F1 Should the Australian GP have been restarted?

AUTOSPORT

BRITAIN'S BEST MOTORSPORT WEEKLY

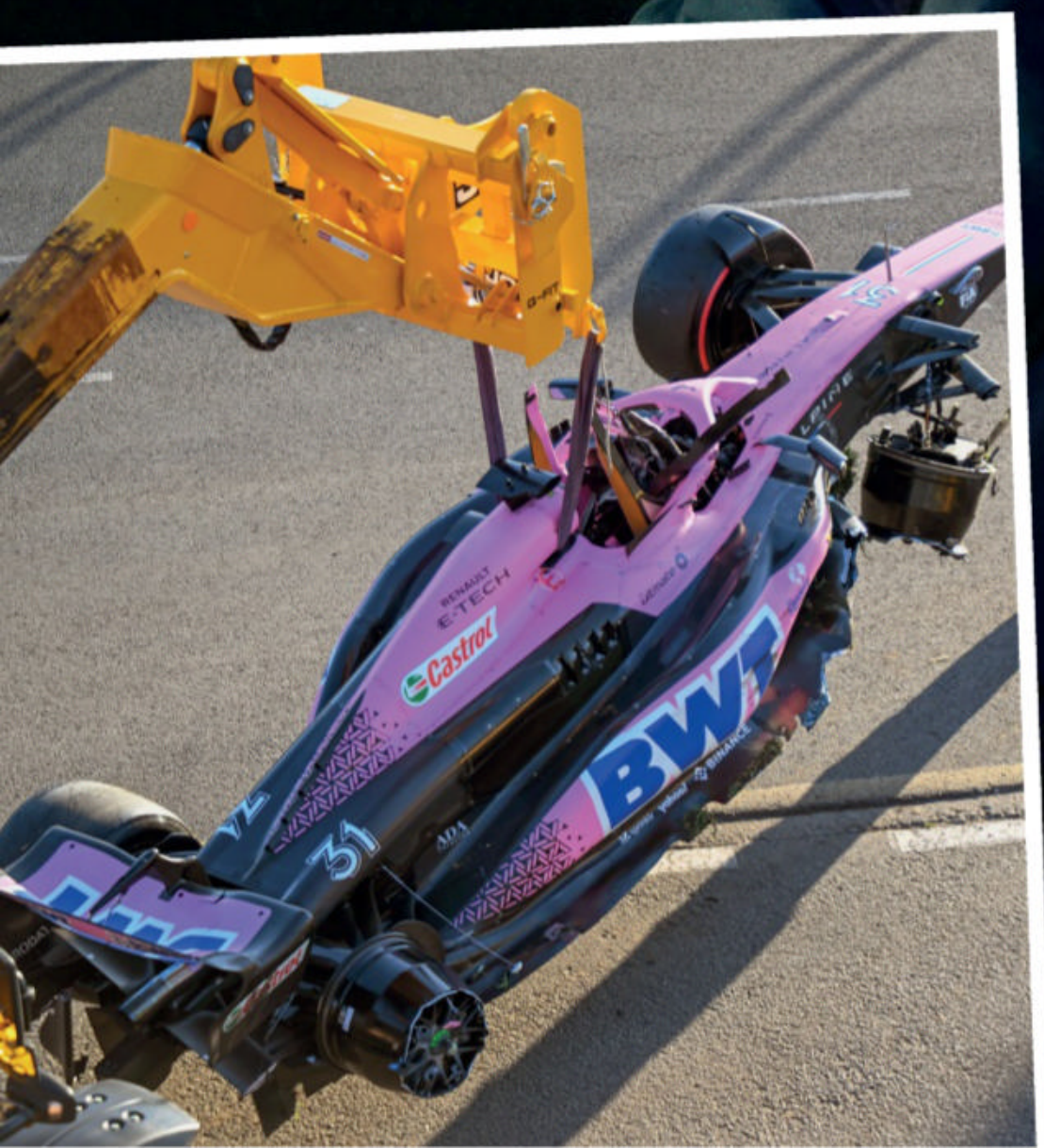
6 APRIL 2023

Max emerges from latest F1 chaos

Red Bull dominates again but questions are asked after multiple crashes and red flags

'I don't understand. It was a bit of a mess'

MAX VERSTAPPEN



INDYCAR

Penske pips McLaren in Texas

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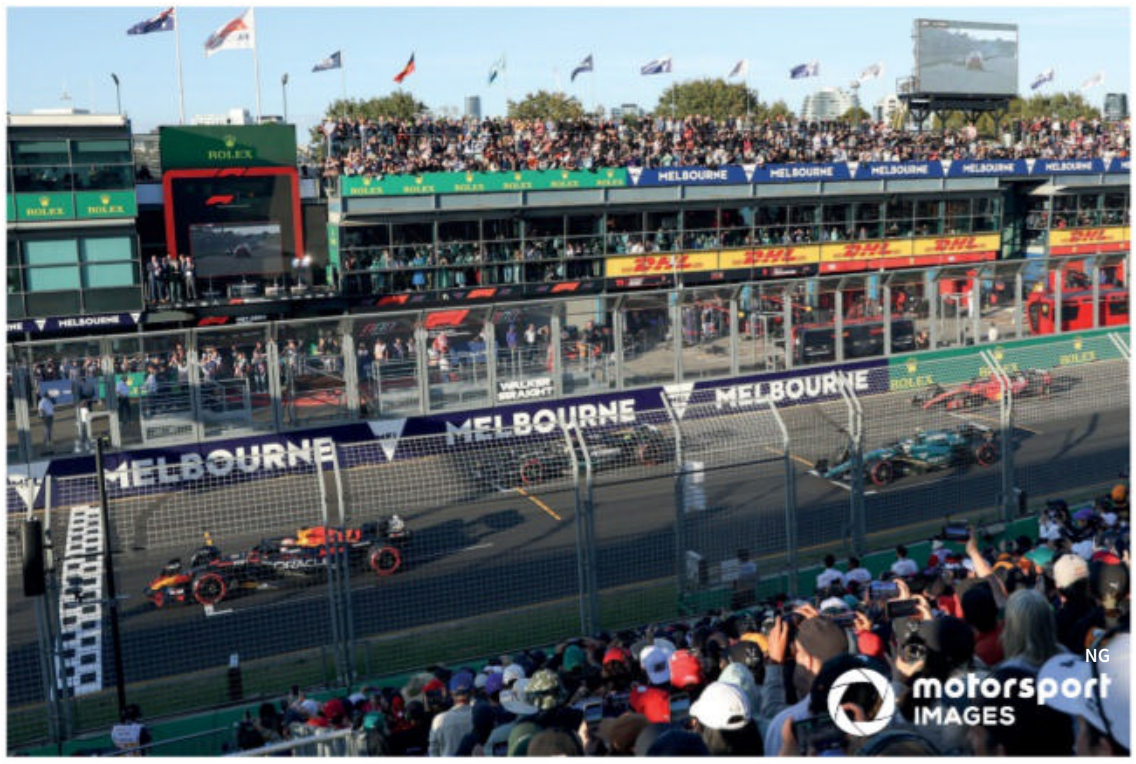

Another clumsy end to a GP but F1 gets away with it

What a load of nonsense. Restarting a grand prix when the cars have completed 56 of the scheduled 58 laps was ridiculous, although – as our debate on page 13 shows – not everyone shares that view.

At least we ended up with the correct result, apart from the incredibly unfortunate Alpine squad, which deserved rather better from the weekend than two extensive car rebuilds. Of course, as we explain on p4, it took several hours to untangle the mess last Sunday.

On track, the prowess of Red Bull's RB19 was once again on display. Mercedes was stronger than expected, Ferrari weaker, but either way Max Verstappen could afford to have one of his less stellar weekends and still come away as an easy winner. It was nice to see him and Lewis Hamilton traverse a corner side by side without crashing (notwithstanding Verstappen's daft and misguided comments about it), but otherwise the Australian Grand Prix underlined how much work the rest have to do to catch Red Bull. Next week, we delve deeper into the RB19 to try to explain what makes it so good.

Closer was the Texas duel between Josef Newgarden and Pato O'Ward. David Malsher-Lopez was there to see Penske beat McLaren (p32).

The UK racing season is gathering momentum. As well as our reports from last weekend's action (p62), Stefan Mackley looks ahead to what could be the best British GT season ever in his preview (p48) and we hear from some of the potential GB3 frontrunners (p52).

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NEXT WEEK 13 APRIL

Secrets of Red Bull success
We take a look at Formula 1's benchmark team and start our Le Mans 100 celebrations

Have your say, get in touch

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PIT & PADDOCK

4 Controversy over Australian GP restart
6 More Formula 1 rule tweaks
8 IndyCar oval aero set-up proves a hit
10 Tandy in third Porsche 963 for Le Mans
13 Debate: should Oz GP have restarted?
14 Opinion: Tom Howard
15 Opinion: Marcus Simmons

RACE CENTRE

16 Australian GP report and analysis
32 Newgarden pips O'Ward in Texas
36 World of Sport: Formula 2; Formula 3; Australian Supercars; NASCAR; MotoGP

CLUB AUTOSPORT

48 British GT season preview
52 The key players in GB3 for 2023
55 Champ Smiley gets new Civic for TCR UK
56 Keen to deputise for Gounon in Brit GT
58 Aussie Hyper Racer to debut in Mono
61 Opinion: Stephen Lickorish
62 National reports: Donington Park; Brands Hatch; Oulton Park

FINISHING STRAIGHT

68 What's on this week
71 Top five: Le Mans one-off winners
72 From the archive: 1954 Belgian GP
74 My favourite team-mate: Yannick Dalmas

SUBSCRIPTION OFFER

54 Special deals for Autosport

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GP controversy after reds, crashes and

FORMULA 1

For the second Formula 1 race in succession, there was more than a four-hour wait after the chequered flag had been waved until the official results were confirmed. Haas triggered the delay this time when they contested the provisional classification of the Australian Grand Prix in an attempt to promote driver Nico Hulkenberg from seventh to fourth place.

The Melbourne race dabbled with farce as the red flags were waved no fewer than four times, including to control a fan track invasion on the cool-down lap. Haas felt the most egregious of the lot was the handling of the third stoppage that preceded a safety car-led procession across the line.

After Kevin Magnussen clipped the Turn 2 exit wall on lap 53 of 58 to rip off his Haas's right-rear Pirelli, the race was paused while the stricken tyre was collected. A third standing start was organised for lap 57 to seemingly tee up a two-lap showdown before a host of crashes unfolded at Turn 1. In the melee of the Alpines wiping one another out and Carlos Sainz punting round compatriot Fernando Alonso, Hulkenberg shot up three places.

Anger arose for the safety car finish, however, when after considerable delay, the order was based on the previous grid minus the drivers wiped out in the carnage. As such, many felt as though the FIA was simultaneously counting and not counting the restart. Haas launched its protest on the grounds that the Sporting Regulations state: "In all cases, the order will be taken at the last point at which it was possible to determine the position of all cars." Boss Gunther Steiner and company reckoned the second safety car line at the pit exit on the Turn 1 approach was this "last point" rather than the previous grid, as used by the FIA.

The stewards dismissed the protest, partly because GPS data showing the relative positions of the cars would have been unreliable. Also, there are concerns that a dangerous precedent could be set if a safety car line is to determine starting order. This is because drivers could theoretically take greater risks by diving past opponents under braking in an effort to secure a late promotion under a red flag.

Arguably easier to pick apart was race director Niels Wittich's defence that: "In the time available for the continuation of the race, the most reliable point was the last grid, given the data available to him at the time; the relative positions of the cars and the incidents on the track." This carries the implication that it is plausible for circumstances to arise where the grid order decided in the moment would be different to one worked out without time constraints.

The first red flag was also the subject of consternation. After Alex Albon lost the rear of his Williams to nerf into the barriers, the race was halted to sweep away gravel that had been scattered on the circuit.

Haas wanted Hulkenberg to add to his tally of three fourth places in Formula 1

CIANFLONE/GETTYIMAGES/RED BULL CONTENT POOL

P13 DEBATE

a protest

Mercedes driver George Russell reckoned it was a "totally unnecessary" intervention when a conventional safety car would have sufficed, adding: "I don't really know what's going on with some of the decisions at the moment. We're all trying to work together with the FIA to improve things, but it's seemingly a bit of a challenge."

The stewards also have their own complaints about the procedure due to a near-miss behind the safety car. They are subsequently lobbying F1 to change the regulations. The rules require the safety car to lead the pack around in formation for a standing start restart before peeling into the pits. But the situation nearly triggered a pile-up while drivers caught up to leader Lewis Hamilton. As the pack concertinaed, Red Bull's Sergio Perez was nearly hit by Guanyu Zhou, while Logan Sargeant had to take evasive action to avoid striking Valtteri Bottas. Magnussen, meanwhile, was forced over the gravel.

While the stewards found no one driver to be predominantly to blame, a statement read: "We do consider that part of the problem is the regulation that permits the lead car to set the pace even when the restart is for a standing start from the pitlane (as opposed to a rolling start). This should perhaps be looked at in the future to see if this is appropriate for a restart of this nature."

JONATHAN NOBLE & MATT KEW

Australian GP promoter in trouble following invasion

FORMULA 1

The Australian Grand Prix Corporation is under scrutiny after a spectator was injured and fans prematurely invaded the track during last weekend's F1 event.

The race promoter was even summoned by the stewards and must present a plan to the FIA outlining the measures the race will take to improve its handling of the public in future.

Outgoing Corporation CEO Andrew Westacott (right) said that a fan suffering a gashed arm as a result of being struck by debris was a "freak one-off". The man sustained his cut after Kevin Magnussen clipped the Turn 2 exit wall on lap 53 of 58 to send carbon fibre from the right-rear wheel hub 20 metres into the air. It cleared the catch fencing.

Westacott said: "You can't necessarily have these debris fences going 20 metres in the air. The debris fences are consistent in height around the world. We're compliant in our FIA regulations. But like everything in motorsport, you do debriefs at the end of the event and see what you can do to improve. I hope the guy is OK. It's a reminder that safety is paramount when it comes to F1."

The Corporation has, however, taken full responsibility for lapses in security that allowed fans to take to the track on the cool-down lap of the Grand Prix to cause the FIA to wave a fourth red flag. As per the governing body's explanation for summoning the promoter: "A large group of spectators managed to break the security lines and accessed the track while the race was still ongoing." Fans were also able to reach the stranded Haas of Nico Hulkenberg, which

TOSCANO/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

was parked on the exit of Turn 2 after finishing seventh. The stewards recorded that the car "still had its light flashing red [meaning the car was in an unsafe condition with possible electrical discharge]".

Found in breach of the FIA International Sporting Code, the promoter must "urgently present a formal remediation plan". Of note, spectators infiltrated the circuit following the 2017 Melbourne race also.

Westacott said: "A couple of hundred metres before Turn 1, there was an uncontrolled ingress of people and patrons onto the grass verges and a couple of people went onto the asphalt... This was clearly a breach of what is a very robust protocol, a protocol that's been developed and improved every year. Something hasn't gone quite right, and that investigation has already started.

"I would hope that there's not a ban [for spectators who broke onto the track]. Clearly what happened was not a good situation."

A VAN LEEUWEN & J NEWBOLD

Lots of Australian F1 fans in the right place last weekend

GALLOWAY/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

More rule tweaks made after confusion

FORMULA 1

The FIA has ushered in tweaks to the sporting regulations to combat controversies exposed by the opening rounds of the new Formula 1 season.

Grid boxes have been widened in response to the infringements that earned Esteban Ocon and Fernando Alonso five-second penalties for being out of position.

In each startline incident, Ocon and Alonso placed their wheels over the white painted lines on the edge of the grid boxes, but remained behind the yellow line that denotes how far forward a car can start. Beginning with the Australian Grand Prix last weekend, the grid boxes have been made 20cm wider for a total of 270cm, with the previous measurement already 20cm wider than the 230cm slots used in 2022.

These changes come amid complaints from drivers that the halo and complex bodywork have significantly impaired visibility. The FIA has also started trialling a new painted central 'guide line' to help drivers during practice starts at the end of free practice sessions.

When Alonso pitted to serve his initial 5s penalty in Saudi, he was subsequently pinged 10s for the rear jack touching the car during this designated fallow period. Aston Martin successfully appealed the result on the grounds of inconsistent precedent to eventually have the two-time champion reinstated in third place four hours after the chequered flag. The FIA has sought to erase the grey area. From now on, pitcrews can no longer touch their cars with jacks during a penalty period.

No more of this, says FIA now

SUTTON/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

In another clarification, teams now face a penalty threat if their personnel climb the pitwall fence during celebrations at the finish line. The banning of the long-standing tradition is not a new clause in the rules as such but, like the jewellery saga, is now the subject of stricter interpretation.

Red Bull team principal Christian Horner said: "I was surprised it was an issue. Anything that relates to safety, obviously one has to take very seriously. But it's a fairly iconic moment when you see a grand prix car finishing a grand prix and its team celebrating on a fence. So long as it's done in a manner that is safe, I have never seen an issue with it.

A KALINAUCKAS & A COOPER

Porsche says no to F1

Porsche was a big F1 player in 1962. It won't be back for some time…

PHIPPS/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

FORMULA 1

Porsche has officially shelved plans to join Formula 1 for the advent of the new engine regulations in 2026 and will instead focus on Formula E and sports-prototypes.

The decision follows the eleventh-hour collapse of a potential partnership with Red Bull, with the reigning constructors' champion getting cold feet about giving up too much independence. It signed a glorified commercial deal with Ford instead,

Despite the setback, Porsche was clear that it would continue to evaluate other options because the increased reliance on sustainable fuels and the scrapping of the expensive MGU-H for the nascent power units boosted the appeal and viability of an F1 presence. But since the 2022 retirement of motorsport vice-president Fritz Enzinger, the trail has gone cold.

Passing evaluations of partnerships with Williams or Michael Andretti's planned entry aside, talks with McLaren were most significant. The Woking squad had considered jumping into bed with Audi briefly when the pandemic presented it with a bleak financial outlook. But it has since found major new investment, while the appeal of a joint SUV road car venture with Porsche proved insufficient. It is also suggested that the McLaren name would have been sacrificed in any collaboration.

Meanwhile, ex-BAR team boss Craig Pollock is helming a bid to enter a gender-equal F1 team. Named Formula Equal, the proposed squad is expecting to operate from the Middle East with a 50:50 split between men and women. Saudi Arabia is believed to be among the key underwriters of the project.

Pollock told CNN: "This has been going on for close on four years, the building up of a brand-new F1 team but taking into it our ambition to build opportunities for women to get to the very top level inside motorsport."

This proposal follows the FIA's launch of a tender process for new teams for 2025 and 2026. Alongside the Andretti alliance with Cadillac, Hitech and Panthera Team Asia are believed to have submitted their interest.

C NIMMERVOLL & J BOXALL-LEGGE

Fire hits Fords in Australia

AUSTRALIAN SUPERCARS

Supercars is investigating the cause of two separate engine fires that rocked the series' Albert Park weekend. Two Ford Mustangs from different teams were badly burnt in Melbourne after what looked to be identical engine fires.

The first was Nick Percat's Walkinshaw Andretti United entry, which went up in flames on the opening lap of Friday's race. The team quickly pointed to an electrical fault that was countered by Supercars, which directed teams to check oil levels and empty catch cans to avoid a repeat.

That clearly didn't do the trick, James Courtney's Tickford Racing Ford (right) igniting in identical fashion on the opening lap of Saturday's contest.

The second fire prompted crisis meetings in the paddock, with the Gen3 Technical Working Group charged with finding a solution. At the same time there were whispers that some Ford teams could boycott Sunday's race on safety concerns if a suitable solution couldn't be found.

Ultimately, a widespread mitigation plan was put in place that included a number of technical changes, including the removal of the tyre pressure monitor system unit, which is situated outside the front-right wheel well. A breathing hose from the crankcase to the catch can was removed on the Fords, while the catch can itself was changed from venting inside the engine bay near the right-front wheel well to venting underneath the car.

The final race of the weekend was also started behind the safety car to reduce the build-up of both temperature and vapour from a standing start.

The early indications are that the catch can vapour in the engine bay and wheel well was providing the fuel for the eruptions. The cause of ignition is thought to be heat from the headers during a standing start.

Work has now begun on verifying the details so that a more targeted solution can be put in place, and standing starts returned, for the next round at Wanneroo at the end of this month.

ANDREW VAN LEEUWEN

P39 MELBOURNE REPORT

How will the Baku grid be set this season?

SUTTON/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

F1 eyes two qualifying sessions

FORMULA 1

Formula 1 chiefs are pushing to shake up the sprint race weekend format by introducing an extra qualifying session that would independently decide the grid for the main grand prix.

Presently, the starting order for Sunday's race is decided by the results of the Saturday sprint. But this encourages drivers to be conservative to safeguard their position for the following day.

As such, plans are afoot to run a separate qualifying on Friday afternoon to set the GP grid. Then, events on Saturday would stand alone, with another qualifying leading into that day's sprint. This would scrub the redundant FP2 from the schedule. The alternative is to run sprint qualifying on Friday before a race qualifying session on Saturday. This could lead to the return of the 2003-05 one-lap shootout for variety.

Talks took place in Australia last weekend in a bid to hurry through the changes for the first sprint weekend of the season in Azerbaijan, across 28-30 April. But the month-long gap with no races means many are on holiday. The challenge of updating the regulations and getting Pirelli to provide extra tyre sets in time also point towards an Austrian arrival in early July.

ADAM COOPER

New oval approach gets thumbs up

FARMER/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

INDYCAR

Double IndyCar champion Josef Newgarden has praised the aerodynamic configurations that the series has allowed for big ovals in order to promote closer racing.

The changes were seen as largely responsible for the vastly improved racing on the 1.5-mile Texas Motor Speedway last weekend. Other factors that had a positive effect were the 'high-line' practice sessions to rubber in a second lane, and the fading of the PJ1 surface additive in Turns 1 and 2. That had been applied to add grip for NASCAR, but had the opposite effect for IndyCar in recent years.

New aero pieces added 300-400lb of downforce, which allowed all cars to race at similar rates early in a stint when tyres were fresh, but race winner Newgarden said that the best cars still became apparent by their rate of tyre degradation thereafter, thereby avoiding endless pack racing.

"It wasn't like people were falling off a cliff really early, but you still had the degradation in the second half of the stint," said the Penske ace. "When that started to build in, you just had somewhere to go. That's the big thing you need. You've got to have racing room. When you have real estate to put your car, it makes the racing 10 times better. That's all you really saw; there was real estate this time around to use.

"IndyCar is always walking a fine line. They've been adding downforce every single year. So I think it's been a combination of finding enough downforce on the cars. I wouldn't put it just on the downforce or configuration, it's also been the track kind of coming back to where we needed it.

"I'd probably take a little downforce off, I don't like it super-packed up. But today was a very good mix between not having a pack race, but also having a difference-maker where there's tyre degradation and you have to work as a team to figure that puzzle out."

More should become clear following the Indianapolis test later this month.

DAVID MALSHER-LOPEZ

P32 TEXAS ACTION

Power commits his IndyCar future to Penske

ABBOTT/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

INDYCAR

Two-time and reigning IndyCar champion Will Power has signed a new deal with Team Penske that will keep him in the cockpit of an IndyCar at least through to the end of the 2025 season. And Autosport understands that both team and driver have left an open option of remaining together in 2026.

The news comes less than eight weeks after the title sponsor of his #12 entry for the past dozen years, Verizon, confirmed a multi-year extension of its partnership with Roger Penske's legendary squad.

After scoring two wins with Walker Racing in Champ Car in 2007, and one win for KV Racing following the merger between Indy Racing League and Champ Car in 2008, Power parlayed a one-off ride with Penske in 2009, subbing for Helio Castroneves, into a part-time deal that yielded a win and two pole positions.

Penske took him on full-time for 2010. As well taking the series title in 2014 and 2022, the Aussie veteran also triumphed in the 2018 Indianapolis 500. He has now amassed 41 Indycar wins — fifth in the all-time list — and holds the record for poles (68).

Power currently sits 10th in the drivers' standings, 42 points behind leader Pato O'Ward, following a troubled outing in round two in Texas last weekend.

DAVID MALSHER-LOPEZ

OTAGO RALLY Mikko Hirvonen was the guest driver in the opening round of the New Zealand Rally Championship, the Otago Rally, held in the lower part of the South Island. The 15-time World Rally winner drove this Rossendale Wines Ford Escort RS1800 to ninth overall and won the Classic class. Home hero and former WRC driver Hayden Paddon, with co-driver John Kennard, was untouchable up front, winning every one of the 15 stages in his Hyundai i20 N Rally2. They were more than four minutes clear of the field as Paddon won the event for the 10th time. McLaren Extreme E driver Emma Gilmour was fifth in a Citroen C3 Rally2. **Photo by Steve Ritchie Photography**

Scottish venue details revealed

EXTREME E

MOTORSPORT IMAGES

A former opencast coal mine site at Glenmuckloch in Scotland will host the second round of the 2023 Extreme E season.

Located in Dumfries and Galloway, the Hydro X-Prix will be held on 13-14 May. The disused coal mine is to be transformed into a Pumped Storage Hydropower plant and wind farm, giving the series the opportunity to promote electric power and clean energy solutions.

"Extreme E uses its racing platform to tell inspirational stories of global locations on the forefront of climate issues," said series CEO Alejandro Agag. "In Scotland, our race site will pay homage to the much-needed transition of an old coal mine that is being given a new and exciting lease of life as a hydro project that will provide a fully renewable energy source for the region for centuries to come."

The Scottish round is next up on the calendar following the season-opener in Saudi Arabia last month.

Briton Catie Munnings, who shares her Andretti entry with Timmy Hansen, said: "There's always something unique about every Extreme E course but racing in a location like this, which is close to home, will be something special for me.

"I've heard the track will be a combination of fast sections on grass as well as drops into a quarry, which will be really interesting to see."

RICHARD ASHER

EX-F3 STAR TO MAKE RETURN IN GT MERCEDES

GT3

Ex-Formula 3 European Championship star Ralf Aron is to make his return to full-time racing in 2023 as a Mercedes AMG Junior driver.

Aron vied for the 2018 Euro F3 crown before a late-season slump and then backed out of racing, only to re-emerge as a team manager for Prema in single-seaters and then LMP2.

The 25-year-old Estonian, whose younger brother Paul races in FIA F3 as a Mercedes F1 protege, will now campaign Mercedes-AMG GT3 machinery in ADAC GT Masters for Haupt Racing Team (alongside Alain Valente) and in the GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup for Theeba Motorsport (with Valente and Reema Juffali).

Aron has a connection with HRT boss Uli Fritz dating back to Fritz's time overseeing the HWA Mercedes engine programme in Euro F3.

"They invited me to do a test at the end of last year – that went really well and that's where it all started," explained Aron, who beat Zhou Guanyu to the 2015 Italian F4 title. "I'm really thankful to AMG and other people who are involved, especially Uli and Reema."

Fritz hinted that Aron could be in line for a future DTM seat as HRT expands into GT Masters for the first time. "We see that as a big advantage and a chance to develop our talented young drivers in GT3 racing, perhaps for the DTM," he said.

Aron has kept his hand in over the past few years with F4 development testing, as well as occasional GT race outings in the Baltic region.

MARCUS SIMMONS

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PORSCHE

Le Mans winner Tandy in third Porsche for 24 Hours

LE MANS 24 HOURS

Nick Tandy will reprise the role that led to him winning the 2015 Le Mans 24 Hours with Porsche in this year's centenary running of the French enduro. The Briton has been named in the third 963 LMDh entered for the double-points round of the World Endurance Championship in June alongside the manufacturer's two full-season cars.

Tandy was announced last week together with Mathieu Jaminet, his full-season team-mate with the Porsche Penske Motorsport squad in the IMSA SportsCar Championship this year. They join Felipe Nasr, another IMSA regular with the team, who was listed in the car in February when the additional entry was revealed on the publication of the Le Mans entry list.

Tandy made no secret of his desire to continue in the IMSA series on his return to Porsche for this year after a two-season hiatus at Chevrolet, but he also let the German manufacturer know that he was up for the chance to try to repeat his victory of eight years ago with Nico Hulkenberg and Earl Bamber aboard the extra 919 Hybrid LMP1.

"When I first talked to Porsche about the four-car PPM programme I always said that racing in IMSA was high on my list of priorities, but if and when there was an extra car or cars at Le Mans, I would love to drive the 963 there," said the 38-year-old. "It wasn't sure at the beginning when that would be possible, but it's great that it's happening in the first year of the programme and that I'm part of it.

"The last time we went to Le Mans with a third entry, it didn't end too badly, did it?"

Porsche had played down the chances of bringing its IMSA squad to Le Mans in the first year of the 963, but marque motorsport boss Thomas Laudenbach said the confirmation of the third car was "all about maximising our chances".

Matt Campbell, the remaining driver on PPM's 10-strong roster, will act as a reserve at Le Mans.

The extra factory Porsche will run as #75 at Le Mans on 10-11 June to mark the 75th anniversary of the brand that has won the race 19 times.

GARY WATKINS

Second Caddy for Spa 6 Hours

WEC

Cadillac will field a second car in the Spa round of the World Endurance Championship as it gears up for its return to the Le Mans 24 Hours.

The extra entry from the Chip Ganassi Racing squad alongside its solo full-season WEC V-Series.R will be a prelude to a three-car assault from the US manufacturer on the French enduro in June.

The Spa 6 Hours on 29 April will be, says Ganassi director of operations Mike O'Gara, "a much-needed dress rehearsal for Le Mans".

The additional Caddy LMDh prototype entered in the Hypercar class will be driven by its regular drivers in the IMSA SportsCar Championship, Sebastien Bourdais and Renger van der Zande, as a duo. Scott Dixon, who will join them for Le Mans, will be on IndyCar Series duty with the team at Barber Motorsports Park that weekend.

"Cadillac and Chip Ganassi Racing believe we are stronger when we race multiple cars on any given race weekend," said O'Gara. "It will be a great opportunity for our IMSA regulars to be immersed in the WEC rules and race procedures in anticipation of the big event in June."

The expanded assault from Ganassi, which competes under the Cadillac Racing banner, is possible because Spa sits in the middle of a one-month gap between the Long Beach and Laguna Seca IMSA rounds. The Caddy roster at Le Mans will be completed by its second team from the North American series, Action Express Racing.

The Hypercar entry will hit 13 cars at Spa courtesy of the second Cadillac and the arrival in the 2023 WEC of the British Jota team's customer Porsche 963 LMDh.

GARY WATKINS

GALSTAD/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Shedden scored team's most recent BTCC win at Croft last June

JEP

Dynamics out of BTCC for 2023

BTCC

British Touring Car Championship heritage squad Team Dynamics will be absent from the series' grid in 2023 in what the Midlands operation has described as "taking a hiatus". Instead, it has entered a "support agreement" with fellow Honda team One Motorsport.

Under the arrangement, Brackley-based One – formerly BTC Racing – will have use of what is likely to be three Civic Type Rs that will be transferred from the Dynamics facility, powered by the Neil Brown Engineering-built Honda powerplants. This is in place of BTC's existing chassis, which have used TOCA customer engines since 2021.

Dynamics' exit was triggered by two major commercial setbacks over the winter: the loss of Dan Rowbottom and his Cataclean backing to the Motorbase Ford set-up, and the more recent pullout of Halfords, which has backed the team extensively for the past two decades.

"We'd been doing all the pre-season planning – it was just the contract hadn't been signed," explained Dynamics boss Matt Neal of the Halfords situation. "It was all systems go, and suddenly they're making mass cutbacks at board level and the BTCC is a high-profile, big investment. But I get it. We had some great years with them."

Neal (right) said that One's support from Dynamics staff, including himself and technical chief Barry Plowman, will be "probably not on a front-line basis, but we'll be there in the background. I think they've got a pretty good crew now." The 56-year-old three-time BTCC champion has not ruled out a return to the cockpit in future and, on the chances of a Team Dynamics comeback in 2024, he added: "We've got some big commercial partners we're talking to and we've got other manufacturers who could be interested."

One's line-up currently consists of Josh Cook and Aiden Moffat, while talk of Jason Plato staying on after all for 2023 refuses to go away, especially with news this week of 2021-22 BTC driver Jade Edwards joining the Team Hard Cupra ranks.

It all appears to leave no room on the grid for Neal's fellow three-time champion and Dynamics stalwart Gordon Shedden. "We were all set to go," said the Scot. "Everything was heading the right way. But the timing has made a mess of everything. Everyone else has done their deals. If this [Halfords' pullout] had happened a month or two before it would have been different."

MARCUS SIMMONS

P15 OPINION

JEP/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

IN THE HEADLINES

ROKIT VERSUS WILLIAMS

Ex-Williams Formula 1 team sponsor ROKiT has launched a $149million (£119million) legal action against the Grove squad in a Florida court, claiming compensation for damage to its reputation. The action, which alleges that the team made "fraudulent statements" when it signed the deal with the mobile phone company, has been dismissed by Williams as "spurious".

MIR OUT AFTER SPRINT CRASH

The factory Honda MotoGP squad was absent from last Sunday's Argentinian Grand Prix after Joan Mir elected to withdraw following a crash in the sprint race. The 2020 world champion qualified 18th and crashed heavily going through Turn 7 and, although initial scans revealed no serious injuries, he was taken to hospital in Santiago del Estero for further checks on his right ankle.

SIM BOOST FOR HYUNDAI

Hyundai boss Cyril Abiteboul plans to expand the World Rally Championship squad's use of digital simulation to improve the performance of its i20 N Rally1 car. The ex-Renault Formula 1 boss, who took over as team principal of the Hyundai team in January, wants to make the squad "more engineering led", with the latest part of this project being a stronger focus on digital simulation following a similar path well-travelled in F1.

GT CHAMPS TO DEFEND TITLES

Raffaele Marciello and Jules Gounon will defend their GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup title this year with the ASP Mercedes team alongside Timur Boguslavskiy, headlining a 56-car grid. Marciello and Gounon claimed the Endurance Cup crown last year together with fellow AMG factory driver Daniel Juncadella, while Marciello also earned the overall GTWCE crown after finishing second in the Sprint Cup with Boguslavskiy.

AMR'S LATEST GRADUATE

Parisian Romain Leroux is the latest Aston Martin Racing Driver Academy graduate. The ex-F4 and GT4 frontrunner will drive a Bullitt Racing-run Vantage GT3 in the GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup, alongside two of this year's AMR Academy candidates, Jacob Riegel and Jeff Kingsley.

Peter Collins

THE VINTAGE SPORTS-CAR CLUB

Race Meetings

22 April - Silverstone Race Meeting and AutoSOLO

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Should the GP have been restarted after Magnussen crash?

Opinions are split at Autosport over the wisdom of staging a third standing start so late in the Australian Grand Prix...

YES
ALEX KALINAUCKAS

When Max Verstappen blew past Lewis Hamilton like a jet plane taking off while a cancelled rival sits idle, the Australian Grand Prix was over as a contest. Even on a track where Red Bull struggles with tyres as much as the rest and had its own braking problems last weekend, there was no hope of any further action for the win. And it had looked so good for the neutral early on.

But when Verstappen's advantage was removed at a stroke by the second red flag, suddenly there was a Hamilton with no 2023 title aspirations to consider when mulling a lunge into Turn 1. Throw in the relentlessly brilliant Fernando Alonso behind, and that's a potent mix. A trio of champion combustion. So much better than a safety car conclusion or a result declared early.

Anticipation is half the joy and, for the 16 minutes before the day's third standing start, this built delightfully. Verstappen dashed it with his best launch of three, and then destruction detonated.

After all those crashes, this writer wondered whether the previous rush of anticipation had been worth it, whether the position I'd arrived at after the damp squib ending to the 2022 Italian Grand Prix was right after all. My glee at the thought of a grandstand-end twist had been replaced with unease, particularly considering a driver could have been hurt.

> "Formula 1 should not be afraid of its current late red flag approach"

But, wait, aren't we told time and again that these are the world's 20 best drivers? Shouldn't they be able to cope with cold tyres in a tricky corner? The best of the best managed just fine...

So, Formula 1 should not be afraid of its current late-red-flag approach. So long as the safety justifications are there (as there were in both instances last Sunday, a spectator injured by flying Haas metal in the latter), it's fine as is. Safety trumps all, and by stopping proceedings the action is packed.

Sure, it's not what used to happen. And some races are dull and that's fine — this one was a good example. But F1 and the watching public are different now. That really matters, and a lot of clever people know it too. F1's stakeholders, including the teams, agreed back in 2021 that where possible races would finish under green-flag conditions. What happened last Sunday was what they wanted. And plenty of people watching on agreed.

NO
KEVIN TURNER

This first became a debate at Autosport following the anti-climax to the 2022 Italian Grand Prix, which finished under safety car conditions. Some fans were angry, but plenty of races — in F1 and elsewhere — have ended in such circumstances. Disappointing, but sometimes that's how the cookie crumbles.

Of course, just because things have been done one way for a long time doesn't mean they always should be. F1 has been good at trying fresh approaches in recent years, such as the cost cap and sprint races, plus improving the technical rules to aid overtaking.

The aim of finishing a race under green is laudable, but restarting a GP so late increases the chances of two things that should be avoided. First, we could end up with the wrong winner. If anyone other than Max Verstappen had crossed the line first, it would have been a travesty and not reflected the previous hours of action. It would have devalued pretty much everything the fans had paid to see previously. Fortunately, he did win, but the other pitfall made itself very obvious. In an age of cost containment and safety very much in mind, sending the cars out on cold tyres for a standing start for two laps was a recipe for disaster. Alpine now has two damaged cars instead of 11 well-earned points and it could have been worse. It was all completely unnecessary: the 75% rule has existed for years and full points could have been awarded after Kevin Magnussen's crash halted proceedings.

> "Alpine now has two damaged cars instead of 11 well-earned points"

The 2021 Abu Dhabi GP also demonstrates the perils of taking it too far. Whatever your views on the destiny of the crown, the result seemed influenced by non-sporting factors. The unorthodox end to the race was because those in charge wanted the title to be decided with a battle, not behind the safety car. Sounds fair enough, except the circumstances were such that one driver was in a much weaker position and lost the championship as a result.

Finally, the overwhelming impression from Australia was one of farce. How many fans — new or old — thought that the conclusion was satisfactory? Broken cars and a long debate about the result hours after the finish. That's exactly the sort of thing that can happen when you allow an obsession with 'entertainment' to override sport.

Another reminder of a legend

Sebastien Loeb doesn't have a World Rally programme for 2023 — yet — but that didn't stop him scoring another victory last weekend

TOM HOWARD

Sebastien Loeb hasn't been snapped up by a World Rally Championship team for a part-time drive this year, but the phone may begin to ring again after his latest triumph. The nine-time world champion once again reminded the rallying fraternity of his supreme talent last Sunday by adding the Azores Rally to his glittering list of achievements.

Competing on his first traditional rally of the year following an invitation from the event organisers, 49-year-old Loeb and co-driver Laurene Godey — the Frenchman's partner — took a Toksport Skoda Fabia RS Rally2 to a 19.2-second victory over two-time Azores winner Andreas Mikkelsen.

The feat on the Portuguese island gravel rally was made impressive by the fact that it was Loeb's first competitive outing in the car, rekindling memories of his charge to the 2022 Monte Carlo win, his 80th career WRC victory, on the debut of M-Sport's Ford Puma. Loeb's victory was made even sweeter by the way he fended off a charge from Mikkelsen, competing in the same machinery, which the Norwegian spent countless hours developing last year.

Coincidently, Loeb's victory arrived just hours before French television station Canal had scheduled the premiere of a new documentary celebrating Loeb's career — *Sebastien Loeb: Eternal Pilot*. It's a title that couldn't be more apt since it seems the driver they call *Le Maestro* is showing no signs of slowing down and is set to continue to stun motorsport fans into his fifties.

"With no signs of slowing down, he seems set to continue to stun motorsport fans into his fifties"

Forty-nine-year-old Loeb flies to victory in the Azores Rally

Following the victory, Loeb wrote on Twitter: "Thank you, Azores Rally. An incredible rally, a top co-driver, a perfect car, amazing tyres… a weekend I'm not ready to forget."

While his display in the Azores once again underlined how he has lost none of his speed, at this moment it appears that Loeb could sit out the WRC this year. M-Sport declared interest in again signing him to a part-time programme after his impressive displays last year, when he led three of the four rallies he contested. But, as with most things in motorsport, it all comes down to funding and resources, and at the minute M-Sport is pouring all of its firepower into new signing Ott Tanak. But the door is not completely closed.

"Certainly if we do use anyone else, it will be later in the season when potentially we need to take points off our competitors," team principal Richard Millener told Autosport when asked about the likelihood of a Loeb return. "But at the moment all of the resources are going into Ott to make things as good as possible for him."

If Tanak is in the mix for the title come the end of the year, Loeb would be the perfect weapon to deploy to take points off rivals, and no doubt M-Sport will do all in its power to make that happen.

Likewise, Toyota is already using Loeb's former arch-rival Sebastien Ogier to similar and devastating effect this year. Ogier returned to the top of the WRC standings after scoring a stunning record-breaking Rally Mexico victory last month, despite only contesting two of the three WRC rounds held so far this year. It followed a record ninth Monte Carlo win in January that lifted him one clear of Loeb in the event's all-time winners list and prompted Loeb to challenge Ogier to another showdown next year. The rally world will most definitely will have its fingers crossed for another Seb versus Seb epic.

But Ogier's impressive display comes as no surprise, since he showed last year hthat e still has the speed and skill to compete for another world title should he wish to return to full-time driving, a matter he continues to downplay.

There is an argument that Loeb's and Ogier's continual dominance at the top of the world rallying when they turn up to selected events casts a shadow on the discipline and its current crop of drivers. But I think that's unfair. There is plenty of talent on show: Kalle Rovanpera proved last year that he is a very worthy contender and was able to beat the pair in Portugal and Kenya. At times on his run to become the youngest world champion, he appeared as though he was from another planet.

The achievements of Loeb and Ogier will perhaps never be surpassed for as long as the WRC is in existence. So let's just enjoy it while it lasts. The two Sebs are in many ways the Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal of the rally world, and everyone seems to marvel at the epic grand slam chase played out between that duo.

Loss of the lofty BTCC veterans

Matt Neal and his father Steve have a tin-top heritage dating back to the 1960s. The departure of Team Dynamics is sad, even if the team will keep an involvement

MARCUS SIMMONS

The lanky Midlanders have taken a step back from the British Touring Car Championship, and we can but hope that, as before, it's a case of *au revoir* rather than *adieu*. Team Dynamics, which will drop into a support role to One Motorsport in 2023, is the heritage team of the BTCC. While it hasn't had the longest unbroken run of participation, there have been few interruptions since it joined the field in 1992 as Rimstock Racing with the ex-Will Hoy 1991 title-winning BMW M3 for Matt Neal.

We're now 750 BTCC race starts down the line for Rimstock/Dynamics, which is what Neal and father Steve, a star of the series in Minis in the late 1960s — how on Earth did a member of the Neal family *ever* fit in a Mini? — would certainly not have predicted when Neal Sr co-founded Dynamics. Neither would they when Neal's promising performances with the Dynamics BMW 318is in 1993 earned him a promotion to the factory Mazda squad for 1994.

Dynamics took a year out from the BTCC in 1994 while Neal raced — and rolled — the uncompetitive Mazda. It was also absent from 2001 until late 2003. The series had switched from Super Touring machinery, but there was still a European championship — the forerunner of what became the World Touring Car Championship — for the formula. Neal and Dynamics toddled off there in 2001 with their Nissan Primera and claimed a victory at Estoril to add to their BTCC history-making 'first for an independent' at Donington in 1999 and subsequent success at Brands Hatch in 2000. When Neal returned to the BTCC as a driver for 2002 it was with the Vauxhall team run by Triple Eight, and Dynamics' re-emergence did not come until late 2003 with an Astra Coupe.

For 2004, sponsor Halfords and Honda machinery had arrived, Neal had returned, and the Dynamics era of BTCC success was kickstarted. Of course, there was another two-year trip off piste to the Triple Eight Vauxhall line-up for Neal in 2008-09, but Dynamics was big enough to stand on its own feet before welcoming the (literal) prodigal son home in 2010.

While Neal had already claimed the BTCC overall title in 2005 and 2006 with the Integra Type R, the 2010s were the golden era for the team. Gordon Shedden, now established as a BTCC top-liner, was in the other car; Barry Plowman led the technical squad and engineered Neal, with Eddie Hinckley on duty for Shedden; Steve Neal remained at the helm, continuing to direct operations and chortle out his rumours for journalists to go and chase juicy stories. Now in Honda Civics, Neal Jr led Shedden to a 1-2 in the title race in 2011; the Scot turned the tables in 2012 in another 1-2 and then gained further crowns in 2015 and 2016.

"Through all the evolutions of the BTCC, Dynamics have been a mainstay," points out Shedden. "They've been everything to me. Every single one of my BTCC victories has been in a Team Dynamics car. It's been a huge part of my racing life. My first year was in 2006. Matt had just won the championship — the first independent [of the single-class era] to win the BTCC outright. That team was bouncing on the crest of a wave, and for Matt and Steve to take a chance on me, who'd just been racing in one-makes, was a massive thing.

Neal, Dynamics, Honda and Halfords dates back to 2004

JEP

"Being there to experience it and take the joy from a lot of parts of it has been amazing. My three titles were all incredible in different ways. The success has come from a whole lot of different rulesets and very different cars — the weird and the wonderful, the first estate car to ever win a race in the BTCC [the Civic Tourer of 2014], the first NGTC car to win the title, so many amazing things."

Shedden, of course, returned in 2021 after a three-year stint away. Hinckley had retired when Shedden left the UK scene at the end of 2017, Honda UK pulled out at the end of 2020, and perhaps some of the old magic had gone. Neal Jr's attempts to procure an extra TBL entrants' licence for 2021 were, he said, key to a commercial deal he had lined up that would enable him to continue driving alongside the returning Shedden and the incumbent Dan Cammish. What a line-up that would have been... But the vote didn't gain enough support from rival teams, and Dynamics had to let Cammish go and replace him with the capable Dan Rowbottom and his Cataclean budget. Two years on, the departure of Rowbottom to Motorbase and the last-minute pull-out of Halfords was too much.

Series boss Alan Gow hopes Dynamics returns. "If they are in a position to come back next year, we'd find a way to help make it happen for them," he declares. "Dynamics have been an incredible part of the championship, but equally nothing lasts forever."

In the meantime, a team with 126 wins to its credit (topped by Neal and Shedden on 52 apiece!) is lost to the BTCC grid. Gow has made no bones over recent years of his desire to trim the field by a few cars, but it's probably fair to say that the cars he would rather shed are still there. No one wanted Dynamics as a casualty, even if, as we hope, it's only temporary.

RACE CENTRE

Verstappen's first-lap patience was critical – "I had a lot to lose and they had a lot to win"

VERSTAPPEN PASSES THE TEST AS CHAOS REIGNS

Red Bull was once again untouchable, but events at Albert Park were not entirely straightforward...

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

PHOTOGRAPHY RED BULL AND motorsport IMAGES

THOMPSON/GETTY IMAGES/RED BULL CONTENT POOL

The 2023 Australian Grand Prix actually had to explain itself, which seemed about right. The stewards of the third Formula 1 race of the campaign summoned its promoter — the Australian Grand Prix Corporation — to explain how fans had breached safety perimeter fences close to the debris barriers near Turn 1 when action was still ongoing on the final lap. One was actually on the circuit waving manically as soon-to-be winner Max Verstappen swept by celebrating his victory in bizarre, neutralised circumstances.

The Dutchman made it three Red Bull wins in three attempts so far in 2023, with lots of what happened in Melbourne very familiar to the Bahrain and Jeddah proceedings. But they were bookended by two very different chapters — one very good, one very bad.

In the former tale, for once it wasn't a story of searing Verstappen brilliance. Nor was it an epic refusal to cede even an inch of ground to rivals. But it asked Verstappen two key questions and, had he answered either differently, the Melbourne result would have been very different, even if the two controversial late red flag events remained unchanged.

The obvious reason why Verstappen won the Melbourne race is because his car is simply much better than his opposition's. But, it's not so much better that the thrilling circumstances that begin every F1 race — a standing start — don't leave him and team-mate Sergio Perez vulnerable. Perez paid for poor starts in Bahrain and Jeddah, and in Melbourne Verstappen did too against George Russell. The pair reacted well when the lights went out for the start of 58 laps, but Russell immediately gained as Verstappen's initial acceleration was sluggish and then he got wheelspin climbing the gears. But the Mercedes' progress wasn't so much that Russell could steam into Turn 1 and seize the lead without Verstappen having the first of his two vital choices to make.

He'd jinked right as the pack plunged into the quick Turn 1 right, with Russell keeping his W14 pointed at the apex. Verstappen could have made things harder, but in fact did what many had considered unthinkable: he turned out of a fight. Verstappen fractionally opened his steering back up, and this gave Russell the space he needed to take the lead, and stymied the Red Bull's momentum on the exit.

This meant that as Russell scampered clear, Lewis Hamilton and the fast-starting Carlos Sainz were threatening Verstappen on the run to the tight Turn 3 right. Here, Hamilton felt, "he braked early and I braked late", with the Briton stealing to the inside and getting alongside. Now Verstappen faced his second big choice in (nearly) as many corners: would he battle the second Mercedes as lightly as the first? The answer ended up being, 'sort of'. Verstappen certainly swung right and didn't move out of Hamilton's way as he had with Russell, but he squeezed his »

Tardy starting Verstappen cedes the lead to Russell into Turn 1; Hamilton will be next through

rival onto the kerbs. For Hamilton's part, he stayed committed.

Somehow, they got through metres that seemed to take an age to traverse without contact. But the Mercedes nipped ahead on the traction-heavy exit towards the soon-approaching Turn 4 left across the Victorian Institute of Sport's car park, which left Verstappen fuming — he felt that he'd been run out of room and denied space to prevent Hamilton accelerating quicker. "It's quite clear in the rules what you're allowed to do now on the outside," Verstappen explained post-race. "But clearly it [was] not followed..."

The world champion was referencing the racing etiquette explained to the drivers in early 2022, which gives a corner to the car with its wheels ahead at the apex. And this was indeed Verstappen, although things were so close between the pair that any contact would have had 'racing incident' written all over it. "I thought it was pretty decent," Hamilton said of the whole sequence. "I think we both left space for each other. I didn't run him off the road and he didn't turn in on me. We didn't touch and that's racing."

The race officials concurred, and the incident was not even noted as contentious by race control. But it all meant that when a dramatic opening lap was completed, Russell led Hamilton by a massive 2.4 seconds and Verstappen sat a further 1.3s back, ahead of Sainz and Fernando Alonso.

Verstappen had argued his case against Hamilton's driving on his team radio. But, really, he wasn't overly bothered, because he'd aced the second critical test of his race. Once again, he'd survived a skirmish on ground where his car was susceptible; now he could bring its strengths to bear. "Max showed great patience really not to get embroiled," said Red Bull team boss Christian Horner of the opening lap.

Leclerc's spin into the gravel after contact with Stroll triggered safety car

"We had a very poor start and then lap one, I was careful, because I had a lot to lose and they had a lot to win," said Verstappen. "After that the pace of the car was quick, you could see that straight away. We were always there waiting for the DRS to open up, to have a chance to pass."

That didn't come right away. First there was a safety car restart to tackle — the race was neutralised after Charles Leclerc had swung across Lance Stroll's bows at Turn 3 in the wake of the Hamilton/Verstappen battle and rather knocked himself out of contention, with the Aston Martin left with nowhere to go given Alonso's sister car was even further to the inside of the action.

Once the Ferrari had been craned away, Russell easily aced the lap-four restart — he was 0.7s clear of Hamilton over the line — and then gave Mercedes its first stint at the head of the pack of 2023, leading the next four laps. His initially growing advantage was quickly stabilised by Hamilton before Russell had escaped DRS range. Hamilton then began to home back towards his team-mate as DRS was finally activated on lap six.

This was both blessing and curse for Mercedes. For Russell, it meant that Hamilton could stay very close thanks to the power of the DRS around, uniquely, four zones. But Hamilton in turn having DRS meant Verstappen was not able to simply breeze past — boosted anyway with Red Bull's existing straightline prowess.

Russell reacted angrily to a lap-six radio call to protect his front-left tyre in the rubber-torturing Turns 5 and 6, but it didn't matter. On the next tour, Alex Albon smashed his Williams against the Turn 6 gravel trap barriers, his previously brilliant weekend actually undone at the preceding corner, when a brief flash of oversteer touching the Turn 5 exit kerb had raised his tyre temperatures enough to loosen the rears and leave Albon unable to catch the ensuing massive snap at the next corner.

The accident initially triggered the safety car, and under these conditions Mercedes acted decisively, bringing Russell in at the end of lap seven to swap the medium tyres on which all the leaders had started for the hards. Hamilton was initially miffed that he'd been left out along with Verstappen, but his circumstances took quite the upswing when the race was stopped on lap eight. This gave the two leaders the chance to change tyres in the pits under the suspension, and mired Russell in the pack along with Sainz, who'd also been brought in quickly by Ferrari when the safety car was called.

The 16-minute stoppage was because the FIA felt that too much gravel and debris had been strewn across the track. But it left Russell frustrated.

FOX/GETTY IMAGES/RED BULL CONTENT POOL

GRANT

Albon's shunt brought out the safety car, then deemed not enough to clear debris

"I THINK WE BOTH LEFT SPACE. I DIDN'T RUN HIM OFF THE ROAD AND HE DIDN'T TURN IN ON ME"

"I thought the red flag was totally unnecessary," he later reflected. "There was obviously quite a bit of gravel on the track, but there was a clear racing line. We've seen it far worse in the past."

When the track was declared clear again, Hamilton got his first chance to lead in 2023, with Verstappen still certain that he didn't need a first-corner melee to win. And so, when the race restarted on lap 10, it was all rather smooth, bar Verstappen questioning Hamilton allowing the safety car to disappear up the road and instead complete a typical warm-up lap at the leader's pace. This was fine by the rules, but the pack's slow pace out of Turn 6 left several backmarkers briefly stopped and Kevin Magnussen had to shoot through the gravel from which Albon's car had recently been removed to avoid a huge shunt. At the time of writing this had not been satisfactorily explained by the FIA, almost as if it had bigger things to consider post-race...

But we're not there yet — first Verstappen had to win the thing. And he basically did so when DRS was reactivated on lap 12, which he'd started with a 0.5s gap to Hamilton. This was instantly evaporated when Verstappen opened his DRS on the sweeping long run between Turns 8 and 9, the Dutchman "sailing by" Hamilton, in the Briton's words, on the outside line with a speed difference that Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff described as "just mind-boggling".

By the end of that tour Verstappen had already pulled a 2.1s lead over »

QUALIFYING

SUTTON

"Mate – this was amazing." Max Verstappen even seemed to surprise himself with the nature of his 1m16.732s pole-position-winning lap at the Australian Grand Prix.

Qualifying at Albert Park was an unusual session compared to the two that had come before in 2023 – although like in Jeddah there was a Red Bull missing from the lead fray after Sergio Perez plunged off into the Turn 3 gravel on his first Q1 flier. The Mexican later blamed brake balance unexpectedly moving forwards leaving him "a passenger", after he'd also basically spent more time off the road than on it during FP3 struggling with the same issue.

For those who remained, the smooth track surface combined with the C4 soft Pirellis and the relatively low temperature allowed drivers to push on for chunks at a time. This helped combat the main challenge for qualifying: getting the tyres on both axles up to temperature and working sufficiently for the tricky opening corners. In Q1, drivers were generally completing two preparation laps out of the pits with each new set of tyres, then a flier and repeat.

For Verstappen, that changed in Q2. First, he followed the conventional approach, then rehearsed his Q3 climax: the more typical qualifying run of out-lap, flier, finish. He topped Q2 with this approach, then led the way early in Q3 – albeit slower in the middle segment than on his first two banker laps on an elongated run. Then came his last. Verstappen produced his quickest out-lap of the session and charged. The result was mesmerising. Bar requiring a tiny correction as it accelerated out of Turn 3, his RB19 did everything he asked. It was so planted. Had this been at a more stunningly sweeping track, say Spa, it might have rivalled the most enthralling of recent years (think Lewis Hamilton in the Mercedes W11 at the Belgian track in 2020).

"VERSTAPPEN HAD TWO SURPRISE FOLLOWERS: THE MERCEDES PAIR"

Verstappen had two surprise followers: Mercedes pair George Russell and Hamilton, who executed the double prep lap plan well to take second and third with the closest gap (0.236s for Russell) to pole for the Black Arrows squad so far in 2023. Russell reckoned "the pace on that final lap was quite surprising", while Hamilton rued lacking "a little bit of temperature" after following Haas's Nico Hulkenberg (impressive to reach Q3 again and score 10th) slowly through the final turns on his last prep tour.

Fernando Alonso was shuffled back to fourth, while Carlos Sainz led Ferrari's charge after Charles Leclerc couldn't replicate Verstappen's one-out-lap magic and ended up seventh, ruing his lack of extra prep time as Ferrari feared rain would arrive at the end of Q3. Behind, Alex Albon starred with eighth for Williams.

DUNBAR

Hamilton. By lap 18 this was 3.4s, and at this moment the Virtual Safety Car was activated after Russell's determined recovery drive ended fierily when his engine suffered "a proper failure", said Wolff, thought to be related to a cylinder problem. This struck as Russell ran through the final corners and down the pitstraight.

Nearly 30 dominant laps followed between Russell's Mercedes being removed from the pit exit and Verstappen's lead reaching 11.1s. He'd pulled away at an average of 0.3s a lap – smack bang in the middle of the advantage Hamilton had predicted after qualifying that Red Bull would have over Mercedes in race conditions. "It was a question of controlling the race from that point [passing Hamilton] onwards," Horner summarised.

But while Verstappen was able to do so, all while pulling away clear in the lead, that approach also covers the fight for the remaining podium steps far behind, as Alonso had given chase to Hamilton from third at the second start. And it all came down, as is so often the case in modern F1, to tyre strategy. A medium-hard one-stop strategy had been considered the optimum coming into the event given how long the Pirellis were lasting on the smooth track surface – the only worry was rubber graining if drivers abused it in the cool temperatures. But the earliest predicted stops had been around lap 14, not the lap-eight red-flag stoppage. There was also the FP2 washout to consider now, since this meant that few drivers had completed more than 10 consecutive laps in practice, leaving teams short on race-run data.

"It was a one-stop race and a very early one-stop race," said Horner, who knew Verstappen was being asked to complete nearly 50 laps on the hard tyres. Verstappen's only concern up front was occasional front locking, the RB19 demonstrating it certainly isn't bulletproof – all weekend Red Bull had braking concerns. This actually had him off the

With DRS reactivated, Hamilton was easy meat for Verstappen

GRANT

Russell's recovery drive was ended by fiery engine failure

"WITH 18 LAPS TO GO, I WAS THINKING, 'JEEZ, I DON'T KNOW IF THESE TYRES ARE GOING TO GO ALL THE WAY'"

road at the penultimate corner approaching the final 10 laps because he "didn't want to flat-spot the tyre completely" after a "tiny lock-up". That gifted 3.3s back to Hamilton, but didn't threaten Verstappen's position because he was already so far ahead.

But for his rivals, getting the hards through that massive second stint was a considerable task. The pace had gradually increased as the race wore on, reflecting how much was being left unspent to get the tyres to the end. And approaching the start of the final period, Hamilton began exchanging fastest laps with Verstappen as he strived to stay clear of the threatening Aston.

"There was a moment where I thought the tyre was opening up and Fernando was applying pressure, then backing off, and I had decent pace and then closing the gap again," explained Hamilton of this period where the former McLaren team-mates traded ever-faster times from the mid-1m22s pace of tyre management down to the mid-1m20s by the finale.

"He had two or three charges, which I had to then really up the ante and try to match him, which was tough. I was able to be around a tenth or so off him, or sometimes ahead. But definitely, with 18 laps to go, I was thinking, 'Jeez, I don't know if these tyres are going go all the way.'"

But they did — in fact both Hamilton and Alonso agreed that "the tyres were better than expected" and "could keep going" (in the words of the Aston driver) once they'd completed the 47 laps on which they were raced. But that was actually a truncated stint because of what happened on lap 54.

With Verstappen back to 8.4s in front of Hamilton after his Turn 13 gaffe, Magnussen inexplicably ran too wide coming out of the long Turn 2 left and tagged the wall with his right rear. This "was enough to crack the rim and take the tyre off", according to the Dane. But his wheel rather exploded off on the run to Turn 3, showering the road with debris.

Once again, the red flags flew, setting up a two-lap sprint to the end. And again, not everyone was content with the decision. "I don't think we needed that second red flag," reflected Verstappen. "I think that could have been done with a VSC or a safety car at worst."

But that wasn't to be and so, as at Mugello in 2020 and in Jeddah a year later, we had a third standing start. This was on lap 57, with all cars switched to the soft tyres.

There was a bit of controversy, first when Verstappen lined up right "on the limit" forwards in his grid box, having "braked a bit late" after completing the five burnouts required by Red Bull to prime his »

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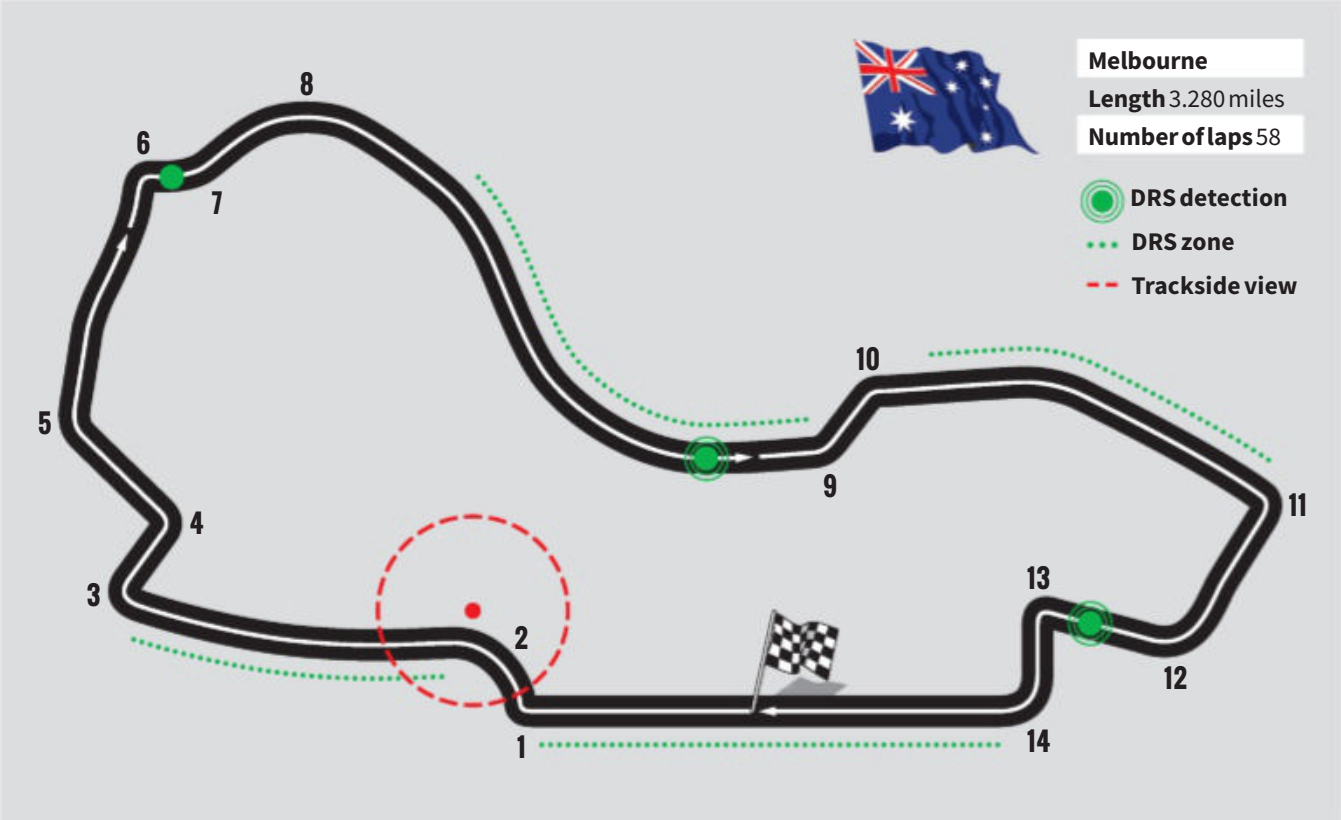
TRACKSIDE VIEW



For most of the world, the Australian Grand Prix is a very long way away. But it provides a stunning reward for those who travel down under, as well as for those living rather closer to its Albert Park home.

Its corners test driver skill supremely, as the smooth track surface and low autumnal temperatures mean they struggle to get their tyres working to have the confidence to chuck their machines in and hope they stick at speed, particularly early in the lap. For this reason, Autosport heads to a photography tower overlooking Turns 1 and Turn 2 for FP1, the former a short distance away to our left, the latter unfurling far beneath our feet. The wind is blowing hard, this writer refusing to look straight down. Thankfully for our nerves, the F1 pack is providing a wonderfully distracting show by the session's halfway point.

Having started off looking rather calm, save for Fernando Alonso kicking the left-rear of his Aston Martin out as he hits the gas over the Turn 2 kerbs early on, things get untidier as the drivers start pushing. The challenge here, assuming sufficient tyre temperature has been generated, is to wrestle the front through the fast right at the end of the main straight without whacking the inside kerbs. Home hero Oscar Piastri does this just before halfway, causing a big orange wiggle and requiring him to step off the gas to stay on track at Turn 2. A few seconds later George Russell gets it wrong in the opposite way – he misses the Turn 1 apex and has too much speed to stay within the Turn 2 track limits, where the kerbs bite the unwary.

Max Verstappen is regularly missing the Turn 1 apex as he struggles for tyre temperature, and in the closing minutes has to save a huge snap of oversteer as his Red Bull is unsettled by a big gust. But the wildest moments come from Alonso and Carlos Sainz plunging off behind Turn 2 after failing to get anywhere near Turn 1, then Yuki Tsunoda actually spinning his AlphaTauri into the Turn 1 run-off gravel – where it nearly rolls – having lost his rear.

Late on there's a lengthy red flag due to an FIA server that handles live timing data failing, and scrambling the governing body's distribution networks that carry many other systems – including GPS car tracking – to the teams. They can't warn their drivers of potential risks with others running at different speeds, and so the session is stopped for 10 minutes. During this, a pair of birds settle between Turns 1 and 2, temporarily scoring the best seats in the whole house before Verstappen arrives as the track goes green again. This place, wow…

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

> **"THE WILDEST MOMENTS COME FROM ALONSO AND SAINZ PLUNGING OFF BEHIND TURN 2"**

Challenge of Turns 1 and 2 entertains; (inset) Sainz and Alonso take to the grass

KALINAUCKAS

The last time there were three world champions on the podium was 2018 Hungarian GP

getaway (he had carried out just four at the first start, when he was beaten by Russell), and "lost my reference a bit". He squirted forwards having already stopped, but ended up with the wheels "not over the limit" of the grid hatching and so escaped sanction.

This time when the lights went out, Verstappen felt "my start was a little bit better than what I had before" and he managed to stay ahead of Hamilton off the line, then swiftly moved right and sat on the inside line to ward off any threat of attack. "I was happy about that because the tyres were really cold," Verstappen said of getting through the restart and Turn 1 unscathed.

The same could not be said for most of his peers, with low tyre temperature a big factor in why Sainz punted Alonso around in Hamilton's wake, and then a split-second later Pierre Gasly and Logan Sargeant separately locked up and triggered two big crashes that eliminated them both, plus Esteban Ocon and Nyck de Vries.

Ocon shunted with his Alpine team-mate when Gasly rejoined from cutting Turn 2 and moved right, putting his fellow Frenchman into the wall near where Magnussen had touched it in a move the stewards declared an unfortunate racing incident.

De Vries was rear-ended by Sargeant, and the Williams and AlphaTauri drivers had to climb out of the wreckage in the gravel behind the opening corners. As they did so, Stroll slid into the Turn 3 gravel as he tried to fend off Sainz, having nipped ahead after the Ferrari had spun the furious Alonso. But then yet again the red flags were ordered out.

Once the pack had returned to the pits, Verstappen cannily passing the timing line before stopping underneath the media centre and so technically starting the final scheduled lap, it was clear that there would be no more actual racing. Indeed, while a confusing 35-minute delay followed, this was the time race control needed to establish the order for the rolling safety car restart that would conclude proceedings just as spectators were breaching fences.

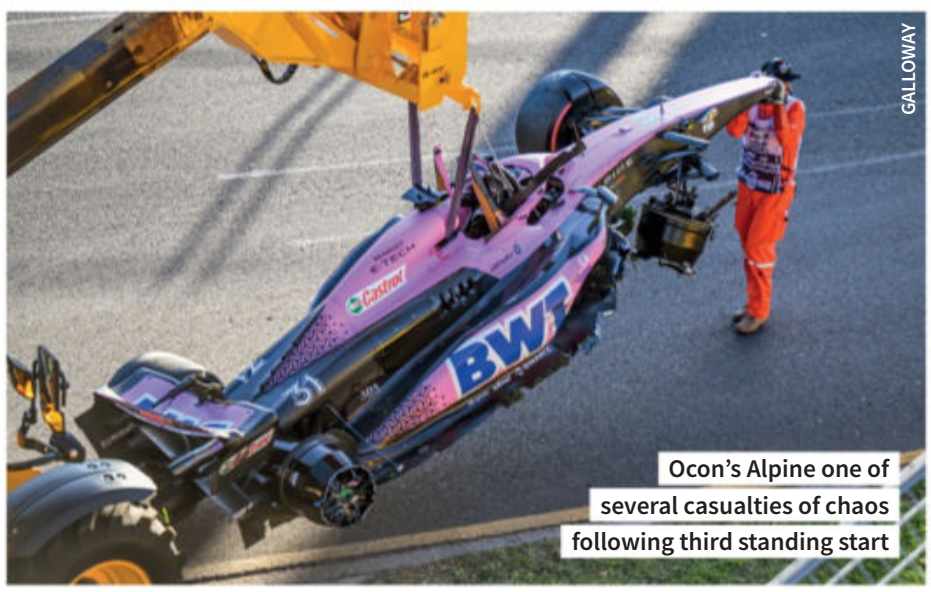
Although the Haas squad, which had seen Nico Hulkenberg rise to fourth in the chaos following the third start, argued otherwise, the decision was taken to reset the order to that final start's grid — minus the cars that couldn't take the finish. This boosted Alonso back to third ahead of Sainz — soon to be penalised and dramatically demoted to 12th for their contact — and Stroll.

The FIA felt that the grid provided the most reliable order and that the SC2 line, which Haas insisted should have been used instead as a reference, sat on a braking zone. Therefore, the officials didn't want to encourage a precedent of drivers diving past such a point at a future late restart, triggering a crash and then maybe gaining with an order reset.

"It was a case of, 'Did they cross safety SC2', was it another Silverstone?" concluded Horner, referencing last year's British GP lap-one red flag and the reset order there being determined with the same process, since not all cars had passed the relevant safety car lines and, like last Sunday, the reds had flown before a sector line had been crossed by the pack. "It was clear the race wasn't going to restart."

Everything seems certain for Red Bull these days, bar the starts and the odd braking zone. But in giving his squad its first Australia win in 12 years, Verstappen demonstrated that he can ace the only tests that challenge its dominant position.

"EVERYTHING SEEMS CERTAIN FOR RED BULL THESE DAYS, BAR THE STARTS AND THE ODD BRAKING ZONE"



Ocon's Alpine one of several casualties of chaos following third standing start

NEXT F1 REPORT
AZERBAIJAN GRAND PRIX
4 MAY ISSUE

DISASTER FOR ALPINE FOLLOWING STRONG SHOWING

Alpine lost its chance to secure a chunky haul of points in one fell swoop when Pierre Gasly and Esteban Ocon ended up in the wall on the fraught lap 57 restart.

In attempting to rejoin the circuit after a lock-up at Turn 1, Gasly skipped across the grass and moved to assume the racing line on the run to Turn 3. The other Alpine of Ocon was already there, however, and the resulting contact between the two ensured that their races would go no further than the barrier.

Gasly was summoned to the stewards, who showed leniency and remarked that "it was a first-lap racing incident". Perilously close to a race ban after accruing 10 of the maximum 12 licence points for a variety of misdemeanours last year, Gasly was let off the hook as no further action was taken.

Until that point, he had impressed and spent most of the race tracking Fernando Alonso and Carlos Sainz while running in fifth place. Initially within a second of the Spanish duo, Gasly lost touch with them in the race's second half but was holding his own against Lance Stroll behind.

Ocon had forged his own path into the points, shaking off a first-restart clash with Nyck de Vries to get as far as 10th before being wiped out two laps from home.

GALLOWAY

ALL PHOTOGRAPHY motorsport IMAGES
GRANT

Perez recovers to fifth after starting from the pitlane

A brake problem in qualifying forced Sergio Perez into a recovery drive to fifth position in Australia from the pitlane.

After stopping under the first-lap safety car to swap his hard tyres for a set of mediums, Perez called in a lap later to ditch them for a long hard-tyre run having completed his stops by the time the safety car came in. He chalked off the two Alfa Romeos in short order, but fell behind Zhou Guanyu and Logan Sargeant on the lap 10 restart following the first red flag after getting baulked by Nyck de Vries off the line.

But the Mexican's patience was rewarded and he reeled off a number of overtaking moves to haul himself back into contention, the Red Bull's powerful DRS helping his efforts to get through the order. He broke into the points with passes on Esteban Ocon and Oscar Piastri on laps 21 and 22 at Turn 9, going down the inside and around the outside respectively. Yuki Tsunoda was also easy pickings to get Perez up into ninth place, but he had his work cut out trying to overcome an impressive defence from Lando Norris.

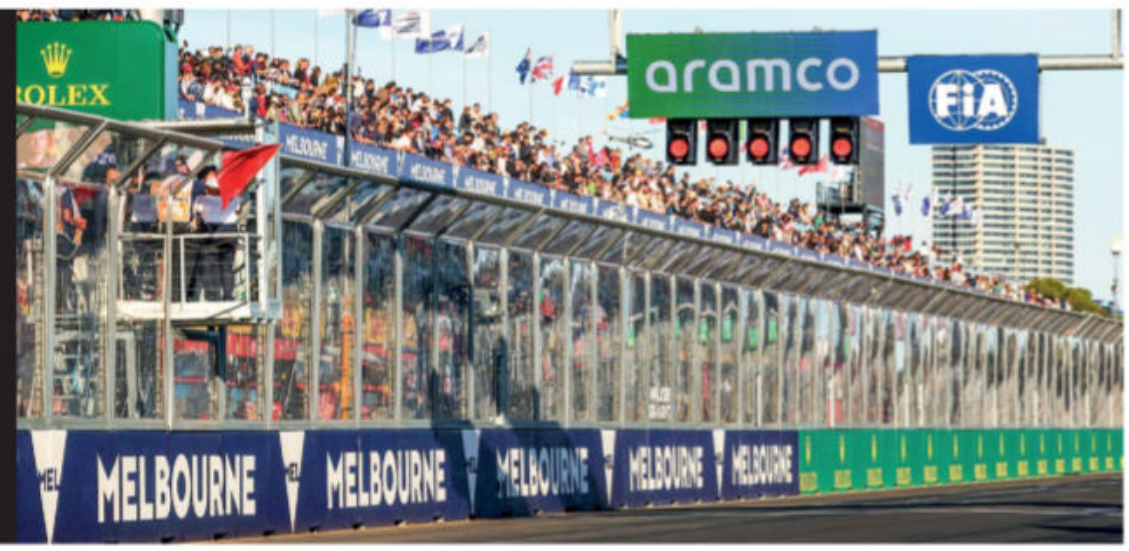
Once past on the 43rd lap, Perez found his way through Nico Hulkenberg in short order, and was starting to make inroads towards Lance Stroll before the race was red-flagged for a second time.

It was here where Perez's hard work was almost undone when, on the restart, he went too deep into the first corner and had to avoid Pierre Gasly ahead. This took the Red Bull across the gravel trap, dropping Perez out of the top 10 until Stroll went off at the next sequence of corners. It proved moot when the results were counted back a lap, promoting Perez to fifth thanks to Gasly's crash and Carlos Sainz's five-second penalty.

BIG NUMBER

4

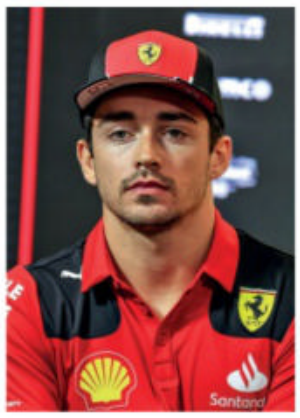
Number of red flags – the final one thrown on the slowing down lap after the chequered flag had been waved due to fans who had climbed over a secondary safety fence who were about to invade the track at the safety car restart.



HORSBURGH/EDGE PHOTOGRAPHICS

Q&A

CHARLES LECLERC
FERRARI DRIVER



Summary of your feelings after the race?
Frustrated. Obviously it's the worst ever start of the season. I mean, only six points, so it's frustrating.

What happened at the start?
In Turn 1 I took it easy. I didn't want to take any risks. In Turn 3, I honestly wasn't really planning to do any overtakes there but Lance had to slow down the car a lot while braking because Fernando [also] had to because of the cars in front. I saw that there was a gap on the outside, I went for it. Unfortunately, Fernando had to slow even more towards the end of braking and Lance found himself between Fernando and myself and we had contact. I'm obviously not blaming it on Lance. I think it's a racing incident. But it's just very frustrating because the end result is that I'm going home with no points.

Is it important to have a break now?
I don't know, I like not having a big break when things are going bad. But it's like this. I mean, I'll use it in the best way possible to improve the car especially. And yeah, we've done quite a bit of changes. So hopefully we can see the benefits.

What's your mindset now, given that you came into the season wanting to fight for championship?
For now, instead of thinking about long-term targets, I think just finishing a race without any penalties or issues whatsoever is a priority and then take the momentum and see what's possible.

What do you expect from Baku from what you've learned this weekend?
Let's wait and see. For now in qualifying I think we're quite OK. We definitely did not put everything together but the potential I think is there. Now we just need to see in the race if we improved anything or not.

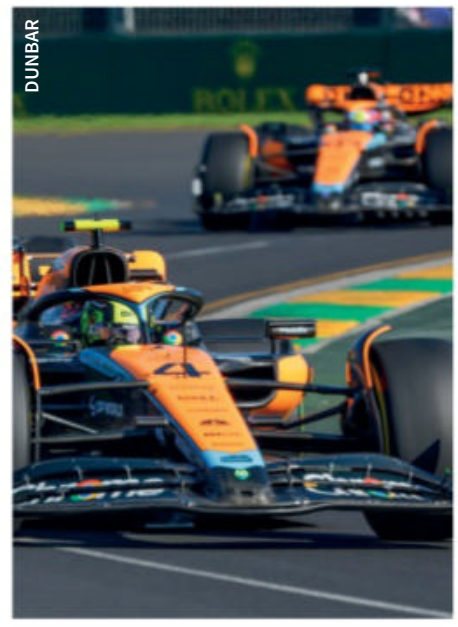
HORSBURGH
HORSBURGH

Albon stars then crashes

Alex Albon put his seventh-lap shunt at Albert Park down to a spike in tyre temperatures, but accepted the blame for his race-ending crash that denied Williams a chance to gather more points.

The Anglo-Thai was running in sixth place and keeping Lance Stroll at bay, but took too much kerb on the exit of Turn 5. Heading into the next corner, Albon faced a snap of oversteer and lost the rear end, spinning into the wall and scattering gravel onto the circuit to bring out the first red flag.

"Unfortunately, touching the kerb at high speed in Turn 5 led to a small snap and a spike in tyre temperature, which led him to lose the car," explained Williams head of vehicle performance Dave Robson, after Albon's impressive early stint from eighth on the grid came to an abrupt end.


DUNBAR

McLAREN GETS OFF THE MARK AS PIASTRI SCORES FIRST POINTS

McLaren finally got off the mark to leap from the bottom of the pile into fifth in the constructors' championship, thanks to its double points finish.

Although the team struggled in qualifying once again, with Oscar Piastri's Q3 appearance in Jeddah its only top-10 start, it made up ground in race trim at Albert Park.

Lando Norris patiently worked his way into the top 10 in his own efforts to open McLaren's account for the season, and his defence against a recovering Sergio Perez was commendable. But he couldn't contain the Mexican and his rapid Red Bull, and the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix winner eventually broke past on lap 43.

Nico Hulkenberg was brought into Norris's sights when Perez moved ahead of the Haas driver, and the German defended fiercely to ward off the DRS-imbued MCL60 in the latter stages of the race. On the 51st tour, Norris finally made his move after enacting a cutback at Turn 11, drawing alongside and taking the inside line for the following corner to secure seventh. This set the order that rewarded Norris with sixth at the chequered flag after the final restart chaos.

Team-mate Piastri collected his maiden points at his home F1 race with eighth from a lowly 16th on the grid, getting clear of the lower midfield battles once he had passed Yuki Tsunoda.

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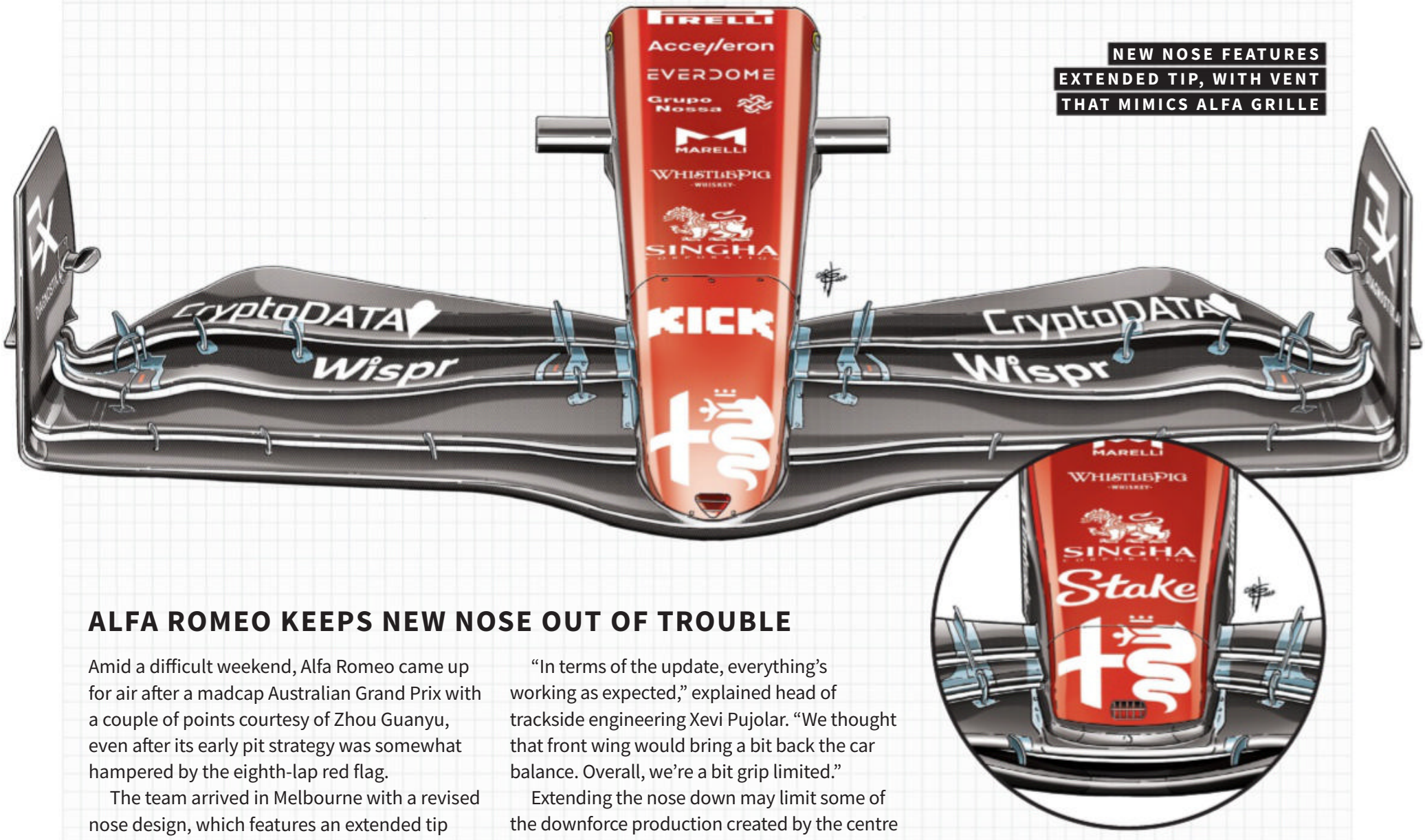


ALFA ROMEO KEEPS NEW NOSE OUT OF TROUBLE

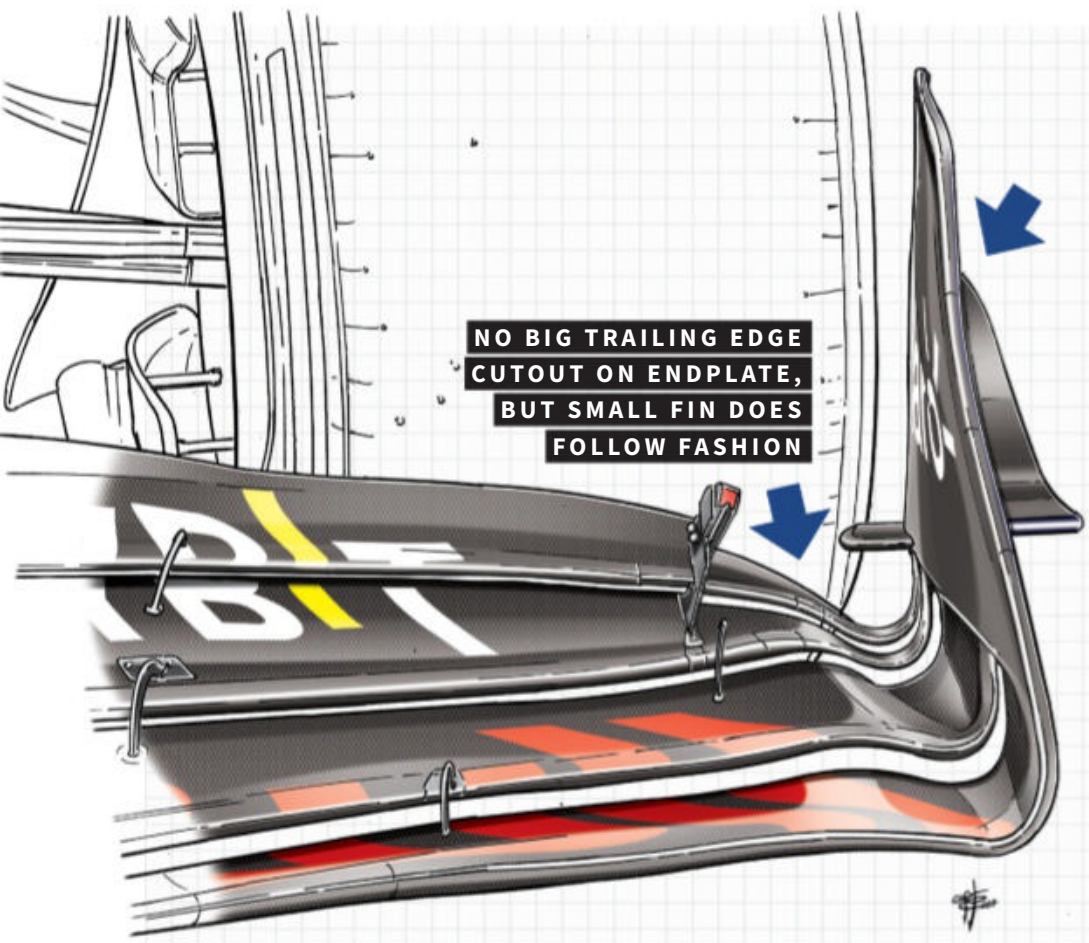
Amid a difficult weekend, Alfa Romeo came up for air after a madcap Australian Grand Prix with a couple of points courtesy of Zhou Guanyu, even after its early pit strategy was somewhat hampered by the eighth-lap red flag.

The team arrived in Melbourne with a revised nose design, which features an extended tip down towards the leading edge of the front wing. Pleasingly, this features a small duct shaped like an Alfa Romeo grille, with the overall design not dissimilar to that seen on last year's Ferrari.

"In terms of the update, everything's working as expected," explained head of trackside engineering Xevi Pujolar. "We thought that front wing would bring a bit back the car balance. Overall, we're a bit grip limited."

Extending the nose down may limit some of the downforce production created by the centre section of the front wing mainplane, but this has to balance out with the load produced by the rear. The wing itself remains largely unchanged, continuing with the inboard loaded philosophy and using the outer dimensions to create clearance ahead of the front tyres. A small fin on the trailing edge of the endplate helps to strengthen the outwash produced by the design.

JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE



A CLOSER LOOK AT RED BULL'S FRONT WING

Small fins on the inside of the front wing endplates appear to be in vogue among the top teams, with Red Bull also employing a similar design in an apparent bid to generate some kind of tip vortex.

The team has continued to plough its own furrow and has not felt the need to respond to the other teams by creating a drastic trailing edge cutout on the endplate to sweep the element attachment points forward. However, the fin and the incline of its exposed edge appears to do largely the same thing in strengthening the outward airflow around the front tyre. The way that the wing elements curl downwards before merging into the endplate helps to build that clearance, assisting with the placement of that airflow to reduce any drag produced by turbulence from the tyre.

There is also a subtle camber to the shape of the endplate, assisting with that outward direction of airflow at the front. As a wing produces less downforce closer to an endplate, it makes sense to sacrifice that part of the geometry and focus on building load towards the centre. On the outside, the diveplane plateaus off to presumably direct air around the wheel cover and towards the sidepod undercut.

JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE

FREE PRACTICE 1

POS	DRIVER	TIME
1	Verstappen	1m18.790s
2	Hamilton	1m19.223s
3	Perez	1m19.293s
4	Alonso	1m19.317s
5	Leclerc	1m19.378s
6	Sainz	1m19.505s
7	Norris	1m19.536s
8	Gasly	1m19.646s
9	Russell	1m19.699s
10	Stroll	1m19.766s
11	Albon	1m19.766s
12	Piastri	1m19.777s
13	Hulkenberg	1m19.806s
14	de Vries	1m19.933s
15	Sargeant	1m20.074s
16	Ocon	1m20.175s
17	Tsunoda	1m20.399s
18	Bottas	1m20.419s
19	Zhou	1m20.569s
20	Magnussen	1m21.147s

WEATHER Sunny, air 18-22C track 27-36C

FREE PRACTICE 2

POS	DRIVER	TIME
1	Alonso	1m18.887s
2	Leclerc	1m19.332s
3	Verstappen	1m19.502s
4	Russell	1m19.672s
5	Sainz	1m19.695s
6	Ocon	1m19.725s
7	Perez	1m20.083s
8	Norris	1m20.176s
9	Hulkenberg	1m20.194s
10	Gasly	1m20.206s
11	Tsunoda	1m20.220s
12	Bottas	1m20.312s
13	Hamilton	1m20.323s
14	Piastri	1m20.380s
15	Zhou	1m20.470s
16	Stroll	1m20.579s
17	de Vries	1m20.600s
18	Albon	1m21.182s
19	Magnussen	1m21.266s
20	Sargeant	no time

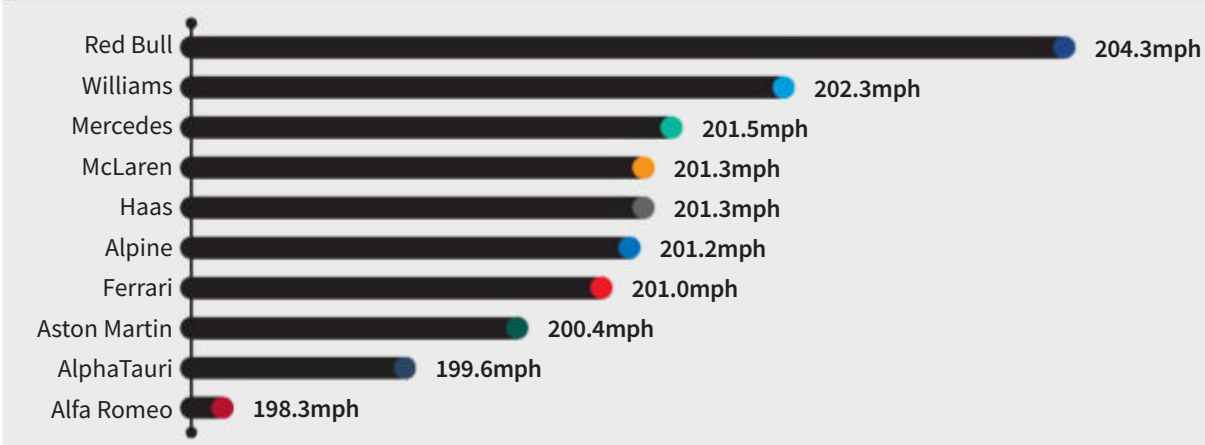
WEATHER Rain, air 16-17C track 20-25C

FREE PRACTICE 3

POS	DRIVER	TIME
1	Verstappen	1m17.565s
2	Alonso	1m17.727s
3	Ocon	1m17.938s
4	Russell	1m17.955s
5	Gasly	1m18.094s
6	Perez	1m18.123s
7	Sainz	1m18.127s
8	Hamilton	1m18.138s
9	Stroll	1m18.198s
10	Zhou	1m18.330s
11	Hulkenberg	1m18.410s
12	Albon	1m18.553s
13	Leclerc	1m18.691s
14	Piastri	1m18.713s
15	Bottas	1m18.809s
16	Tsunoda	1m18.901s
17	Sargeant	1m18.947s
18	Magnussen	1m19.056s
19	de Vries	1m19.092s
20	Norris	1m19.146s

WEATHER Overcast, air 15-16C track 20-24C

SPEED TRAP (QUALIFYING)



QUALIFYING 1

POS	DRIVER	TIME
1	Verstappen	1m17.384s
2	Russell	1m17.654s
3	Hamilton	1m17.689s
4	Ocon	1m17.770s
5	Alonso	1m17.832s
6	Stroll	1m17.873s
7	Sainz	1m17.928s
8	Albon	1m17.962s
9	Hulkenberg	1m18.029s
10	Magnussen	1m18.159s
11	Leclerc	1m18.218s
12	Norris	1m18.243s
13	Gasly	1m18.312s
14	de Vries	1m18.450s
15	Tsunoda	1m18.471s
16	Piastri	1m18.517s
17	Zhou	1m18.540s
18	Sargeant	1m18.557s
19	Bottas	1m18.714s
20	Perez	no time

QUALIFYING 2

POS	DRIVER	TIME
1	Verstappen	1m17.056s
2	Alonso	1m17.283s
3	Sainz	1m17.349s
4	Leclerc	1m17.390s
5	Hulkenberg	1m17.412s
6	Russell	1m17.513s
7	Hamilton	1m17.551s
8	Gasly	1m17.574s
9	Stroll	1m17.616s
10	Albon	1m17.761s
11	Ocon	1m17.768s
12	Tsunoda	1m18.099s
13	Norris	1m18.119s
14	Magnussen	1m18.129s
15	de Vries	1m18.335s

QUALIFYING 3

POS	DRIVER	TIME
1	Verstappen	1m16.732s
2	Russell	1m16.968s
3	Hamilton	1m17.104s
4	Alonso	1m17.139s
5	Sainz	1m17.270s
6	Stroll	1m17.308s
7	Leclerc	1m17.369s
8	Albon	1m17.609s
9	Gasly	1m17.675s
10	Hulkenberg	1m17.735s

WEATHER Overcast, air 15-17C track 21-23C

NEXT RACE
30 APRIL
AZERBAIJAN GP
Baku

SEASON STATS

	DRIVERS' CHAMPIONSHIP	PTS	BEST FINISH	BEST QUAL
1	Verstappen	69	1	1
2	Perez	54	1	1
3	Alonso	45	3	3
4	Hamilton	38	2	3
5	Sainz	20	4	4
6	Stroll	20	4	6
7	Russell	18	4	2
8	Norris	8	6	11
9	Hulkenberg	6	7	10
10	Leclerc	6	7	2
11	Bottas	4	8	12
12	Ocon	4	8	7
13	Piastri	4	8	9
14	Gasly	4	9	9
15	Zhou	2	9	12
16	Tsunoda	1	10	12
17	Magnussen	1	10	13
18	Albon	1	10	8
19	Sargeant	0	12	16
20	de Vries	0	14	15

	CONSTRUCTORS' CHAMPIONSHIP	PTS
1	Red Bull	123
2	Aston Martin	65
3	Mercedes	56
4	Ferrari	26
5	McLaren	12
6	Alpine	8
7	Haas	7
8	Alfa Romeo	6
9	AlphaTauri	1
10	Williams	1

QUALIFYING BATTLE

Verstappen	**2**	0	Perez
Leclerc	**2**	1	Sainz
Hamilton	0	**3**	**Russell**
Gasly	1	**2**	**Ocon**
Norris	**2**	1	Piastri
Zhou	**2**	1	Bottas
Alonso	**3**	0	Stroll
Magnussen	0	**3**	**Hulkenberg**
de Vries	0	**3**	**Tsunoda**
Sargeant	0	**3**	**Albon**

Events removed when one driver in a team could not record a representative time for reasons outside their control

WINS

Verstappen	2
Perez	1

FASTEST LAPS

Perez	1
Verstappen	1
Zhou	1

POLE POSITIONS

Verstappen	2
Perez	1

Pole based on qualifying results, not sprint races

GETTY IMAGES/RED BULL CONTENT POOL

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STARTING GRID

10 Hulkenberg #27	9 Gasly #10	8 Albon #23	7 Leclerc #16	6 Stroll #18	5 Sainz #55	4 Alonso #14	3 Hamilton #44	2 Russell #63	1 Verstappen #1
1m17.735s	1m17.675s	1m17.609s	1m17.369s	1m17.308s	1m17.270s	1m17.139s	1m17.104s	1m16.968s	1m16.732s

RESULTS ROUND 3/23 (58 LAPS – 190.22 MILES)

POS	DRIVER	TEAM	FINISH TIME	LED	TYRES
1	**Max Verstappen** (NLD)	Red Bull-Honda RBPT	2h32m38.371s	47	**M**n, **H**n, **S**u, **S**u
2	**Lewis Hamilton** (GBR)	Mercedes	+0.179s	5	**M**n, **H**n, **S**u, **S**u
3	**Fernando Alonso** (ESP)	Aston Martin-Mercedes	+0.769s		**M**u, **H**n, **S**u, **S**u
4	**Lance Stroll** (CAN)	Aston Martin-Mercedes	+3.082s		**M**u, **H**n, **S**u, **S**u
5	**Sergio Perez** (MEX)	Red Bull-Honda RBPT	+3.320s		**H**n, **M**u, **H**n, **H**u, **S**n, **S**n
6	**Lando Norris** (GBR)	McLaren-Mercedes	+3.701s		**M**n, **H**n, **S**n, **S**u
7	**Nico Hulkenberg** (DEU)	Haas-Ferrari	+4.939s		**M**n, **H**n, **S**u, **S**u
8	**Oscar Piastri** (AUS)	McLaren-Mercedes	+5.382s		**M**n, **H**n, **H**u, **S**n, **S**n
9	**Zhou Guanyu** (CHN)	Alfa Romeo-Ferrari	+5.713s		**S**n, **H**n, **H**u, **S**n
10	**Yuki Tsunoda** (JPN)	AlphaTauri-Honda RBPT	+6.052s		**M**n, **H**n, **H**u, **S**u, **S**u
11	**Valtteri Bottas** (FIN)	Alfa Romeo-Ferrari	+6.513s		**S**n, **H**n, **S**n
12	**Carlos Sainz** (ESP)	Ferrari	+6.594s		**M**u, **H**n, **S**u, **S**u
13	**Pierre Gasly** (FRA)	Alpine-Renault	-2 laps		**S**n, **H**n, **S**u
14	**Esteban Ocon** (FRA)	Alpine-Renault	-2 laps		**S**n, **H**n, **S**n
15	**Nyck de Vries** (NLD)	AlphaTauri-Honda RBPT	-2 laps		**H**n, **M**n, **S**n, **S**u
16	**Logan Sargeant** (USA)	Williams-Mercedes	-2 laps		**H**n, **M**u, **H**u, **M**n, **H**u, **S**n
17	**Kevin Magnussen** (DNK)	Haas-Ferrari	-6 laps		**M**n, **H**n
R	**George Russell** (GBR)	Mercedes	17 laps-power unit	6	**M**n, **H**n
R	**Alexander Albon** (THA)	Williams-Mercedes	6 laps-accident		**M**n
R	**Charles Leclerc** (MCO)	Ferrari	0 laps-accident		**M**n

FASTEST LAPS

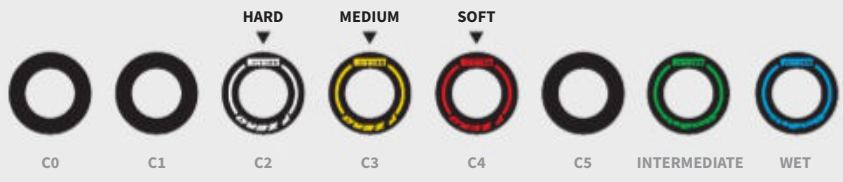
POS	DRIVER	TIME	GAP	LAP
1	**Perez**	1m20.235s	-	53
2	**Verstappen**	1m20.342s	+0.107s	49
3	**Sainz**	1m20.467s	+0.232s	53
4	**Alonso**	1m20.476s	+0.241s	53
5	**Hamilton**	1m20.613s	+0.378s	49
6	**Stroll**	1m20.934s	+0.699s	50
7	**Gasly**	1m20.995s	+0.760s	47
8	**Hulkenberg**	1m21.124s	+0.889s	46
9	**Norris**	1m21.173s	+0.938s	46
10	**de Vries**	1m21.183s	+0.948s	50
11	**Ocon**	1m21.203s	+0.968s	44
12	**Piastri**	1m21.335s	+1.100s	53
13	**Sargeant**	1m21.456s	+1.221s	50
14	**Magnussen**	1m21.685s	+1.450s	52
15	**Tsunoda**	1m21.789s	+1.554s	52
16	**Zhou**	1m21.819s	+1.584s	48
17	**Bottas**	1m22.233s	+1.998s	46
18	**Russell**	1m22.680s	+2.445s	16
19	**Albon**	1m23.349s	+3.114s	6
20	**Leclerc**	no time	-	-

WEATHER Sunny, air 18-20C track 22-35C

WINNER'S AVERAGE SPEED 74.771mph **FASTEST LAP AVERAGE SPEED** 147.149mph

TYRES

KEY: H - Hard M - Medium S - Soft I - Intermediate W - Wet n - New set u - Used set



RACE BRIEFING

GRID PENALTIES

BOTTAS required to start from pitlane for change to suspension set-up

PEREZ required to start from pitlane for additional power unit elements used and suspension changes

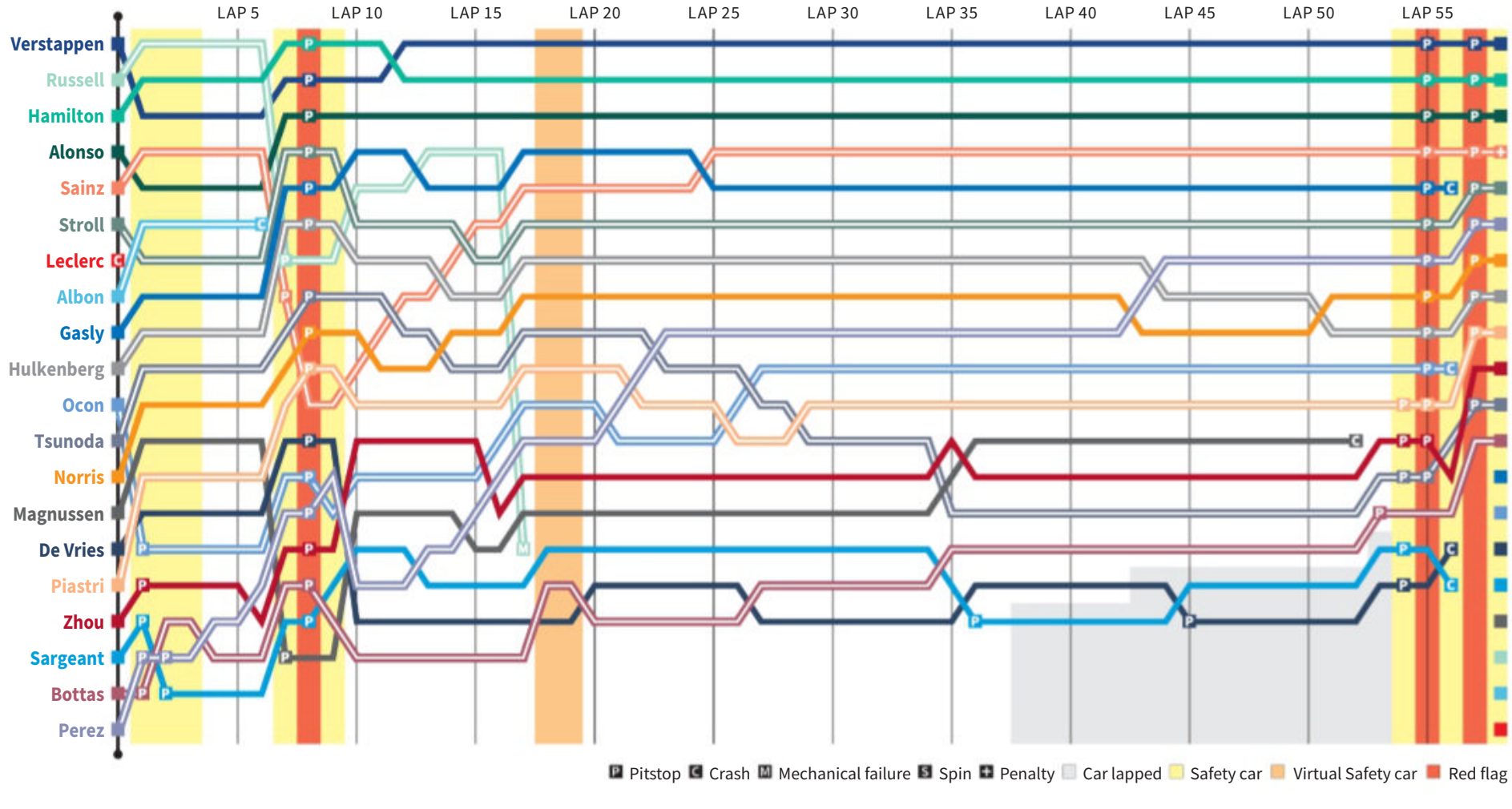
RACE PENALTIES

SAINZ Five-second penalty and two licence points for causing a collision with Alonso

STAT 11

Total number of world titles won by those on the podium, soon to be 12…

LAP CHART What happened, when



AUSTRALIAN GRAND PRIX DRIVER RATINGS

Not the best-scoring race, but some respectable efforts nevertheless

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

RED BULL

MAX VERSTAPPEN

Started **1st** — Result **1st**

7 Perhaps one of his scruffiest race wins. Verstappen could not contain an explosive George Russell start, and then conceded a further place to Lewis Hamilton at Turn 3 in a messy first lap. Car pace was ultimately too strong not to be at the front, although brain fade led to lap 47 off at Turn 13.

SERGIO PEREZ

Started **20th** — Result **5th**

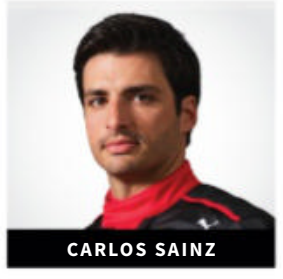
6 Had car advantage to make ground from pitlane start but made heavy weather of progress. Final restart off threatened to undo his good work, but benefited from the chaos to take fifth. Made some decisive moves, but he did the minimum expected given Red Bull's pace.

FERRARI

CHARLES LECLERC

Started **7th** — Result **R**

2 Overly ambitious in his attempted move on Stroll and showed limited spatial awareness in trying to go around the outside at Turn 3. The two touched, and Leclerc had nobody but himself to blame while beached in the gravel. As per our marking system, he cannot score more than two.



CARLOS SAINZ

Started **5th** — Result **12th**

4 The 5s penalty for his Alonso clash was fair, and rather set the end-of-race events in motion. A good start was hampered by the decision to pit before the red flag, but he had an outside shot at a podium before Alonso turned up the wick. Late-race clumsiness results in a lower score here.

MERCEDES

LEWIS HAMILTON

Started **3rd** — Result **2nd**

8 Despite Verstappen's complaints, Hamilton's Turn 3 move was fair. Picked up lead after Russell's stop and held it through the first restart. Powerless to resist Verstappen on lap 12, but kept tabs on him. Dealt well with Alonso's increasing pace towards the end, despite tyre life issues.

GEORGE RUSSELL

Started **2nd** — Result **R**

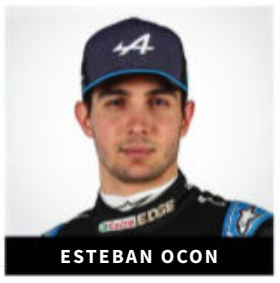
8 Made excellent start to beat Verstappen off the line and forge an early lead. His lap-seven pitstop, which came moments before the first red flag, was unfortunately timed and put him in seventh. Embarked on a recovery, matching the leaders' pace, but engine issues struck while in fourth.

ALPINE

PIERRE GASLY

Started **9th** — Result **13th**

4 Was set for a nine in these rankings before losing five marks at the restart. Strayed into team-mate Ocon's path, spilling a potentially hefty points haul for Alpine. Had been excellent in keeping pace with faster cars until then, clinging onto Sainz, and was set for fifth place before his crash.



ESTEBAN OCON

Started **11th** – Result **14th**

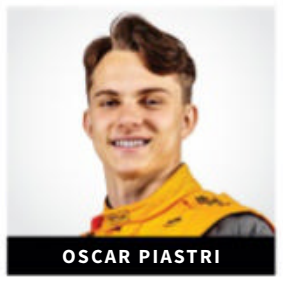
5 Another of the early stoppers to have been pegged back by the opening red flag period. Sat on the fringes of the top 10, and was having a quiet day before Gasly cut across him and forced the two Alpines into the Turn 2 exit wall on the second restart. Had been on par prior to that incident.

McLAREN

LANDO NORRIS

Started **13th** — Result **6th**

8 Punched well above his weight despite car lacking aero efficiency. Survived first restart brush with Tsunoda. Defended well against recovering Perez even with clear car deficit. Persistence paid off with excellent cutback move on Hulkenberg at Turn 12. Later benefited from final restart chaos.



OSCAR PIASTRI

Started **16th** — Result **8th**

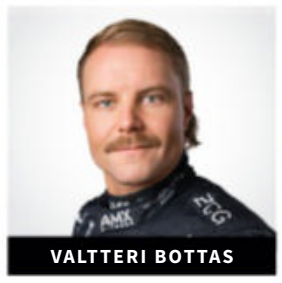
7 Dealt well with the pressure of a first home F1 race to score maiden points. Patient in combat with Tsunoda, but spent too much time behind the AlphaTauri. Missing about 0.4s per lap versus Norris but did well to avoid clashing Alpines ahead on the final restart to preserve top 10 finish.

ALFA ROMEO

ZHOU GUANYU

Started **17th** — Result **9th**

6 First points of the year, making early pitcall work despite benefit being eradicated by the first red flag. Put Magnussen under pressure and collected a place when the Dane crashed, and then avoided drama late on to sit in the points. Perhaps lucky to score as car lacked pace, but executed a clean race.



VALTTERI BOTTAS

Started **19th** – Result **11th**

4 Next to no presence in Melbourne, Bottas's race was comparable to a can of Foster's. Switch to hards lost fizz due to lap-eight red flag, but was outclassed by Zhou on the same plan. He instead spent most of the day at the back, missing the points despite the action late on.

Hulkenberg impressed with strong race effort

ASTON MARTIN

FERNANDO ALONSO

Started **4th** — Result **3rd**

8 Three races, three third places. Passed by Sainz at the start, but the younger Spaniard's pre-red flag stop brought Alonso back into play. Like the first two races, he grew as the fuel burned off to put Hamilton under pressure. Looked to have lost podium after Sainz restart clash, but crucially unscathed.

LANCE STROLL

Started **6th** — Result **4th**

6 Was boxed in at Turn 3 by battles ahead and could not avoid Leclerc contact. Briefly lost a spot to Albon before the Thai crashed, but held on to Sainz and Gasly throughout the middle stages. Lock-up on late restart at Turn 3 looked amateurish from third on-track, but it ultimately counted for little.

HAAS

KEVIN MAGNUSSEN

Started **14th** – Result **17th**

3 Comprehensively outclassed by Hulkenberg throughout the course of the race. Did well to get past Zhou in the middle of the race, but buckled under pressure from the Alfa Romeo driver and hit the wall on the exit of Turn 2 to bring out the late red flag. Hardly a day that he would be keen to remember.

NICO HULKENBERG

Started **10th** — Result **7th**

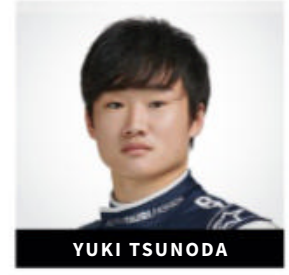
8 Proved his worth with very strong performance. Despite the VF-23's limitations, race pace was good and he mingled among quicker cars. Weaving in defence against Norris was borderline. Final restart call offered podium hope until the countback rule played against him.

ALPHATAURI

NYCK DE VRIES

Started **15th** – Result **15th**

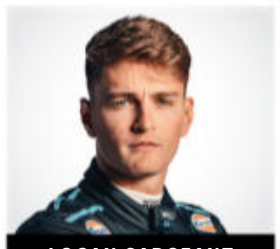
5 Decision to start on hard tyres looked like a good bet, but progress stymied by first restart clash with Ocon. Struggled on with a broken front wing from there, and was forced into a mammoth stint on mediums. Hit by Sargeant on final restart, out through no fault of his own.


YUKI TSUNODA

Started **12th** – Result **10th**

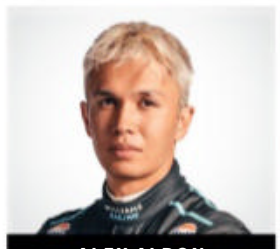
5 One of the main beneficiaries of the late-race drama and sat in fifth before the order was redrawn. Held his own well against faster cars in the opening stages, but descended through the order rapidly in the second half of the race as he struggled to get the hard tyres in the right window.

WILLIAMS


LOGAN SARGEANT

Started **18th** – Result **16th**

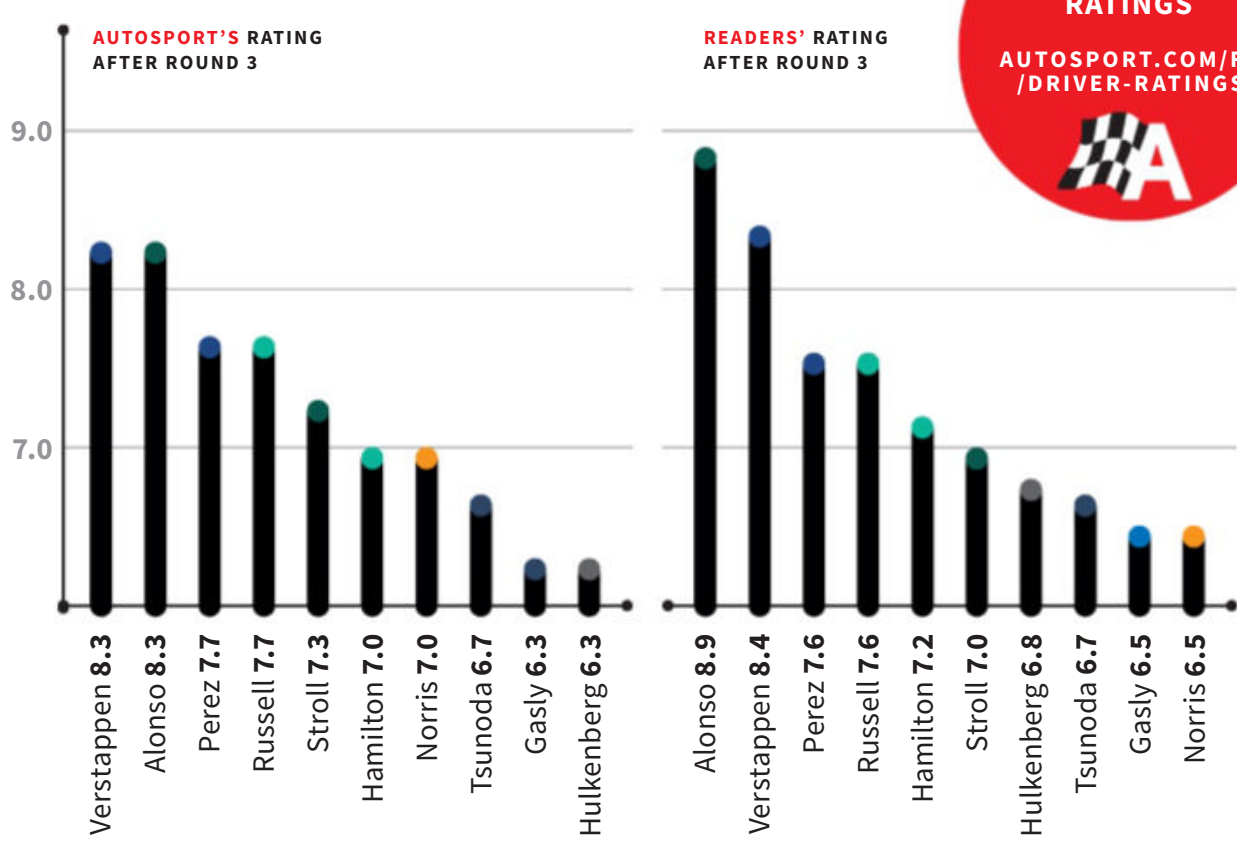
3 Another hard-tyre starter, Sargeant struggled with medium-tyre pace after red-flag compound switch. Lacked speed until move to a used set of hards. Rear-ending de Vries on the second restart at Turn 1 was needless. Lucky not to receive a penalty for that incident.


ALEX ALBON

Started **8th** — Result **R**

4 Amazing work in the opening laps completely unravelled thanks to his own unforced error at Turn 6. Managed to move past Stroll on the first lap and sat in sixth but got wide on the exit of Turn 5 and lit up the rears into the next corner to throw away another potential points finish.

TOP 10 AVERAGE RATINGS



GIVE YOUR DRIVER RATINGS

AUTOSPORT.COM/F1/DRIVER-RATINGS

O'Ward denied in Newgarden duel

A late twist tipped the Texas race in Josef Newgarden's favour after an enthralling battle with points leader Pato O'Ward

DAVID MALSHER-LOPEZ

PHOTOGRAPHY motorsport IMAGES

Josef Newgarden's third Texas Motor Speedway win was a classic. Yes, he led 123 of the 250 laps, but his victory wasn't certain until the drop of the chequered flag. Or rather, the drop of the final yellow on lap 249, when the field was frozen and finished under its fifth caution. Had the race played out to the end, who knows whether the Penske driver could have held on to beat the man who led 91 laps and dominated much of the second half of the race: Pato O'Ward of Arrow McLaren?

In the final, frantic shootout, O'Ward, on three occasions, crossed the start/finish line ahead of his foe, swinging to the outside through the dog-leg of the front straight. Did Newgarden have a tactic for keeping his nosecone ahead for the crucial lap?

"I was watching the runs every lap, kind of trying to gauge what I needed to do, where I needed to be," said the two-time champion, who has now racked up 26 victories. "I think the difference maker for our car was that it just had really good speed. I felt like it was a little bit quicker than Pato's car. In the past when I've raced him here, I felt the opposite. Today, my car had the speed it needed. It was about keeping positioning where I was. That was the key. Just don't let him get underneath me, basically."

Yet O'Ward sounded equally confident that he could have edged it. "Oh, yeah, I had the timing right," he said. "The lap before when we crossed the line, my nose was slightly in front of his. There was no way it was going to finish in single file. But the racing gods had other plans."

He later added: "I knew I could have won. It's just there was really no other way to do it besides timing it. You had to do it the last lap,

Newgarden leads the Team Penske celebrations

FARMER

because if not, they were probably going to do it to you. Just the timing of the last yellow is what really killed us to be honest."

O'Ward had reason to feel rueful. Yes, runner-up finishes in the opening two rounds of the IndyCar season have sent him to the top of the points table, but he could have won them both. Still, he was right to accentuate the positive. The Arrow McLaren team appears to have taken a step forward in competitiveness in 2023, and it's surely only a matter of time before O'Ward is once more in Victory Lane.

One of his team-mates, Felix Rosenqvist, took pole position at Texas for the second straight year and, while he never looked a match for O'Ward in terms of race pace, he was in the top eight when he crashed after 177 laps. New colleague Alexander Rossi was in the top six when he got knocked out of contention in the pitlane by his replacement at Andretti Autosport, Kyle Kirkwood, who swooped into his pitbox just as Rossi was given the signal to depart his. The two made contact, but despite Kirkwood coming in from the fast lane rather than the transition lane, IndyCar declared Rossi responsible for the collision. So, as well as losing laps while his bent toe link was replaced, Rossi had to serve a drive-through penalty. He was left seething at the powers-that-be.

In his absence, the race was very much a two-horse scrap between Newgarden and O'Ward – although with Chip Ganassi Racing's Alex Palou making occasional but very impressive interventions.

The signs of who would become preeminent were there through practice. IndyCar had brought revised 'big oval' aero options that added around 300lb of downforce and the PJ1 surface covering in Turns 1 and 2 – which had been like black ice for IndyCar's Firestone rubber in years past – had not been renewed, and is now weathered. In addition, every driver had taken advantage of the specific 'high-line' practice sessions on the Saturday, adding rubber to the track and confidence to themselves.

Come final practice, that confidence was most overt in Newgarden and O'Ward, who seemed able to pass people at will on any line around the 1.5-mile oval. So while they started fourth

"I think the difference maker for our car was that it just had really good speed"

and fifth, behind Rosenqvist, five-time Texas winner Scott Dixon and Rossi, it was no surprise to see Newgarden wrest the lead away from Dixon's Ganassi machine – making it stick on lap five – and for O'Ward to move into second on lap nine.

Palou, up from seventh, also passed Dixon to claim third, but made no impression on the lead pair until after the first round of stops, which came under caution following a crash for Takuma Sato. The double Indianapolis 500 winner had qualified an impressive sixth in his first outing for Ganassi, but dropped back to 12th almost from the start. On lap 47 he drifted high and struck the wall coming off Turn 2, having been caught out by champion Will Power, slowing with severe oversteer.

Following the restart, Palou looked hyper-aggressive, getting around O'Ward and even Newgarden, to lead laps 66-67. But by the end of lap 75 he was behind them both – and then also lost out to the impressive and determined Romain Grosjean of Andretti Autosport, and Dixon.

Newgarden pitted from the lead on lap 109, while O'Ward risked a caution dropping him down the field by remaining on track until lap 114. While O'Ward emerged from the pitlane 4.5 seconds behind his prey, that gap was rapidly closed. After going a tad loose in the second stint, Newgarden had called for changes at his stop. But the tweaks were now inducing understeer, whereas O'Ward had gone in the opposite direction, making his turn-in a touch sharper. He hunted Newgarden down, passed him on lap 129 and disappeared into a race of his own, at least for a while, lapping everyone up to and including Grosjean's third-place car. In fact he was 7s to the good by the time Newgarden made his third stop on lap 164. »

Rosenqvist on pole again in Texas; his race ended in the wall

FARMER

Again, O'Ward went five laps longer, and his stop was slightly delayed by a problem with the left-rear, but he still emerged 5s ahead of Newgarden, who had used this third stop to get his car back 'in the window' as far as handling was concerned. Rosenqvist's shunt brought out the second caution, and ironically that hurt his team-mate, putting the #5 McLaren in Newgarden's crosshairs again.

Both leaders pitted under caution, for what they thought could be the last time, on lap 182. That left 68 laps – minus however many more laps the field was under yellow to clean up the mess left by Rosenqvist. That was going to prove tricky in terms of fuel mileage and, probably, in terms of tyre life. When IndyCar extended the yellow to allow the track cleaners to blast away some of the marbles from the high line, that helped... but what helped Newgarden even further was that, during this caution period, Penske president Tim Cindric called Newgarden in again, to make him a bit less compromised than his primary enemy of the day.

The other drivers got the wave-around, and all but David Malukas took it, the Dale Coyne Racing with HMD team admitting that was a mistake. Briefly elevated to second, the series sophomore immediately lost it to Newgarden at the drop of the green, while Palou was heading in the other direction, and blasted by Newgarden and O'Ward to hit the front for six of the next eight laps. His job was made somewhat easier by the fact that O'Ward and Newgarden – or Newgarden and O'Ward, depending on which lap it was – were trying to feather-foot the throttle and have another car ahead breaking the air. When Palou was reminded that he too, needed to be wary of his fuel consumption, that was enough to allow the charging Colton Herta to put an Andretti Autosport car in front for the first time in the race. But these four cars were now tripping over themselves trying to go slow and not lead, such are the joys of fuel mileage racing.

Grosjean (left) and Herta battle for position, but only Herta took the flag

LEVITT

It was Palou in front when the yellows flew again on lap 210, for rookie Sting Ray Robb sticking his Coyne with RWR car in the walls on both sides of the back straight. With still only eight cars on the lead lap, despite the earlier wave-around for the slow cars, O'Ward and Newgarden stopped again, knowing that even from seventh and eighth, they could carve their way to the front again. In fact, with Malukas taking a badly needed fourth stop, and Scott McLaughlin stopping his Penske from eighth, O'Ward and Newgarden were actually fifth and sixth for the restart, and now with no fuel worries. A proper showdown was in prospect.

Although there were less than four laps of green-flag running before a nasty looking collision between Graham Rahal and the hobbled Andretti car of Devlin DeFrancesco brought out the fourth caution, O'Ward was into the lead, with Newgarden fourth – which became third once Grosjean pitted.

At the next green, Palou, despite tyres that were 25 laps less fresh than those on O'Ward and Newgarden, was past both of them and into first. It lasted for just three laps, but he remained in the mix as the two dominant cars duelled. Then the fun finished prematurely, when Grosjean's entertaining run ended in the wall after being passed by the impressive Malukas for fourth. That of course spelled the end of O'Ward's challenge, too, which is where we came in.

Dixon had one troublesome set of tyres that induced major understeer, and also made a late final stop, but he salvaged fifth, ahead of compatriot McLaughlin who had climbed from 15th on the grid. The third Penske, that of Power, had an appalling day, getting ever more tail-happy halfway into each stint, and dropping as low as 23rd at one point. Then a loose wheel came off in the pitlane, losing the champion yet more places, and he was handed a drive-through penalty. In those circumstances, 16th wasn't so bad.

NEXT REPORT
LONG BEACH
20 APRIL ISSUE

JUNCOS DUO CONTINUE TO IMPRESS

FARMER

Juncos Hollinger Racing continues to punch above its weight, and it is a measure of the team's progress with its blend of JHR hires and former Carlin personnel that it was actually disappointed with ninth for Callum Ilott (above) in Texas.

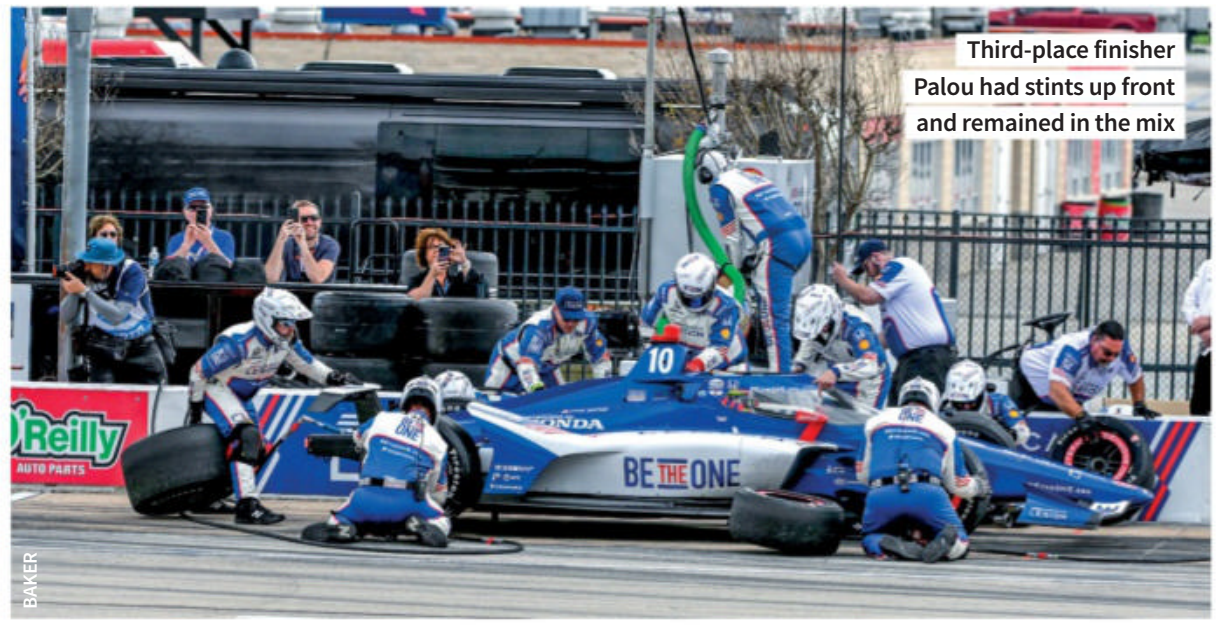
The ex-Formula 2 driver qualified 17th of 28 starters (team owner Ed Carpenter was in a third ECR car for the first oval race of the season), and was up to a legitimate 11th before half distance. A bad second stop dropped him to 15th, and a bad third stop left him outside the top 20. But through strong pace, decent fourth and fifth stops (and admittedly some attrition) he clambered back through the field.

Yes, he was a lap behind the leaders, but he was in the wheeltracks of 2022 Indy 500 winner Marcus Ericsson… And if it had been a green flag from start to finish, *everyone* would have been a lap down on the lead pair. Ilott now lies seventh in the standings.

Meanwhile, team-mate Agustin Canapino – a man who hadn't even tried an oval until he passed his rookie test a couple of weeks ago – was barely less impressive. The Argentinian (below) started 19th, gained a couple of places at the beginning and remained out of trouble to come home 12th, and top rookie, ahead of oval winners such as Carpenter, Will Power and Simon Pagenaud.

"I think we did a great job with our pace, especially on the used tyres in the middle of the race," said the former touring car driver. "That meant I could finish in a strong position. I'm very happy to finish in P12 and I'm very grateful to the whole team for the outstanding job they continue to do."

BAKER



BAKER

Third-place finisher Palou had stints up front and remained in the mix

RESULTS ROUND 2/17, TEXAS (USA), 2 APRIL (250 LAPS – 360.000 MILES)

POS	DRIVER	TEAM / CAR	TIME
1	**Josef Newgarden** (USA)	Team Penske / Dallara-Chevrolet	2h07m07.2653s
2	**Pato O'Ward** (MEX)	Arrow McLaren / Dallara-Chevrolet	+1.2838s
3	**Alex Palou** (ESP)	Chip Ganassi Racing / Dallara-Honda	+1.8839s
4	**David Malukas** (USA)	Dale Coyne Racing with HMD / Dallara-Honda	+2.1173s
5	**Scott Dixon** (NZL)	Chip Ganassi Racing / Dallara-Honda	+2.4379s
6	**Scott McLaughlin** (NZL)	Team Penske / Dallara-Chevrolet	+4.1359s
7	**Colton Herta** (USA)	Andretti Autosport with Curb-Agajanian / Dallara-Honda	+6.4228s
8	**Marcus Ericsson** (SWE)	Chip Ganassi Racing / Dallara-Honda	-1 lap
9	**Callum Ilott** (GBR)	Juncos Hollinger Racing / Dallara-Chevrolet	-1 lap
10	**Helio Castroneves** (BRA)	Meyer Shank Racing / Dallara-Honda	-1 lap
11	**Rinus van Kalmthout** (NLD)	Ed Carpenter Racing / Dallara-Chevrolet	-1 lap
12	**Agustin Canapino** (ARG)	Juncos Hollinger Racing / Dallara-Chevrolet	-1 lap
13	**Ed Carpenter** (USA)	Ed Carpenter Racing / Dallara-Chevrolet	-1 lap
14	**Romain Grosjean** (FRA)	Andretti Autosport / Dallara-Honda	248 laps-accident
15	**Benjamin Pedersen** (DNK)	AJ Foyt Enterprises / Dallara-Chevrolet	-2 laps
16	**Will Power** (AUS)	Team Penske / Dallara-Chevrolet	-2 laps
17	**Simon Pagenaud** (FRA)	Meyer Shank Racing / Dallara-Honda	-3 laps
18	**Jack Harvey** (GBR)	Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing / Dallara-Honda	-3 laps
19	**Christian Lundgaard** (DNK)	Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing / Dallara-Honda	-3 laps
20	**Conor Daly** (USA)	Ed Carpenter Racing / Dallara-Chevrolet	-4 laps
21	**Santino Ferrucci** (USA)	AJ Foyt Enterprises / Dallara-Chevrolet	-4 laps
22	**Alexander Rossi** (USA)	Arrow McLaren / Dallara-Chevrolet	-7 laps
23	**Devlin Defrancesco** (CAN)	Andretti Steinbrenner Autosport / Dallara-Honda	221 laps-accident
24	**Graham Rahal** (USA)	Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing / Dallara-Honda	219 laps-accident
25	**Sting Ray Robb** (USA)	Dale Coyne Racing with RWR / Dallara-Honda	208 laps-accident
26	**Felix Rosenqvist** (SWE)	Arrow McLaren / Dallara-Chevrolet	177 laps-accident
27	**Kyle Kirkwood** (USA)	Andretti Autosport / Dallara-Honda	97 laps-accident
28	**Takuma Sato** (JPN)	Chip Ganassi Racing / Dallara-Honda	46 laps-accident

Winner's average speed 169.917mph. **Fastest lap** **O'Ward** 23.4475s, 221.090mph.

QUALIFYING

1 Rosenqvist 220.264mph; 2 **Dixon** 219.972mph; 3 **Rossi** 219.960mph; 4 **Newgarden** 219.801mph; 5 **O'Ward** 219.619mph; 6 **Sato** 219.508mph; 7 **Palou** 219.480mph; 8 **Power** 219.355mph; 9 **Malukas** 219.256mph; 10 **Herta** 219.184mph; 11 **Grosjean** 219.165mph; 12 **Defrancesco** 219.146mph; 13 **Pedersen** 219.100mph; 14 **Ferrucci** 218.892mph; 15 **McLaughlin** 218.765mph; 16 **Ericsson** 218.698mph; 17 **Ilott** 218.427mph; 18 **Carpenter** 218.375mph; 19 **Canapino** 218.367mph; 20 **Kirkwood** 218.227mph; 21 **Castroneves** 218.196mph; 22 **Pagenaud** 218.103mph; 23 **Robb** 217.676mph; 24 **Rahal** 217.611mph; 25 **Daly** 217.457mph; 26 **Kalmthout** 216.880mph; 27 **Lundgaard** 216.210mph; 28 **Harvey** 216.103mph.

CHAMPIONSHIP

1 O'Ward 82; 2 **Ericsson** 75; 3 **Dixon** 67; 4 **Newgarden** 66; 5 **Palou** 60; 6 **Malukas** 53; 7 **Ilott** 52; 8 **McLaughlin** 48; 9 **Rossi** 40; 10 **Power** 40.

SUTTON

More Red Bull success – this time in F2

FORMULA 2
MELBOURNE (AUS)
1-2 APRIL
ROUND 3/14

Red Bull junior Ayumu Iwasa emerged victorious in Australia, securing his second Formula 2 win in as many events to lead the standings. The DAMS driver (above) became the first repeat winner of 2023 after converting pole position, set during a disrupted wet qualifying, into feature race victory for his fourth series triumph.

Hauger topped tricky sprint encounter

NG

Japanese driver Iwasa made a strong getaway to lead the opening lap, as pre-season favourite and 2022 runner-up Theo Pourchaire repelled a challenge from ART team-mate Victor Martins for second.

The top runners remained in that order until the safety car was scrambled when Hitech rookie Jak Crawford crashed at Turn 11 while battling for position with Virtuosi Racing's home hero Jack Doohan. Martins led half a dozen drivers that pitted to change from soft tyres to mediums just before the safety car, with most of the rest coming in on the following lap after the caution period started.

Frederik Vesti stayed out on his prime tyres and inherited the lead, from fellow non-stoppers Roy Nissany, Enzo Fittipaldi and Kush Maini. Iwasa ran fifth.

Prema driver Vesti was able to build a lead as Nissany held up the pack, with the Israeli holding second until he tried in vain to resist an attack by Fittipaldi through Turns 9 and 10, which allowed Maini to jump both and snatch second on lap 14 of 33.

Iwasa followed Maini through for third, and soon overcame the Indian driver for second, where he would remain until Vesti pitted from the lead on lap 26 as Nissany crashed and brought out another safety car.

Behind Iwasa and Pourchaire, Martins ran into the MP Motorsport car of Dennis Hauger, who had climbed from 10th to third, at the penultimate corner prior to the final safety car restart. That promoted Arthur Leclerc from fifth to third to score his first F2 podium, with Vesti fourth.

Hauger had endured mixed conditions to take victory in Saturday's sprint race, which included a safety car restart as rain proved difficult for many. The Norwegian led from lights to flag for his third series victory, holding off Crawford and Maini, despite a long late-race safety car period.

A wet-to-dry track and intermittent showers contributed to several drivers' races ending prematurely, with Fittipaldi and Ralph Boschung both out on the sighting lap. Maini also spun but managed to keep going and line up third behind poleman Hauger and Crawford.

Hauger held firm off the line as Ollie Bearman (later to be a victim of both a puncture and penalties in the feature event) passed fellow Ferrari Driver Academy member Arthur Leclerc for fourth. The Monegasque made it back past Bearman into Turn 9 as Martins took advantage to sweep into fifth. On lap four, Rodin Carlin driver Zane Maloney demoted Bearman to seventh.

Leclerc began looking to make a move on Maini for third, taking his chance three laps later at Turn 10, only for Maini to get back ahead into the following corner and hold his podium position.

The safety car was deployed on lap 14 after Juan Manuel Correa tagged Doohan at Turn 3, spinning the Alpine Academy driver and ending his race. Correa was handed a 10-second penalty.

Iwasa was 13th, but his Sunday success puts him eight points ahead of Pourchaire, with Vesti another eight further back.

MEGAN WHITE

Trident rookie built a handy points lead with second 2023 win

NG

Bortoleto wins again to stamp his authority

FORMULA 3
MELBOURNE (AUS)
1-2 APRIL
ROUND 2/10

Gabriel Bortoleto made it two in a row in Melbourne, dominating Sunday's Formula 3 contest to take his second consecutive feature race victory, after Zak O'Sullivan scored his first series win in the sprint. Trident rookie Bortoleto, a protege of F1 driver Fernando Alonso, extended his championship lead to 20 points after race-long pressure from Gregoire Saucy.

From pole, Bortoleto didn't put a wheel wrong over the course of the 23-lap race, holding off ART man Saucy by 0.596 seconds. Alpine junior Gabriele Mini, like Bortoleto a Formula Regional European graduate, led home a long train of cars to take the final podium spot for Hitech.

Bortoleto had maintained the lead at the start on a relatively calm opening lap, but it wasn't long before the safety car made its first appearance of the morning owing to two separate incidents. The first involved Franco Colapinto, as the MP Motorsport driver picked up a puncture from contact with Luke Browning exiting Turn 3 and subsequently crashed at Turn 5. The Briton was handed a 5s penalty for the incident.

Then, Mari Boya was involved in a scary incident at the fast Turn 9-10 complex as he launched off the rear wheel of Nikola Tsolov and hit the barriers, although Boya was able to exit his MP car unaided.

When action resumed on lap six, the order at the head of the field remained unchanged until a crash for Ido Cohen exiting Turn 3, the result of contact with Rafael Villagomez, produced the second and final caution just after half-distance.

Saucy applied pressure on Bortoleto over the final eight laps but never got close enough to attempt an overtake. Mini was 3s behind in third, leading home Trident's Leonardo Fornaroli, and Aston Martin Autosport BRDC Award winners O'Sullivan (Prema) and Browning (Hitech), who fell from sixth to eight thanks to his penalty.

Colapinto had claimed victory in the sprint before he and his MP Motorsport team-mates Boya (ninth) and Jonny Edgar (12th) were disqualified for a technical infringement. Stewards said the keel of the bodywork on all three cars was different in its geometry from the spare parts catalogue and not in conformity with the Dallara user manual. A team representative agreed that the geometry of the keel did not conform with the authorised part but could not explain how the difference arose.

Williams Academy member Colapinto crossed the line first after an incident-packed encounter, taking the lead following the first safety car restart before enduring two more. Lining up sixth, he cleared those ahead before executing a brilliant pass on poleman Sebastian Montoya.

SUTTON

O'Sullivan was handed victory after the finish

WEEKEND WINNERS

FORMULA 2
MELBOURNE (AUS)
Race 1 Dennis Hauger, MP Motorsport
Race 2 Ayumu Iwasa, DAMS

FORMULA 3
MELBOURNE (AUS)
Race 1 Zak O'Sullivan (below), Prema Racing
Race 2 Gabriel Bortoleto, Trident

NG

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O'Sullivan, up from eighth, passed the Hitech driver on lap 18 for second, taking the position around the outside at Turns 11 and 12. The Briton was more than 3s behind Colapinto when the safety car was called for the fourth and final time, with the first F3 race at Albert Park ending under caution.

MP's exclusion handed the win to O'Sullivan, from Montoya and the second Prema machine of Paul Aron. Bortoleto came through to sixth after starting 12th.

MEGAN WHITE

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Kostecki on fire – but so are the Gen3 engines

AUSTRALIAN SUPERCARS
MELBOURNE (AUS)
30 MARCH-1 APRIL
ROUND 2/12

Kostecki took his first wins and was the star of the Albert Park weekend

Brodie Kostecki emerged from the Melbourne SuperSprint with both the Larry Perkins Trophy and the Supercars series lead. But it was also a weekend of controversy at Albert Park as engine fires ruled the headlines.

The weekend got off to a mostly expected start, Shane van Gisbergen winning the opener after charging past Anton De Pasquale and Kostecki in the opening laps to take a lead he would hold until the end. The only quirk was the declaration of a wet track, which allowed drivers to skirt the multi-compound tyre rules and stick to the supersoft. That wasn't a trick Dick Johnson Racing was wise to, De Pasquale dropping down the order as Kostecki and Will Brown made it a Chevrolet Camaro 1-2-3.

On Friday Kostecki broke through for a first career Supercars victory, albeit behind the safety car after a late crash for Jack Le Brocq. James Courtney finished second but was later stripped of the result after being judged to have hit team-mate Cam Waters at the start. That promoted van Gisbergen to second and Broc Feeney to third. Nick Percat, meanwhile, encountered a bizarre engine fire on the opening lap that left his Ford Mustang badly damaged.

On Saturday there was a second engine fire, Courtney's Mustang going up in flames on the first lap of the third race. Kostecki added a second victory ahead of van Gisbergen and Brown, but it was the second fire in as many days that got tongues wagging in the paddock.

The incident prompted crisis meetings, the outcome of which was a raft of changes ahead of Sunday's finale. Among them were technical tweaks as well as a safety car start to mitigate concerns over high temperatures and fuel vapour with standing starts.

Feeney went on to win the race, the second of his career, from Andre Heimgartner and Kostecki. The third place helped Kostecki seal the Larry Perkins Trophy for the Albert Park weekend, while he also took over the series lead for the first time in his career.

ANDREW VAN LEEUWEN

Larson wins despite pit clash

NASCAR CUP
RICHMOND (USA)
2 APRIL
ROUND 7/36

HARRELSON/NKP/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Kyle Larson took advantage of a late wreck by Hendrick Motorsports Chevrolet team-mate William Byron and claimed the NASCAR Cup Series win at Richmond Raceway last Sunday.

Byron, who had led the most laps in the race, emerged from the final round of green-flag pitstops with the lead, but a caution for a spin by Tyler Reddick sent most of the lead-lap cars into the pitlane with 29 of 400 laps remaining.

Larson was first out and led the way on the restart. Two laps later, Byron got hit by Christopher Bell, knocking him out of contention. Larson got a good jump on Josh Berry on the ensuing restart and cruised to a 1.535-second victory, his first of the 2023 campaign.

The win completed a rebound from what could have been a disastrous episode earlier in the race in the pitlane, when Larson collided with Daniel Suarez. "I got into him sometime in the second stage, and we were awful after that," said Larson. "I was hoping the damage was the reason why, but they had to calm me down a little bit and get refocused."

Ross Chastain's Trackhouse Chevrolet finished third, with Joe Gibbs Racing's Bell the leading Toyota driver in fourth and Kevin Harvick's Stewart-Haas Ford fifth.

Berry was making his fourth start as a sub for Hendrick's Chase Elliott, injured in a snowboarding accident in March.

JIM UTTER

WEEKEND WINNERS

AUSTRALIAN SUPERCARS
MELBOURNE (AUS)
Race 1 Shane van Gisbergen
Triple Eight (Chevrolet Camaro)
Race 2 Brodie Kostecki
Erebus Motorsport (Chevy Camaro)
Race 3 Brodie Kostecki
Erebus Motorsport (Chevy Camaro)
Race 4 Broc Feeney
Triple Eight (Chevrolet Camaro)

NASCAR CUP
RICHMOND (USA)
Kyle Larson
Hendrick Motorsports (Chevrolet Camaro)

NLS
NURBURGRING (DEU)
Kuba Giermaziak/Jesse Krohn
Walkenhorst Motorsport (BMW M4 GT3)

BRAZILIAN STOCK CARS
GOIANIA (BRA)
Race 1 Daniel Serra
Eurofarma RC (Chevrolet)
Race 2 Thiago Camilo
A.Mattheis Motorsport (Toyota)

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Rossi's protege is too good for rivals in the rain

MOTOGP
RIO HONDO (ARG)
2 APRIL
ROUND 2/21

Bagnaia battled Marquez for second spot before crashing to 16th

He may have retired at the end of the 2021 season at the conclusion of a campaign that yielded little success, but Valentino Rossi's legacy and influence still looms large over MotoGP. His VR46 Academy, set up in 2014 to help foster a new breed of young Italian grand prix talents, has produced some real gems. First came Franco Morbidelli, its first MotoGP winner; then Francesco Bagnaia, its first champion in the premier class; and now there is Marco Bezzecchi.

Already marking out his star in a rookie season in 2022 that saw him produce a maiden podium for the VR46 Ducati squad and a first pole, Bezzecchi has now added his name to the MotoGP race winners' list. In a dominant display in wet conditions at the Argentinian Grand Prix, Bezzecchi – with his smooth riding style, big hair and even bigger personality – harked back to the glory days of Rossi as he seemingly cruised to his maiden win.

But it was anything but easy. Having stormed to second in the Saturday sprint contest in the dry, Bezzecchi woke up on Sunday morning with a feeling that he could win the main event. Then he saw the rain and became "desperate", a sight that was "a disaster for my emotions". A 10-minute warm-up in the wet on Sunday morning returned his confidence, and from the off he was impeccable. Nailing his launch off the line from second on the grid, Bezzecchi led into Turn 1 and didn't look back.

At the chequered flag he was 4.085 seconds up the road. At one stage, his lead was above 7s. As the podium order behind him didn't settle until the last lap, and heavy hitters dropped out of contention, Bezzecchi looked anything but the second-year satellite Ducati rider still learning his trade that he still is.

At the end of a near-perfect weekend, Bezzecchi leads the championship by nine points on the 2022-spec bike that carried Bagnaia to the championship. It's a bike that Bagnaia knew he wouldn't be catching last Sunday at Rio Hondo, but the factory rider was on for a certain second to cap off a trickier weekend than anticipated. That was until he crashed on lap 17.

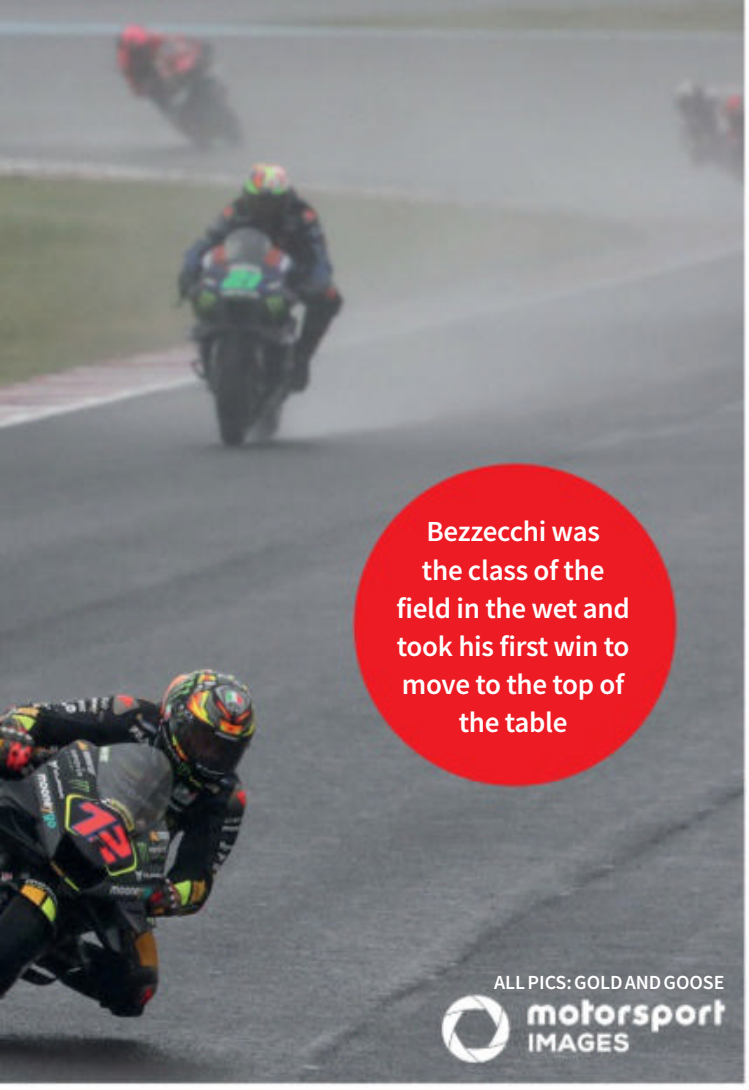
For the first 14 laps Bagnaia had sat comfortably in third before mounting an attack on poleman Alex Marquez on lap 15 of 25 that moved him up to second. Without any warning, or any real reason, a "very angry" Bagnaia slid off his factory Ducati and dropped to 16th, where he would finish.

Hoping he'd eradicated these types of errors (his Argentinian escapade without explanation right now) from a 2022 season in which he made four unforced race-ending exits, Bagnaia was harsh on himself. But, with the absence of team-mate Enea Bastianini and Honda's Marc Marquez through injury, unexpected wet grip issues for the Aprilias and a tough weekend for Fabio Quartararo, Bagnaia's title defence hasn't taken any serious damage.

A hard-charging Johann Zarco on his Pramac Ducati, who at one stage was over 8s away from a podium he couldn't even see, denied Marquez a shot at equalling his best MotoGP result. Zarco moved up to third ahead of a resurgent Morbidelli on lap 23, and overhauled Marquez for second on the final tour to plonk himself in the middle of an all-satellite Ducati podium – the first for any marque since 1996.

A brace of fourths across the weekend for Morbidelli was Yamaha's only positive from a tough weekend in Argentina, as Quartararo battled rear grip and braking problems. Throwing multiple set-up changes at his

Bezzecchi started second but led every one of the 25 laps



Bezzecchi was the class of the field in the wet and took his first win to move to the top of the table

ALL PICS: GOLD AND GOOSE motorsport IMAGES

Binder won the sprint race for KTM but was then last in the GP!

bikes throughout the weekend, he felt he could have salvaged a top-five in the GP had LCR's Takaaki Nakagami not punted him out of 10th to 16th on lap one at Turn 7 with a move that went unpunished by the stewards — much to Quartararo's frustrations. Still, with relatively few crashes in front, Quartararo was able to recover to seventh. But for now, he admits, there can be no thoughts of titles until Yamaha sorts the numerous issues it has with its troublesome M1.

There would be no comeback through the field for KTM's Brad Binder in the GP. Having stunningly risen from 15th on the grid to win the 12-lap sprint, he was nudged off his RC16 by Maverick Vinales' Aprilia on the opening lap of the main race. Binder ended up last of the depleted 17-rider grid chasing Bagnaia across the line, while team-mate Jack Miller was sixth.

LEWIS DUNCAN

NEXT REPORT

GP OF THE AMERICAS
20 APRIL ISSUE

POWERED BY motorsport STATS

RESULTS ROUND 2/21, TERMAS DE RIO HONDO (ARG), 2 APRIL (25 LAPS – 74.658 MILES)

POS	RIDER	TEAM	TIME
1	**Marco Bezzecchi** (ITA)	VR46 Ducati	44m28.518s
2	**Johann Zarco** (FRA)	Pramac Ducati	+4.085s
3	**Alex Marquez** (ESP)	Gresini Ducati	+4.681s
4	**Franco Morbidelli** (ITA)	Yamaha	+7.581s
5	**Jorge Martin** (ESP)	Pramac Ducati	+9.746s
6	**Jack Miller** (AUS)	KTM	+10.562s
7	**Fabio Quartararo** (FRA)	Yamaha	+11.095s
8	**Luca Marini** (ITA)	VR46 Ducati	+13.694s
9	**Alex Rins** (ESP)	LCR Honda	+14.327s
10	**Fabio Di Giannantonio** (ITA)	Gresini Ducati	+18.515s
11	**Augusto Fernandez** (ESP)	GasGas Tech 3 KTM	+19.380s
12	**Maverick Vinales** (ESP)	Aprilia	+26.091s
13	**Takaaki Nakagami** (JPN)	LCR Honda	+28.394s
14	**Raul Fernandez** (ESP)	Aprilia RNF	+29.894s
15	**Aleix Espargaro** (ESP)	Aprilia	+36.183s
16	**Francesco Bagnaia** (ITA)	Ducati	+47.753s
17	**Brad Binder** (ZAF)	KTM	+48.106s
NS	**Joan Mir** (ESP)	Honda	injury

WEEKEND WINNERS

MOTO2
RIO HONDO (ARG)
Tony Arbolino
Marc VDS Racing (Kalex)

MOTO 3
RIO HONDO (ARG)
Tatsuki Suzuki (below)
Leopard Racing (Honda)

Winner's average speed 100.718mph **Fastest lap** **Bezzecchi 1m45.510s**, 101.892mph.

QUALIFYING 2 **1 Marquez 1m43.881s**; 2 **Bezzecchi** 1m44.053s; 3 **Bagnaia** 1m44.739s; 4 **Morbidelli** 1m45.982s; 5 **Vinales** 1m46.236s; 6 **Zarco** 1m46.463s; 7 **Marini** 1m46.588s; 8 **Martin** 1m46.635s; 9 **Espargaro** 1m46.878s; 10 **Quartararo** 1m47.122s; 11 **Nakagami** 1m48.209s; 12 **Rins** 1m48.694s.

QUALIFYING 1 **1 Marquez 1m47.317s**; 2 **Quartararo** 1m47.385s; 3 **R Fernandez** 1m47.420s; 4 **Giannantonio** 1m47.456s; 5 **Binder** 1m47.511s; 6 **Miller** 1m47.671s; 7 **A Fernandez** 1m48.420s; 8 **Mir** 1m48.585s.

SPRINT RACE (12 LAPS – 35.836 MILES)
1 Binder 19m56.873s; 2 **Bezzecchi** +0.072s; 3 **Marini** +0.877s; 4 **Morbidelli** +2.354s; 5 **Marquez** +2.462s; 6 **Bagnaia** +2.537s; 7 **Vinales** +2.643s; 8 **Martin** +3.754s; 9 **Quartararo** +4.856s; 10 **Miller** +5.143s; 11 **Nakagami** +5.574s; 12 **Giannantonio** +6.965s; 13 **Zarco** +7.568s; 14 **R Fernandez** +7.725s; 15 **Rins** +8.687s; 16 **A Fernandez** +9.040s; R **Espargaro** 8 laps; R **Mir** 0 laps.
Winner's average speed 107.788mph. **Fastest lap** **Bezzecchi 1m38.777s**, 108.838mph.

RIDERS' CHAMPIONSHIP **1 Bezzecchi 50**; 2 **Bagnaia** 41; 3 **Zarco** 35; 4 **Marquez** 33; 5 **Vinales** 32; 6 **Miller** 25; 7 **Martin** 22; 8 **Binder** 22; 9 **Morbidelli** 21; 10 **Quartararo** 18.

CONSTRUCTORS' CHAMPIONSHIP **1 Ducati 71**; 2 **KTM** 38; 3 **Aprilia** 32; 4 **Yamaha** 27; 5 **Honda** 20.

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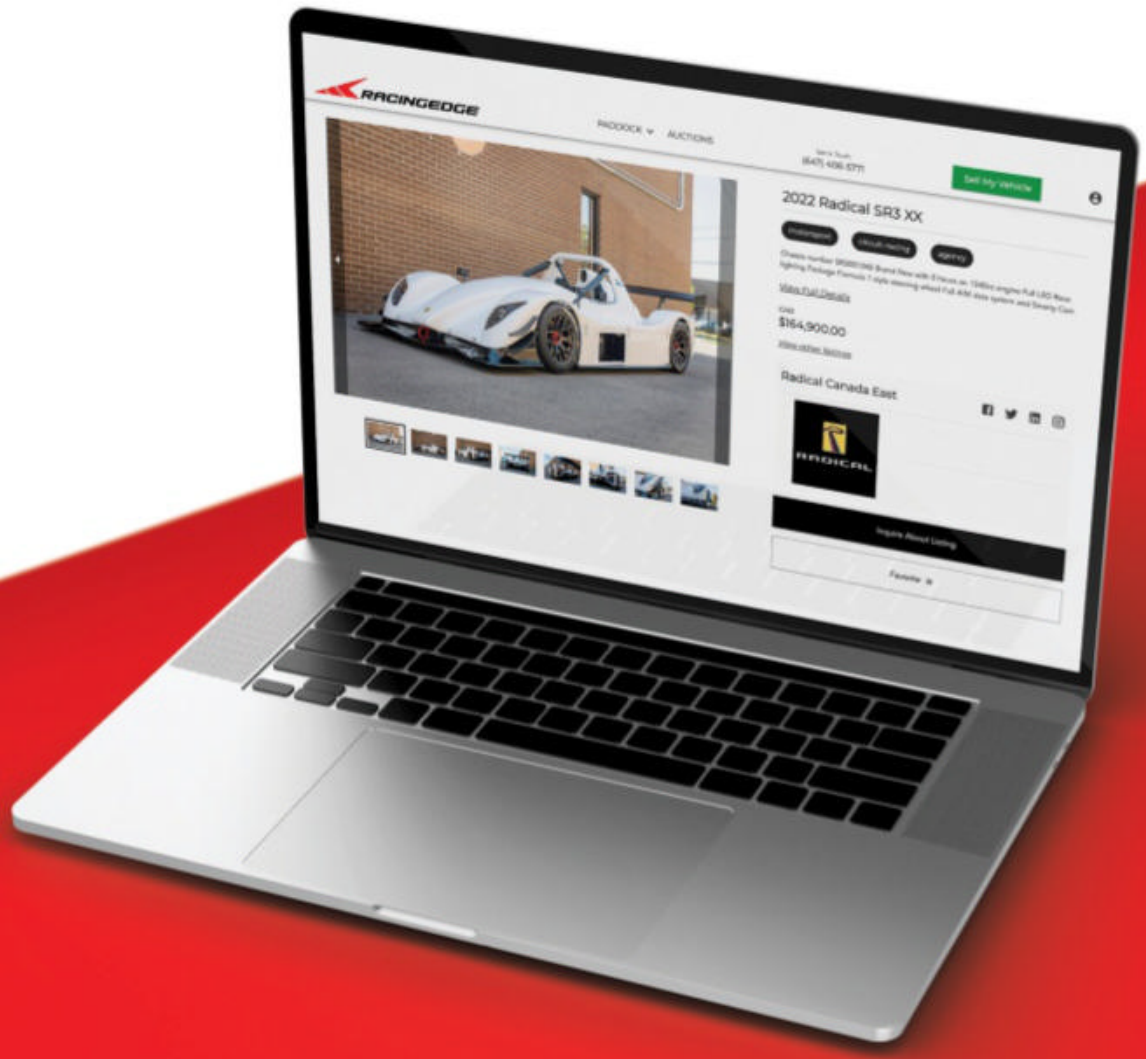

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- Optimising content and copy to suit different social media platforms and their varied requirements
- Community Management and engagement with audiences across social channels
- Social media ideation across hub and hygiene content
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Countdown to the British GT battle

The key contenders for hotly anticipated Oulton opener

GB3 STARS READY FOR HARD-FOUGHT ACTION

NEW HONDA FOR SMILEY'S TCR UK DEFENCE

AUSSIE SINGLE-SEATER ENTERS MONOPOSTO FRAY

BRITISH GT'S PINNACLE?

No fewer than eight factory drivers will race in British GT3 this season, making it arguably the most competitive in the championship's history

STEFAN MACKLEY

PHOTOGRAPHY **JEP**

"I'm convinced, without fail, I have the best driver in GT racing with me." It's quite a statement to make about your team-mate, but John Ferguson has every reason to believe just that about the driver he'll be racing alongside in this season's British GT3 Championship, which kicks off at Oulton Park this weekend.

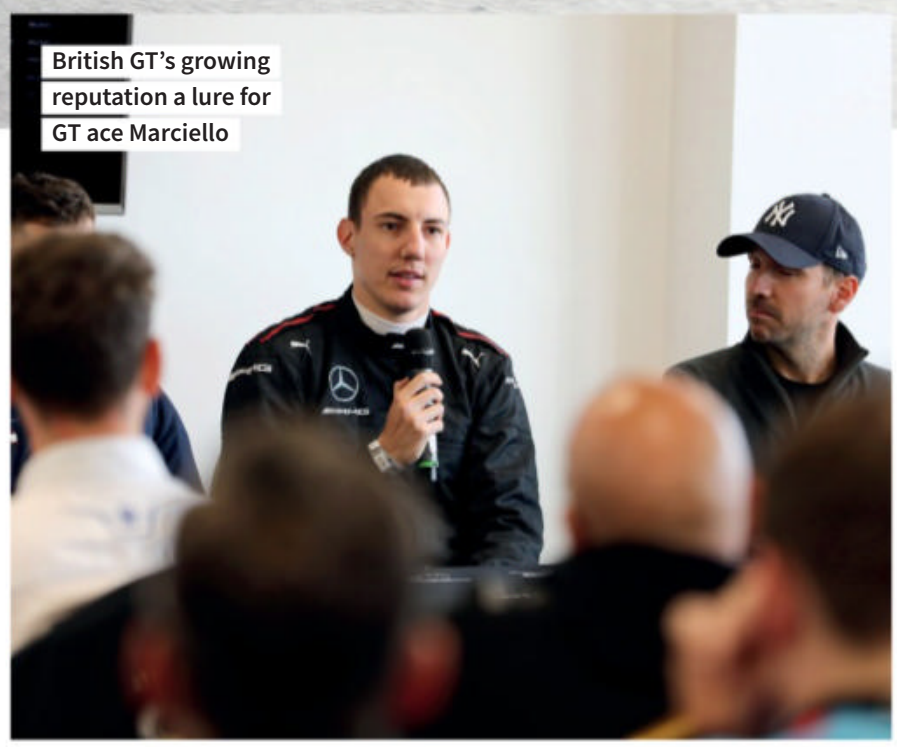
Regarded as one of the fastest if not *the* fastest GT3 driver in the world, Raffaele Marciello is a man who knows how to win titles. The Mercedes factory driver, who is reigning GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup and ADAC GT Masters champion, has clearly made his mark on the world of GT racing since switching his focus from single-seaters in 2017.

The former Ferrari Driver Academy member is just one of eight factory drivers who will compete in British GT's top division this season, making it arguably the most competitive in the championship's history as 16 full-time crews have been confirmed.

Over the past 12 months, Marciello has gradually become aware of British GT's growing reputation, in part due to the success of fellow Mercedes Pro driver and team-mate Jules Gounon last season. "I think last year I started to follow a bit more because in the past I never really followed [the championship]," admits Marciello. "I know the tracks are mega from TOCA in the past when I was playing [video] games, so I always wanted to drive here. I spoke with Jules, he loves this championship. I loved when I came to Brands Hatch and Silverstone [in other series], [it was] always full of fans and people."

The Swiss-Italian came close to a one-off outing in the championship last year but prior racing commitments meant he was unable to enter a round. However, it instigated a dialogue with Ferguson, which continued for nine months and ultimately

Ferguson's partnership with Marciello in RAM Mercedes a clear statement of intent



British GT's growing reputation a lure for GT ace Marciello

"I KNOW THE TRACKS ARE MEGA FROM WHEN I WAS PLAYING VIDEO GAMES, SO I ALWAYS WANTED TO DRIVE HERE"

led them to partner together at RAM Racing sharing a GT3 Mercedes in 2023.

Despite having never raced in British GT before, Marciello is all too aware that his Am driver will be the one who can make the difference come the final results and that consistency will be crucial if they are to challenge for the crown. "In this championship, I think more than to be quick you need to score points," he says. "Even if you finish every time in fourth then you can win the championship, so more than the pure pace it's important to stay out of the gravel. With so many GT4 [cars] it's really easy to have contact so we need to be safe."

For Ferguson, having a driver of Marciello's calibre alongside is a firm sign of his intention, and ahead of the season he's been putting in the work behind the scenes – losing 15kg over the winter, as "you can't get Mr Marciello and not make an effort".

This year will be just Ferguson's third in endurance racing, having made his British GT debut with a Toyota GR Supra GT4 in 2021 – taking a best result of two third places – before moving up into the GT3 division with RAM last year. A maiden win came at the second Snetterton race with Ulysse de Pauw, but Ferguson's season came to an abrupt halt after he damaged the car in practice at Brands Hatch and missed the final two rounds.

Ahead of the 2023 campaign – which begins with the traditional Oulton double-header – the 49-year-old already knows the areas he needs to improve upon to give himself and Marciello the best possible chance. "I struggled with new tyres in qualifying, that was my biggest downfall, and a heavy fuel load at the start of a race," says Ferguson. "But the Mercedes is a very good car. It holds its tyres so it's just a matter of trying to keep myself in the mix at the start and, by the end of the stint, the car really comes into its own."

Last year was the perfect campaign for RAM. It secured the GT3 drivers' title with Ian Loggie as well as the teams' championship, but the squad has undergone significant changes over the past 12 months. Team founder Dan Shufflebottom departed at the end of 2022, with British Touring Car race winner Tim Sugden now team manager after Ferguson bought the squad in February last year. The personnel changes were one of the reasons Loggie has moved to 2 Seas for the upcoming campaign, where he will look to defend his title alongside Gounon. »

Balfe and Mitchell make a strong pairing in Barwell Lamborghini

"RAM was a great team, but a bit of politics was going on – as there always is in motorsport," says Loggie, who spent four seasons with the team. "I'm here to drive rather than get involved in politics, so I think I've done the right thing – 2 Seas will do a great job."

The Scot is certainly no stranger to the Anglo-Bahraini squad, having driven with the team before, including taking a class podium at the Gulf 12 Hours last January, while the outfit has recorded wins in British GT.

"Pretty high I would say," says Loggie on his chances of defending the British GT3 crown. "I think we've got a decent driver line-up. That said, the grid is full of amazing drivers, so this year is going to be tougher than last year but, like always, I don't think you have to be the fastest, I think you have to be the most consistent.

"Don't make mistakes and use that experience. I've been doing it for God knows how many years now but a lot of last year was down to not making mistakes."

Loggie recorded just one retirement last season after being the innocent victim in an opening-lap crash at Silverstone but, perhaps more ominously, he achieved a podium in all four races that Gounon competed alongside him. With the Frenchman returning for a full-time campaign in 2023, there's every reason to believe that a second title could be heading Loggie's way.

One of the biggest threats on the grid, though, could well come from the other side of the 2 Seas garage. James Cottingham remains with the squad having finished fourth in the 2022 standings despite not quite managing an overall victory. He will be joined by four-time British GT champion Jonny Adam, the current Aston Martin factory driver having raced with 2 Seas at two rounds last year. Clashes with the European Le Mans Series mean Adam will miss the three-hour race at Silverstone as well as the Donington Park decider, but his experience could well guide Cottingham to within a shot of the title come the final round.

BRITISH GT3 CALENDAR

RD	VENUE	DATE
1	**Oulton Park** (2x 1 hour)	10 April
2	**Silverstone** (3 hours)	7 May
3	**Donington Park** (2 hours)	28 May
4	**Snetterton** (2x 1 hour)	18 June
5	**Algarve Circuit** (3 hours)	23 July
6	**Brands Hatch** (2 hours)	10 September
7	**Donington Park** (2 hours)	22 October

"I DON'T THINK YOU HAVE TO BE THE FASTEST, I THINK YOU HAVE TO BE THE MOST CONSISTENT"

Adam's former team-mate Andrew Howard will once again embark on a full-time campaign, the Beechdean team owner and double GT3 champion (2013 and 2015) this time alongside factory Aston Martin driver Ross Gunn – the GT4 champion from 2015.

Other factory drivers on the roster this season include Rob Bell, who will drive a McLaren 720S Evo alongside Mark Radcliffe for Optimum Motorsport, and Marvin Kirchhofer, who will partner Alex West in a Garage 59-run 720S Evo.

Dan Harper, the 2019 Porsche Carrera Cup GB champion, is another factory driver who will make his debut in the series having spent the past three years racing with BMW in the Nurburgring Endurance Series and GT World Challenge. He will race a Century Motorsport-run BMW M4 GT3 alongside Darren Leung, the Am driver having won on his British GT debut in the Donington Park finale last year alongside Alexander Sims.

One of the strongest driver line-ups on paper comes in the form of Sandy Mitchell and Shaun Balfe at the wheel of a Barwell Motorsport-run Lamborghini Huracan EVO2. Balfe has become a nearly-man in British GT, finishing runner-up in 2003 and taking third in 2019, losing out on the title by just five points on that occasion despite missing the first two races at Oulton Park.

He and team-mate Adam Carroll won the opening round of last season at Oulton Park in an Audi R8 LMS GT3 Evo II, but they departed the championship after a puncture caused a non-score in the three-hour race Silverstone and the duo finished a disappointing eighth at Donington.

Outside of the teams with factory drivers, there are some familiar faces who could well challenge at the front. Among then are Marcus Clutton and Morgan Tillbrook, the Enduro Motorsport pairing having taken two wins last season aboard their 720S before finishing third in the final table. With the new 720S Evo model at the duo's disposal, victories are highly likely again, even against the numerous factory drivers that are on the grid this season.

Reigning GT Cup champion Simon Orange also graduates full-time into British GT alongside Michael O'Brien, having impressed in the Donington decider last season, again at the wheel of a 720S.

Ferguson's belief that Marciello is the best GT driver will certainly be put to the test over the season's nine-race calendar, as they'll need every ounce of skill against one of the most competitive fields ever assembled by British GT. All of which makes the 2023 season one of the most highly anticipated in the championship's history.

R Racing duo could be the ones to beat in 2023

Miller took two wins last year in British GT4

NEW AND OLD TARGET GT4 TITLE

Young guns and returning champions promise to make British GT's second division one to remember

STEFAN MACKLEY

PHOTOGRAPHY **JEP**

The British GT4 class promises to be just as competitive in 2023, with new and returning faces making up the 16 full-time entry list that contains no fewer than seven manufacturers.

The two leading crews from last year – champions Sennan Fielding/Richard Williams (Steller Motorsport) and Darren Turner/Matt Topham (Newbridge Motorsport) – are both absent from the grid this season, leaving the way open for new challengers to take the crown. One of those could well be Josh Miller, the 17-year-old having starred in his and R Racing's inaugural British GT campaigns last year, as two wins – the first of which at Snetterton gave Miller the record for the youngest winning crew alongside Jamie Day – allowed them to finish third overall at the end of the year. Miller will be joined in the Aston Martin Vantage by Seb Hopkins, who himself impressed with Team Parker Racing on his British GT debut last term, and together the duo will make a formidable Silver-Silver pairing.

"With a second year of experience under our belts I think it's all to play for this year, I definitely think we can be in with a chance," says Miller. "We've just got to keep our heads down and we should be there at the end of the season. You've got to minimise all mistakes, and I think that's the crucial thing in British GT – finish consistently throughout. It's not always all about winning and pushing as hard as you can, it's just about consistent points scoring and at the end of the year it adds up."

Cowley and Academy will be a threat for the title

Matt Cowley is another driver capable of mounting a serious title challenge this term, remaining with Academy Motorsport for a fourth season having recorded wins in the previous three campaigns. This year he will partner Erik Evans in the Ford Mustang, the young American having made a one-off appearance in the Donington Park finale last year with Will Moore.

"We know that it's a winning formula, Academy and the Mustang," says Cowley. "We've been title contenders every year we've been in it, we've just had bad luck and things haven't gone our way. Hopefully this year we can have a bit of luck and maybe do a bit of a better job."

One of the dark-horse pairings could be Aston Millar and Josh Rowledge, the 2021 and 2022 Ginetta Junior champions joining forces at the wheel of a new-for-2023 McLaren Artura operated by DTO Motorsport. Despite both drivers being new to the championship, Millar believes they have every chance of challenging for wins and ultimately the title.

"We've got a great team around us so hopefully we can use their experience to push us along as well – every day we go out we're learning more," says Millar, who is now a McLaren Academy Driver. "Some people might say we've got no experience [in British GT] but we've just got to learn the hard way."

While this year's grid contains plenty of new faces, there are also some previously successful drivers making a welcome return to the championship. Dan Vaughan, the 2020 GT4 champion alongside Jamie Caroline, and Stuart Middleton, champion in 2017 with Will Tregurtha, will both compete this season. Vaughan will race alongside Zac Meakin in a Team Parker-run Porsche 718 Cayman, while Middleton will partner Freddie Tomlinson in a Ginetta G56 operated by Raceway.

Century Motorsport will also likely feature near the head of the field with two new-for-2023 BMW M4s driven by Michael Johnston/Chris Salkeld and Carl Cavers/Lewis Plato. With these two pairings, plus a further five Pro-Am line-ups helping to make up the GT4 field, there's an added element to the overall championship that once again promises to go to the Donington Park finale in October.

SEASON PREVIEW

GB3'S MOST OPEN SEASON TO DATE

With a number of returning faces and close testing times, predicting who will come out on top is far from straightforward

STEVE WHITFIELD

PHOTOGRAPHY **JEP**

The GB3 Championship is on the rise. Following one of its most successful seasons in 2022, a series record of 24 drivers are confirmed ahead of this weekend's Oulton Park opener, and a grid of 27 cars could even be reached later this year. The series will again use the Tatuus MSV-022 chassis, which was widely praised throughout the paddock during its first season of use in 2022 and, if testing is anything to go by, lap times are set to be even quicker this year.

The series has gained international status from the FIA, allowing a second international event at Zandvoort to be added to the calendar for the first time alongside Spa. With two visits to Silverstone's Grand Prix layout once again part of the schedule, it means half of this season's eight rounds will take place at current Formula 1 venues.

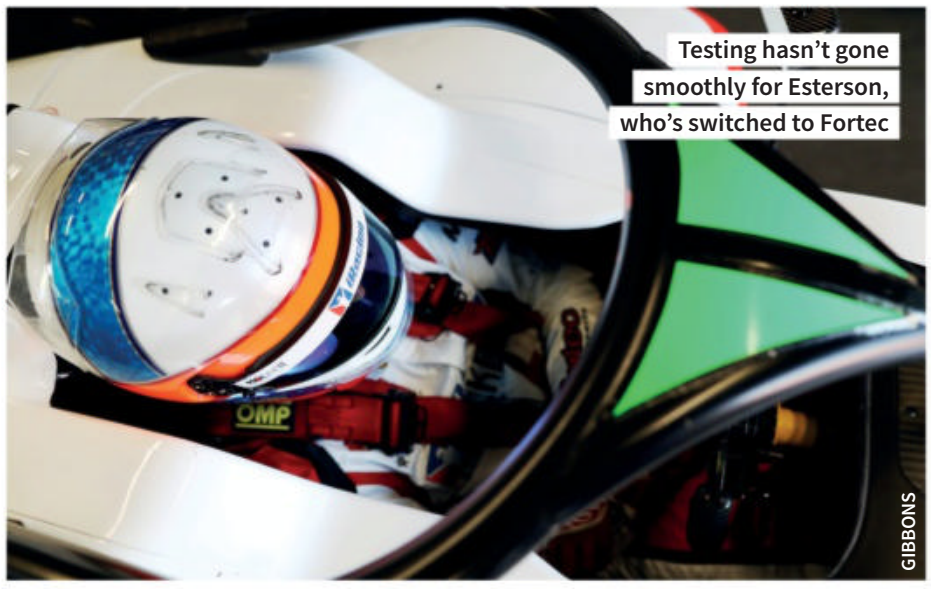
While last season's championship generally went to form – Hitech GP's Luke Browning delivered on his 'favourite' tag despite being pushed all the way by the consistent Joel Granfors – the 2023 fight appears to be wide open.

Reigning British Formula 4 champion Alex Dunne, who was also runner-up in Italian F4 last year, is aiming to follow in the footsteps of Browning with Hitech in GB3, and is considered one of the favourites. And while confident of being in the mix, the Irishman feels that the competition will make it hard to repeat his dominant form of 11 victories during his British F4 campaign.

"I definitely don't think I'm going to do what I did in British F4 last year," admits Dunne. "I think this year it's going to be really, really close. From what I've seen from pre-season testing I think there's maybe 10 drivers who are good enough to win the championship. The top 20 were separated by nine tenths. I think sometimes in F4 you maybe had the top five separated by nine tenths. Obviously, it's a new car and a new championship for me but I'm feeling really confident."

Dunne will be partnered by fellow F4 graduate Michael Shin and French F4 race winner Souta Arao. The Japanese is backed by the Red Bull junior programme, showing the growing stature of GB3 as a step on the ladder to F1.

After finishing fourth overall with three wins last term, Callum Voisin is the highest-placed driver to continue in the series and also starts as one of the strong favourites with Rodin Carlin. His qualifying pace, which secured him the Jack Cavill Cup in 2022, could be decisive in a strong field. "We are just counting down the days to round one, I feel like I want to get it under way now," says the 17-year-old. "Testing has gone very well. Being my second year and a more experienced driver, I know what to expect and how to win. There's stuff to improve on, but even watching my onboards


Testing hasn't gone smoothly for Esterson, who's switched to Fortec

GIBBONS

Dunne is confident but knows his dominant 2022 F4 form will be hard to repeat in GB3

ROBERTS

I feel like a more complete driver from 12 months ago."

John Bennett, who like Voisin turned a few heads as a single-seater rookie last year, moves to Rodin Carlin for his sophomore season. Costa Toparis will start with less experience than his two team-mates but the Australian, who will turn 16 just two days before his debut, has put in eye-catching times so far.

JHR Developments has expanded to a three-car line-up, with 2021 British F4 champion Matthew Rees remaining with the team after securing one win at Brands Hatch last year. He will be joined by Joseph Loake, who graduates with JHR from British F4, and GB3 sophomore David Morales. Rees has been among the testing pacesetters as he looks to build on a strong end to last season and the Welshman is another serious title contender.

McKenzy Cresswell struggled in his first year of GB3 with Chris Dittmann Racing in 2022, but the 17-year-old appears reinvigorated following a switch to Elite Motorsport over the winter. He has been consistently putting in fast times, which makes him another potential contender for the crown. Cresswell is joined by British F4 graduate Oliver Stewart, who has also impressed so far. "I'm feeling very confident with the car, feeling really good in the team, we've all gelled really well," says Cresswell. "I feel I have a better foundation to prove what I can do in the car. We struggled last year and

"FROM WHAT I'VE SEEN THERE'S MAYBE 10 DRIVERS WHO ARE GOOD ENOUGH TO WIN THE CHAMPIONSHIP"

we felt we needed a change."

Max Esterson, whose form tailed off last year after taking a maiden win with Douglas Motorsport at Donington Park, will also be hoping to fight for the title following a switch to Fortec Motorsports but has experienced some trouble-filled test days. After finishing runner-up in GB4 last year, team-mate Jarrod Waberski could be a dark horse and has looked very fast on occasion.

The field has been strengthened further by the addition of several interesting names from overseas, proving the international appeal of the championship. Gerrard Xie, who dominated Chinese F4 last year with 12 wins from 14 starts, joins Hillspeed, while Brazilian F4 runner-up Lucas Staico will debut with Douglas, but it's his team-mate who could spring a surprise. Backed by Alfa Romeo F1 title sponsor Orlen, Tymek Kucharczyk was a winner in Spanish F4 last year and has shown flashes of rapid pace in testing. With such strength in depth, this could be a classic year for GB3.

A three-time winner last season, strong favourite Voisin can't wait to get started

ROBERTS

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Restart driver will give the new Civic TCR car its global debut at Snetterton

Smiley to debut new Civic TCR machine

TCR UK

Reigning TCR UK champion Chris Smiley will give a global race debut to the new FL5 version of the Honda Civic Type R TCR when he begins his title defence at Snetterton this weekend.

The British Touring Car Championship race winner claimed the TCR UK crown at his first attempt last year, piloting the FK7 Civic run by Restart Racing.

The FL5 has been developed by Honda's customer racing specialist JAS Motorsport of Italy with World Touring Car Cup runner-up Nestor Girolami. It features a revised chassis and aerodynamics, plus upgraded brakes and transmission.

Restart collected its car last week – after the TCR UK launch day at Donington Park – and Smiley gave it a run at Spa.

"It's a big thing for Honda to trust us to launch the new car," said Smiley. "We haven't done a lot of running but, to be honest, with all the running I think we've seen most people do, it's either been very cold or very wet. We don't race in those conditions so, it's OK to get your eye back in again, but I think for performance testing it's very, very hard to judge.

"It's going to be an unknown on the UK circuits and with the Goodyear tyre. The tracks in the UK are tight and twisty so there's going to be a few changes we're probably going to have to make to it, but it's a quality product.

"JAS are sending over a few engineers along with the car that are familiar with running it as well, so they're making as big an effort as we are to make sure it's right."

Two more TCR UK drivers attracting manufacturer support from Europe are multiple race winners Alex Ley and Bradley Kent, who have been named as Hyundai Customer Racing Junior Drivers. A programme of mentoring and testing began with Ley trying a BRC Racing Team Hyundai i30 N at Misano last month.

"It was my first meeting with Alex and he did a very good job," said driver mentor and touring car great Gabriele Tarquini. "We are focused on this young programme to let them grow up as professional drivers.

"If they are good enough, and we are good enough to choose the best ones, probably in two, three or four years' time we will see some of these young drivers jumping on the World Tour or the next level."

MARK PAULSON

Smiley took the TCR UK title last season

JEP

FILES SET FOR ONE-OFF TCR UK APPEARANCE

TCR UK

Multiple TCR champion Josh Files will make his UK series debut at Snetterton this weekend, piloting an Area Motorsport-run Hyundai Elantra N TCR (below) for its own UK debut.

Files won both the Renault UK Clio Cup and Clio Eurocup in 2013 before focusing his racing on the continent. He secured back-to-back titles in TCR Germany in 2016 and 2017, before adding Middle East and European crowns in 2017 and 2019. Files finished third in the standings in TCR Europe last year in the Elantra, which had been set for a British debut with Jamie Tonks until he had to withdraw from the series.

Files will continue in his role as a driver coach for Area. His race outing this weekend is currently set to be a one-off while Luke Sargeant chases the requisite signatures to upgrade his licence by racing in the supporting Civic Cup.

"Having raced so successfully in TCR championships across Europe and Asia, it's great to be able to race in front of my fans in the UK," said Files. "I owe many thanks to [Area's] Rob [Baker] and Richard [Humphrey], as well as to Luke Sargeant at RS Vehicle Sales for letting me take out the Elantra."

Also joining the grid at Snetterton are race winners Adam Shepherd (Area Hyundai i30 N) and Darelle Wilson (DW Racing Vauxhall Astra). Dan Kirby (Zest Cupra Leon) also returns after a year out, having finished third in 2021.

MARK PAULSON

JEP

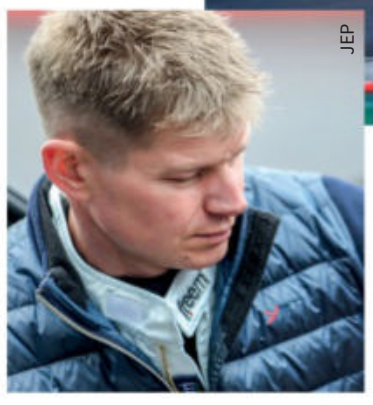
Keen to sub for Adam and Gounon in BGT

British GT regular Keen has been getting to grips with Merc

BRITISH GT

British GT's most successful driver in terms of race wins, Phil Keen, will contest three rounds of the championship this season for 2 Seas Motorsport.

Keen, who has taken 19 overall GT3 victories and finished runner-up in the standings on three occasions, will stand in for both Jonny Adam and Jules Gounon at various points this season due to their commitments as Aston Martin and Mercedes factory drivers, respectively.



Four-time British GT champion Adam will miss the second round at Silverstone and the Donington Park finale, while Gounon will be absent for British GT's maiden visit to the Algarve circuit. Keen will stand in on each occasion, twice alongside James Cottingham and once with reigning British GT3 champion Ian Loggie – both in Mercedes-AMG GT3s.

"I've raced against Ian a long time and we get on really well, and I've known James for a long time so it should be fun," said Keen, who competed in British GT with Michael Igoe in 2022. "The first time I ran with the team was the media day at Donington Park. It feels like a good car but I've not done an awful lot. I've not had any proper dry running but it feels good in the rain. I did the media day, did a few laps around Silverstone and a few laps at Oulton."

Loggie has joined 2 Seas from RAM Racing, having won the title with the latter team last season, while Cottingham remains with the Anglo-Bahraini outfit. 2 Seas has won races in the championship previously, including the Silverstone three-hour race in a one-off appearance in 2021 with Hunter Abbott and Martin Kodric.

Keen added: "Really looking forward to working with 2 Seas Motorsport – they are a great team, they have made me feel very welcome, and I feel like I've been there a season already. I'm looking forward to working with everyone to keep the championship momentum!"

In the GT4 division, former DTM racer Esmee Hawkey will join Toro Verde and make her British GT debut this season. The 2020 Porsche Carrera Cup GB Pro-Am champion will partner Joe Wheeler in one of the team's Ginetta G56 GT4s.

STEFAN MACKLEY

British GT champion team Steller to Europe

LE MANS CUP

Title-winning British GT squad Steller Motorsport is progressing into European competition this year as it targets climbing the sportscar ladder to Le Mans.

Steller pairing Sennan Fielding and Richard Williams took the British GT4 crown last season at the wheel of an Audi R8 LMS. But, having been a long-standing stalwart of the British category, the team is now moving to the Le Mans Cup, where Fielding will be joined by historics racer James Wood at the wheel of a GT3 Audi that will carry the logos of Jackie Stewart's Race Against Dementia charity.

"We had great success last year and we reached a bit of a crossroads where we wanted a new challenge," explained team manager Max Daymond. "With the outlook with the ACO for the next couple of years, GT racing is very exciting, and so it seems like the perfect time to get onto that pyramid."

Steller managing director Gary Blackham has previous history at Le Mans, having been involved in the works Audi operation in the late 1990s, and his team has aspirations to climb the ranks.

"Our vision is definitely to try to get to the very top of the tree but we're going to enjoy the process and that starts with Barcelona [Le Mans Cup opener]," added Daymond. "We're confident but, until you're out there against the competition, you never really know."

Fielding (l) and Wood will race in the Le Mans Cup

Daymond said the team has been focusing on getting to grips with the Michelin rubber compared to the Pirellis it has previously used, and also did not rule out a British GT return. "We're certainly keeping that option well and truly open but, for the moment, fully focused on the plan ahead," he said.

STEPHEN LICKORISH

Three-time BRC champion Higgins (r) to join son Ben

Higgins Jr won Legends rookie title last season

GRAHAM HOLBON

Rally star Higgins to join his son on Legends grid at Cadwell

LEGENDS

Triple British Rally champion Mark Higgins is due to join his son Ben on the Legends grid for the season opener at Cadwell Park next weekend.

Alongside his BRC titles in 1997, 2005 and 2006, Higgins also claimed the 2018 British Rallycross spoils and has worked as a stunt driver on recent James Bond films. His latest assignment is a return to the Legends category, in which his son was rookie champion last year, tackling the Lincolnshire opener with Beaty Motorsport, and he may also make further appearances later in the year.

"I wanted to have a play in Legends and this opportunity came up, and it's a great chance to race with my son Ben – I hope he beats me!" said Higgins. "Cadwell is more like a rally stage than a track, so I'm looking forward to it. I did do a couple of Legends races years ago but it's been a long time, so I've no idea how quick we'll be. It should be a lot of fun."

Meanwhile, 2006-07 Legends champion Chris Grieve is also due to make a return to the category this year, having raced motorcycles since his previous title wins. He is set to contest the three-event Elite Cup competition across Legends' British Touring Car outings.

HOBSON BACK TO CIVIC CUP WITH TOP AREA SQUAD

CIVIC CUP

Former Civic Cup frontrunner Danny Hobson will return to the championship this weekend at the wheel of an EP3 run in conjunction with Area Motorsport.

Multiple race winner Hobson last raced in the Civic Cup in 2019 before focusing on the 750 Motor Club's Type R Trophy, where his DH Racing team successfully ran a fleet of cars. With no clashing rounds, that programme will continue alongside Hobson's own racing in the Civic Cup.

"I made a return [in the Type R Trophy] last year and had a race win and dominated at Donington, and thought, 'Do you know what? Let's see if we can go back to Civic Cup,'" said Hobson. "I've matured a bit as a driver, learned a lot more about the cars. See if we can mix it with some very good lads in the championship. We've not entered it to make numbers up – I want to try and win."

Elsewhere, 2021 Civic Cup champion Alistair Camp has switched to an expanded Pro Alloys Racing line-up. After impressing in his first front-wheel-drive campaign last year, former Mazda MX-5 Supercup frontrunner Jack Harding has joined multiple race winner Ben Sharpe's new team.

MARK PAULSON

Taylor, Solley and Byrne to spearhead Graves bid

MINI CHALLENGE TROPHY

Mini Challenge Trophy race winners Nicky Taylor and Alex Solley will spearhead Graves Motorsport's eight-car line-up in the series this year.

While neither Taylor nor Solley won a race last year, having each triumphed in 2021, both were regular frontrunners and Taylor finished fourth in the standings. Now, they are planning to launch title bids as they attempt to follow in Nelson King's footsteps and make it back-to-back championships for Graves, starting at Brands Hatch this weekend.

"A real highlight of last year was the first event where we took our first ever 1-2-3 finish, and both Nicky Taylor and Alex Solley were massive parts of that and our success last year," said team manager David Graves.

Podium finisher Jack Byrne, who competed as a privateer last season, has joined the team's line-up for 2023, while Ben Jenkins and Alex Keens will continue with Graves. Frankie Taylor also switches from LDR, while Britcar Trophy racer James Black and karting graduate Daniel Armstrong complete the roster.

Elsewhere, Nathan Edwards will continue with Excelr8 Motorsport after finishing 10th in last year's table.

JEP

Australian Hyper Racer comes to UK

MONOPOSTO

An innovative lightweight, high-downforce trackday single-seater built in Australia has landed in the UK, and is to be raced in the Monoposto Championship by Ollie Hulme.

Created by father-and-son racers Jon and Dean Crooke in Melbourne, Suzuki motorcycle-engined Hyper X1 Racers are taking their homeland by storm, with more than 20 currently built or on order. Following a four-race pilot series last season, the cars will venture outside the state of Victoria this year.

Weighing less than 400kg, with a transverse-mounted 1340cc GSXR engine, the striking machine delivers a power-to-weight ratio of around 500bhp/ton, yet is designed to be operated by a driver without a pit crew. The six-speed sequential-change gearbox is driven via a centrifugal clutch.

Hulme, 38, intends to show the car at Monoposto events initially, then run it following an acclimatisation programme. He also believes that there are markets for the Hyper X1 Racer in hillclimbs and as a training chassis for young drivers aspiring to high-downforce race series.

MAWP+SPORT

The single-seater is set for Monoposto, while Spartan (behind) is also now in UK

"I found it on Instagram, then looked at their website," said Hulme, who runs continuation car seller Le Mans Coupes. "The car really looks the part. I was impressed by what they were doing in Australia and saw potential to replicate that in the UK, either with young hotshoes or older business people who have dreamed of racing a single-seater.

"The guys [at the factory] are great to deal with. Nothing is too much trouble. At a time when we were looking to diversify our business, it ticked the boxes."

Designed by Jon Crooke – a third-generation racer whose grandfather won Australia's first car race in 1904 – the Hyper X1 is crafted around a robust tubular steel frame to FIA safety specification.

Hulme and his father have also imported the first of an intended run of 300 Spartan sportscars, road-legal machines with svelte early Can-Am Lola/McLaren styling cues.

MARCUS PYE

Cadwell win goes the way of Kelly/Colman

PETERSCHERER

Skoda Fabia duo took the spoils at Cadwell

CIRCUIT RALLYING

Mark Kelly and Neil Colman won the Alan Healy Memorial Rally, the penultimate Circuit Rally Championship round, in their Skoda Fabia R5 at Cadwell Park last weekend.

Newly crowned champions John Griffiths/Emma Morrison pulled out an early lead in their Ford Fiesta R5, with 2020-21 champion Kelly heading the pursuit.

Kelly lost time on SS2 when he grabbed second gear instead of the handbrake, but a nine-second lead soon began to disappear when Kelly set a string of fastest times and Griffiths had a grassy moment on SS4.

The lead changed on the next stage, and Kelly finally took the victory spoils by 6s, with Ollie O'Donovan/Ashleigh Morris (Hyundai i20 R5) a distant and day-long third.

PETER SCHERER

Drivers avoid serious injury after big smash

CATERHAMS

Caterham racers Roger Gaunt and Duncan Cooke escaped serious injury after a major crash at Oulton Park last weekend in which both of their 310R machines were sent into a series of rolls.

The pair tangled through the high-speed Island Bend left-hander on the International Oulton layout during the third 310R contest at the Cheshire venue. The race was instantly red-flagged and the meeting abandoned, with a lengthy clear-up operation needed and Gaunt being taken to hospital by air ambulance.

Gaunt was still being kept in hospital for observation as Autosport closed for press, while Cooke had already been released, both having seemingly avoided any major injuries.

Caterham chief motorsport and technical officer Simon Lambert paid tribute to the volunteers who arrived on the scene and dealt with the crash. "The rescue crews were great and the red flags were out while the cars were still in the air," he said. "The Oulton team and the BARC team, the rescuers and marshals were fantastic."

Since seven laps of the 310R race had already been completed, full points could still be awarded, while Lambert says the cancelled Caterham Seven UK encounter will instead be added onto the timetable of another event later in the year.

STEPHEN LICKORISH

Gaunt (left) and Cooke were involved in a serious accident

BOURNE PHOTO/JJ

Win Percy Mazda RX-7 replica to race at Members' Meeting

HISTORICS

Club racer Alex Taylor is to debut family team Rassler Racing's latest Mazda RX-7, a tribute to Win Percy's 1981 British Saloon Car championship winner, at Goodwood's 80th Members' Meeting.

Coordinated by Taylor's father, Trevor, the project has taken two years. John Freeman masterminded the bodyshell and Tony Absolom the final build.

"It's dad's baby, I've just been brought in as the wheel man," said Taylor Jr. "We have campaigned a turbo RX-7 since 2015, and accrued a brains trust of people who know 12A rotary engines inside out.

"It's as close as we can get to Win's Tom Walkinshaw Racing car. Win won two races outright and qualified on pole five times in 1981. Our hope was always to be invited to Goodwood, because the Gerry Marshall Trophy Group 1 race has been crying out for an RX-7 to get among the Capris."

A limited amount of testing has so far been completed, with further tweaks needed. "Trying to contain the [fabled] exhaust note without suppressing the power output is difficult," said Taylor. "The car handles nicely and is gripping well, but our priority now is to come up with a solution to meet the event noise limit."

MARCUS PYE

Mazda has taken two years to be put together ahead of its race outing

LEE MARSHALL/OPENTRACK

IN THE HEADLINES

GB4'S LATE ADDITIONS

Four more drivers have been confirmed for the opening round of the 2023 GB4 Championship at Oulton Park this weekend. Josh Irfan and Harri Reynolds will drive for Elite Motorsport, Irfan in a bid to gain single-seater experience ahead of a planned British Formula 4 campaign, while Fortec Motorsports will run Ruhaan Alva and Aditya Kulkarni. It takes the total number of confirmed drivers to 14.

GARLICKS ADDED TO RECIPE

Brothers Conner and Luke Garlick are set to race on the same Ginetta GT Championship grid this season for Xentek Motorsport, starting at Oulton Park this weekend. Former GT4 Supercup racer Conner will be in the headline GT Pro class at the wheel of a G56, while his brother will be in a G40 in the GT5 class for his first full campaign after graduating from karts, having made a one-off GT5 outing last year.

ROMANEK TO RACE AT COMBE

Lucas Romanek will compete in the opening round of the Castle Combe Formula Ford Championship on Easter Monday. The National FF1600 driver will race against reigning title winner Felix Fisher, and double champions Luke Cooper and Adam Higgins.

O'DONOVAN'S NEW STEED

Reigning British Rallycross champion Patrick O'Donovan will swap his Ford Fiesta for a Peugeot 208 (below) – previously campaigned by Hansen Motorsport in World Rallycross – for his title defence, which begins at Lydden Hill this weekend. "This is an absolute beast of a car and it feels really good to be in a position where we can head into Euro RX and 5 Nations BRX with competitive equipment," said O'Donovan. Joining him on the grid will be Latvian Roberts Vitols, who was a race winner in 2021, and will pilot a Citroen C4.

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Some encouraging signs

There have been several huge grids at the first batch of 2023 circuit racing events despite the continued economic uncertainty, but not everyone is faring quite so well

STEPHEN LICKORISH

Where has the time gone?! It's already over a month since the 2023 club circuit-racing campaign began when the Classic Sports Car Club shook off the winter blues with its successful season-opening event at Silverstone at the end of February. Since then, a further six events have taken place in England and, although the season truly begins in earnest over the forthcoming busy, four-day Easter Bank Holiday weekend, those initial fixtures still provide an intriguing snapshot into the overall health of national motorsport.

Now, yes, it's a very small sample size. And, yes, opening event figures are not always truly representative, particularly when the venue in question is an ever-increasing factor in any given grid's popularity. But there are still some very encouraging early signs. Out of the 38 English categories that have begun, and where there is equivalent data from 2022, 21 of them (55%) have featured increases over last season's average.

Pick of the bunch has to be the stunning British Racing & Sports Car Club opener at Silverstone, where the smallest grid was 'only' 29 cars and four non-combined categories — C1 Endurance (61), Clubsport Trophy (59), Mazda MX-5 Supercup (49) and Modified Fords (47) — all impressively topped 45 cars. The Classic Sports Car Club has also enjoyed two Tin Tops rounds where entries were nudging 40, while its Snetterton Swinging Sixties Group 1 contest also attracted 39. Others to impress include 32 cars for the Oulton Park Caterham Roadsport races and 57 entries across the shared Mini Miglia and Se7en grid at their first round at Silverstone.

> "The true impact on the clubman racer without endless resources is still yet to be determined"

Despite the tricky economic climate and stubbornly high inflation, there is clearly still an appetite to go racing even when finances are squeezed. "Most people say, 'I can't spend so much money, but the last thing I would stop is the racing,'" notes John Pearson of Equipe Classic Racing, which began its season at Brands Hatch last weekend with Equipe GTS leading the way on 32 drivers. That trend of racers protecting their motorsport budget as much as possible was seen last year when some categories were able to thrive despite the overall fall in UK living standards, and is seemingly continuing this season as well. It also ties in with the argument that many competitors are still racing while they can, either amid advancing years or concern about the future of the sport as pressure to better protect the planet grows every week.

But, returning to those stats listed earlier, it does still mean that 17 categories were down on their 2022 average at their opening events this year. Many of these were by tiny margins — in fact, over a third were smaller by just one or two cars — but this all adds up when clubs require every entry they can lay their hands on. Yet it's worth bearing in mind that early season meetings do not always give an accurate picture. On the one hand, enthusiasm to get going can boost numbers, while others are put off by the cold and unpredictable weather. "The first race of the year you've always got the same thing — people saying, 'I thought my car would be ready and it isn't,'" Pearson adds.

Perhaps more worrying is that some of the new categories launched for this year have not got off to overflowing starts. Take the Bell Sport Challenge Series that began at Donington Park last weekend, and had 11 paddleshift Ferraris, ranging from 360s to newer 488s, on its inaugural grid. Organisers are optimistic of more joining the fray as the season progresses and the initial batch of drivers were positive about its prospects. But the smallest grid so far this year goes to the Britcar Prototype Cup, which is supposed to pit Praga R1s against a range of other prototypes, but attracted a feeble six cars for its first Silverstone round last month. "I think it's a great concept and it's great the Britcar family have put their weight behind it," says British Automobile Racing Club group chief executive Ben Taylor. "I know they're expecting more people to come out in due course, whose cars may not be ready at the moment."

And, while Taylor has been encouraged by the interest in some of the club's other categories — including busy grids for the first event since the manufacturer-backed Caterham series joined the BARC portfolio — he is not getting carried away, arguing that the true impact on the clubman racer without endless resources is still yet to be determined. "These are real people with real lives and may be affected by what's going on around them," he says.

In the meantime, there are set to be more packed grids in action this weekend. British GT has reached its capacity — no mean feat at a time of economic uncertainty — and the always-popular 750 Motor Club gets its campaign under way at Donington on Monday. Almost 40 cars are expected in Hot Hatch and Locost, while the highest-ever entry for the Campaign Against Living Miserably Porsche contest is also possible.

Before we know it, dozens more events should be in the books and we will have a better idea of exactly how things are shaping up. For now, let's savour and celebrate some of these large grids that are still being assembled.

Wallis took a brace of wins on Sunday in his Mercedes-AMG

Audi, McLaren and Mercedes share the honours during GT Cup opener

DONINGTON PARK
MSVR
1-2 APRIL

James Wallis did the double in the GT Cup opener at Donington Park, with the honours across the weekend shared between Audi, McLaren and Mercedes.

Hugo Cook triumphed in his Cook Racing Audi R8 GT3 in Saturday's sprint race, which was disrupted by a bizarre collision between reigning British GT champion Ian Loggie and Lucky Khera. Cook built a 3.5-second lead over Wallis's Drivetac Mercedes-AMG GT3 before the incident occurred with seven minutes remaining.

Khera was in an all-McLaren 720S GT3 battle for third with Morgan Tillbrook as he came up to lap Loggie, who appeared to be heading for the pitlane exiting the Roberts chicane when the contact occurred. Loggie's McLaren was left broadside at the pit entry, while Khera spun before rejoining down the order. Cook remained ahead following the resultant safety-car period, with Wallis and Tillbrook completing the podium.

A heavy crash for reigning champion Simon Orange caused the subsequent pitstop race to be red-flagged. Cook handed over driving duties for the start to Sacha Kakad, who ran second early on behind Tillbrook before being passed by Wallis and Khera. Orange closed in on the Audi driver for fourth, but then lost control of his McLaren exiting the chicane before spearing head-on into the pitwall.

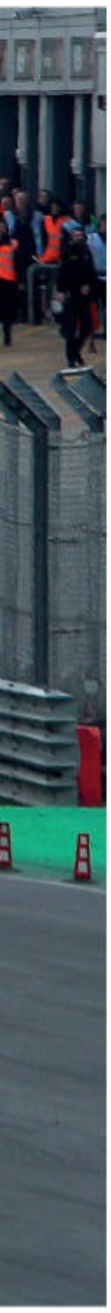
Wallis's race was also ended by a wheelnut issue, as teams took the opportunity to make their mandatory stops before the red flag was shown. Marcus Clutton led from Euan Hankey, who had taken over from Tillbrook and Khera respectively, in the restarted contest. Clutton eventually pulled clear to win by 6s for Enduro Motorsport, while Sennan Fielding (sharing with Grahame Tilley) went on a late charge to snatch second. The Triple M Motorsport Mercedes driver passed Cook for third as the pair negotiated a lapped car before sweeping around the outside of Hankey at Redgate.

Drivetac's fortunes improved on Sunday, when Wallis took the spoils in both encounters. The Mercedes driver took advantage of lapped traffic at Coppice to move alongside early leader Casper Stevenson — the ex-British Formula 4 racer had taken over driving duties from Loggie for the sprint — before completing the move into the chicane and then taking victory by 2.7s, while Khera finished third for RaceLab.

Tillbrook led from pole in the final pitstop race before Wallis moved ahead into Redgate in the early stages. His advantage grew after the mandatory pitstop due to a lack of success penalties — a legacy of his retirement in Saturday's second race — and

Mailer chases Morris in Porsche contest before taking the lead and win

ALL PHOTOGRAPHY: MICK WALKER



Middlehurst kept Budzinski at bay

Colbourne got the better of Hill in final chicane

Reynolds (777) made late pass on Mitchell (81) for Focus Cup win

he eventually cruised home over 26s clear. Clutton finished in a lonely second after taking over from Tillbrook, while Loggie and Stevenson completed the podium.

Chris Middlehurst won the opening United Formula Ford race before mechanical woes handed victory to Lucas Romanek in the sequel. Back at the wheel of his rebuilt Van Diemen LA10, which was destroyed in a Team Dolan factory fire last year, the 2021 British Racing & Sports Car Club National FF1600 champion surged from fourth on the grid to snatch the lead from polesitter Romanek in race one and took advantage of a squabble behind to pull clear. Ammonite Motorsport Ray pilot Elliott Budzinski prevailed against Oldfield Motorsport Van Diemen pair Romanek and Brandon McCaughan before closing in Middlehurst, who held on after the chequered flag was waved a lap early, while Romanek edged McCaughan in a thrilling dice for third.

Middlehurst looked on course to win again in race two before suspension and driveshaft failure pitched his car into the gravel at Old Hairpin. That allowed Romanek to take a comfortable win, while Budzinski held off McCaughan and Nolan Allaer for second.

Tom Andrew and Jonathan Lovell shared the spoils after close battles in the two Porsche Boxster Cup contests. Andrew snatched the lead in race one at Redgate, only for Lovell to wrestle back the advantage through the Craner Curves. Andrew was back in front again at the end of the lap after making the better exit from the chicane, with Lovell eventually having to settle for second after an excursion at Redgate.

Lovell built a 4.5s lead in race two as Andrew ran third behind Ashley White initially but, after taking second, Andrew closed in before Lovell prevailed by under 1s.

The opening Porsche Club Championship race was disrupted by two red flags, the first coming on lap one when Mark McAleer dipped a wheel on the grass approaching McLeans before collecting the hapless Bill Caley, with the resultant car damage ending the pair's meeting early.

Peter Morris (997) resisted early pressure from Harry Mailer (Cayman) in the restarted contest until Mailer eventually made a better exit from Old Hairpin to grab the lead, before the race was ended two minutes early after another car became beached in the gravel. Morris again led in race two, but eventually faded with tyre issues, with Steve Wood's 996 passing Mailer at Coppice before pulling clear to win.

One of the most thrilling finishes came in the opening Production GTI race, which shared the track alongside Z Cars. There was little to separate James Colbourne and Simon Hill throughout, with Hill snatching the lead in the closing stages into Redgate. But a lock-up into the chicane on the final lap from Hill allowed Colbourne to prevail in a drag to the line by 0.199s. Ryan Sayer finished third ahead of Z Cars winner Edd Giddings. Sayer triumphed in the sequel ahead of Spencer Beale and Simon Vercoe as Colbourne slipped back to fourth, while Giddings again took Z Cars honours.

Reigning champion James Lay did the hat-trick in the Radical Cup UK despite being pushed hard by SR1 champion Daryl DeLeon, who was making his SR3 debut.

Sean Reynolds and Simon Watts took a win apiece in the Focus Cup, Reynolds making a late pass on Ian Mitchell through the Craner Curves in the opener.

Wayne Marrs scored a comfortable brace of victories in the inaugural round of the Bell Sport Challenge Series at the wheel of his Ferrari 488, while Darren Goes bounced back from a race-one crash to finish second in the sequel.

STEVE WHITFIELD

WEEKEND WINNERS

GT CUP
Race 1 Hugo Cook (Audi R8 GT3 Evo II)
Race 2 Morgan Tillbrook/Marcus Clutton (McLaren 720S GT3)
Races 3 & 4 James Wallis (Mercedes-AMG GT3)

UNITED FORMULA FORD
Race 1 Chris Middlehurst (Van Diemen LA10)
Race 2 Lucas Romanek (Van Diemen JL13)

PORSCHE CLUB BOXSTER CUP
Race 1 Tom Andrew
Race 2 Jonathan Lovell

PORSCHE CLUB CHAMPIONSHIP
Race 1 Harry Mailer (Cayman)
Race 2 Steve Wood (996)

Z CARS & PRODUCTION GTIs
Race 1 James Colbourne (Golf)
Race 2 Ryan Sayer (Golf)

RADICAL CUP UK
Races 1, 2 & 3 James Lay (SR3, below)

FOCUS CUP
Race 1 Sean Reynolds
Race 2 Simon Watts

BELL SPORT CHALLENGE
Races 1 & 2 Wayne Marrs (Ferrari 488)

For full results visit: tsl-timing.com

Pratt charges to win after stuttering start

BRANDS HATCH
ECR
1-2 APRIL

After previous startline strife, there was no trouble for Pratt's Morgan in Equipe GTS race two

Equipe Classic Racing and MG Car Club shared the bill for their Brands Hatch Indy circuit season openers and, between them, produced an entertaining weekend with a varied and attractive line-up of machines.

Tom Smith won the restarted Equipe GTS opener in his MGB Roadster, taking the lead early then keeping a scrapping pack behind at arm's length. Poleman Oliver Pratt in his Morgan +4 had a poor start and dropped to mid-pack, before clawing his way up to a close second.

Pratt got better launches in the also-restarted race two, and got the lead from Smith at the restart before keeping him out of reach. "I knew, if I got the start right, the rest would be plain sailing," Pratt said. "In race one] I had two awful starts. We've made some changes to the engine – when it's lower down, it's a big groggy."

Nigel Winchester in his elegant and powerful Shelby was circumspect in damp Equipe Pre '63/50s qualifying and started the opener 11th. But, in the dry race one, he rose to second on the first lap and, at one-third distance, passed Joe Willmott's Austin-Healey for a lead he didn't lose.

In race two, poleman Winchester led all the way, but had to resist a gaggle of cars headed eventually by Nick Finburgh's vociferous Lola. Winchester's Shelby grunt kept him ahead, but he lost the win via a five-second track-limits penalty, letting Finburgh prevail.

Chris Beighton's Sunbeam Tiger, which is due to compete at the Le Mans Classic this summer, led all the opening Equipe Libre race from pole to win by 5.6s from Rick Willmott's AC Cobra. Beighton looked on course to repeat the showing in race two, but suddenly lost the lead at half distance with a Clearways spin. Soon he had climbed from fourth back to first, but his Sunbeam then started to smoke – from a dipstick tube problem leaking oil onto the exhaust – and Beighton dropped out. Gerard Buggy's Lotus Elan therefore took victory.

Andrew Wenman was a late replacement for his unwell father David driving their Morgan, and looked good to win the first Equipe 70s race, but spun at Surtees and

Fowler stormed through in BCV8s after earlier fire extinguisher woes

ALL PHOTOGRAPHY: GARY HAWKINS

MIGHTY MUSTANG Almost no car at Brands Hatch was as striking as the mammoth 1971 Ford Mustang Mach 1 that Martin Reynolds twice took to third place in Equipe 70s. He's renovated the ex-Marcus Bicknell car over the past three years, and now his aim is to "get a total handle of it". Reynolds plans to run the car shortly in Bernie's V8s, and in V8 meetings in Germany and at Assen in the Netherlands. "It makes me smile – it's a very popular car, people love it, and I enjoy driving it," Reynolds said. "It's not like my Escort and my Anglia to handle, put it that way!"

Winchester recovered from tricky damp qualifying to star in Equipe Pre '63/50s

lost out to Stephen Winter's Porsche 911. Winter remained ahead until the end, before Wenman kept it clean to win race two.

The Midget and Sprite races were likely the pick of the MG bunch at Brands, with both the entertaining contests won by Stephen Watkins. He found the less-modified Class E machines hard to shake, though, particularly since they could warm their tyres more quickly. Richard Bridge, indeed, attacked Watkins persistently in race one.

Bridge missed race two due to a cylinder head cracking on his return to the paddock after the opener. In his absence, Watkins looked more comfortable, but a red flag and subsequent five-minute sprint threatened to undo his good work, and reigning champion Pippa Cow indeed got ahead briefly. But Watkins, with his slicks warm, retook first.

In the MG Cup, MG Owners' Club racer Steve McDermid shook down his new ZR 190, and took a clear race-one win. He led again in race two but retired with rear-corner damage after contact with the pursuing Ashley Woodward. The pair disagreed on how the contact came about. Woodward, left hobbled, was later overtaken for victory by *Strictly Come Dancing* singer Lance Ellington, who returned to Rover Tomcat racing after a quarter of a century away (see below).

Baynton Jones Historic Motorsport boss Charles Jones, driving his MG L Magna for the first time in four years, won both pre-War Triple-M races.

Neil Fowler had the clear legs of the BCV8 field and won both contests, despite starting them from the back after he accidentally set off his fire extinguisher before qualifying. He also had just enough of a race-one advantage to keep victory despite a penalty for passing too early at a safety-car restart.

Champion Graham Ross was also a double winner in the MG Trophy, though was aided by fellow ZR 190 runner Doug Cole missing race one after an alternator failure and flat battery left him stranded in the collecting area. A fully charged Cole chased Ross hard in race two, but Ross hung on.

GRAHAM KEILLOH

WEEKEND WINNERS

EQUIPE GTS
Race 1 Tom Smith (MGB Roadster)
Race 2 Oliver Pratt (Morgan +4)

EQUIPE PRE '63/50s
Race 1 Nigel Winchester (Shelby 260)
Race 2 Nick Finburgh (Lola Mk1)

EQUIPE LIBRE
Race 1 Chris Beighton (Sunbeam Tiger)
Race 2 Gerard Buggy (Lotus Elan)

EQUIPE 70s
Race 1 Stephen Winter (Porsche 911 2.8 RSR)
Race 2 Andrew Wenman (Morgan)

MIDGET & SPRITE CHALLENGE
Races 1 & 2 Stephen Watkins (MG Midget)

MG CUP
Race 1 Steve McDermid (MG ZR 190)
Race 2 Lance Ellington (Rover 220 Turbo)

TRIPLE-M RACING CHALLENGE
Races 1 & 2 Charles Jones (MG L Magna)

BCV8 CHAMPIONSHIP
Races 1 & 2 Neil Fowler (B GTV8)

MG TROPHY
Races 1 & 2 Graham Ross (ZR 190)

For full results visit: tsl-timing.com

STRICTLY SUBLIME Viewers of *Strictly Come Dancing*, or of the 1990s Dunlop Rover Turbo Cup, will be familiar with Lance Ellington. He raced a *Daily Mirror*-sponsored Tomcat 220 Turbo in the latter and, after a quarter of a century away, returned in the MG Cup in a Tomcat hired from Castle Combe champion Gary Prebble. Ellington immediately bagged a pole and a win. "I couldn't have wished for anything better, I had the best weekend back," he said, "and it's everything I remember, especially the Tomcat, which is a great car. Gary Prebble set it up beautifully, and the racing was such fun."

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CLASSIC TYRES

Chiddicks leads Lower as opening 270R race got the Caterham season off to a fine start

Major 310R crash overshadows the close Caterham contests

OULTON PARK
BARC
1 APRIL

For most of Saturday, it looked like the various Caterham series were enjoying a triumphant return to the track in their 2023 season opener at Oulton Park. There had been consistently close battles – mostly in brilliant sunshine – throughout the day but, as the clouds gathered in the late afternoon, events took a dramatic turn. The 310R finale had been fought out for seven laps when Roger Gaunt and Duncan Cooke had a heavy accident (see News), serious enough to end the meeting and call out the air ambulance.

Earlier, the near-perfect blue skies and crowded paddock promised an enjoyable day. With various changes made to the Caterham regulations and a move to two or three 20-minute races per class, there were plenty of encouraging signs.

The Caterham Seven 270R Championship was given the honour of opening proceedings with Charlie Lower claiming pole from Rrutuj Patki. As the lights went out, Alex Vincent struggled to get away from fifth spot and, just to compound his misery, also received one of the first 10-second penalties (mainly imposed for starting out of position), which were a regular occurrence during the day.

Exciting racing through the whole field followed with constant changes of position throughout, and multiple leaders of the race within a single lap were not uncommon. Freddie Chiddicks probably covered the most miles at the front but, in the end, the penalties had the last word. Chiddicks took the chequered flag but was demoted for a transgression at the start – although he did later get to keep his triumphs in races two and three. Lower inherited the opening win with Matt Larbey taking second and Patki third.

It seemed likely that the best race had taken place first but in fact the next one, for the 310R Championship, showed that the 270Rs had simply established the pattern for the day. The larger, 31-strong grid resulted in even more racing to watch as the 11 laps of tight slipstreaming and multiple passing moves between gaggles of cars were reeled off. With every race finish setting the grid for the next, the spectacle of 310R pilot Alan Cooper converting 12th on his first grid to last within the opening lap and then climbing back up to second by his third chequered flag was noteworthy. Lars Alexander Hoffmann took the overall spoils each time.

A common feature during the day was the massed charge out of Deer Leap for the finish line, with the closest win coming in the Caterham Roadsport Championship's first outing. Lyonel Tollemache took victory by a mere 0.006s from Ben Timmons, with Tom McEwing a further 0.059s behind him. It was not quite so close in race two, with Timmons prevailing by a far larger 0.142s over McEwing.

Despite all this action, as the day progressed, incidents were few and primarily limited to broken bodywork. Fate decreed, though, that what had been an exceptional day of racing closed with a palpably downbeat paddock waiting and hoping for good news from the medical centre. The incident meant that the Caterham Seven UK finale was not held, Lewis Thompson having earlier taken two victories.

STEPHEN MOSLEY

Hoffmann was a treble winner in 310R contests

ALL PHOTOGRAPHY: BOURNE PHOTO/JJ

WEEKEND WINNERS

CATERHAM SEVEN 270R
Race 1 Charlie Lower
Races 2 & 3 Freddie Chiddicks

CATERHAM SEVEN 310R
Races 1, 2 & 3 Lars Alexander Hoffmann

CATERHAM ROADSPORT
Race 1 Lyonel Tollemache (below)
Race 2 Ben Timmons

CATERHAM SEVEN CHAMPIONSHIP UK
Races 1 & 2 Lewis Thompson

For full results visit: tsl-timing.com

FINISHING STRAIGHT

Silverstone on a different scale

SCALEXTRIC
SILVERSTONE MUSEUM

Silverstone is a magical place. For motorsport fans it's the birthplace of the Formula 1 world championship, it's where Nigel Mansell swept past Nelson Piquet on the Hangar Straight in 1987, and where Lewis Hamilton roared clear to win a rain-soaked British Grand Prix in 2008.

Sites of such cultural importance deserve to have their past preserved and celebrated, and Silverstone is no exception with its modern interactive museum. With support from the National Lottery Heritage fund, the BRDC was able to convert a former Second World War RAF hangar into a repository for its archive while at the same time providing visitors with an attraction that tells the story of this revered venue.

Upon arrival you are taken to a virtual grid for an immersive audio visual journey through grids from the past before entering the museum itself. The displays provide a comprehensive history of the site all the way back to medieval monks, through to the Second World War when the site was an RAF Bomber Command training base.

Further displays detail the evolution of the site from airfield to racing circuit and explain the origin of the names of Silverstone's famous corners, and its connection with the surrounding villages and communities. You can even visit a replica of the local pub that Stirling Moss, Mike Hawthorn and Graham Hill frequented when they visited the circuit.

You're then transported to modern-day Silverstone on a race day to get a better understanding of what's involved in hosting a race; you can stand on a replica pitwall and find out what the marshals and medical teams do to maintain the safety of the drivers and spectators. Space is also given to celebrate the science behind motorsport and the work involved in producing championship-winning cars and bikes, with first-hand accounts from engineers.

Ready to race: wide range of slot cars includes GTs, tin-tops, historics and F1 machinery

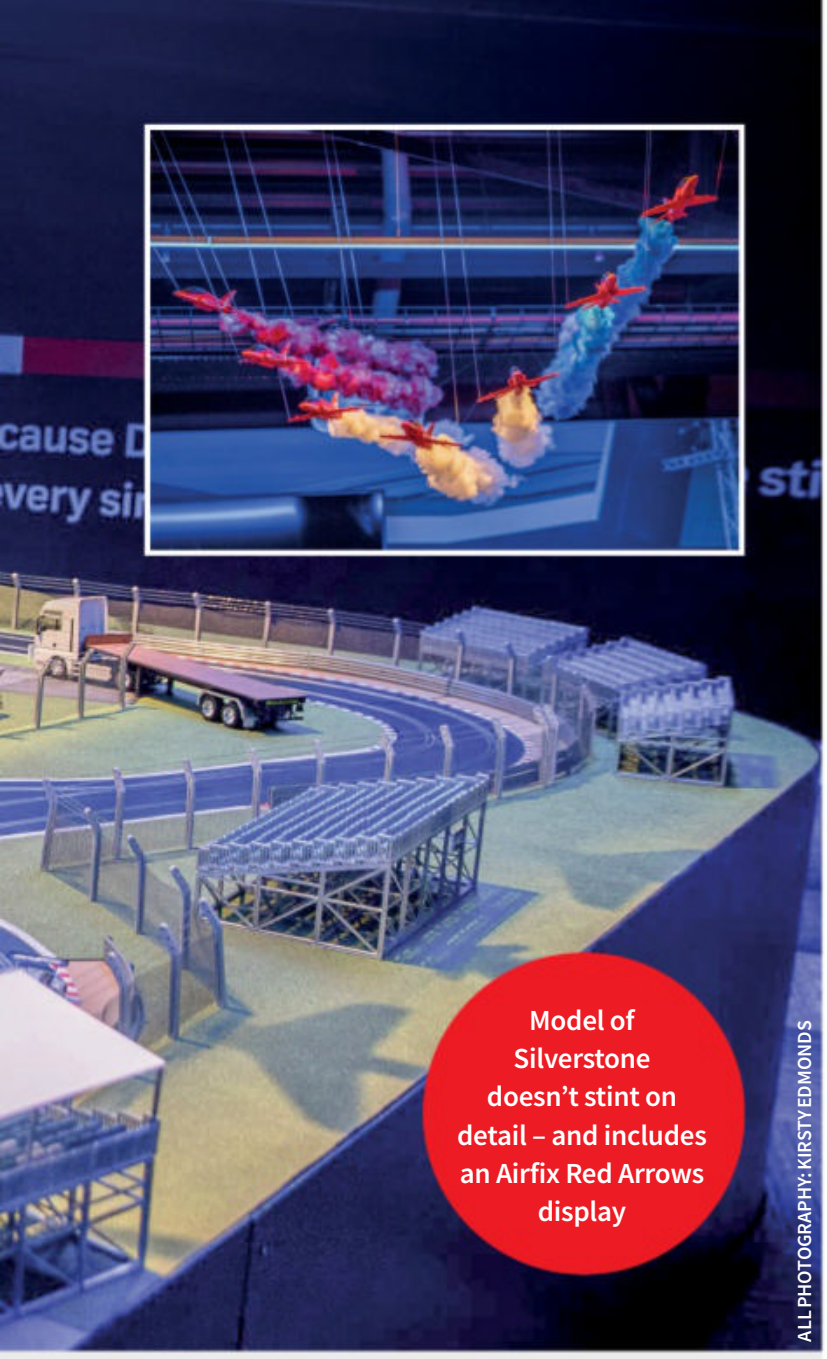
In addition to these educational and interactive elements you can get up close to cars, race suits, helmets and memorabilia dating back to Silverstone's earliest days. A lot of the suits and helmets have been loaned by drivers such as Martin Brundle, George Russell and Lewis Hamilton from their personal collections.

The range of cars and bikes on display is equally impressive – highlights include David Coulthard's McLaren-Mercedes MP4/15 in which he won the British Grand Prix in 2000 and Jenson Button's 2009 championship-winning Brawn BGP 001.

As if this wasn't enough, the museum has teamed up with Scalextric and built a detailed replica of the current F1 circuit. The attention to detail is impressive, in particular a replica of the Silverstone Wing pits and paddock complex and a squadron of Airfix Red Arrows sweeping down the pit straight, and there's even a model of the museum itself.

A team of specialist model makers spent hundreds of hours meticulously recreating the circuit. The track is almost 25 metres in length and is made up of 108 individual sections of Scalextric track – far too big to be recreated in most people's bedrooms or sitting rooms!

Over the Easter period the museum is welcoming a number of full-size cars into its



Model of Silverstone doesn't stint on detail – and includes an Airfix Red Arrows display

ALL PHOTOGRAPHY: KIRSTY EDMONDS

collection, models of which you'll also be able to race on the Scalextric circuit, including Damon Hill's Williams FW16B-07, a Ford Lotus Cortina, Honda Civic Type R and a Ford Sierra RS500 Cosworth.

The museum should be on every motorsport fan's bucket list. The array of cars, bikes, suits, helmets, signing-on sheets and trophies is second to none, and the comprehensive overview of Silverstone's past promotes a greater appreciation of the role it's played in shaping British motorsport history.

The Scalextric exhibition is a superb addition, allowing adults to finally get their hands on the kit that was on the top of their dream Christmas lists and children to experience the thrill of racing on the circuit.

RICHARD ROWE

autosport.com/podcast

SUTTON/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

F1 Australian Grand Prix review

Max Verstappen claimed his second win of the 2023 Formula 1 season after beating Mercedes' Lewis Hamilton in an Australian Grand Prix that ended in farcical scenes. Podcast host Martyn Lee is joined by Kevin Turner, Jake Boxall-Legge and Matt Kew to analyse the biggest talking points from a chaotic race at Albert Park.

WHAT'S ON

INTERNATIONAL MOTORSPORT

Super Formula
Round 1/7
Fuji, Japan
8-9 April
Livestream on Motorsport.tv, Sat 0100, Sat 0600, Sun 0100, Sun 0600

NASCAR Cup Series
Round 8/36
Bristol, USA
9 April
TV Live Viaplay, Sun 2330

NASCAR Truck Series
Round 6/23
Bristol, USA
8 April
TV Live Viaplay, Sat 0030

UK MOTORSPORT

Oulton Park BRSCC
8, 10 April
British GT, GB3, GB4, Ginetta (GT Academy, GT Championship, Junior)
Livestream via Britishgt.com

Donington Park MSVR
7-8 April
HGPCA, Masters (Endurance Legends, Gentlemen, GT Trophy, Pre-'66 Touring Cars, Sports Car Legends)

Snetterton BRSCC
8-9 April
CityCar Cup, Civic Cup, Fiesta ST150s/ST240s, Fiesta Juniors, Modified Fords, Supersport Endurance Cup, TCR UK

Brands Hatch BARC
8-9 April
British Trucks, Caterham Graduates (Sigma 135, Sigma 150, Sigmax), Hyundai Coupe Cup, Kumho BMWs, MGOC, Mini Challenge Trophy, Pickup Trucks
Livestream via barc.net

Castle Combe CCRC
10 April
CCRC (FF1600, GT, Hot Hatch, Saloons), CMMC Tin Tops/ Super Saloons, WRDA/ Intermarque Silhouettes

Donington Park 750MC
10 April
Bikesports, CALM Porsche, Formula Vee, Hot Hatch, Locost, MR2s

British Rallycross Championship
Round 1/6
Lydden Hill, England
8-10 April

NATIONAL MEETING OF THE WEEK
The opening round of the British GT Championship from Oulton Park, with support action from GB3, GB4 and all three Ginetta categories

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TOP FIVE

LE MANS ONE-OFFS

Winning the Le Mans 24 Hours is a feat many drivers spend their career attempting to achieve. Five drivers have won in their only appearance, but which of their victories was best?

KEVIN TURNER & JAMES NEWBOLD

ALL PHOTOGRAPHY motorsport IMAGES

5 HERMANN LANG (1952)

A pre-Second World War grand prix ace, Lang lost his best years to the conflict but played his part in Mercedes' first success at the 24 Hours. He and Fritz Riess needed a little luck – ill-advised late changes to the rapid Jaguar C-types, which all retired, and the late failure of leader Pierre Levegh's Talbot-Lago – but the organised German team got the job done and Mercedes scored a 1-2 with its W194 coupes.

4 NICO HULKENBERG (2015)

Yet to stand on a Formula 1 podium in over 180 attempts, Hulkenberg took just one to crack Le Mans. Then a Force India driver on a weekend jolly aboard Porsche's third 919 Hybrid LMP1, he started and finished the race and was also aboard when #19 took the lead during his quadruple stint into the night. Nick Tandy and Earl Bamber established the car in a lead it held to the end, but Hulkenberg than played his part..

SUTTON

3 LUIS FONTES (1935)

Alfa Romeo had won the previous four editions and started the 1935 event as favourite. But, in a race afflicted by poor weather, a combination of unreliability and lap chart confusion undid the Alfa attack. Despite low oil pressure, rising star Fontes nursed the Lagonda he shared with Johnny Hindmarsh to a surprise win. An air racer, Fontes's wheeled career ended when he was imprisoned following a fatal road accident.

2 AJ FOYT (1967)

Already a four-time USAC champion and treble Indianapolis 500 winner when his only Le Mans visit came in 1967, Foyt's triumph alongside Dan Gurney furthered Ford's growing reputation as a powerhouse. Windshield problems on their MkIV limited practice mileage, but once in front they always looked in command – despite Foyt struggling in an uncomfortable straight-arm driving position due to a non-adjustable seat.

SCHLEGELMILCH

1 TAZIO NUVOLARI (1933)

The legendary Italian, already a Mille Miglia, Targa Florio and multiple GP winner, teamed up with French ace Raymond Sommer for the 1933 24 Hours. Along with the 2.3-litre Alfa Romeo 8C, they made a formidable combination, but this was one of the closest Le Mans. Despite building an early lead, the duo was hamstrung by a serious fuel leak, but Nuvolari grabbed victory on the final lap in an Alfa 1-2-3.

FROM THE ARCHIVE
The low cockpit sides of the Ferrari 625 heighten the impression of Mike Hawthorn sitting on – rather than in – the car as he puts in a gallant effort during the 1954 Belgian Grand Prix at Spa. Hawthorn was racing for the first time since his accident in the Syracuse GP two months earlier, and a diminishment in pace initially thought to be a result of the lingering effects of his injuries prompted his team to call him in so that Jose Froilan Gonzalez, whose own car had expired on the first lap, could take over. But it was leaking exhaust gasses to blame, so Gonzalez was swiftly back in for repairs, resulting in a shared, lapped fourth-place finish.

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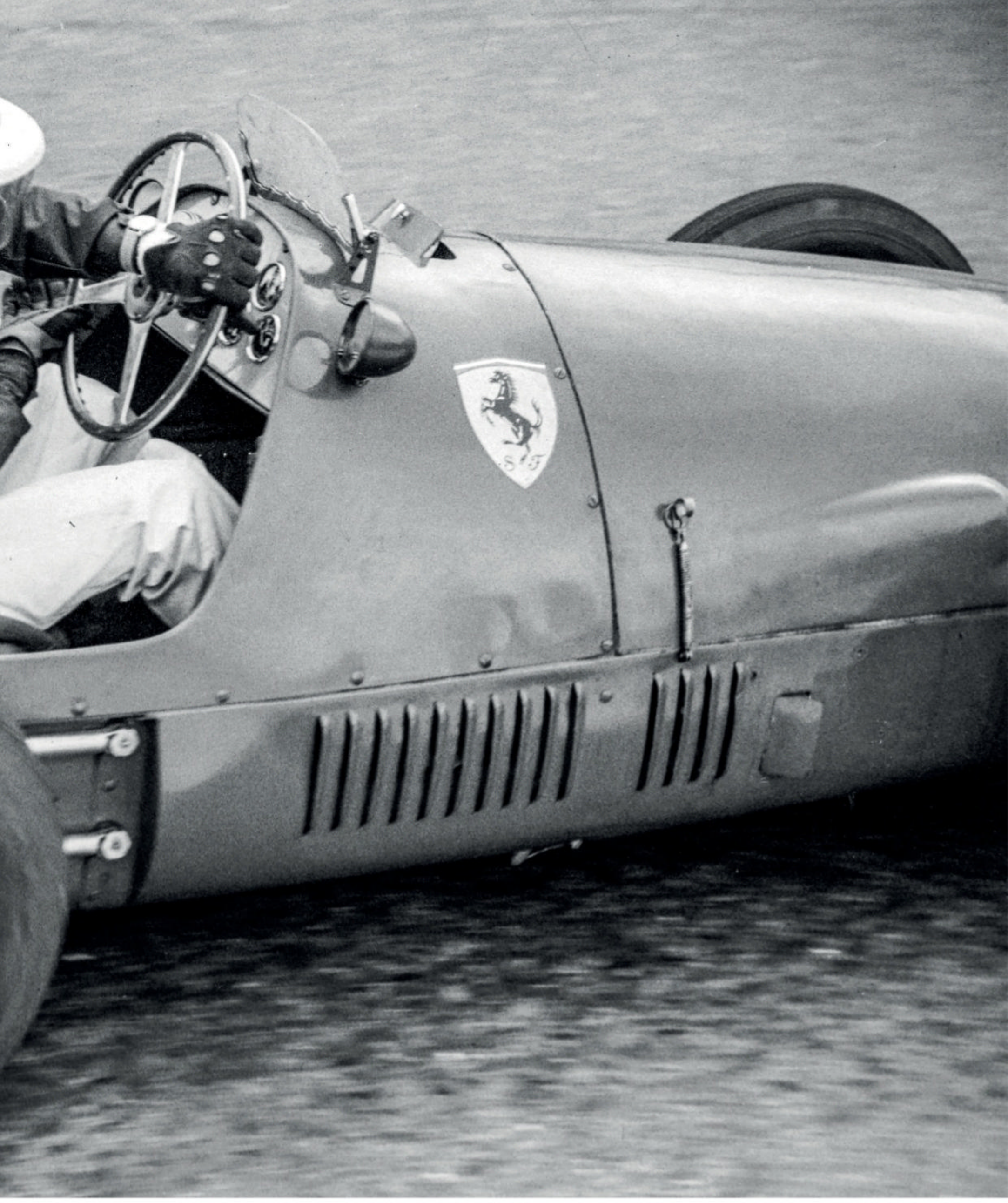

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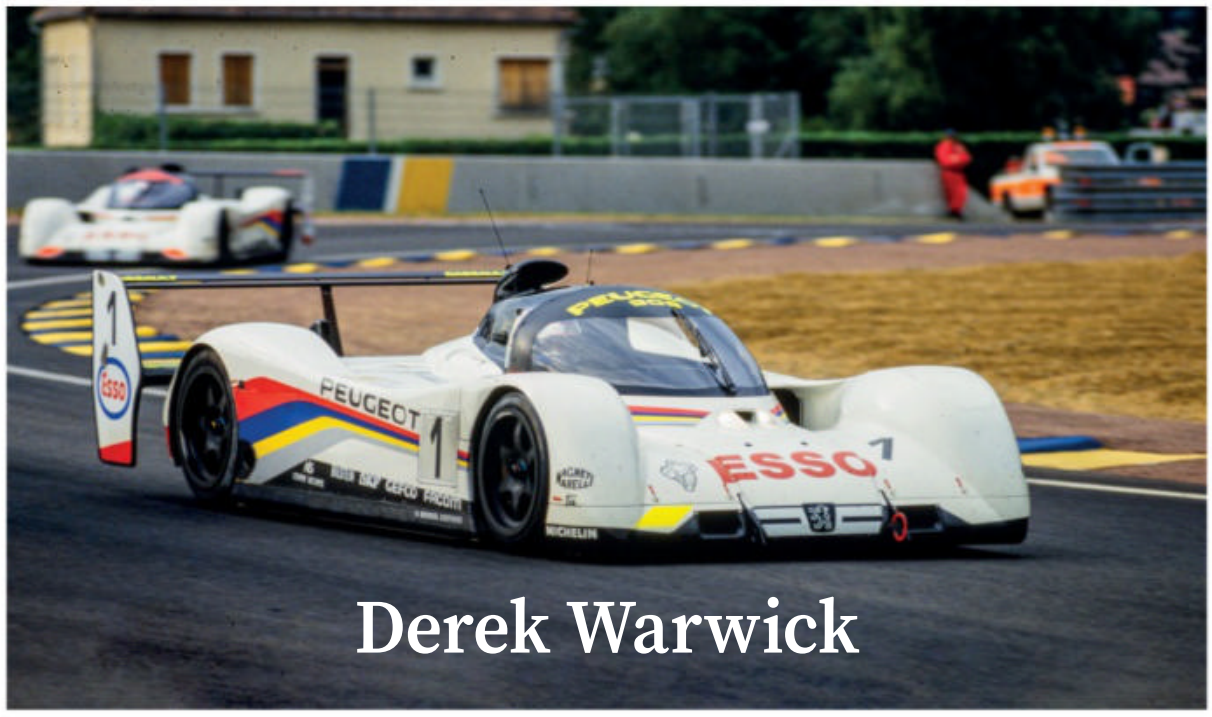

Derek Warwick

The World Sports Car Championship wasn't in the best of health in 1992 following the withdrawals of Jaguar and Mercedes. Peugeot pair Derek Warwick and Yannick Dalmas saw off the challenge of team-mates Mauro Baldi and Philippe Alliot plus the Geoff Lees-led Toyota team to clinch the title in the penultimate round at Suzuka, the scene of their third victory aboard the 905 Evo 1 Bis after triumphs at Silverstone and the Le Mans 24 Hours.

Such was the impression made by ex-Jaguar racer Warwick that, despite being paired with him for only one season, Dalmas rates him as his favourite team-mate. "Between Derek and me, it was a very good cooperation," reflects Dalmas. "He was at this time like a brother for me."

Dalmas and Warwick had crossed paths in Formula 1, where the differing competitiveness of their Larrousse and Arrows squads meant they were rarely in the same fight. But that changed in 1991 when, armed with Jaguar's XJR-14, Warwick became the WSC's benchmark driver and only lost the title to a technicality at Silverstone. It was clear to Dalmas that Peugeot boss Jean Todt had signed a driver well-placed to extract the maximum from their "very sensitive" mount. "At this time, he was the best driver," Dalmas says.

No preferential treatment was given to either car by management — Dalmas stresses "the objective was that Peugeot won, that's it" — and it was up to the crews to see who could do the better job. Pole positions were shared equally across the six rounds, but it was Warwick and Dalmas who had the edge in the bulk of races.

Warwick (right) helped boost Dalmas's confidence

Working with the Briton, Dalmas says, was important in his development into one of the decade's pre-eminent sportscar racers, one who claimed further Le Mans wins in 1994, 1995 and 1999. "I think I got more experience and more confidence with him, about the set-up of the car," he says. "Derek helped me. When you choose this set-up, 'Forget the other possibilities, we go with this, get confidence on yourself.' And for me, it was this attitude I have."

JAMES NEWBOLD

Secrets of the Red Bull RB19

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT THE F1 CAR EVERYONE HAS TO BEAT

ALL PHOTOGRAPHY: MOTORSPORT IMAGES

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