car started by Yuhi Sekiguchi, emerged as the top two after a chaotic pitstop phase. This followed a spin for a GT300 Nissan that prompted almost the entire GT500 field to pit in anticipation of a safety car. As the lead pair gapped the field after the restart, Tsuboi piled the pressure on Yamashita but couldn't find a way through. Their fight was resolved with seven laps



remaining when Tsuboi outbraked himself during a passing attempt at the Turn 5 hairpin and ran into the gravel. Tsuboi recovered and maintained second place, closing to within 1.2s at the finish. Prior to the stops, the pole-winning TOM'S Toyota of Sena Sakaguchi controlled proceedings, with Sacha Fenestraz's stand-in Sakaguchi soaking up the pressure of Oshima in just his second GT500 start. But a slow stop in a crowded pitlane meant co-driver Ryo Hirakawa emerged in a net fourth behind the SARD Toyota. Hirakawa was able to recover one place to salvage the final spot on the podium

ahead of the SARD GR Supra shared by Heikki Kovalainen and Yuichi Nakayama. Honda endured a weekend to forget at a track where the NSX-GT was expected to shine, with the Real Racing car of Bertrand Baguette and Koudai Tsukahoshi ending up as the marque's best finisher in fifth. Nissan fared even worse as its top finisher was the NDDP/B-Max GT-R of Kohei Hirate and Katsumasa Chiyo in ninth, although the NISMO car of Ronnie Quintarelli was running sixth early on before a slow stop and race-ending contact later on for Tsugio Matsuda.

JAMIE KLEIN

Truex topples Hamlin to win

NASCAR CUP
MARTINSVILLE (USA)
11 APRIL
ROUND 8/36

Denny Hamlin dominated much of last Sunday's rain-delayed NASCAR Cup race at Martinsville Speedway, but he was right to be uncertain about holding on for the victory. Even late in the race, Hamlin said he felt as though "it was only a matter of time" before his Joe Gibbs Racing Toyota team-mate Martin Truex Jr would run him down for the lead.



Truex did, passing Hamlin with 15 of the 500 laps remaining and then holding off Chase Elliott to become the first repeat winner of the season, adding to his recent Phoenix success. Truex led only 20 laps in total, whereas Hamlin had been out front for 276 tours. "That last pitstop, we were able to get us the lead," Truex said. "I couldn't quite hold off [Hamlin] on that restart. He was really fast firing off. I just tried to stay with him and take care of my car. I knew there were enough laps left that tyre wear in the long run would come into play. "[Hamlin] started getting tight, our car was getting better and better. We were able to take advantage of it. For whatever reason our car really turned on when the lights went down. "It's always good when a plan comes together, and it works out the way you hoped it would." The win is the 29th of Truex's Cup career, and three of his last four series victories have come at Martinsville, NASCAR's shortest track at 0.5 miles.

JIM UTTER

WEEKEND WINNERS

- SUPER GT**
OKAYAMA (JPN)
Kazuya Oshima/Kenta Yamashita
Team Rookie Racing (Toyota GR Supra)
- NASCAR CUP**
MARTINSVILLE (USA)
Martin Truex Jr
Joe Gibbs Racing (Toyota Camry)
- NASCAR XFINITY SERIES**
MARTINSVILLE (USA)
Josh Berry (below)
JR Motorsports (Chevrolet Camaro)



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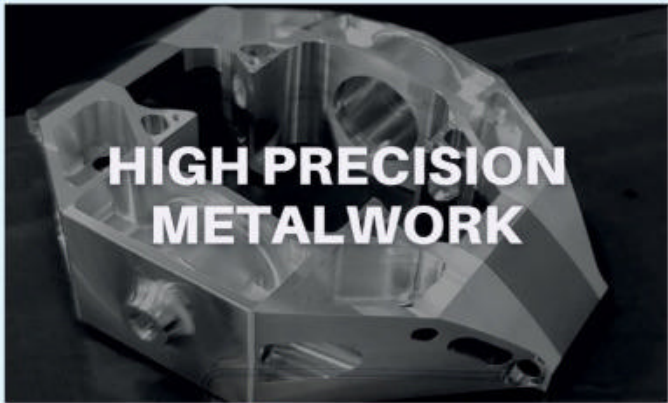
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Previous Lotus GT4 car, the Evora, last raced in British GT in 2016

JEP/MOTORSPORT IMAGES



NEW LOTUS GT4 CAR UNDER

GT4

Lotus is gearing up for a return to international sportscar racing with a new GT4 contender based on a top-of-the-range model due to be launched in the summer.

The British manufacturer is working on a racing comeback in a category in which it previously competed with the Evora Cup GT4 in the 2010s as part of a major relaunch under the ownership of Chinese car maker Geely, which took a controlling interest in Lotus in 2017. It will stop production of its existing range – the Elise, the Exige and the Evora – over the course of this year and introduce three new models.

Lotus has started evaluating the top model, known internally as the Type 131, for GT4 racing. Ray Mallock Limited, which won the British Touring Car Championship with Vauxhall and Nissan in the 1990s, has been working with Lotus on the project and has already undertaken preliminary testing with a development mule built on the chassis of the Type 131 and clothed in Evora bodywork.

It is understood that RML has completed the first phase of development and that the project is now awaiting sign-off from the Lotus board.

A spokesman for Lotus explained that the company “has a definite interest to go racing with the Type 131” and admitted that it has been working with RML.

“We’re not yet at the stage of signing off the programme, but naturally we are looking at what we can do in racing with the new car and whether we can replicate the success we had with the Evora in GT4,” he said. “As with any new car, you have to look at

a number of criteria, including the business case, and we are in the middle of that right now.”

Lotus has not revealed technical details of the Type 131, but it is known that the car retains the Toyota-based V6, again mounted transversely, of the Evora. It is believed that the engine has run in supercharged form in the test hack built at RML, which was unwilling to comment on its link-up with Lotus.

Lotus sold more than 30 Evora GT4s from 2010. UltraTek, Cor Euser Racing, ISSY Racing and the Gary Ayles-run Lotus Sport UK operation were among the teams to field the car, which took a total of eight class wins in the British GT Championship in 2011-15.

TF EXITS FROM BRITISH GT4 AS TURNER JOINS

Reigning GT4 champion team TF Sport will not remain in British GT this season, and has put its two Aston Martin Vantage GT4 chassis up for sale.

The Tom Ferrier-run operation has won the past two GT4 titles alongside an expanding presence on the international scene, with an LMP2 programme in the European Le Mans Series added for this season to its two-car World Endurance Championship GTE Am assault. But Ferrier told Autosport that a dearth in the UK driver market had given it no option but to focus attentions elsewhere.

“We had no interest at all from customers in GT4 this year, and with double ACO programmes already sorted we decided that it was time to call it a day,” said Ferrier. “We’re very happy to have been back-to-back champions in 2019 and 2020, but it’s time to move on.”

Ferrier added that the team may enter “a few one-off races” in GT3, a class from which it withdrew its two

IN THE HEADLINES

CONNOR SEALS F3 MOVE

Alex Connor will graduate to BRDC British F3 this year with Arden, as the team also joins the series. The 17-year-old has spent the past two years in British F4 with Arden, taking three wins and fourth in the standings last season. Chris Dittmann Racing has announced Max Marzorati as its first British F3 driver, after he competed with the team at two rounds in 2020.

PINTOS OUT OF GINETTAS

Ginetta Junior racer Tommy Pintos will not compete in the category this year amid continuing coronavirus travel restrictions. The Spaniard was seventh in last season's points and was due to stay with Elite Motorsport. One driver who *is* set to race a Ginetta is Luca Hirst, the GT5 Challenge podium finisher making a return to competition for the first time since 2015 by joining the GT4 Supercup grid this year with his own Raceway Motorsport squad.

PORSCHE CHARITY AUCTION

Porsche Cars GB has teamed up with the Place2Be charity, which provides in-school mental health services for children in the UK, to run a virtual auction until Sunday. Among the items being auctioned is the chance to have a driving experience with Mark Webber in a Porsche 911 GT3 car, various hospitality packages, and a number of models and other merchandise signed by Porsche Le Mans winners. For more details, head to givergy.uk/porschecharityauction

HAMMOND BACK TO MINIS

Former Mini Challenge Cooper class champion Matt Hammond (below) will make a return to the series this year, his first racing since winning the 2017 title. One racer stepping up from the Coopers to the top JCW class will be Lydia Walmsley, who has been signed to BTC Racing's new Young Driver Programme. Another driver due to be on the JCW grid is Lewis Brown, who was a race winner with the LDR squad last year.



TF's GT4 Astons were frontrunners in 2020

JEP/MOTORSPORTIMAGES

DEVELOPMENT AT RML

entries prior to the pandemic-afflicted 2020 season.

Aston will, however, be represented in British GT's GT4 class courtesy of Newbridge Motorsport, which steps up for a full season after making a first appearance in last year's Silverstone 500 finale.

Three-time Le Mans 24 Hours class winner and long-time factory ace Darren Turner will return to the series, for the first time since a one-off outing at Spa in 2019, alongside GT Cup graduate Matt Topham. Turner, who scored three GT3 podium finishes in 2018 with Beechdean AMR, raced a GT4 Vantage in the GT Cup season opener last week for Feathers Motorsport.

OTHER GT4 LINE-UPS REVEALED

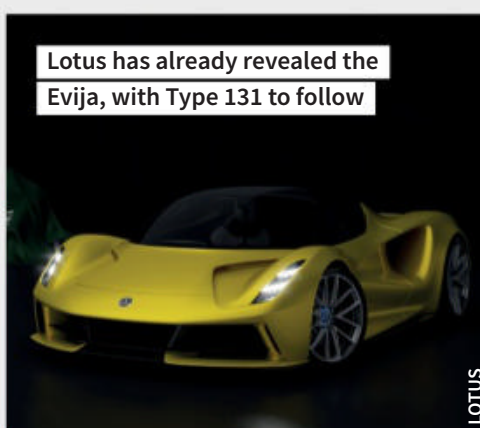
Speedworks Motorsport has taken on 2019 Ginetta GT5 champion Scott McKenna as the first member of its Toyota Gazoo Racing UK Young Driver Programme. The 19-year-old will share the team's GR Supra GT4 with fellow Porsche Carrera Cup GB graduate John Ferguson in the Pro-Am class.

Matt Cowley will remain at Academy Motorsport as part of a planned Silver Cup line-up for Matt Nicoll-Jones's Ford Mustang team. Cowley was an outside title contender last year and won the Brands Hatch race with Jordan Albert before ending the year fifth in the points. His team-mate has yet to be signed.

Fox Motorsport will also return to British GT after a year away, and is switching from a Mercedes to a McLaren 570S GT4. Team regular and 2010 GT4 champion Jamie Stanley will be partnered in the Pro-Am entry with Ginetta GT4 Supercup graduate Nick Halstead.

GARY WATKINS AND JAMES NEWBOLD

Lotus has already revealed the Evija, with Type 131 to follow



LOTUS

McKenna has joined Toyota programme



Fox returns to British GT4 with a McLaren this year



JEP



Shepherd and Deegan make up strong Type R Trophy entry

TYPE R TROPHY

Multiple club racing champions Adam Shepherd and Lee Deegan are two of the drivers set to be on the much-expanded Type R Trophy grid this year.

The 750 Motor Club category was launched for the 2019 season but averaged below 10 entries over its first two years. Now a number of cars that were in build have been completed, and the addition of a

Foundation Programme, which helps to support new drivers onto the grid with a ready-to-race car, has led to entries surging, with 29 already secured for the season opener at Silverstone next week.

For former Civic Cup and M3 Cup champion Shepherd, the Type R Trophy will mark a return to racing after last competing in the Ginetta GT4 Supercup in 2018. He took five podiums that year, but struggled to raise the budget to

continue racing in Ginettas, so began to look elsewhere.

“Luke [Sedzikowski] from Tegiwa [series sponsor] said, ‘Had you thought about looking at this? We’ve got a car if you want to try it,’” explained Shepherd. “We did the test day with the Type R Trophy launch day and it was quick and I enjoyed it. Luke said it was pushing 30 cars for the first round and that got me interested. You’ve got quick people like Lee out there and it’s good to race against them.

“It took me a little while on the test day to get my head back into front-wheel drive and the lack of aero. Driving the Ginetta, the amount of aero grip you’ve got means it’s a very different driving style.”

Deegan, a fellow former Civic Cup champion, has contested a variety of different categories in recent seasons, including Mini Miglia. A proposed drive in the GT4 Supercup fell through last year, and he is now looking forward to racing against Shepherd for the first time on the Type R Trophy grid.

“We struggled a little bit with COVID and sponsors so that knocked things on the head with trying to go a bit bigger in the racing world,” said Deegan. “Rob Baker at Area Motorsport came up with a good offer for this year.

“There’s a lot of good drivers in the Type R Trophy and I thought it would be a good challenge. Adam will be one of the ones to watch and there’s some others putting in some good times.”

STEPHEN LICKORISH

Mittell impressed by new car after double podium

BIKESPORTS

Bikesports frontrunner Scott Mittell scored a double podium on the debut of his new Mittell MC-41RR at Donington Park on Easter Monday.

The car is a development of his previous MC-41R, modified to fit the class-leading 1300cc Suzuki Hayabusa engine rather than the 1000cc Suzuki GSX-R he previously used.

After one day’s testing at Oulton Park, he qualified on



pole and set the fastest race lap, but was unable to match double race winner Joe Stables in the braking zones.

“The car feels great,” said Mittell. “It should be able to go quite a bit quicker, I think. The rear diffuser’s not completely

finished – it needs some strakes putting in – and there’s a few more little bits that we’ll do.

“In my opinion, they’ve upped the weight limit too much for the 1000s because they did it on raw power. The actual power figures are not majorly different [from the Hayabusa] – it’s the torque figure which is massively different.”

Mittell’s multiple race-winning MC-41R has been sold to Richard Wise.

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IN THE HEADLINES

LOW DEMPSEY'S LINE-UP

Low Dempsey Racing has completed its three-car National Formula Ford 1600 line-up with American karting graduates Colin Queen and Andre Lafond. Sixteen-year-old Queen, who has previously competed in Europe and North America, joined compatriot Maxwell Esterson – already announced in the squad following his outings last year – for testing at Donington Park last week ahead of the circuit hosting the first rounds of the National Championship on 8-9 May.

HILLCLIMB START DELAYED

The British Hillclimb Championship has postponed its opening round of the season at Prescott Speed Hill Climb, due to take place on 24-25 April, over concerns about travel restrictions caused by COVID-19. The event is now scheduled to take place on 24-25 July, with the opening round of the championship now set for Loton Park (15-16 May).

MONDELLO'S AGREEMENT

Mondello Park has reached an agreement with Motorsport Ireland to be organiser and promotor of the Motorsport Ireland circuit racing championships, which will be a five-year deal beginning this season. Mondello Park managing director Roddy Greene said: "We are privileged and honoured to be appointed as the new organisers and promoters. I firmly believe that we have the expertise and personnel to provide the highest level of support, ensuring the strongest future for circuit racing in Ireland."

MSV BUYS DONINGTON HALL

Circuit operator MotorSport Vision has purchased the freehold of the 28-acre Donington Hall Estate comprising the 18th century mansion, Donington Hall (below). MSV plans to develop the Grade II listed structure into a 40-bedroom hotel, which is due to be opened for the 2023 season.



HAWKINS



Fourth in class and sixth overall for Fletcher GT

JONES

Kent gives rare Fletcher GT an outing at Oulton CSCC meeting

SWINGING SIXTIES

A rare Fletcher GT was in action at Oulton Park last weekend as Jonnie Kent contested the Classic Sports Car Club's Swinging Sixties event.

One of only four examples built, the Fletcher was based on the Ogle SX1000, itself one of many Mini-based kit cars of the period. When marque founder David Ogle died, the body moulds were sold to Norman Fletcher of Fletcher Boats, who decided to develop a racing version with recessed headlights and a more angular tail.

Kent's example was displayed at the 1967 Racing Car Show at Kensington Olympia in a white livery. It is believed to have then been prepared by Broadspeed for the Targa Florio but failed to start

the event. A similar car had been campaigned in 1966 by future European Touring Car champion John Handley, including in the Prototype class of the Nurburgring 500Km.

"I'm Mini-obsessed – I've got nine Minis," said Kent, who pressed the Fletcher back into service following a one-off outing at Brands Hatch last year, when the Mini he damaged at Spa in 2019 was not ready in time.

"The whole floorpan is a Mini, the subframe's a Mini, it's 100 per cent Mini apart from the bodyshell. It's fun, isn't it? The only thing is, you sort of want to race it at eight tenths, not ten tenths."

Kent took the Fletcher to fourth in class and sixth overall among 28 starters.

MARK PAULSON

All-electric series joins BRX roster

BRITISH RALLYCROSS

A standalone category for all-electric cars will join the British Rallycross Championship 5 Nations Trophy roster at selected rounds this year, in addition to the introduction of electric cars into the headline Supercar category announced last month.

The new 'Electro Rallycross' category for more entry-level machines is set to include a cluster of electric Fiat 500s, prepared and run by Polish team Elemen Racing, with series regulations awaiting final approval from Motorsport UK.

Shirley Gibson, head of the Retro Rallycross division, is working on the UK coordination of the series, and Elemen is expected to field a minimum of five cars for the opening weekend of the campaign, with a further three cars available for hire. Three rounds will make

up the Electro Championship this season, all held within Lydden Hill BRX events.

In Supercar, British RX event winner Andy Scott will return to the series this year with his Albatec Racing team's Peugeot 208, the team having claimed the title with triple British Rally champion Mark Higgins in 2018.

Scott will race as a three-generation family effort, with son Marc, a multiple RX150 class champion, also set to return, and grandson Finley set to make his rallycross debut in the Junior championship driving in the single-make Suzuki Swift class.

Andy Scott said: "It's been a while since I've competed in rallycross, but I'm very much looking forward to racing against all the familiar names again, and hopefully some new drivers to the BRX 5 Nations Trophy."

HAL RIDGE



LEGENDARY TURKINGTON Four-time British Touring Car champion Colin Turkington had his first taste of Legends action in a test at Brands Hatch last week. The Northern Irishman wanted more rear-wheel-drive mileage to keep sharp ahead of driving his West Surrey Racing BMW this year. “There’s nothing really behind it,” he said. “It was just over lockdown I came across Legends on Amazon Prime, as you do when hunting for something to watch. I was interested to have a blast in one. I got in touch with Phil Cooper, who runs the championship, and he steered me towards a team – 24Hr Solutions. It was an eye-opener. They’re a tricky car to drive but, once you get your head around it, it’s a lot of fun.” Turkington added he has no plans to race one. **Photos by Gary Hawkins**

Gunn upgrades pay off with podium lockout

SPORTS 2000

A podium lockout for Gunn drivers at Donington Park and a 105mph lap record for double winner Tom Stoten vindicated improvements made by Loaded Gunn Racing in a bid to return the marque to the top of the Sports 2000 Duratec tree.

Seven-time manufacturers’ champion LGR has played

second fiddle to rival MCR’s Michael Gibbins for the past two years, but developments to the Gunn TS11 designs – now to TS11b spec – have unlocked further speed from the 200bhp, 521kg machines.

“It’s not down to one thing, but working with final-year Motorsport Engineering degree students Michael Hunkin and Zak Wells and translating CFD results into

more efficient aerodynamics has certainly found significant performance gains,” said LGR’s Gary Gunn.

“Tom’s car and Neil ‘Sparky’ Burroughs’s have new front floors, lighter noses, undercut sidepods and revised tails, which helped them lock out the front row in qualifying. We are motivated by wanting to beat the MCRs. Having

evolved the patterns for the new bodywork – I’ve gone through 75kg of resin creating the panels – it was great to get a result first time out.”

Stoten reduced the lap record to 1m07.810s when beating Burroughs in the second Donington contest. Paul Trayhurn, whose car does not have the full upgraded kit yet, was third.

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Spectators made to wait

COVID-19 restrictions were eased this week, but motorsport fans have been left frustrated by some of the lingering rules

STEFAN MACKLEY

Queues around the block to get into Primark; vox pops in pubs and several pints down even before midday; months of hair growth given a long overdue chop and trim. These were the videos and photos on many news channels and social media feeds this Monday as the UK government moved into Step Two of its COVID-19 lockdown exit strategy.

After months of restrictions, for many it was a welcome sight, even if you have to question who would *really* bother rolling into a pub at 8am! The easing of restrictions, coupled with the UK's vaccine rollout programme, which earlier this week reached its target of offering a dose to everyone aged over 50, represents another step closer to normality.

But, while hospitality and certain sectors of the leisure industry were able to begin reopening on Monday, the same couldn't be said for motorsport as the latest government guidelines mean that spectators will still not be allowed into venues. It's a bitter blow to loyal motorsport fans and against what many had thought only a few weeks ago. The reason being that national motorsport, despite the fact that it's held in vast outdoor areas, was included alongside other sports such as football and rugby where restrictions – even for non-elite events – remain in place.

It means that fans will have to wait until 17 May at the earliest before there is a chance of a return to motorsport venues, which is

“Circuits are by their very nature wide-open spaces, with ample room for social distancing”

when Step Three of the exit strategy *might* come into effect. Over the weekend, there was no shortage of tongue-in-cheek messages on social media – and some a bit stronger – about the open space at Donington Park, which held the first round of the GT Cup last week, and other motorsport venues.

MotorSport Vision, owned by ex-Formula 1 driver Jonathan Palmer and which operates Donington, Oulton Park, Cadwell Park, Snetterton and Brands Hatch, released a statement that didn't hold back the disappointment no doubt felt by many.

“While outdoor attractions like zoos and theme parks can reopen, and events such as boot fairs, steam rallies and food festivals can take place with up to 4000 visitors per day, a specific ban has been applied to spectators at sport events – even at grassroots level – until 17 May,” it read. “This

means that all events due to take place between 12 April and 17 May will now be run behind closed doors, and only essential personnel may attend.

“MSV is incredibly disappointed by this development. The UK government is now actively encouraging people to get outside and enjoy the fresh air, and circuit venues are by their very nature wide-open spaces like parks, with ample room to enable social distancing across dozens of spectator viewing areas.”

It is hard to justify why non-elite motorsport has been stopped from opening its doors when people can go to a theme park or zoo, which, in some cases, have less open space than a race circuit. It's also difficult to understand why these same venues were allowed to have a limited number of spectators last year after new protocols – such as social distancing and having a food takeaway service only – were brought in to ensure that visitors remained as safe as possible. But not now.

Certainly, when it comes to elite events such as the British Grand Prix or British Touring Car Championship rounds, which attract thousands of spectators, it makes sense to have a ban in place until the wider implications of lifting *another* lockdown are known, but that was always going to be the case. Now, ironically, these same events in theory will be allowed to welcome a limited number of fans at the same time as non-elite fixtures. As ever, contradictions seem to be the theme.

On the flipside, though, the return of racing across the UK remains in a delicate state, with no confirmed date of when it will actually resume in Wales at all, while Scotland is due to have its first race meetings in June.

And, while MSV was keen to welcome fans back to its venues this month, the British Automobile Racing Club, which operates Thruxton, Croft and Pembrey, was a little more pessimistic about those prospects. BARC was one of the last operators to allow fans back in 2020 and was on the side of caution again.

“To be honest, it was what we expected [the government decision],” said BARC group CEO Ben Taylor. “We weren't forecasting or anticipating having any spectators at any of our events before 17 May. Anything that came before it, that would've been a bonus.”

While fans would wish for motorsport to be a top priority, and in this instance given special treatment, it's not the only outdoor sport to be hit. Horse racing and golf are both sports that benefit from open space but, like motor racing, will have to wait until next month before welcoming spectators back.

Whether it was the right or wrong decision, hopefully by 17 May spectators can be sitting on the banks of beloved circuits across the UK once again. Not that this will be much consolation to many over the next 36 days. 🏁

Twists and turns in the Simpsons' Tin Tops episode

OULTON PARK
CSCC
10 APRIL

A charging drive earned Steve Simpson the season-opening Tin Tops victory in the Peugeot 206 RC he shared with father Colin for the Classic Sports Car Club event at Oulton Park.

The pair qualified second but were promoted to pole by gearbox failure on the Honda Integra of Nigel Ainge and Danny Cassar. Simpson Sr was 10th after the first lap of the restarted race (due to a collision between Lee Webster and Paul Boulton) following a poor getaway and then rear-ending Nigel Tongue's Peugeot 306 as he tried to make up ground.

But Simpson Jr took over in a net fourth and set a searing pace, overhauling the Peugeot 106 of Martin Addison exiting Cascades and Tom Mensley's Clio (set to retire with a blown valve) into Britten's to finish second on the road. That became first when Andrew Windmill's rapid Honda Civic was penalised for a pitstop 0.5 seconds too short, dropping him to third. Addison, in second, had narrowly made the grid after hub failure in qualifying, before a dragging clutch



Simpson duo
overcame first-lap
woes to take the win
in battle-scarred
Peugeot

at the start forced his own fine recovery.

Dave Griffin's BMW E36 M3 led the Future/Modern Classics race throughout, as battles raged behind. The initial scrap for second between Alex Taylor (Mazda RX-7) and Stephen Scott-Dunwoodie (Ford Sierra Sapphire Cosworth) ended when Scott-Dunwoodie was surprised by Taylor's defence and ploughed into him at Druids, bringing out the safety car. It failed to pick up Griffin, who extended his 13s lead before pitting, while Stuart Daburn caught out fellow TVR Tuscan pair Christian Douglas and Matt Holben by darting late into the pits. That allowed Daburn an easy run to second, while Douglas eventually

snatched third from Paul Dolan's BMW E30 on the final lap.

There was another podium for Griffin in the Open series, a distant second overall to Mark Smith's New Millennium BMW as rain made for tricky late-afternoon conditions. Matty Evans (BMW 1M Coupe) and the newly acquired Volkswagen Polo R of Andre and Jake Severs both retired from podium contention, allowing Mike Nash (SEAT Supercopa) to take third, while Charlie Newton-Darby's Mini topped the Turbo Tin Tops section.

Classic Mini expert Nick Swift starred in his full historic-spec car in the very wet opening stages of the smaller-car

Abba crew are the winners who take it (nearly) all

DONINGTON PARK
MSVR
10-11 APRIL

The Team Abba Racing Mercedes-AMG GT3 of Richard and Sam Neary proved almost unbeatable in the opening round of the GT Cup at Donington Park.

Father Richard got the crew's weekend off to the perfect start as he was a lights-to-flag winner in the first sprint race. It was Richard Chamberlain's Porsche 935 that led the initial chase, until Michael Igoe (Lamborghini Huracan) charged

ahead on lap seven of 20. Grahame Tilley's GT3 Nissan completed the podium.

The first enduro was soon under the safety car after Chamberlain spun at Redgate on the opening tour. Neary had the lead, but couldn't hold off Igoe, who dived ahead into the Craner Curves on lap six, with Lucky Khera's Lamborghini third.

They held station until the stops, before Phil Keen, in for Igoe, comfortably took the spoils. Fellow British GT entrant Lewis Proctor climbed his McLaren 720S GT3 — started by dad Stewart — to second, well clear of the nose-to-tail duel between Abbie Eaton in John Seale's Lamborghini and Will Tregurtha in the Tilley Nissan.

It was a comfortable win for Sam Neary in the second sprint, as Khera and Tilley disputed second after Igoe pitted at quarter-distance. Khera consolidated second, while third-placed Tilley had Chamberlain and Seale closing in until the Porsche and Lambo clashed.

The Neary-versus-Igoe battle was rekindled in the second enduro, with Tilley

fending off John Dhillon's Lamborghini for third. Igoe grabbed the lead from Neary Sr into the chicane just before the pitstop window, but after the stops it was Neary Jr all the way, with Keen second and Tregurtha reclaiming third from Phil Quaife in the Dhillon Huracan.

While Mark McAleer's 997 proved unbeatable in the Porsche Club contests, it was far from settled behind. Peter Morris duelled with Chris Dyer for most of race one, joined in part by Simon Clark. Once Morris got away, he drastically reduced McAleer's winning margin to below half a second, with Dyer just holding third. Dyer was a comfortable second in race two, with Morris losing third to Clark late on.

Tom Stoten was another double winner, taking two Sports 2000 victories in his Gunn. Neil Burroughs led the first race before slipping to fourth, while Michael Gibbins's off from second on lap 10 of 19 allowed Dominic Lesniewski's MCR to seal the runner-up spot. Burroughs reclaimed third at the chicane on the last lap from



Harrison made up for clutch failure with race-two victory

WALKER



Watkinson survived this backmarker moment to win Swinging Sixties in his Mini

JONES

JONES

set of Swinging Sixties, charging in typically spectacular style from 14th on the grid (he was twice penalised for track-limits infringements) to lead in just over two laps. Novice partner Giles Page then held on to a creditable fifth, as his sons Jonathan and Matthew staved off Ian Staines's MG Midget for third in their Mini. With wider tyres on his Mini, Chris Watkinson eased to victory from familiar Mini men Dan and Charlie Budd, making their historic debuts.

Among the quicker cars in Group 2, regular pacesetter Jamie Keevill's Lotus Elan was sidelined by a loose manifold, helping Mark Campbell to qualify his

Triumph TR5 on pole by nearly 4s. Campbell was initially behind Malcolm Johnson's Lotus Europa in the wet race, but dived ahead at Cascades and pulled clear to win as track conditions improved. Mark Parsley spun from third on the final lap of the curfew-shortened race in the TR4 started by Jon Ellison, handing Iain Daniels's Reliant Sabre Six the position.

Caterham Seven UK star Stephen Nuttall dominated the Magnificent Sevens, although his 51s victory margin was extended by Ben Simonds's tangles with backmarkers in the latter stages, Colin Watson and Tim Davis the beneficiaries.

MARK PAULSON



Nearys' Merc could often be found battling Keen/Igoe Lamborghini

WALKER

Paul Trayhurn (Gunn). Stoten took charge of race two on the opening lap, with Burroughs seeing off Trayhurn for second from lap five to complete a Gunn podium lockout.

Clive Wood snatched a last-lap win from Steve Dickens at Redgate in the first of the Clubmans races, with Peter Richings third. Despite Wood's efforts, Dickens held on to his race-long lead in race two, with Wood only 0.265 seconds down at the flag.

Clutch failure robbed Neil Harrison (Dallara) of victory in the first Monoposto

F3, 1400, Classic and 1800 race. Lee Fern then took charge, his Dallara's winning margin boosted when Chris Davison spun out at McLeans from second. Harrison got his reward with victory in race two. With Fern spinning at McLeans, Robin Dawe was second again.

Dan Gore headed home a Jedi trio to win both Monoposto M1000, 2000 and 1600 races from Edward Falkingham and Robert Bailey.

PETER SCHERER

WEEKEND WINNERS



JONES

OULTON PARK

TIN TOPS

Colin Simpson/Steve Simpson
(Peugeot 206 RC)

FUTURE CLASSICS/MODERN CLASSICS

Dave Griffin (BMW M3 E36, above)

NEW MILLENNIUM/OPEN/

TURBO TIN TOPS

Mark Smith (BMW M3 Evo E36)

SWINGING SIXTIES

Group 1 Chris Watkinson (Austin Mini)

Group 2 Mark Campbell (Triumph TR5)

MAGNIFICENT SEVENS

Stephen Nuttall (Caterham Supersport)

DONINGTON PARK

GT CUP

Race 1 Richard Neary (Mercedes-AMG GT3)

Race 2 Michael Igoe/Phil Keen
(Lamborghini Huracan)

Race 3 Sam Neary (Mercedes-AMG GT3)

Race 4 Richard Neary/Sam Neary

PORSCHE CLUB

Races 1 & 2 Mark McAleer (Porsche 997 C2S)

SPORTS 2000

Races 1 & 2 Tom Stoten (Gunn TS11b)

CLUBMANS SPORTS PROTOTYPE

Race 1 Clive Wood (Mallock Mk23)

Race 2 Steve Dickens (Mallock Mk29)

MONOPOSTO F3, 1400, CLASSIC & 1800

Race 1 Lee Fern (Dallara F301)

Race 2 Neil Harrison (Dallara F302)

MONOPOSTO M1000, 2000 & 1600

Races 1 & 2 Dan Gore (Jedi Mk4)

TRACKDAY TROPHY

Sam Gay/Colin Tester (Honda Integra)

TRACKDAY CHAMPIONSHIP

Scott Parkin (Volkswagen Golf)

911 CHALLENGE

Piers Masarati/Miles Masarati (Turbo, below)

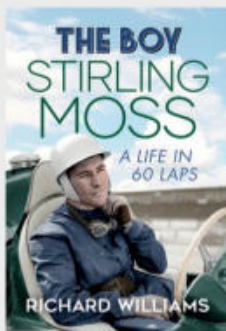


WALKER

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REMEMBERING A LOST MOTORSPORT GREAT



BOOK
THE BOY - STIRLING MOSS: A LIFE IN 60 LAPS
RRP £20

Richard Williams is one of those annoyingly talented people who is able to combine broad interests with deep knowledge.

Despite working in many other areas, Williams has consistently proved capable of matching the specialists when delving into motorsport, perhaps best exemplified by his book on the 1957 Pescara Grand Prix: *The Last Road Race*.

Autosport has long been a fan of the original *The Old Grey Whistle Test* presenter and former *Guardian* chief sportswriter, so we were eager to read his take on Stirling Moss, who died a year ago this week at the age of 90.

There have probably been more books written about Moss than any other driver, with the possible exception of Ayrton Senna (another topic Williams has previously taken on). As Williams himself points out, the first Moss biography was published in 1953 and there have been numerous works – some with Moss's help, others by those involved with his illustrious career – since then, not to mention the amount of coverage he had in magazines and newspapers.

To come up with something fresh is therefore a challenge, but Williams paints a picture with broad brushstrokes. This is not a blow-by-blow account of Moss's racing career. There is no extensive list of results at the back. That's not the point; it's been done before.

Instead, Williams's 60 short chapters – the 'life in 60 laps' – each pick out a certain moment or aspect

of Moss's life that provides an insight into the man himself and a flavour of what else was going at the time. Which helps to explain, among other things, why a 20-year-old 'Boy' who narrowly missed fighting in the Second World War became so popular with a recovering nation looking for new heroes. And how Moss maintained that long after his frontline career ended.

It's touching in places too. Williams shows his personal involvement from the very start. Ill health prevented the 16-time world championship GP winner from attending a trip to Pescara in 2017, so Williams picked up a statuette on his behalf before delivering it to Moss's home: "I had taken the Boy his last trophy."

Many of the other stories will be familiar to enthusiasts, from his snub from Ferrari at Bari in 1951 to his legendary Monaco GP victory a decade later, but Williams still tells them in an interesting and concise way.

And such is the level of his research that you learn new things, whether they be about Moss himself, Cuban kidnappings or the numerous other cultural and political backgrounds that Williams effortlessly moves through without ever becoming ponderous. Even Roxy Music's Phil Manzanera makes an appearance!

It's not all about the successes and Moss's strengths either. Although Williams clearly admired Moss, he hasn't left out the negatives. The 'Crumpet' chapter shows how Moss's attitudes didn't always change with the times, while the account of his early support of the UK Independence Party is downright uncomfortable, though it was not a relationship that lasted very long. But it all adds to the overall picture.

No book is perfect – the two BRMs finished fifth and seventh at the 1951 British GP, not fifth and sixth, and Juan Manuel Fangio was fourth (not fifth) in his final

Moss's big
break came
with Mercedes
in 1955

ALL PHOTOGRAPHY
motorsport
IMAGES



Moss died last
year on 12 April

world championship Formula 1 start at the 1958 French GP – but the minor errors do not detract from the enjoyment.

Williams's aim was to “explore the scope and nature of Moss's remarkable fame, and to examine aspects of the character behind the public image”. He has achieved that in a very accessible way – this is not a book that will take you months to read – and his work is incredibly good value for money.

If you're a Moss fan, this is still a book worth adding to your collection. If your interest and experience dates from a later time, this is a fine introduction to both a bygone era and one of motorsport's greatest figures.

KEVIN TURNER

WHAT'S ON

INTERNATIONAL MOTORSPORT

Emilia Romagna Grand Prix

Formula 1 World Championship
Round 2/23

Imola, Italy

18 April

TV Live Sky Sports F1, Sun 1355

TV Highlights Sky Sports F1, Sun 1800, Channel 4, Sun 1830

IndyCar Series

Round 1/15

Barber Motorsports Park, Alabama, USA

18 April

TV Live Sky Sports F1, Sun 2000

Formula Regional European by Alpine

Round 1/10

Imola, Italy

17-18 April

GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup

Round 1/5

Monza, Italy

18 April

TV Livestream on Motorsport.tv, Sat 0755, 1300, Sun 0750, 1330

European Le Mans Series

Round 1/6

Barcelona, Spain

18 April

TV Livestream on Motorsport.tv, Sat 1015

Michelin Le Mans Cup

Round 1/6

Barcelona, Spain

17 April

TV Livestream on Motorsport.tv, Sat 1105, 1510

NASCAR Cup

Round 9/36

Richmond, Virginia, USA

18 April

TV Live Premier Sports 2, Sun 1930

NASCAR Truck Series

Round 6/22

Richmond, Virginia, USA

17 April

Nurburgring Endurance Series

Round 1/8

Nurburgring, Germany

17 April

TV Livestream on Motorsport.tv, Sat 0755, 1300, Sun 0750, 1330

Australian Supercars

Round 3/12

Symmons Plains, Australia

17-18 April

TV Live BT Sport 2, Sat 0700, Sun 0700

MotoGP

Round 3/19

Algarve Circuit, Portugal

18 April

TV Live BT Sport 2, Sun 1230

TV Highlights on BT Sport 3, Sun 1930

UK MOTORSPORT

Oulton Park BARC*

17 April

BARC Red, Caterhams (Sigma 135, Sigma 150, Sigmax), CNC Heads Sports/Saloons, Superkarts

Cadwell Park 750MC*

17 April

Formula Vee, Historic 750 Formula, Hot Hatch, Renault Clio 182s, Toyota MR2s

Silverstone VSCC*

17 April

'50s GT & Production Cars, F3 (500), Allcomers, Pre-'66 Grand Prix Cars, Pre-War Sports Cars, Vintage and Pre-'61 Racing Cars

Snetterton HSCC*

17-18 April

'70s Road Sports, '80s Production Challenge, Classic Clubmans, Classic F3, Classic FF1600, Ecurie Classic Racing, Heritage FF1600, Historic FF1600, Historic FF2000, Historic Formula Junior, Historic Road Sports, Historic Touring Cars

**Behind closed doors*



The San Marino, sorry, Emilia Romagna GP takes top billing

SUTTON



FROM THE ARCHIVE

George Eyston's riding mechanic ducks as low as possible as they race to third place in their Alfa Romeo 8C 2300 Monza at the Mannin Moar on the Isle of Man's Douglas circuit in

July 1933. The race was the RAC's answer to the Monaco Grand Prix, the location dictated by the British mainland ban on motor racing taking place on public roads. The RAC's insistence on riding mechanics was

a point of contention because by 1933 it was an outdated practice, and this was one of the last grand prix-type races to feature them. The race was won by Brian Lewis, who led an Alfa Romeo 1-3-4.



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IN DEFENCE OF...

F1 RULE CHANGES

Changing regulations, particularly in Formula 1, can be expensive. Invariably they come with cries of being unnecessary, and sometimes the reasons for them can be debated. Lewis Hamilton has already suggested that the tweaks for 2021 were made to “peg us back” in the wake of Red Bull’s renewed challenge to Mercedes.

But rule changes are important, for a number of reasons, such as safety and a response to technological developments.

F1 rulemakers are in a constant battle to contain speeds so that cars don’t ‘outgrow’ current circuits. In a similar vein, rule changes allow a response to technological progress that might be undesirable – such as traction and stability control – or that pushes the performance envelope on too quickly, such as the first era of ground-effects aerodynamics. They allow the sport to follow automotive trends when required too, such as the increased efficiency of the turbo-hybrid powerplants.

But almost as important – whether intended or not – is that changes can mix up the competitive order. Periods of domination are not good for F1 as a whole,

and fans always respond to the excitement of increased competition or a different order to the one they saw the year before.

Almost all F1 rule revolutions have resulted in a changing of the guard, or at least a fresh challenge for the frontrunners. The exceptions are McLaren’s time at the top across the switch from turbo to normally aspirated power in 1988-89, and the continuing Mercedes winning streak despite new aero regulations for 2017.

The downside is that new rules often spread out the field as the bigger/better-funded teams can adapt better. But there are exceptions. The banning of electronic gizmos for 1994 (above) closed things up, curbing a Williams advantage that was almost akin to the gaps of the 1950s.

The 2022 regulations are aimed at doing something similar, while also addressing the financial issue with a cost cap that has already kicked in. If more teams have a chance of winning, the changes will be accepted. And even Hamilton, who says he enjoys competition, will surely welcome it – assuming he decides to stay in F1.

KEVIN TURNER

IN NEXT WEEK’S ISSUE

Formula 1 returns to Europe

FULL REPORT FROM THE EMILIA ROMAGNA GP



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Ben Anderson gets behind the wheel of McLaren's 720S GT3 this month (p8)



CELEBRATING UK RACING AS 2021 SEASON BEGINS

They have no spectators, socially distanced paddocks and still feel a bit different to 'normal', but it's great that circuits are once again reverberating to the sound of club motorsport action – well, in England, at least. As competition is getting back under way, it seemed the perfect moment to bring back Autosport's national supplements, too.

Autosport remains fully committed to our coverage of UK motor racing and feels these supplements provide an excellent way of further exploring the brilliant characters, fantastic series and incredible cars that make club motorsport such an important strand of the sport. And this first instalment of 2021 showcases both ends of the motorsport spectrum.

A car that competes at the very top level of national motorsport is the McLaren 720S GT3 – a proven race

winner in British GT. Ben Anderson was fortunate enough to get behind the wheel of the sportscar beast for this edition (see page 8). He was certainly left impressed, finding that the car instilled in him an unexpected level of confidence.

At the opposite end of the sport, it is vital that organisers always look at ways of attracting new competitors. And the Knockhill Motor Sports Club's Super Lap Scotland series does exactly that, encouraging trackday drivers to take that first step into the world of competition. It has hit on a winning formula with its time-trial format (p18) – with a British GT champion among its graduates.

Elsewhere, Stefan Mackley speaks to Caterham ace Danny Winstanley (p14) and British Motorsports Marshals Club chair Nadine Lewis gives an update on how the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting the work of the orange army (p5).



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Bingham/Motorsport Images, James Roberts, John Stewart, Richard Styles

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OPINION NADINE LEWIS

HOW MARSHALLING'S FARING AMID COVID

The British Motorsports Marshals Club chair says there have been some positives to emerge but introducing new recruits remains a challenge

For the return of English motorsport earlier this month, we've started this year how we finished last year in terms of marshalling guidance. It worked and there's nothing new in the government guidelines that means we should do anything differently. From what I've seen, interest from marshals in the early events has been pretty good. I was at Donington Park for three days over the Easter weekend and did the FIA Masters Historic and then the 750 Motor Club meeting on the Monday, so it was three full days straight back into it! Those events were all sufficiently marshalled.

I know some events coming up — because we're still restricting numbers with the rule of six in place on marshal posts — were having to turn people away. We're oversubscribed, which is a great place to be and hopefully we won't have to turn people down for much longer. It's done for the right reasons and those people who

“People say they've learned more in the past 12 months without three other people to rely on”

have been turned down understand it. The chief marshals make sure they mix it up and it's not the same people missing out each time.

Everybody who has come back followed the guidelines and did what they needed to do. They were really happy to be back and I think the drivers were as well! The same as last year, everybody just wanted to make it work. Seeing different faces in person was quite nice and it was good to have conversations with different people who you weren't looking at through a screen.

We will alter the guidance as things change. At the moment, for



example, we can't do assessments, so if people want to upgrade we've said for now we will keep those on hold. But when the restrictions are next relaxed, due to be in the middle of May, it would make sense to allow assessments to happen and to allow trainees back. If trainees had done some marshalling previously and were doing a specific duty like being a flag marshal, they were allowed to marshal. But anyone who had done nothing at all, we've said no because they would need too much support.

From May, as I say we're hoping that will change. I suspect we've lost some people along the way who have found something else to do in the past 12 months. But there are plenty of people who are desperate and message me 'what's the date I can start?' so hopefully we can stay on track with the government roadmap.

The next stage, which we're in consultation with Motorsport UK about, is when we can begin bringing completely new recruits back. We attracted an awful lot of interest last year from various sources — Formula 1 helped quite a lot as we got mentioned in commentary and many people realised 'that's how I can go motor racing'. A lot of them are itching to get started.

Generally, with a lot of things that were introduced, people have said 'why have we not done this before?' and 'can we continue to do this post-pandemic?' We all do pre-event declarations three or four days before the event and it means the chief marshal knows we've done it. Different venues have different ways of doing things. At Donington, for one of the meetings, they got everybody to drive onto the Melbourne Loop and form a queue. Someone at the end of the queue handed you a bacon butty and radio, if you needed one, and off you went to your post. People used to have to hang around quite a bit and wait for the chief marshal to arrive. You can't now have a wander around the paddock, but speeding up the signing-on process and getting in position quicker works really well. It could take up to an hour before and now it's done in 20 minutes.

In terms of being on post, those people who did manage to marshal last year did a fantastic job. A lot of them would've perhaps been used to being with a bigger group. People say they've learned more in the past 12 months because they've had to — without three other people to rely on, it was them, they had to do it. It's good because a lot of people will continue to do that.

A word must also go to Murray Walker, who was president of our club for 20-odd years. He went out of his way to find out more and attended training days — they did get him to put a fire out at one point — as he wanted to be able to talk about us with some knowledge of what we do. He always wanted to make sure we were recognised, along with the fact we are volunteers, and he definitely raised the profile of marshals. Murray was a phenomenal supporter of the club and will be sorely missed. ■



PICKUP TRUCK

A mainstay of UK motorsport, the Pickup Truck Racing Championship will return in 2021 – after its hiatus – bigger and better

BY STEFAN MACKLEY



S

ince it was launched in 1997, the Pickup Truck Racing Championship has become a popular fixture of the UK's national racing scene.

After being hit hard last year by the pandemic, which subsequently meant organisers decided to cancel the British Automobile Racing Club-run series, things are looking promising on its return this season with 31 registered drivers and 22 races planned across 10 venues.

"It was conceived, for a better word, to entertain," says Sonny Howard, creator and organiser of the series. "At first it was really designed more like a Tonka toy. It's robust, easy to maintain, easy to repair but most importantly it was designed to race from a Tesco car park to a full circuit and anywhere in between."

Despite being nearly 25 years old, the design has stayed largely the same, with only minimal changes through the years, such as uprated engines and gearboxes, while many of the vehicle's features are controlled by the organisers to help limit costs but also ensure parity across the board.

Two classes – Pro1 and Pro2 – differentiate the trucks with bigger engines, although those in the former are required to run success ballast and pickups can vary in price from £10,000 to nearly £20,000 depending on the class, engine and gearbox.

Unlike other forms of UK motorsport, drivers are allowed certified 'spotters' in the ilk of NASCAR and, like America's most popular form of racing, there is a strong fanbase. As Howard adds: "It shouldn't do what it says on the tin!"

ENGINE

A number of different engines are used depending on which class a competitor chooses to run in. For the Pro1 category, either a 2.5-litre Duratec or a 2.3-litre GM engine can be used, while for the Pro2 class entries can choose either a 2.3-litre Duratec or two-litre GM, with certain parts controlled. "The estimated power on a Pro1 is 265bhp and on a Pro2 around 250bhp," says Howard.

All trucks are restricted to using the same ECU, which controls the revs (limited to 7500rpm) and ignition, but competitors are allowed to change the fuel mapping.



CHASSIS/BODYWORK

The spaceframe chassis consists of 87 metres of tubing, including 258 separate joints and 112 brackets, and has only undergone minor changes in the past to incorporate updated suspension brackets.

The fibreglass bodywork consists of 18 separate panels that are supplied by the championship, with different panels used on the front depending on the truck running a Ford or GM engine. On the rear, all have a blade spoiler, which must remain in a set position. "The scrutineers have a tool for measuring them all and it was originally designed for running at Rockingham because they were doing 155mph, so that's why it's fixed at that angle," says Howard.

TYRES

Aluminium rims are fitted with control Avon tyres, both slicks and wets. "When drivers start the season, they start off with four brand new tyres, and four used tyres," says Howard. "They're all documented, and then what happens is you're allowed to have one new tyre per meeting and that's it. You've definitely got to do tyre management through the season and it is a challenge."

GEARBOX

"There is a stigma, for a better way of describing it, for left-hand drive," says Howard. "When we were using a four-speed gearbox and a rocket-type box then you could, on a downshift, put it in the wrong selection."

To avoid this problem sequential gearboxes were introduced five years ago, but drivers are still able to race trucks fitted with a traditional gearbox.

"They've got a fixed set of ratios, so if somebody wants to end up using an ordinary conventional gearbox, they can use it," confirms Howard.

SUSPENSION

This is one area where there is scope to make adjustments. The trucks run double-wishbone front suspension, which has adjustable anti-dive or dive geometry, while there is a GM truck front-upright and hub.

"It is fitted with an anti-roll bar on the front and there are five variations," says Howard. "We do 2mm, 3mm, 4mm, 6mm and 8mm options, and competitors are allowed to choose whichever one they want. The truck also uses a fixed adjustable coilover, and it has a spring rate of between 750 and 900 pounds."

On the rear, the pickup truck uses a four-link rear suspension and has a truck live axle originally from a Ford, as well as a ZF limited-slip differential.

DRIVING MCLAREN'S GT3 'SINGLE-SEATER'

Time in a thoroughbred racer leaves you searching for time in yourself, especially when the rewards for total commitment are so high, as our man discovered at Snetterton

BY BEN ANDERSON

PHOTOGRAPHY BINGHAM



motorsport
IMAGES

I'm driving back from Snetterton down the M11, traces of earlier adrenaline still coursing through the bloodstream. I'm trying to decompress, and somehow process my experience. The usual stuff: what I did well; what I didn't do well; where I could have done better. A racing driver's staple diet.

I'm thinking particularly about the last

part of the lap, the bit that still feels most like the old circuit: the Esses, Bomb Hole, and the entry to Coram – that corner used to be super-fast, but it's now a frustrating, long-radius, almost 180-degree right-hander that feeds into the second part of what used to be the Russell chicane.

It's through this section – five corners if you're being generous, three if you're not

– where I'm giving away most of my laptime deficit to McLaren pro driver Rob Bell. The main difference is that Rob brakes later for the Esses and shows more trust in the car's aerodynamics through the fast bits. That's not unexpected, but what is unexpected is how insanely late you can brake, and how hard you can attack these corners in what is a 1200kg supercar.

Preconceptions were blown out at Snetterton. GT3 racers have moved on





No need to remove your hands: wheel is fully armed



McLaren GT3 has much in common with single-seaters

I didn't think GT3 cars were like this, or *supposed* to be like this. I was expecting something lazier; something with a lot of power and a few gizmos to help you control that power, but not much else.

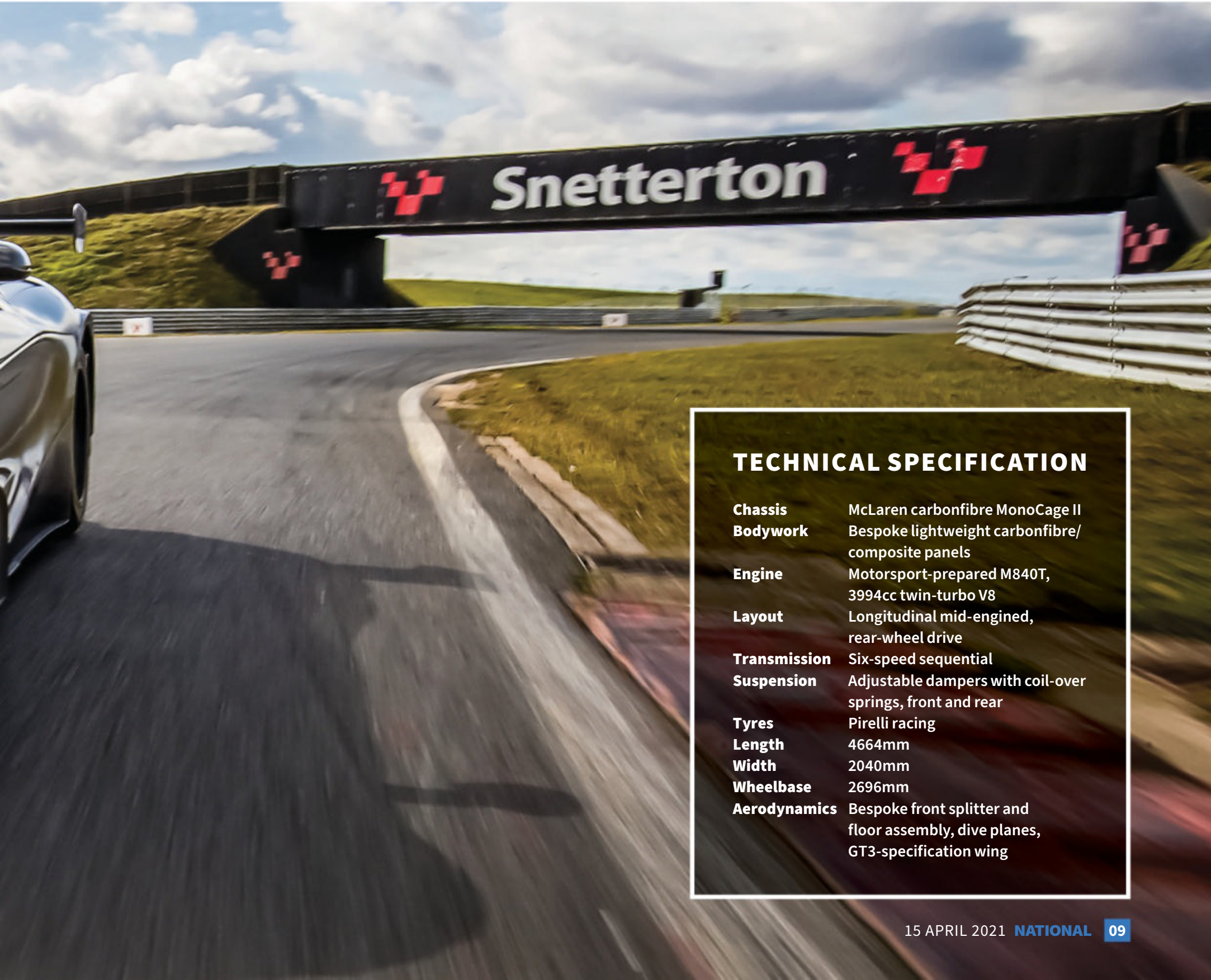
How wrong I was. What you have here is something much closer to a thoroughbred racing car. When you drive it, as I was fortunate to do for 25 flying laps and on a

couple of sets of new Pirelli tyres, it feels closer to a junior single-seater or a closed-cockpit LMP3 prototype. I thought GT cars were all 'point and squirt', but this thing actually likes going around corners.

When I describe the feeling of discombobulation from this unexpected discovery to McLaren head of customer racing Danny Buxton and McLaren

Automotive motorsport chief Ian Morgan (previously a Red Bull engineer during that F1 team's title-winning years), they break out in knowing grins...

"We think we've got a car that's as good as anything out there," says Morgan, whose team launched the 720S GT3 in 2019. "We've got a massively stiff structure that underpins the whole thing; we've got a ▶



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Chassis	McLaren carbonfibre MonoCage II
Bodywork	Bespoke lightweight carbonfibre/composite panels
Engine	Motorsport-prepared M840T, 3994cc twin-turbo V8
Layout	Longitudinal mid-engined, rear-wheel drive
Transmission	Six-speed sequential
Suspension	Adjustable dampers with coil-over springs, front and rear
Tyres	Pirelli racing
Length	4664mm
Width	2040mm
Wheelbase	2696mm
Aerodynamics	Bespoke front splitter and floor assembly, dive planes, GT3-specification wing

lot of focus on aero; we've got good suspension. Any race car needs all those aspects to be right for it to be competitive.

"There's a lot of guys on board with our team who've got single-seater backgrounds, like myself, and I guess that maybe changes the way we go about trying to do a car as well. So, a bit more of a single-seater feel – very dynamic, quick to change direction, quick to respond; the things that make the car very agile. And ultimately rewarding, because nobody wants to spend 24 hours

"Nobody wants to spend 24 hours in a car that's lazy or boring, or needs to be hustled too much"

driving a car that's lazy or boring, or which you have to hustle too much.

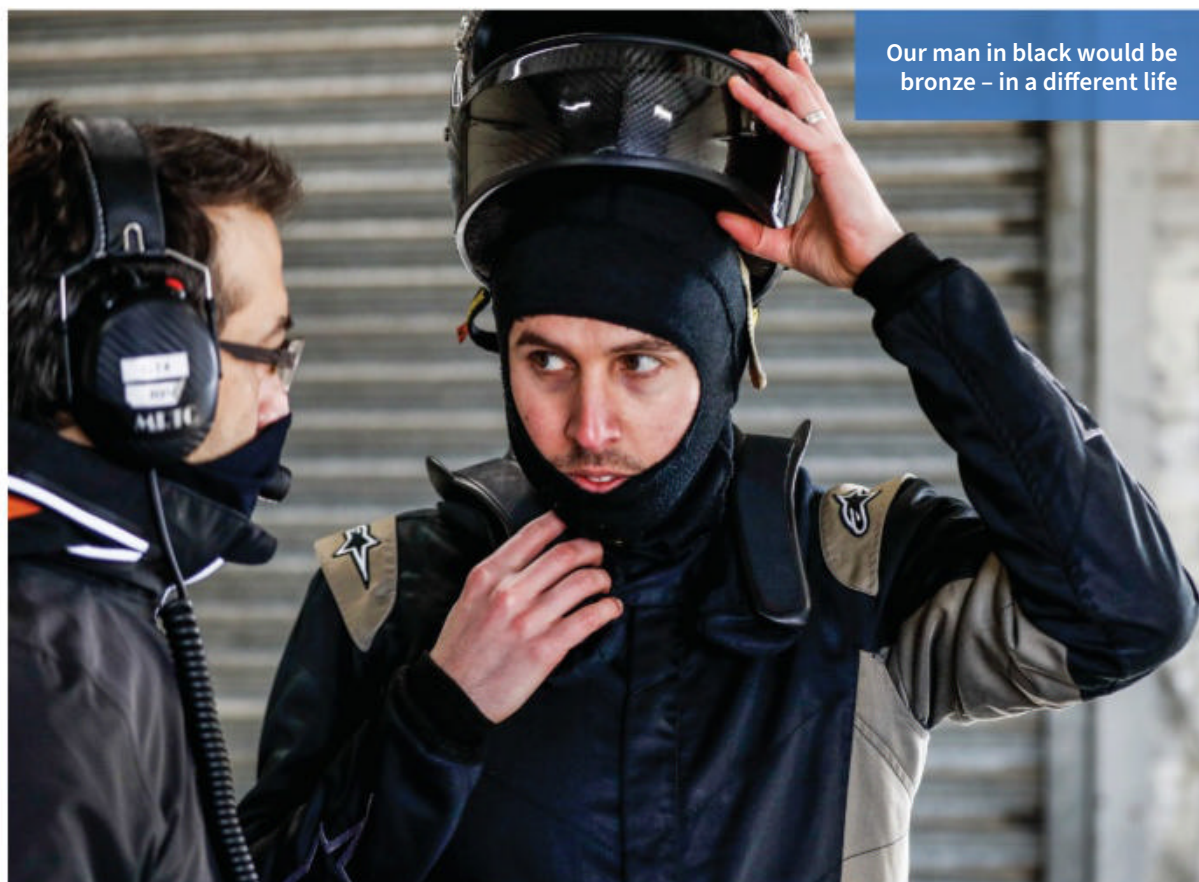
"We get a lot of good feedback, particularly from new drivers that come in. The likes of Brendan Iribe and Nick Moss who have come from Pure [McLaren's own one-make GT4-spec racing series] and within one year have gone through GT4

into GT3. It's very rare that you see anyone getting in for the first time who doesn't feel they can get on it quickly. It gives confidence quite quickly, which is absolutely perfect for the bronze drivers."

Which is exactly the category of driver I would be if I lived in a parallel universe where I'd made loads of money and was

planning on racing one of these cars seriously. I'm in a decent position to put McLaren's philosophy to the test. My GT experience is limited, and I'm being dropped into the team's test mule for a few runs around some traction control development work that Bell is undertaking.

Snetterton is cold, but the sun is out at



Our man in black would be bronze – in a different life



least, slowly drying the circuit after some overnight rain. As time ticks on towards midday, I finally get the call to jump in. From the moment I first clamber aboard, I'm impressed with what I find. I'm comfortable, the seating position is perfect, the pedals and steering wheel position easily adjusted. I feel like the car's been made for me, even though it hasn't.

"We designed everything to be accessible through the steering wheel," explains Bell, as attention turns to the various switches and dials laid out before me, "so you don't have to take your hands off."

Three dials across the top of the wheel control engine map, traction control and ABS settings (12 options for each function), and there are buttons to the right for reverse gear (hopefully won't be needing that!) and to start the engine.

"The ABS, you don't want to use," adds Bell. "It's a great tool in the wet, but you're not [really] in control [when you use it]. We want this to be a car you drive, not one that does everything for you. The TC is primarily designed to help look after the tyres, not help you out of a shitty situation..."

The first run (on old tyres) goes off without a hitch. The cold track

means front tyre temperature is difficult to generate, but of course I'm not immediately driving at a level that would land me in any real trouble in any case. The car is accessible, feels solid and enveloping – like an affectionate bearhug. My data traces are pleasingly similar to Rob's in terms of style and steering input. The deficit starts, as ever, with braking technique. I'm slamming on my anchors too soon and at not much more than half the pressure he's generating. This means I'm also not benefiting from the extra engine braking available from making rapid, last-second downshifts on the paddles.

I get new boots for my second run – just a fortunate quirk of the test schedule. Unfortunately, an early chequered flag cuts this outing short after five laps. Beforehand, Rob completes a new-tyre run of his own and cuts a 1m48.2s lap, which provides a useful reference for me on the dashboard.

McLaren's system logs mini-sectors in real time, so you can see yourself gaining – or in my case losing – time as you make your way around the lap. I'm into the 1m52s now, so still a fair way to go. I can feel I'm not quite at the races yet, not achieving the rotations I want at low speed, while Rob is compounding my weaknesses with greater commitment through the higher-speed stuff at Riches (taken in fourth gear), Bomb Hole (also fourth) and Coram. I at least break into a sweat this time, so things are starting to happen.

For my final run, I get more new tyres (lucky me!) and a full 10-lap stint. This time I can feel myself make clear improvements in technique, braking harder and getting the car to come to life under braking. Arriving onto the back straight, I'm consistently forecast to achieve 1m50s lap times. But several times I encounter traffic through the last part of the circuit, which breaks my rhythm. On clear laps I ▶

McLaren is a growing force on the GT racing scene

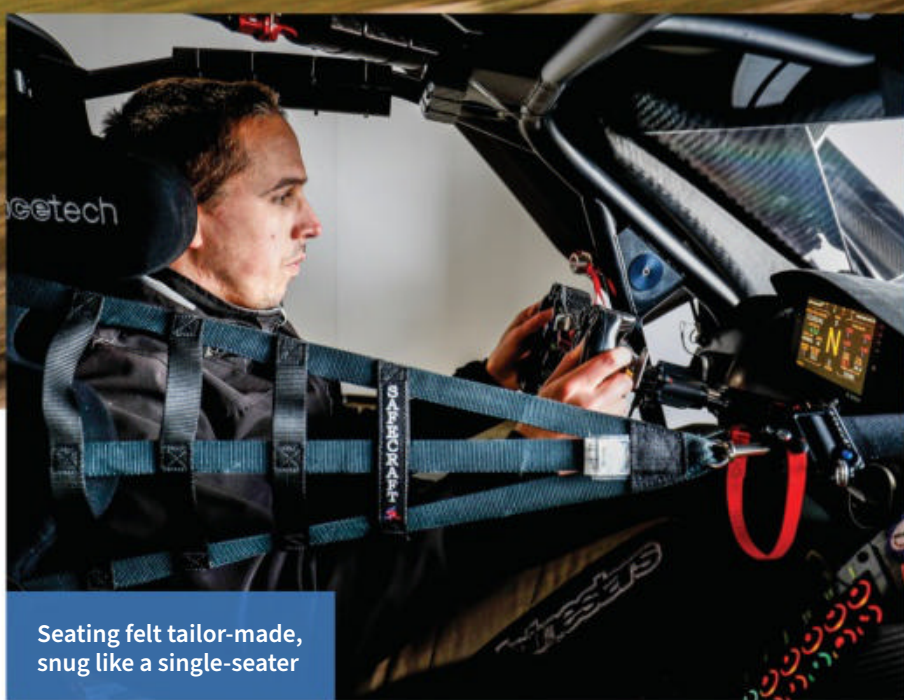


CHIVERS



Our run was part of a full McLaren test at Snetterton

720S GT3 has evolved far beyond road car origins



Seating felt tailor-made, snug like a single-seater



“We’ve been thorough to make sure changes are progressive, that we don’t have any scares”

still drop between one and two seconds to Rob, who displays his greater level of trust in the aerodynamics. As I move past the peak of the tyre, I can feel some snap oversteer on corner exit, so I dial the TC up from ‘4’ to ‘5’. Towards the end of the run I’m consistently in the low-1m52s, so I feel sure a smoother run would yield at least a 1m51s. Rob jumps back in straight after me and I notice he consistently laps in the 1m49s-1m50s. I was starting to wake the car up, no doubt; beginning to feel what it is really capable of. But now my time is up.

Later, I reflect on how well the car looked after me, encouraged me to find fresh ground without ever threatening to turn nasty on me. I was able to progress step by step with each run, a process that surely would have continued had I been able to continue driving. It seems to me that McLaren has consciously engineered the learning curve on this car, delaying the difficult part of the slope – those last bits of hard-to-find time – towards the end of the climb, rather than giving unacclimatised drivers a dose of instant shock and awe.

Of course, this means the tough stuff comes later, time much harder to find as you gain experience and competence, but

this is true of most cars. The bias here is similar to a Radical SR3 – the engine isn’t going to help you out much, so you need to work up to eventually hustling a laptime out of the car. McLaren’s engineers wanted to develop a driver-friendly platform for the start of that journey, something that inspires confidence in the first instance, and I’m happy to say they have achieved what they set out to do.

“Some of the cues that give you that fear factor – that snap, or that unpredictability – limit amateur drivers very quickly,” says Morgan. “If you can take that away, people then get the ability much easier to quickly notch up to the level you need to be at. We’ve been very conscious with our development to make sure the car’s predictable to the limit, and any changes at the limit are very progressive.

“Platform control is what it’s about – a lot of cars react badly because you end up with a change in aero and balance quickly through a transition phase, whether it be pitch or roll or whatever. So, we’ve been very thorough in the way we develop to make sure any changes are very progressive, that we don’t have any scares.

“If you look at the numbers [in GT3], over the past seven or eight years the

downforce numbers haven’t changed that much – it’s the characteristic underneath those numbers that makes the difference.”

Morgan also speaks of the ‘cross-pollination’ McLaren gets from having its GT programme and a Formula 1 team under the same roof. People talk, ideas are swapped, and some personnel – Morgan says six mechanics specifically – have progressed from the GT side into the F1 squad. You get a real sense that this is a car sprinkled with a little of F1’s aerodynamic stardust. Superb handling, but also a high degree of efficiency to make up for Balance



Data traces showed Ben where he was losing time



'Aerodynamic stardust' from F1 was present and correct, says Anderson

of Performance-limited engine performance – and horses is one area McLaren admits it is lacking in compared to some of its major rivals.

What results from this work is a truly impressive feat of engineering, which feels close in performance to an LMP3 car. In fact, Bell tells me that there are only a couple of seconds in it owing to the lightness and extra agility of the prototypes. McLaren's unrestricted version of the 720S – the GT3X – is, Morgan says, around three seconds quicker than its GT3 cousin around Snetterton; more on longer circuits where 710+bhp from an unrestricted version of the four-litre twin-turbo V8 engine can be better unleashed.

I've been fortunate to drive the road-going version of the 720S on a circuit – Estoril to be precise – and it felt a world away from this. That car was all go in a straight line and quite ungainly through the turns (by racing standards). The 720S GT3 turns the whole origin of GT3 racing – essentially road cars with roll cages – on its head. Here you have a thoroughbred race car, built by a thoroughbred racing team, something that's absolutely worthy of competing with the biggest and best supercar manufacturers in the world. When you add in McLaren's burgeoning presence on the international GT scene, plus a junior driver programme that makes its chosen candidates salaried employees, there is a lot to like about what the team at Woking is doing now. ■

WEATHERING THE STORM

I know from first-hand experience that McLaren Automotive's GT racing activities are customer focused. Its Pure McLaren events bring enthusiasts together at some of the world's most iconic circuits. You can race GT4 cars, trackday your own McLaren, or be driven and instructed by McLaren's roster of professional racing drivers. It's the motorsport equivalent of a high-end golfing holiday, and hugely enjoyable.

But this business model relies heavily on bringing people together, something that has become almost impossible during the global pandemic. In the meantime, the McLaren group has also gone through a painful process of cost-cutting while reaching for fresh investment.

"It was an incredibly painful year," admits McLaren motorsport chief Ian Morgan, "but we came out the other side, I think, stronger, leaner, with a very motivated team, and with some probably clearer plans as a result.

"It's trying to make the best from a difficult situation; we're still in that situation. A lot of our teams will find a worse effect this year than last because at the start of 2020 people had their plans in place and were ready to kick them into action when we got going in July. But this year is different, and marketing budgets

will be affected and so on.

"It's going to be a long path out, and I do think it's going to be a difficult few years. But we're going to make the best of it, do what we can to make sure we support all our customers as well as we can, and try making the best of every day and every race that comes up. That's the only way we can deal with it.

"We're all on our phones following events – a lot of my engineers are sitting at

"WE'VE GOT A MOTIVATED, PASSIONATE BUNCH OF PEOPLE. WE CAN PUNCH WELL ABOVE OUR WEIGHT"

home, in their bedrooms or in their studies or whatever, on a laptop looking at data anytime. A lot of them don't even need to be doing it. And that's a really good feeling. It feels like it was with F1 in terms of the passionate support – we're just doing things any way we can.

"I like that. I feel we've got a really motivated, passionate bunch of people and that means we can punch well above our weight."



FORGING A NEW PATH

Danny Winstanley has dominated in Caterhams for several years, firstly as a driver and more recently as a team owner. Now he has more ambitions on the horizon

BY STEFAN MACKLEY

I think the most fun I've ever had racing any car has been in Caterhams. With the way they tow off each other it's the most exciting racing I've known. I'll always say that to anybody.

"It's not necessarily the fastest car, but the racing and whole package has been by far the most enjoyable. That and the fact obviously I've done well in it!"

When it comes to Caterhams, there aren't many who come close to Danny Winstanley – in terms of raw speed, as well as the trophies and title successes to match as a driver and team owner.

The 28-year-old's assessment that he has "done well in it" is something of an understatement. Winstanley took back-to-back titles in the top tier of Caterhams – then dubbed the Caterham Seven 420R Championship – in 2017 and 2018 after finishing on the podium in every race across both seasons, more often than not on the top step.

And his success has now spread to beyond his own driving. Winstanley has focused on developing his DW Motorsport team over the past two years and, with the squad, John Byrne has secured the renamed Caterham Seven UK

Championship in 2019 and 2020 to continue the Winstanley domination.

While he is predominantly renowned as a Caterham driver, Winstanley's racing career has stretched across a whole spectrum of national motorsport over the past decade. It's perhaps not surprising that he was able to find his feet so well in a number of series, since he was thrown in at the deep end from the outset when he made his car racing debut in 2009 at the age of 16 in the TVR European Challenge.

"Stepping into the Tuscan straight out of the box from a go-kart was quite eye-opening," recalls Winstanley. "It



A familiar sight over the years: Winstanley leads in Caterhams



There have been many victories despite close nature of Caterhams



Leading a horde at Snetterton

“I didn’t enjoy it with the weight penalties. So we went the one-make series route”

was a fast car, even by today’s standards. It was just raw and brutal and, although it sounds like a cliché, when people say if you can drive that you can drive anything... that car made anything else I ever drove easy in comparison. It was like holding on to a wild animal.

“A few guys, they obviously knew about the Tuscan Challenge. One of them came over to me in testing [before his debut] and said, ‘You’re going to get eaten alive in there.’ I thought, ‘Bloody hell, nothing like giving me a bit of confidence!’ I’ll never forget him saying that and I felt so good not long after, because the first time

I ever raced the car I won the race.”

After that debut win, at Cadwell Park, Winstanley went on to finish third overall in the championship standings and second in class before moving into the GT Cup for two seasons, first with the Tuscan, before switching to a Porsche 964 and then a TVR Sagaris. “I didn’t enjoy it with the weight penalties,” he says. “So we went the one-make series route. It cuts out all the bullshit, basically.”

While there were occasional outings in series such as Euro Saloons, Ferrari Formula Classic, Britcar and the Civic Cup between 2012-15, most of which

featured victories, Winstanley’s focus soon centred upon Caterham racing. Over the next three seasons there were appearances in the Classic Sports Car Club’s Magnificent Sevens and in the British Racing & Sports Car Club-run Caterham Superlight R300 Championship.

He was third in the Superlight standings in 2014, and there were plenty of wins in the Magnificent Sevens, before he switched his focus to a full-time attack on the Caterham Seven 420R Championship in 2017. With help from his dad Craig and mechanic Callum Fletcher, there followed a double helping of titles, but with success came a raising of the stakes.

“When you go racing, especially in the second year, you start feeling under pressure,” admits Winstanley. “People expect you to do well. I actually finished third once at Zandvoort – it was my

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Early years were spent driving TVRs, first a Tuscan then a Sagaris

“To put it bluntly, I’d only be excited to go racing again if it was in something ‘proper’”

worst finish of the year and I had the most wins and seconds. A guy [from Caterham] actually said to me, ‘What happened?’ I finished third, I got a trophy, yet he asked me what happened! I kind of felt that winning was what people were expecting from me in the end.”

As Winstanley started to become a focal point for advice in Caterham paddocks and interest began to grow in hiring out a spare machine from the double champion, he took the decision to make the switch to team manager from 2019. As well as guiding Byrne to his back-to-back titles, Winstanley also ran cars for Rob Watts and Lewis Thompson, the latter in the 310Rs. Both will be returning with the team this season along with Tom Eden, who ran part-time in 2020.

Winstanley even dipped into Ginettas last season, running former Caterham driver Jamie Falvey in the opening rounds of the GT4 Supercup, and has grown to enjoy his team leadership role. “I actually started to enjoy it more than my racing,” he says. “I’d done what I wanted to do in the Caterhams and I can just enjoy still being around the whole atmosphere of everything, plus I’m getting paid for it, which is even better.

“I’m still going to all the race circuits, and I still get to drive the cars because the customers want me to go out in them, so it’s not like I’m not doing anything.”

He’s not only getting behind the wheel alongside customers and in his role as an ARDS Grade A instructor; Winstanley also appeared in selected Lotus Elise Trophy rounds last year. Unsurprisingly, he was on the pace from the beginning and took three

outright wins. He plans to do the full season aboard the Elise this year as well as run customers in the championship as part of a plan to be become more established in that category.

“I don’t want to put all my eggs in one basket for the Caterhams and see it fail,” he says. “If, for one year, I don’t get any Caterham drivers at least I’ve established myself a little bit in the Lotus and I can help people that way, because I’ll have learnt more about the car as well.”

While his focus now is on running the team as a business and taking to the track for some fun, Winstanley still harbours ambitions of competing at a higher level on the British motorsport scene. Keeping to the one-make theme, he hopes one day

DANNY WINSTANLEY CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

YEAR	CHAMPIONSHIP/SERIES
2020	Team owner; ran John Byrne to Caterham Seven UK title. Raced and won in Elise Trophy
2019	Team owner; ran John Byrne to Caterham 420R title
2018	Caterham 420R champion
2017	Caterham 420R champion
2015-16	Magnificent Sevens/Civic Cup
2014	Caterham Superlight R300 Championship; third overall in standings
2013	Civic Cup
2012	Euro Saloons/Ferrari Formula Classic/Britcar (Marcos Mantis)
2010-11	GT Cup (TVR Tuscan/Porsche 964/TVR Sagaris)
2009	Won on TVR European Challenge debut; third overall in standings
2006-08	Karting

to make it into the high-profile Porsche Carrera Cup GB, but knows that gaining sponsorship would be crucial and certainly not the work of a moment.

The world of historic racing is another potential avenue and, whatever route he takes, Winstanley is clear that his driving will lie outside of Caterhams, even if he still has fond memories of them. “To put it bluntly, I think I’d only be excited to go racing again if I was in something ‘proper,’” he says. “Something reliable, like Porsche Carrera Cup. It’s not like a home-built road car converted like the TVR Sagaris and the Civic Cup cars I’ve raced. The Lotus is good fun but it’s not ‘proper’, is it?”

“I think most people, if you said do you want to race Porsche Carrera Cup, would jump at the chance. I’ve done Caterhams; I’m not really excited by anything else. But whatever I do, I don’t think I’ll ever have that same feeling I had in those years when I was racing Caterhams.” ■



Lotus Elise Trophy beckons in 2021

SPRINTING TO SUCCESS

Low-cost. Easily accessible. And the perfect route for trackday drivers into competitive motorsport. It's easy to see why Super Lap Scotland's time-trial format is proving popular and encouraging new people into the sport

BY STEPHEN LICKORISH

It's an age-old question asked by event organisers: how to get more people involved in motorsport? One logical group to target as potential future competitors is trackday drivers – after all, these are people who are already showing an interest in cars and visiting a circuit. In 2013, the Knockhill Motor Sports Club recognised this and has aimed to reduce the gap between trackdays and racing north of the border via its Super Lap Scotland series.

“The realisation came to us that the popularity of trackdays is huge but from trackdays to racing is a ginormous step for so many people,” says KMSC chairman Stuart Gray. “They love driving fast, they love going on track but the first step in motorsport was then full-blown racing and, for that reason, it was a giant leap.

“Traditional sprinting had been around a long time, but is expensive per lap so we looked around and adopted a Super Sprint format. It has become a stepping stone to allow trackday drivers to have competition without the giant leap to having a bespoke competition car and all the paraphernalia that goes with circuit racing.”

The KMSC is not alone in targeting trackday drivers as possible racers – MotorSport Vision Trackdays has successfully introduced many of these men and women to competition via its hugely popular entry-level Trackday Trophy and Trackday Championship categories, but the jump to actually race against other drivers on track can still be daunting for many. And that is where the real strength of SLS lies. Its time-trial format was devised to allow drivers to compete against the clock rather than directly with each other.

“It's really grown,” continues Gray. “I think the first year we had about 12-15 entries and now we've got maybe 80-90 drivers who take part in a year, with around 65 per event.”

An SLS round starts with warm-up and practice sessions in the morning, ensuring competitors get plenty of track time, before things get more serious with

a 15-minute qualifying session that determines the order drivers complete their Super Lap in – and then it all comes down to that one hot lap in the final.

“You get points for qualifying, so it's important, and they're in the pits and out the pits, simulating the Super Lap – which, at the end of the day, is an out-lap, a fast lap and then an in-lap,” says championship coordinator Duncan Vincent. “If you qualify fastest in your class, you would run last, so slowest would go first.”

Gray adds: “The Super Lap at the end is where all the pressure's on because each class lines up in the pitlane and the cars get released one at a time. Basically every 10 seconds or so a car gets released.”

SLS has evolved over time to cater for an incredibly diverse range of cars, split into groups by power-to-weight ratio, featuring commuter Minis up to track-focused Radicals in its new Pro Extreme class, while there is also a division for retro machines.

“You don't need to have a 1000bhp Mitsubishi or Subaru to win the overall King of the Hill,” explains Vincent. “So, a Class G car, which is the slowest and littlest engine, could actually be the King of the Hill champion, if they win each of their events all the way through. So that's a bit of fun. As long as you've got a competition licence, we'll give you some stickers and away you go after a proper safety video from the clerk of the course.”

For drivers in the majority of classes, it is the Rally Speed Interclub licence that's required – for the Pro divisions it's Race Interclub – and, in terms of equipment, drivers just need an approved helmet,

racersuit and gloves in the lower groups.

One of the best case studies of a driver who has progressed from SLS to enjoy great success in racing is 2019 British GT champion Graham Davidson. He used to take part in trackdays at Knockhill in his Noble and was persuaded to join SLS – and says he would never have started racing without it.

“Some of the staff there said, ‘Graham, you should try racing’, and I said, ‘I don't know, I don't want to damage the car and the costs seem astronomical’, but they convinced me it was worth trying this

Events build to a crescendo with one chance to succeed



FLAT OUT PHOTOGRAPHY

FLAT OUT PHOTOGRAPHY



SLS event begins with practice before the serious work of qualifying

“The popularity of trackdays is huge but from trackdays to racing is a ginormous step”

new SLS series,” he recalls.

“It was just you against the clock and you try and do the best lap you can. SLS was good because it allowed me to get into motorsport and I was learning about how to drive and how to find the limit of the car in an environment that I wasn’t racing someone else, causing me financial damage and crashes. It was just down to me.

“Had it not been for SLS, there’s no way I would’ve gone into a full grid of cars – I probably wouldn’t have made the big step to do it. Starting racing can

be quite daunting, but with SLS you’ve got just one or two things to focus on.”

After achieving podiums and wins in SLS, Davidson progressed into racing Sports and Saloons at Knockhill and says competing has had a transformative effect on his life. “Getting into the car gave me something to focus on,” he says. “Racing helped me out of my rut – it’s been the making of me.”

Another driver singing the praises of SLS is Classic Sports Car Club director David Smitheram. He headed to Knockhill last year to discuss the CSCC racing at ►



JEP/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Davidson went from SLS to British GT champion



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“Motorsport’s got this big perceived barrier of you need a lot of money. There are a lot of misconceptions”

as possible, take away the barriers to anything. Motorsport’s got this big perceived barrier of you need a lot of money, you need a special licence, you need this and you need that, and there are a lot of misconceptions out there.

“One of the things we’ve been so proactive with is, any time we’ve got a trackday here, we go round the paddock and look who’s driving well and got an appropriate car, we’ll go up and chat to them and say, ‘You could be competing in this car, all you need is your racesuit, helmet, gloves, get a licence and you can be competing’. And, for half the people, there’s shock they’re so close to competing without realising it.

“We’re very proactive in encouraging people to make that step and that’s where this is the stepping stone to future competition. If people come into SLS, do SLS and then don’t do anything else, then it’s not really achieving its goal. The goal is to get people into full-blown racing.”

The inspirational example of Davidson is perfect proof that SLS can achieve exactly that. ■

the venue and, while there, took part in an SLS event in his road car.

“I did one round and it was brilliant,” Smitheram says. “It’s probably an hour’s track time for less than £200 and that’s pretty good. The competitors were friendly and welcoming and I was able to push hard like I can when racing but without the normal fear of car-to-car racing. I would be lying if I said it’s as exciting as racing – you’ve not got that element of battling for position and ‘how do I defend from this person?’ – but it was a close second and good value for money.”

Smitheram believes KMSC has struck gold with the format, and can easily see

why SLS is proving popular. Gray and Vincent attribute that success to a number of different factors, including being able to compete on the clockwise and anti-clockwise configurations of Knockhill over one weekend and the fact that competitors can share a car to reduce costs.

“I think it’s value-for-money, and there’s a very wide knowledge in a friendly paddock – people are here to help, whether it’s your fellow competitors or us as organisers,” says Gray. “Track time is good and I think also you’re not diving into Duffus Dip wing mirror to wing mirror where you could have contact.

“I’m always keen to make things as easy

HOW SLS IS ATTRACTING DRIVERS FROM OTHER DISCIPLINES

One of the drivers set to be on the Super Lap Scotland grid this year has a very different background to many of the competitors, who have stepped up from trackdays. Instead, Ashleigh Morris is a regular rallying competitor who took part in the *Motorsport News*

“YOU CAN GO TESTING BUT IT’S NOT QUITE THE SAME”

Circuit Rally series for several seasons before targeting a move to the Scottish Rally Championship.

That was until the COVID-19 pandemic hit rallying hard, given its nomadic nature and



Morris was a regular in MN Circuit Rally series

SMJ PHOTOGRAPHY

social distancing difficulties of two people in a car. Now, she aims to return to action in SLS in her Ford Fiesta R200.

“I was thinking of trying some racing and Stuart [Gray] at Knockhill suggested SLS,”

says Morris. “It’s an opportunity to get a bit of seat time. You can go testing but it’s not quite the same – there’s not the same adrenaline rush as when you go out and compete.”

Morris encourages other

drivers forced onto the sidelines to get back behind the wheel and “support motorsport in any way” they can. “It’s a case of doing what you can to get out there and have some fun and stay sharp,” she adds.



GETTING MORE FROM YOUR DATA

Club drivers have more tools than ever to help them improve on track, but understanding how to get the most out of them is where Your Data Driven comes in

BY STEFAN MACKLEY

Data in motorsport is nothing new – it's been used in the top tiers for decades. Now, with data recorders better priced, and the raw data supposedly more accessible than ever, a greater number of club competitors are buying them in the hope of improving their driving. But understanding the data and how it equates to laptime is not necessarily as straightforward as plug-in-and-go.

Your Data Driven, founded by Samir Abid, is a website centred on helping club drivers to fulfil their potential. A competitor himself – he started racing in the Locost Championship in 2005 and more recently competed in the 750 Motor Club's Ma7da Championship, Abid believes there is a gap in the market to help club

drivers find performance out on track.

After working in vehicle dynamics – he developed suspension systems for road and racing cars – for companies such as Aston Martin and Jaguar for more than 10 years, Abid spent the next decade working alongside Olympic teams after setting up a sports engineering consultancy.

He used his ability to crunch numbers to help athletes find 'marginal gains'. Then, with COVID-19 affecting the availability of potential work, he turned what had initially been a hobby into his full-time job by offering help to fellow competitors.

Abid's website offers a range of resources looking at different aspects of motorsport, such as race car engineering, data analysis and race car driving.

This is done through written advice, online courses and podcasts, which

have featured well-known names from the world of motorsport including three-time British Touring Car champion Matt Neal, ex-Formula 1 driver Perry McCarthy and renowned driver coach Rob Wilson.

But how does Your Data Driven work, and is it for everybody?

Stefan Mackley: How did Your Data Driven come to exist?

Samir Abid: I set Your Data Driven up about 18 months ago as a blog to help my fellow competitors. I've raced at club level with builders, accountants and gardeners and they don't know about the data. I thought, 'Why don't I share some of my knowledge and information, because a lot of the technical stuff is overwhelming?'

STYLES



Abid's Ma7da in
action with Scott
Mansell at the wheel

I find it overwhelming and I'm meant to know about it! So the idea was to present a friendly face to the engineering and this data, and help people get more fun and more enjoyment from their racing.

SM: What is the main purpose of Your Data Driven?

SA: What I'm trying to do is help people be almost less frustrated, or less uncertain, or less unsure about what to do. And whether they choose to do it or not is up to them because it still has to be fun. It's not their job and if at any point some of this stuff starts to become a job — if they're feeling racing is less fun because they are now sitting having to do a data debrief — don't do it. What I'm trying to say is if you want to know how the professionals go about their work, this is what you could try.

SM: Data in racing is nothing new, but it might be new to a lot of club drivers...

SA: Some of these data systems are 'buy



Founder of Your Data
Driven Samir Abid

“I like to dig into the numbers and ask, ‘What is that really saying?’ so we can translate that”

our system and you'll go quicker'. People will spend a not insignificant amount of money and then they get the information and it's like, well I don't understand it. On the data side you've got two things you can do — you can look at the driver and you can look at the car. So my focus for a club environment is the driver first, because the most opportunity is in the driver. Everyone is trying to improve and you can always improve. The loggers are better priced and better quality than they've ever been, but what they don't necessarily help you with is putting that process together.

SM: Track time for club drivers is limited but invaluable. Will this help them get the most out of it?

SA: If we go and do some testing we'll improve through the day, we'll improve the laptime. But if we can improve your way of constructing a lap as a driver, that's transferable to another track. It means that your limited track time becomes much more valuable because you're not spending the first five/10 minutes of your qualifying session learning the track. You spend maybe the first lap or two laps learning the track. So you can reduce the time required to get on the pace, and then

once you have your plan it's about then trying to execute it, and that's where the fun comes in.

SM: How does helping people in club motorsport compare with your role helping Olympians?

SA: In some ways it's kind of similar, because what I was doing for Olympic sports teams is the same kind of thing I'm doing for the club racer. That is to try and help them get more value from technology when they may not be either interested in it or that comfortable using numbers, but they want to win. I'm a bit of a detective, I like to dig into the numbers and ask, 'What is that really saying?', so then we can translate that back into improving a training programme.

SM: Would you recommend data analysis for everyone?

SA: People who like Your Data Driven want to learn. If you're not interested in learning anymore, you know all there is to know about racing, great, my site's probably not for you. If you're curious and thinking, 'Yeah, actually I'm not quite happy with the explanation I was given in the paddock about what to do', then I try and help you find an answer. ■



FROM THE ARCHIVE

Sixty years ago today (15 April), the Jaguar E-type made its racing debut at Oulton Park. Here, Roy Salvadori leads in the John Coombs-entered example, ahead of eventual winner

Graham Hill in the Equipe Endeavour entry. They are chased by Innes Ireland's Aston Martin DB4 GT, which started on pole and would pip Salvadori for second in the closing stages of the 25-lap contest, and the

Ferrari 250 GT Berlinetta of Jack Sears. Hill and Salvadori shared fastest lap during a performance that Autosport felt was "impressive" enough to earn a place on the cover of that week's magazine. For more on

the race and the E-type's motorsport career, listen to a special edition of the Autosport Podcast, featuring top historic racer Gary Pearson and leading commentator Ian Titchmarsh. Go to [autosport.com/podcast](https://www.autosport.com/podcast)





CLUB GUIDE

Want to go racing now the 2021 season is under way?
Here are the contact details for the main organising clubs



UK RACING CLUBS

Online and on the phone

500 Motor Racing Club of Ireland

kirkistown.com

028 4277 1325

750 Motor Club

750mc.co.uk

01332 814548

Aston Martin Owners Club

amocracing.co.uk

01276 818902

Bentley Drivers Club

bdcl.org

01295 738886

British Automobile Racing Club

barc.net

01264 882200

British Racing & Sports Car Club

brscc.co.uk

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classicsportscarclub.co.uk

01225 810655

Club Time Attack

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Darlington & District Motor Club

darlingtondmc.com

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Equipe Classic Racing

equipeclassicracing.com

01371 606588

Fifties Sports Car Racing Club

fiscar.org

Formula Junior Historic

Racing Association

formulajunior.com

Goodwood Road Racing Club

goodwood.com/grr

01243 755057

Historic Racing Drivers Club

hrdc.uk

Historic Sports Car Club

hsc.org.uk

01327 858400

Knockhill Motor Sports Club

knockhill.com

01383 723337

Lydden Hill Motorsport Club

lyddenhill.co.uk

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