

2024 Schumacher and Kubica in top Le Mans seats

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as Mercedes pips Ferrari

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MAX VERSTAPPEN



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Now over to you, Ferrari, Mercedes, Aston Martin...

Max Verstappen has led 1003 laps this season on his way to 19 wins out of 22 in the Formula 1 World Championship. That's an incredible achievement by both him and the Red Bull team, and one we salute.

But let's go back to 1982... That year, Keke Rosberg led just 84 laps and took a measly one victory out of 16 during his journey to the F1 crown with Williams. That was in the days of jeopardy, unreliability, and 11 different winners in a season. And not one person looks back on Rosberg's title as undeserving. He had no perceived advantage, although Williams bosses Frank Williams and Patrick Head would have bemoaned the unfair advantage of the French! That was in the form of turbo-boosted Renault pair Alain Prost and Rene Arnoux, who led 259 and 204 laps respectively but had trouble finishing races.

Such is the brilliance of F1 engineering and development these days that we're never going to see a repeat of such unpredictability. What we can only hope for is that Ferrari, Mercedes, Aston Martin and the rest make big strides over the coming winter – and Red Bull doesn't! Not because of any desire to see Verstappen and the Milton Keynes brigade fail, but because every sports enthusiast enjoys watching great competition. In decades to come, it will likely be their 2021 victory over Lewis Hamilton that lives longest in the memory, after all.

Such is the nature of the BTCC that Red Bull-type domination can never last there. But before tweaks to the sporting rules kick in for 2024, there was a window of opportunity this year. In this issue, we sit down with Alliance Racing to find out how they did it (page 34).



MS

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Schumacher
will be
ensconced
in Alpine

Schumacher at Alpine, Kubica in Ferrari as 19-car Hypercar field takes shape

WEC

Mick Schumacher and Robert Kubica are among the big-name signings for the World Endurance Championship as the grid for next season continues to come together. They will be part of a 19-car Hypercar field in 2024, which was confirmed when the provisional entry list was unveiled on Monday.

Schumacher and Kubica will race respectively for Alpine and an AF Corse satellite operation running a customer Ferrari. The German was announced by the Renault brand when it took the wraps off its full line-up – but not the driver combinations – last week, while the Pole was revealed as an AF signing.

His programme was then confirmed on the publication of the entry list when his name was listed against the additional Ferrari.

Schumacher has signed up to combine his duties as Mercedes Formula 1 reserve with a full season in the WEC at the wheel of one of Alpine's A424 LMDhs to be run by its long-term partner Signatech. The chance to have him in the car was too good to pass up, according to Alpine motorsport boss Bruno Famin. "To have the opportunity to have such a good and fast driver, I don't see why we would miss it," he said. "I am convinced that in F1 he is underestimated and don't forget he is Formula 2 champion, Formula 3 champion – he has a lot of very good skills."

The other newcomer to Alpine is Ferdinand Habsburg, who has stepped up to the top class of the WEC after three seasons in LMP2 with WRT, the first of which in 2021 yielded the class title. The rest of the line-up has existing links with the marque and Signatech: Nicolas Lapierre, Matthieu Vaxiviere, Charles Milesi and Paul-Loup Chatin have all previously raced their prototypes.

Kubica graduates to Hypercar, also after three seasons in P2, with the customer Ferrari 499P Le Mans Hypercar for which plans were outlined earlier this month. He has joined AF after negotiations with the British Jota team about being part of its expanded two-car squad of Porsche 963 LMDhs along with F1 world champions

Sebastian Vettel and Jenson Button.

"AF is one of the most successful teams ever in motorsport: I'm sure we'll do a great job together," said Kubica. "What's more, I'm back in an Italian team, which is no small matter."

Neither Vettel nor Button were listed on the entry. Teams are only required to nominate one driver per entry at this stage and Jota put Will Stevens and Oliver Rasmussen, respectively part of its Hypercar and LMP2 line-ups in 2023, next to its two cars. Negotiations with the two ex-F1 stars are understood to be still ongoing.

Raffaele Marciello has finally been confirmed by BMW after his winning farewell with long-term employer Mercedes in the FIA GT World Cup at Macau this month. The Italian was announced by BMW last week, though his programme was not revealed. But it can be taken as read that he will be driving one of the M Hybrid V8 LMDhs run by WRT in the WEC.

The comments of BMW M Motorsport boss Andreas Roos hinted at an involvement in the LMDh programme. "Raffaele has consistently demonstrated his prowess for years, particularly in GT cars," he said. "But there is much more to him. Before his GT career, he showcased his class multiple times in open-wheel racing. In our view, he brings the perfect all-around package with his versatility to further strengthen our already high-quality roster of works drivers."



JEP/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Kubica named in
third AF-run Ferrari

McLaren to continue with Mercedes until end of 2030

FORMULA 1

McLaren has renewed its vows with Mercedes to keep running the manufacturer's Formula 1 power units until the end of 2030. Woking hierarchy had tentatively considered other options, with McLaren Racing CEO Zak Brown notably inspecting the nascent Red Bull Powertrains project earlier this year, reasoning that world championships can still be won while working with a customer engine.

By sticking with Mercedes powerplants, McLaren will maintain a relationship with the Three-Pointed Star that was rekindled in 2021 after an ill-fated Honda works programme and a brief dalliance with Renault. The fresh paperwork replaces a deal that was due to expire in 2025 and will span the entirety of the 2026-30 engine cycle, which ditches the expensive and complex Motor Generator Unit-Heat.

Team principal Andrea Stella explained: "Above all, the kind of reassurance we got from a technical point of view, the operational standards, just how solid is what we saw, when we checked what was at stake for 2026, made this decision quite simple for us."

McLaren contract lawyers have also tweaked the job description for IndyCar frontrunner Pato O'Ward. For 2024, the Mexican, who took part in the post-season Abu Dhabi test earlier this week, will join the squad's pool of F1 reserve drivers alongside Mercedes standby Mick Schumacher plus Stoffel Vandoorne and Felipe Drugovich, who are back-up options for Aston Martin. O'Ward replaces two-time IndyCar champion Alex Palou, who McLaren is suing in a case rumoured to be worth over \$20million. The two parties agreed



O'Ward named as new F1 reserve

a contract for next year, but the Spaniard reneged. A McLaren deal would have plausibly given Palou a route to a full-time F1 seat, but this was effectively closed thanks to the standout rookie performances from Oscar Piastri, who has re-signed until the end of 2026.

While Mercedes stickers will continue to adorn McLaren F1 machinery for the foreseeable, Sauber's engine cover will look that bit barer for the next two seasons. Title sponsorship from Alfa Romeo has now ended but Audi, which will turn the Swiss squad into its works operation, will not plaster its branding over the cars until its formal arrival in 2026. Team principal Alessandro Alunni Bravi said: "Commercially speaking, it is important to have a big bang in 2026, not to dilute the Audi involvement with the team. So, we will continue as Sauber, based on the heritage of the group."

Meanwhile, Alfa Romeo is expected to rear its head in the World Endurance Championship, having turned its back on an F1 presence after failing to agree satisfactory commercial terms with Haas, which has already handed naming rights to American payment firm MoneyGram.

MATT KEW & JONATHAN NOBLE



Marciello set for BMW seat

JULIAN KROEHL

So far BMW has nominated only Dries Vanthoor and Sheldon van der Linde, who took part in three of the IMSA enduros this year with the Rahal-run North American team, for its two WRT-run LMDhs.

The 19-car Hypercar field is pretty much as expected with the arrival of Alpine, BMW and Lamborghini with their LMDhs. The revived Isotta Fraschini marque has secured a solo entry for its Tipo 6 Competizione LMH, but there was no room for the Vanwall Vandervell 680 LMH of the former ByKolles team. The Isotta will be run not by Vector Sport, whose partnership with Isotta was announced late last year, but by the French Duqueine operation, which finished third in LMP2 at Le Mans this year. Financial reasons have been cited as the reason for the switch.

Porsche was one of two manufacturers along with Toyota to nominate its full driver roster on the first entry list. Matt Campbell has replaced Dane Cameron in its #5 963. The return of Alex Lynn to the Chip Ganassi Racing-run Cadillac Racing squad alongside Earl Bamber was confirmed, with one driver in the V-Series.R still to be named.

GARY WATKINS



McLaren will continue with Mercedes power

F1 sprints: change needed, but what?

FORMULA 1

The Formula 1 Commission met for the final time this year at last weekend's Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, where it was agreed that the sprint race format must undergo even more tweaks for 2024. But stakeholders could not form a consensus on what those changes should actually be. As such, the Sporting Advisory Committee will pick up the matter in the spring.

Six sprint events were held in 2023, but most were unspectacular and took excitement away from the full grand prix by effectively spoiling what would unfold in the opening stint. That created a groundswell behind the idea of running the shortened races before traditional qualifying on a Saturday, so that parc ferme may be reopened to potentially mix up the

competitive order. There is also momentum behind adopting reversed grids for sprints, although F1 team bosses reckon that such a decisive rejig cannot be implemented without fan consultation.

Red Bull F1 team principal Christian Horner said: "This is where you've got to do the research. It's very important the next step that we make is one that is fixed for a long period of time. I think that fan feedback is going to play a crucial role in this, in terms of what is it actually that the audience want? Do they actually enjoy the sprint format as it is, or do they want to see a bit more racing? If we're going to do [reversed grids], then how are we going to do the points? How do we incentivise drivers and teams?"

The F1 Commission did manage to agree to delay the ban on tyre blankets until



2025, as Pirelli's attention needs to be fixed on "reducing issues of overheating and improving the raceability" of the rubber. In addition, designers may add a cooling scoop to cars to avoid drivers

overheating in extreme conditions. This was prompted by the particularly sweaty Qatar GP. Also, teams cannot begin development on the next-generation 2026 cars before the start of 2025.

MATT KEW

Verstappen queue impatience sparks rule tweak

FORMULA 1

Formula 1 drivers were banned from overtaking in the pit exit at last weekend's Abu Dhabi Grand Prix after Max Verstappen caused consternation during FP2 on Friday, when the three-time champion muscled his Red Bull past rivals in the narrow tunnel under the Yas Marina circuit.

Most notably, Verstappen barged his way ahead of the Mercedes of George Russell and then found his path briefly blocked by Lewis Hamilton and came close to brushing the wall. Having accelerated past the lead Mercedes, he was then held up by Pierre Gasly's Alpine.

Verstappen blamed the others: "They have to move. They are all driving slow.

I want to go out because we are limited on time. They just keep on driving in the middle. When I tried to pass, they tried to squeeze me in the wall. A bit silly."

While his actions were not a strict breach of the regulations, the fact that Verstappen came close to being squeezed into the barriers highlighted the potential safety issue. As such, F1 race director Niels Wittich stepped in with revised event notes sent to teams on Saturday morning. Wittich wrote: "Overtaking is prohibited in the pit exit road unless a car slows with an obvious problem."

Passing in the pitlane has become a talking point recently as the governing body has moved to reduce traffic jams in qualifying. With drivers forced to stick within a maximum time for out-laps, they have taken to trying to build gaps in the pit exit, which has triggered further problems. In Brazil, the FIA allowed overtaking in the pit exit to prevent cars blocking each other, but that again caused trouble when drivers felt it was suboptimal for safety.

JONATHAN NOBLE



F3 champion Bortoleto gets Virtuosi drive

FORMULA 2

We're used to the Formula 2 line-up in the Abu Dhabi post-season test being pretty indicative of how the grid will shape up for the following year. And this time around, rather than waiting weeks to announce what everyone already knows, some teams have come clean: a third of the grid for 2024 took shape early this week before mileage was clocked up at Yas Marina.

Recently crowned FIA F3 champion and new McLaren protege Gabriel Bortoleto is heading to Norfolk to join Virtuosi Racing alongside Kush Maini, who transfers from Campos Racing after an impressive rookie season – so much so that the Indian has picked up an Alpine junior role and the patronage of Mika Hakkinen.

"Gabriel has visited us at our base and kept in touch since his signing," said Virtuosi chief Andy Roche of the hotly tipped Brazilian. "He's left a good impression on everyone here and has quickly become part of the team. We were impressed by his



F3 king Bortoleto (front) and Maini are on board for Virtuosi in F2

adaptation to F3 and, like everyone, are excited to see what he can do in 2024."

Super Formula champion Ritomo Miyata's place at Rodin Carlin, which we tipped last week, has been confirmed alongside the staying-on Zane Maloney. Miyata, a reserve for the Toyota Hypercar team, has chosen to compete in F2 plus LMP2 in the European Le Mans Series over WEC GT3.

"We will keep him training for endurance racing and he will be a test driver for the GR010," said Toyota team director Rob Leupen. "We wanted to support him to see how much he can achieve and how he can

develop. The environment will be different: it's outside of Japan, it's an international series, the level of competition is different. This is important for Ritomo to learn."

Maloney has fallen off the Red Bull Junior scheme, and so too has Jak Crawford, who has switched from Hitech GP to DAMS. Also on the move from Hitech is Isack Hadjar – the Franco-Algerian will form an all-Red Bull-backed line-up at Campos with Pepe Marti. The Spaniard remains with his home squad for his step up after taking fifth in the F3 rankings.

MARCUS SIMMONS & GARY WATKINS



Pourchaire and Iwasa to Japan

SUPER FORMULA

Two of the three drivers who went into last weekend's Formula 2 finale with a title shot are set to move to Super Formula in Japan next season.

While champion Theo Pourchaire is expected to line up with Toyota squad Team Impul, a seat for Ayumu Iwasa (left), who eventually fell to fourth in the points, is already confirmed by Honda. He will partner two-time champion Tomoki Nojiri at Honda's Team Mugen, taking the seat vacated by Liam Lawson. The Kiwi is set to be on full-time Formula 1 reserve duties for Red Bull

in 2024, precluding a return to Japan.

Iwasa, who was due his first taste of F1 with AlphaTauri in Tuesday's post-season test in Abu Dhabi, said: "I'm really excited to be able to compete as a member of such an experienced team and alongside Nojiri, who has experience of winning titles. In order to realise my dream of racing in the world's highest category, I'll aim for victories and the championship while learning from Nojiri's strength and speed in each race."

Prior to F2, Iwasa raced in FIA F3 and French F4, meaning that 2024 will be his first full season of car racing in Japan.

JAMIE KLEIN

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Rossi took victory
with WRT in GTWCE
at Misano this year

Bike king Rossi moves into BMW's WEC line-up

WEC

Seven-time MotoGP champion Valentino Rossi will switch to the World Endurance Championship in the new LMGT3 class for his third season in cars. The Italian is moving over from the GT World Challenge Europe to race one of two WRT-run BMW M4 GT3s confirmed when the 2024 entry list was published this week.

Rossi was listed against one of the cars and confirmed by BMW, for which he became a factory driver this year, at the same time. He has made no secret of his desire to race at the Le Mans 24 Hours, the centrepiece round of the WEC, and took part in the Road to Le Mans event on this year's support bill to gain experience.

He described the move as "the next step for me" and a chance to "race globally again". He added that the "the format with three drivers from three different performance categories will be new for me". That is a reference to the FIA driver categorisation system, which will be an essential part of LMGT3 like its predecessor, GTE Am. Each line-up must have at least one Bronze-rated driver and can only have a single Platinum or Gold-ranked professional. The line-ups are typically made up of a pro, a Silver and a Bronze.

Rossi's path into the WEC has been eased by a downgrading from Gold to Silver status for 2024. He is certain to be joined by one of BMW's factory roster; marque stalwart Augusto Farfus has already been

confirmed in the sister car.

A total of nine manufacturers will be represented in LMGT3 next year. They are as predicted with Aston Martin, Ford and McLaren joining Ferrari, Porsche, BMW and Lamborghini, as well as Cadillac and Toyota sister marques Chevrolet and Lexus, which were given priority because they are also represented in Hypercar.

AF Corse and Iron Lynx were confirmed as Ferrari's and Lamborghini's respective representatives, while the Aston entry will be split between the Heart of Racing and D'Station squads, although both will be run by the in-house Aston Martin Racing squad at the manufacturer's GT racing partner Prodrive.

GARY WATKINS

Audi veteran van der Linde switches to Lexus squad

WEC

Long-time Audi factory driver Kelvin van der Linde will race for the Auto Sport Promotion Lexus squad in the World Endurance Championship's new LMGT3 class next year.

The South African (left), a two-time winner of the Nurburgring 24 Hours, has taken the seat originally earmarked for Toyota Hypercar reserve Ritomo

Miyata before it was decided that the Japanese will race in Formula 2 (see p7) alongside an LMP2 programme in the European Le Mans Series with Cool Racing. His announcement followed a successful try-out in ASP's first Lexus RC F GT3 at Barcelona last week.

Gregoire Saucy, 2021 Formula Regional European champion driving for ART Grand Prix, will switch to sportscar racing with the

United Autosports McLaren WEC squad. The Swiss, who raced in Formula 3 with ART in 2022-23, was announced as one of the drivers for its two-car squad of 720S GT3 Evos along with Marino Sato. The ex-F2 driver will dovetail the WEC programme with an attack on the IMSA SportsCar Championship enduros with United in his second year with the team.

GARY WATKINS





BRAZILIAN STOCK CARS Felipe Massa scored his first race win since his bitter-sweet 2008 Brazilian Grand Prix victory in the Brazilian Stock Car Championship at Cascavel last weekend. He started his Chevrolet Cruze from the front row of the top-10 reversed grid, and led home Atila Abreu, Ricardo Mauricio and Ricardo Zonta. Ex-GP3 racer Bruno Baptista won the opener from pole ahead of Daniel Serra. Massa lies 12th in the standings with one round to go, so is unlikely to take legal action about any races in 15 years' time! **Photograph by stockproseries.com.br**

Aston secures Spa 24 winners

GT WORLD CHALLENGE EUROPE

The Spa 24 Hours-winning Walkenhorst Motorsport squad is swapping from BMW to Aston Martin for a factory-backed campaign incorporating the GT World Challenge Europe and the Nurburgring 24 Hours. It will run one Vantage GT3, the latest-evolution version for 2024, in the Pro class with a roster of factory drivers.

It is a significant move, not just because the German team is moving away from the manufacturer with which it won the blue-riband Spa round of the GTWCE in 2018 (pictured), but also because it means that Aston will have a full-season presence in the Pro class of the GTWCE for the first time since 2019. Walkenhorst returns to the Pro class of the GTWCE after a two-season absence: it was BMW's factory team in the Endurance Cup with the M6 GT3 in 2021.

"We at Aston Martin look forward to



working with Walkenhorst to help achieve its ambitious and exciting plans with the Vantage GT3," said Adam Carter, head of endurance racing at Aston. "We know that Walkenhorst is capable of delivering at the pinnacle of global GT racing, which is why Aston Martin Racing has entered this long-term partnership."

Walkenhorst will field a further two Vantage GT3s in other GTWCE classes and at the 24 Hours at the 'Ring and in the NLS, and is also open to entering the ADAC GT Masters series in its homeland.

GARY WATKINS

WELL DONE WHELDON JR

Sebastian Wheldon, the 14-year-old son of the late Indy 500 winner Dan, scooped the Skip Barber Race Series title at Circuit of The Americas last week at the end of his rookie season of car racing. Wheldon, who is backed by the Andretti team, scored his sixth win of the season in the series' old F4 Mygale machinery, and wins a \$100,000 prize for 2024 to graduate to USF Juniors, the lowest rung of the IndyCar support ladder.

HAUSMANN IN THE HOUSE

Swiss Formula 4 racer Tina Hausmann has become the latest addition to the all-female F1 Academy grid for 2024. The 17-year-old, who scored a best result of 16th in Italian F4 this season, has been recruited as an Aston Martin F1 protégée, where she will be mentored by Jessica Hawkins, and has joined Prema Racing.

FE BY ITALIAN COAST...

Italian track Misano has been chosen to replace the Rome street circuit on the Formula E calendar for 2024. The venue by the Adriatic coast – a European F2 host in the 1970s and 1980s, and which also staged a DTM/European F3 event in 2018 – will enjoy a double-header round of the electric series on 13-14 April.

...AND ERC BY WELSH COAST

Wales will host a round of next year's European Rally Championship following confirmation that Rali Ceredigion will join the eight-round schedule. It means the return of international rallying to the UK for the first time since Rally GB in 2019. The asphalt rally located around the seaside town of Aberystwyth will be held on 30 August-1 September.



Hayden Paddon won 2023 ERC crown

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So Max really *does* care...

The world champion often fights shy of comparisons to past greats and talk of records and stats, so it's gratifying to know he went out of his way to surpass an epic milestone

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

After 22 races, the usual end-of-term air ran all around at last weekend's Abu Dhabi Grand Prix. But for many people who had crossed the globe on the 8200-mile journey (as the crow flies, at least) from Las Vegas, exhaustion reigned supreme.

Which brand or form of melatonin might help best with time zone realignment? Did you hear Christian Horner quip "I sincerely hope that subscriptions to Lemsip are not within the budget cap"? What had kicked off the illness making its way so determinedly through the Mercedes camp? Team boss Toto Wolff decried that he had been "the last of the Mohicans here standing" before being struck with a debilitating cough.

George Russell certainly had an uncomfortable race around the Yas Marina track as a result. Having been "really ill the last two weeks" – a situation not helped by fever and then a five-hour flight delay leaving Vegas, which eventually had him eating a 3am breakfast with Alpine's Pierre Gasly in a 24-hour Dallas diner as they battled to swiftly move onto Abu Dhabi time – his condition worsened over the final weekend. Come the race, he had a "horrendous cough that stayed with me all week and in the car", and was therefore "pleased to bring it home when I saw that chequered flag".

Such a downbeat illustration serves to highlight two things. One was what a fine job Russell did, ending what he called "one

"Celebrating a niche moment highlights again where relative joy had to be found this year"

of the worst" campaigns of his racing life with a second podium of 2023, when he might have had at least five more. The other was the sense of achievement at having completed another F1 campaign. For so many of the people working up and down the pitlane, plus those who strive to get the show on the road and into existence, there were countless examples of brilliance.

For the world champion, the records, and the sheer mass of unprecedented success, were sensational. Among a staggering stack of accolades, Max Verstappen completed every racing lap possible in the 2023 campaign, and on the way joined a small club of F1 legends – Juan Manuel Fangio, Jack Brabham and Nelson Piquet – in sealing a title in a Saturday race.

And as he crossed the line last Sunday, Verstappen ended the year on 1003 racing laps led in a season, a simply stunning figure

with which to illustrate his unprecedented dominance – handy given those record 19 wins will blur in the passage of time. But there was an additional element to this achievement worth considering here. How Verstappen had known "it was on the cards going into the race" that he'd need to lead at least 49 laps last Sunday to cross into yet more unparalleled F1 territory.

Red Bull had realised it had to convert to a two-stopper and that his maximum possible total had been reduced by six during the first pitstop phase for the leaders, when first Charles Leclerc and then AlphaTauri's Yuki Tsunoda (unaware he was doing so) led six laps, so Verstappen was aware that the 1000 laps record was in peril. In the end it didn't matter, but this further explains his call for Red Bull to consider pitting Sergio Perez first at the second round of stops when he'd cycled through to run second after Lando Norris, Russell and Leclerc pitted again.

Here we might reflect that celebrating a niche moment of a crushing season highlights again where relative joy had to be found in this year, devoid as it was of a lack of opposition to Red Bull up front. But, also, it was interesting that Verstappen even cared. This is the driver who consistently replies "I find it very hard to compare world champions or even non-world champions" when asked about matching or beating existing driving feats, or comparisons to other F1 greats and multi-champions. We've known for some time this is something of a facade. That the driver who "tells [it] straightforward how things are", according to his father Jos, actually "knows about the wins and things". It's just that for the elder Verstappen, the situation is: "I don't think it matters too much to him."

In choosing not to engage with the discourse around his many achievements as F1's leading star, we can see how the directness cuts both ways. That it's possible to be somewhat fixated on wins and stats to prove your class above the rest, and at the same time shroud the reality for your own gain to avoid losing focus.

Maybe it was the end-of-year delight that had Verstappen – along with Leclerc and Russell – wishing the press conference attendees at the far end of Yas Marina paddock a happy winter break as he headed outside to celebrate with his team. Normally the drivers can't get away quick enough. Surely that same guard-lowering, 'school's out' feeling – one that had Russell amusingly gesturing behind his rival's head that money was a key motivator in Verstappen's six wins since clinching the title two months ago – was what revealed that Verstappen indeed cared for stats and achievements he's historically dismissed. And how excellent it is to know that he does care – even if it is only to a limited extent. F1, with a world champion who takes some joy in the little things that many fans really love, on what is a rather relentless march around the world at times, is all the better for it. 🌸

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Looking back on a hectic season

The BRDC SuperStar and Porsche Supercup race winner has had a busy year, racing in 10 countries. With the season finally over he has time to reflect

HARRY KING

It's been a very active season for me in 2023. I started off doing some endurance racing and the Asian Le Mans Series, all while carrying out preparations for my Porsche campaign in the Carrera Cup Middle East, which went really well.

We claimed a win in every race we entered, so the programme was looking very strong. The expectations for the European season were very high and I had everything I needed in terms of testing mileage, physical preparation, and all the ingredients to attack the Porsche Supercup season with the best approach possible.

We started off at Spa with the Carrera Cup Deutschland, which was my first race in the series. Going to Allied Racing – a brand-new team for me, with new mechanics and engineers – was a big undertaking, but we secured pole position in the wet conditions and followed it up with a race win, which was the best way we could have got that season under way. That proved all the preparations in the winter were paying off.

We had a strong season in Germany, scoring podiums in the majority of the races. And if we weren't on the podium, we were either fourth or fifth. A couple of races where we had contact from a car behind ended up putting us out of contention. Such strong performances throughout the year and storming into it with a pole position and the race win definitely got everybody's attention.

What would have been the Imola weekend to start the Porsche Supercup, where I was back with Lechner Racing, was quite bizarre, because those are the ones where you really want to perform and do a good job. You do everything to prepare in the week leading up, so to get a call from your team manager saying, 'Don't go to the airport just yet,' was a bit odd. But despite the floods meaning the Imola event was called off, it wasn't long until we got going in the Supercup in Monaco. That was one of the highlights of the season, and of what hopefully will be a successful career. Nothing quite tops winning in Monaco, especially in such a competitive one-make series. I'm very proud of the achievement and to bring that home for the team.

I had to cancel my flight home on the Sunday from Monaco, but for a very good reason. The hardest thing was trying to get a suit organised in time for the dinner. It was already 1pm, and you only have a few hours to find a suit before you go to dinner with Prince Albert! Thankfully I managed to look the part and enjoyed a nice evening to celebrate the achievement.

The Porsche Supercup title was always the aim. But to claim the most wins [three, at Monaco, the Hungaroring and Monza] and to do so on some of the most prestigious tracks in the world, as well as fighting hard in some of the other races, definitely caught the attention of important people in motorsport and that's as valuable as claiming a championship. We proved that we were consistently



one of the quickest cars, but two mishaps and two DNFs, which were unavoidable from my side, ultimately meant we were not in the championship battle by the time we got to the finale.

It's such a specific one-make series, and getting the most out of the car is almost a black art in comparison to other formulas. Getting extra mileage is a big benefit, so it's a huge boost if you can get the right support with the right team. You will find the top 15 drivers in the Supercup will all be doing the same thing, so if you were the one not doing that, you'd be at a disadvantage before you even get to the startline.

It was a last-minute invitation from EMA Motorsport to go and provide them with support in the Carrera Cup Australia. I was delighted to get the call because racing at Bathurst was a bit of a dream of mine. To not only go and drive the circuit, but to claim three wins in three races, with the lap record, was incredible. Winning at Monaco and Bathurst means it has been a positive year, but the motivation is as high as ever to keep going.

Nothing is signed and secured yet for 2024. There are lots of options and the season got the attention of the right people, so I'm excited to explore what comes next. The dream is to race a Porsche and keep having success with the brand I started my GT journey with. I enjoy driving the cars and being a Porsche factory driver is something I'm working very hard towards.

I've been on the BRDC SuperStars programme for three years and each season my performances have been better and better. It's useful to have the advice and support of people who have been successful in the past with factory teams and get their insight on how to approach certain situations from a driving perspective or on off-track matters. Those are the things I find are the most valuable part of the programme, getting that kind of access and that support in areas where you wouldn't really expect it. 🌟

RACE CENTRE

Donuts and pyrotechnics can't quite offset a less-than-thrilling season finale

THOMPSON/GETTY IMAGES/REDBULL CONTENT POOL



FORMULA 1

MAX IN COMMAND AS REAL FIGHTS UNFOLD BEHIND

While the world champion ended the season with victory, eyes looking for place-swapping action were on Leclerc, Russell, Perez, Norris...

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

PHOTOGRAPHY RED BULL AND



motorsport
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Formula 1 has now had 10 successive season finales in Abu Dhabi. But so few of these races have been thrillers. And when they have been exciting, this has come via tense affairs, such as Nico Rosberg hanging on as Lewis Hamilton backed him into threatening traffic in 2016, or 2021's jaw-dropping off-track drama. So, a week on from Max Verstappen's wild Las Vegas win, his latest Abu Dhabi triumph at the conclusion of the season – and the devastatingly dominant circumstances in which he secured the year's final victory – raises quite the question. With Sin City's race sitting pretty in the rear-view mirror, is it time to seriously entertain what some were already saying: how about Vegas as the climax instead?

F1 has its financial affairs to consider here, given how Abu Dhabi pays for the privilege of hosting the last round. Plus there was much that could have been improved about its return to Las Vegas, and recency bias is an undeniable factor at times. But the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix was once again a dull affair on which to end a campaign, won at a canter by a new F1 legend and his crack Red Bull squad. And yet, the race around Yas Marina really should have been better. Here's why.



...after which the Ferrari driver makes two further attempts on the opening lap...

Leclerc once again had too much to lose early on

Again, we need to cast our minds back eight days to the start of the Vegas race. After all, the two drivers sharing the front row there – Verstappen and Charles Leclerc – did so again in Abu Dhabi. This time, Verstappen lined up on pole with his Ferrari rival behind and, when the lights went out in the twilight last Sunday, it was roles reversed from the full night setting of the penultimate round.

Leclerc launched best from second, shooting fully alongside Verstappen as they powered through both phases of the start. Leclerc's run to Turn 1 was so good that his nose was slinking towards being in front by the time they hit the brakes. He never quite got a fraction ahead, but had still reached a position where he'd done enough to earn space on the inside of the 90-degree left-hander. We know what would have happened had it been Verstappen inside Leclerc – a feisty move to steal the lead. But here the Dutchman turned defender, sweeping through Turn 1 with an ultra-decisive chop on the racing line to maintain the lead.

Leclerc wasn't done, and he got another excellent run on Verstappen down the long back straight to the Turns 6/7 chicane. Leclerc stole to the inside and "made him think that I was going to the right, then I went to the left". Verstappen again squeezed his rival to the track's limit – like in the Austin sprint – and then, just when it looked like Leclerc might brave it out on the brakes, the Red Bull again steamed around on the outside to keep in front.

Round three happened immediately – Leclerc "tried also in Turn 9", the long, left-hand hairpin at the end of the curved second main acceleration zone. But this time he was obliged to take

to the outside and had to back out, remembering "it was important for me to take care of those tyres, even in the first lap. So, at one point, I just decided to settle for the second place."

There was another vital element Leclerc had been grappling with through these exciting early exchanges – as entertaining as the lead fight ended up being all afternoon – which Verstappen did not. This was, as in Vegas, the battle with Mercedes for second in the teams' standings. "Obviously I had in my mind the constructors' championship," Leclerc explained. "So, I couldn't take too many risks."

The lead gap in the first stint was artificially close

Through the remaining seven corners of lap one of 58, Verstappen shot clear to a 0.9-second lead. Now, Leclerc had more to worry about in the close attentions of Oscar Piastri, who had followed the leading pair from third on the grid while McLaren team-mate Lando Norris jumped compatriot George Russell through the opening corners.

On lap three, just as DRS was activated, Norris used the overtaking aid to blast past his team-mate on the run to Turn 6. Then he set off after Leclerc. By the end of lap 11, however, it was clear that the lead battle was a two-horse race, with Norris 2.2s adrift.

Russell had also closed in on Piastri. He put the remarkably unflappable rookie under pressure and then passed him with a well-judged outside-line move into Turn 9 on lap 11. From there, Russell



Leclerc launches well, triggering a decisive defensive move from Verstappen...

ETHERINGTON

chased Norris to their opening pitstops on lap 14 – one tour after Piastri had become the first of the frontrunners to pit, and exchange medium tyres (most runners had started on these) for hards.

This trio had just been unable to match the mid-1m30s the two leaders had been putting in up to that point. During this sequence, Verstappen's lead had hovered around 1.5s – sometimes he'd ship a few tenths to Leclerc in sectors one or two, before taking them back come the lap's final third. "The first stint, I didn't really know what to expect because I didn't do a long run [in practice, thanks to the crash-filled FP2 session]," Verstappen would later explain. "So, I probably took it a bit too easy in the beginning. I also think the medium was just not as good as expected."

Finally, on lap 15, Verstappen was able to extend his gap above 2s. And one tour later he headed to the pits. With the undercut being powerful here, even around a clear desire not to overstress either compound on the first lap of a stint, any hope of Leclerc passing by on the same strategy was gone.

"I think Max was saving quite a bit on the medium because there were two or three laps before he pitted where he started to push," Leclerc said of this point in the post-race press conference. "And then straight away I understood: 'OK, they've got maybe much more margin than what I initially thought.'"

"STRAIGHT AWAY I UNDERSTOOD: 'OK, THEY'VE GOT MAYBE MUCH MORE MARGIN THAN I INITIALLY THOUGHT'"

After Leclerc had followed Verstappen in on lap 17 to take his own set of new hard tyres, the gap between them for the net lead was 2.9s. Now they had to make their way through the contra-strategy runners Carlos Sainz and Lance Stroll, while ahead Yuki Tsunoda led the next five-lap phase, setting up his ambitious (and ultimately successful) >>



MAUGER

one-stopper. By the time Verstappen and Leclerc ran 1-2 again on the road for real, the gap between them was up to 4.7s.

Once again, the Ferrari driver was operating with the team's constructors' battle with Mercedes in mind. With Sainz and Hamilton on recovery drives from their poor qualifying results, how Leclerc got on against Russell and how they interplayed with the other frontrunners was going to be key to this event's main subplot behind Verstappen's latest steamrolling display.

Russell, not Norris, was Leclerc's main threat, for two reasons. The first was that the Mercedes driver had moved up to third thanks to McLaren's first service for Norris running to 5.1s due to a slow left-rear change. Once they were back on track, Norris ran 1.7s back from Russell as they bedded in with the hard tyre.

"On the hard, it was mostly about managing the gap to George behind," Leclerc explained. "I was aware that we couldn't go and fight with Max, so I didn't want to take too much out of the tyres in the first few laps to then push. And I was also still thinking about a one-stop at that time, so [if] I had to go to the end of the race."

Norris was the main factor in how Ferrari's strategy was decided. Just as it looked as though a straightforward one-stopper would play out, with Verstappen edging away to an 8.3s lead over Leclerc at this point, McLaren pulled its lead car in and kicked off a second pitstop phase. Because of the undercut's power, Mercedes had to bring Russell in on the following tour and Ferrari did likewise with Leclerc one lap later – all three drivers took a second set of new hard tyres.

These had to be delicately managed, according to Pirelli motorsport boss Mario Isola, to avoid "overheating" as well as "the graining [seen mainly on the medium fronts] – something you could initiate quite early in the stint if you pushed too much".

But no passing attempts came to be in this trio. In fact, there was another driver who'd soon be doing that.

"LECLERC WAS OPERATING WITH FERRARI'S CONSTRUCTORS' BATTLE WITH MERCEDES IN MIND"



The race's real action wasn't for the lead

Having not started higher than fifth since he lined up second at Spa for the Belgian GP just before this year's summer break, Sergio Perez had to put in yet another recovery drive of his own last Sunday. As he had of late in Texas and at Interlagos, he lined up ninth.

On the first lap, Perez's Red Bull fell behind Hamilton's run around the outside of Turn 1 and its track limit on exit (which fell within the lap one leniency allowed by race control officials). Then Perez repassed the Mercedes into Turn 6 on lap three, before getting Pierre Gasly's Alpine shortly before the first pitstops.

Once Norris and co had piled into the pits for a second time – by which point Perez was fifth, after jumping Fernando Alonso and the struggling-for-pace Piastri – Red Bull opted to leave the Mexican out, running just over 16s behind his team-mate in second on the road. "Going into the race, we were planning on a one-stop," said Red Bull team boss Christian Horner. "And then we deviated to a two because we saw the deg on the medium tyre was a little bit more than we were liking. I think we could have done it with Max on a one-stop because he had the pace and the ability to manage the tyre."

On lap 36, Verstappen even told Red Bull that it should consider giving his team-mate preference on timing for the second pitstop. At





first glance this appeared to be because it would give Red Bull the best chance of recording a 10th double podium of 2023. But, in fact, the world champion had something very specific in mind.

“It was to try and lead for 1000 laps in the season,” said Verstappen. “I knew that that was on the cards. I said to GP [race engineer Gianpiero Lambiase], he was also of course aware of that, just to make sure they wouldn’t pit me too early. The tyres still felt OK. They were not fantastic, but they felt OK at that point, so we just kept on extending a little bit.” Given Verstappen ended up with a final laps-led total for the season of 1003, his thinking here clearly made a difference in achieving such an accolade.

So, Red Bull pitted Perez for more hard tyres on lap 42, then Verstappen the next time around. This gave Verstappen a reduced lead over Leclerc of 5.6s at the end of his out-lap. But he also had an eight-lap tyre-life offset with which to work, and so by the end of lap 48 the gap was back up to 8.2s.

Perez therefore became the focus. For Red Bull it was all about getting him back towards the podium, but for Leclerc and Ferrari there was a chance that his progress would thwart Mercedes’ attempt to preserve its pre-event four-point gap to its rival in the standings.

Over the four laps following his second pitstop, Perez finally passed Tsunoda and homed in on Norris. Then, on lap 47, he closed to attack Norris on the approach to Turn 6. Norris “tried to let him past... four car lengths away from the apex”, but when Perez sailed past this, they clashed between the two parts of the chicane, forcing Norris to cut Turn 7 and stay ahead. After each had aired their inevitably differing views of the incident over the airwaves, Perez got Norris at the same spot on the following tour. But while Perez was hovering up the 4.4s gap to Russell ahead over the next six laps, the stewards handed him a five-second penalty for causing the Norris clash. Their reasoning was that Perez “dived in late, missed the apex of the corner and understeered towards the outside”.

On lap 54, Perez forced his way to the inside of Turn 9 with a neat, DRS-assisted dive on Russell and suddenly he was third.

At this stage, Hamilton was barely in the points, and Sainz was even further back, heading for a non-score and racing in the doomed hope of a safety car period that never came. So Ferrari needed the six-point swing it could grab if Russell was kept off the podium and Leclerc could hang on to second. Leclerc, therefore, had to try something. In a smart move that evoked memories of Sainz gifting Norris a DRS tow to keep the Mercedes pair at bay in Singapore, he hatched a plan to give Perez that aid and pull him clear of Russell to the flag. Had he been successful, it would have overturned Mercedes’ eventual three-point edge in the constructors’ table.

“As soon as I was aware about the five seconds penalty, basically,” Leclerc explained when asked when he’d begun forming his plan. “Then, I was constantly asking the gap between George and Checo. When they told me that Checo had passed George, I knew Checo was behind me and his best chance was obviously to get the DRS from me and try and pull away as much as possible from George. There was quite a bit of discussion between my engineer and myself, and I let »



Well, that was more like the Pirelli-era Formula 1 qualifying. After the chilly conditions and smooth track surface in Las Vegas eight days earlier meant the pack pushing on for multiple runs, trying to coax their rubber into life, at the Yas Marina circuit they were desperately working to *keep* it alive.

Out-lap, flier, back to the pits – pray your red-walled softs had enough still about them to get through the Turns 15-16 double-right at the end of the lap without being spat wide of track limits just before the finish line. That was the challenge. And, funnily enough, armed with the tyre-massaging Red Bull RB19, Max Verstappen aced it. He ends his most dominant season to date with 12 poles, thanks to his efforts against the clock in Abu Dhabi.

Verstappen waltzed through Q1 and Q2 as the leader, needing just a single set of softs in the opening segment and just one run on a new set in the second: “luckily”, said the world champion, after Red Bull had been “struggling a lot with the balance” in the three practice sessions to this point – particularly with “unpredictable” oversteer then understeer from corner to corner. Verstappen had even missed FP1, with Formula E world champion and Red Bull simulator driver Jake Dennis aboard his car, as the constructors’ championship-winning squad finally made an effort to fulfil its rookie running requirements.

In Q3, Verstappen “could definitely push more” to a 1m23.445s on the first runs. He was followed by McLaren pair Lando Norris and Oscar Piastri respectively at 0.371 seconds and 0.504s down, with Ferrari’s Charles Leclerc in ninth and 1.051s adrift. But none of the rest had completed their first runs in the final segment on new soft rubber.

When they did on the second efforts, Norris ran first of the frontrunners on the road, but was undone by a wild slide in the Turn 13 cambered left under the circuit-straddling W Hotel. This cost him 0.4s in the final sector and dropped him from Verstappen-bothering form to fifth. Piastri and George Russell plunged in ahead of Norris, but all were usurped by Leclerc. He “suddenly was feeling much more at ease” with the Ferrari now on new softs, and produced a lap he compared to the “really good lap as well” that netted him pole in Vegas.

But that was still 0.139s off Verstappen’s leading time, with the Dutchman ending up 0.105s slower than his own personal best on his second run. He put this down to “running out of front tyre”, with the challenge made harder here by the risk of wheelspin and additional sliding in the early corners coming at a rubber cost. Car placement was key.

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

“Norris was undone by a wild slide that dropped him from Verstappen-bothering form to fifth”

TRACKSIDE VIEW

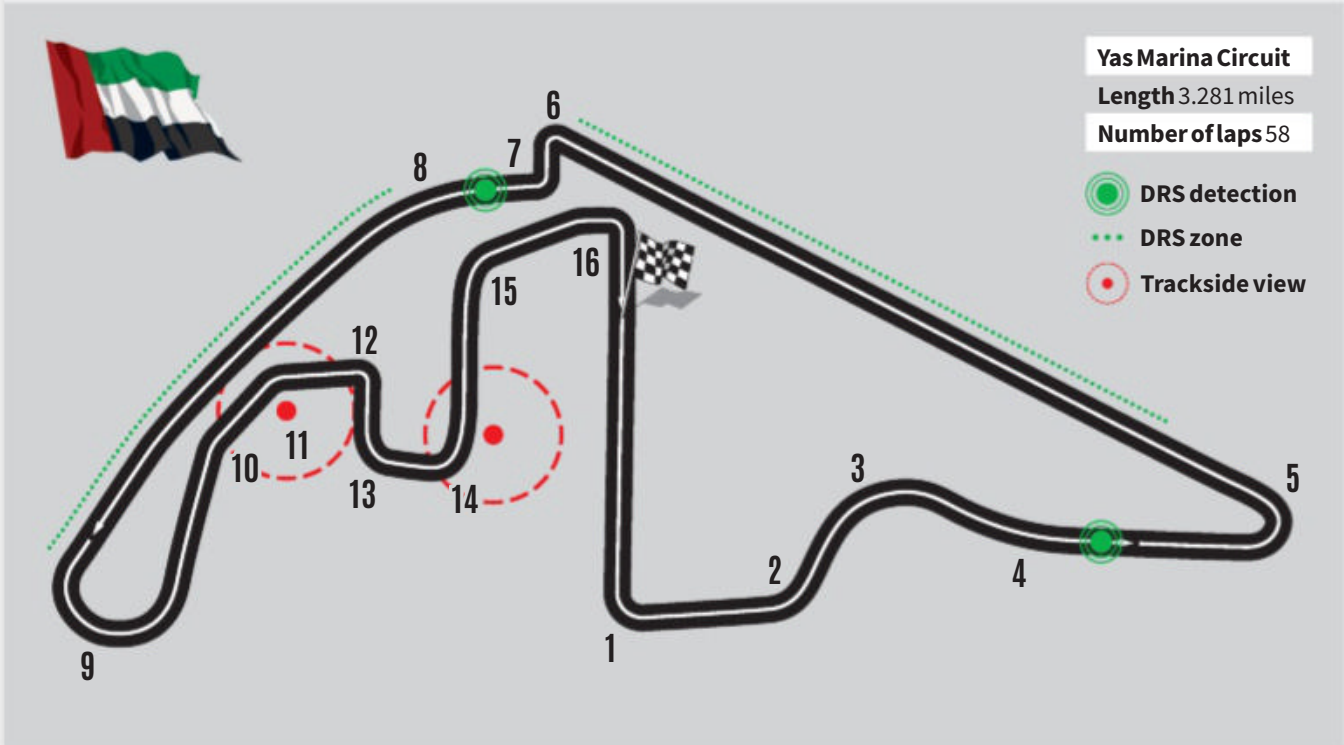


We've become accustomed to layering up as the British winter sets in, so the opportunity to bask in one final blast of sunshine at the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix is most welcome. And boy, it's warm – but thankfully not too humid. We meander to Turn 14, the corner just after the W Hotel underpass, for our first viewing of the day to get a sense of how close each car in FP1 is getting to the exit wall. *GP Racing* editor Stuart Codling has joined us, and he elects to label the corner 'Latifi's Folly' in honour of the

“There are 10 rookies in this session, so a prudent approach is evident in the opening minutes”

amiable Canadian dropping his Williams in 2021 to set up that year's last-lap title showdown.

There are 10 rookies in this session, so a prudent approach to the limits of that corner is evident in the opening minutes. But it's the old hands who almost come close to strife; Carlos Sainz is on a slow



lap, and is almost unsighted by a hot-lapping Haas barrelling around the right-hander.

The rookies are first tasked with some aero mapping work; Robert Shwartzman and Isack Hadjar are laden with aero rakes, which stop them from going too wild in the opening laps – unlike Sainz, who

comes around again on a hot lap and immediately gets a snap of oversteer on the exit. He just about saves the car from the barrier but forces a step back from those standing there.

The less-experienced drivers start to get more confidence, and Frederik Vesti – doubling up on his F2 title battle with Mercedes duties – is going for it. IndyCar's Pato O'Ward is looking particularly confident too, as he covers for Lando Norris in first practice.

We walk around the corner to get a more direct view of the apex, and the drivers almost universally hang it wide into the corner to get a late apex and leave themselves with less to do in avoiding the exit wall. After all, this is the 15th race at the Yas Marina circuit, and this isn't (for half the grid, at least)

their first rodeo here.

All the corners in this sector are slow and off-camber, and so there are varying degrees at the previous corner – Turn 13 – of kerb-hugging to get the best exit. Lance Stroll is feeling particularly keen to cuddle the bollards placed at the centre of the corner, while Oscar Piastri is slightly more hands-off when he makes his appearance.

After walking to Turn 11 to luxuriate in the sheer speed that the drivers carry, and watch sparks cannon out of the diffuser, we head back as the session draws to a close to hydrate and hope our factor 30 sun cream – kindly supplied by Alex Kalinauckas – has protected us enough. That's our last trackside trip of the year, and it's one that we've savoured.

JAKE BOXALL-LEGG



ALL PICS: BOXALL-LEGG



Will smiles be broader if track embraces need for further improvements?

him know as well that this was my plan.”

In the end, Leclerc actually gave up second on the road on the final lap, pulling over on the run to the Turn 5 hairpin. He then had to stick close enough behind Perez so that he’d get the place back when the penalty was applied post-race, and hope that Russell was too far back to do likewise. But, in the end, the Mercedes was only 3.9s behind Perez at the flag.

“It was the logical thing to do in Ferrari’s position, but they only did half the job,” said Horner, who saw Verstappen end up with a final winning margin of 18s. “Because they let Checo through but then didn’t [back off and hold Russell up]. As Checo has demonstrated in that sector of the circuit [in 2021, famously against Hamilton here], you can hold up quite a bit of time there. Charles just needed to hold off George a little more to get that extra second.”

Norris blew a pole shot

Speaking after qualifying, McLaren team principal Andrea Stella said Norris had been “very close” to being in pole contention.



“IT WAS THE LOGICAL THING TO DO IN FERRARI’S POSITION, BUT THEY ONLY DID HALF THE JOB”

It can’t be known whether the Briton might have edged Verstappen, because in Q3 only the Red Bull had two new-tyre runs, and Norris’s Turn 13 mistake came on his sole attempt with fresh softs.

It’s tantalising to think how he might have made the opening laps more exciting for Verstappen, Leclerc and therefore the race overall had he started at the head of the pack. Yet, in the end, Norris felt McLaren was “missing something” and he “had to push very hard to keep up with the Mercedes and Ferrari, and when I did that, I destroyed the tyres very quickly”.

Ferrari team boss Fred Vasseur reckoned the difference on the day came down to his squad having an “advantage of pace, you can manage – you don’t have the deg”. This was particularly the case in the Turns 2 and 3 swoops, where Vasseur said the McLarens were “flat-out when we were managing the tyres”.

Red Bull also, before qualifying, solved what Horner called “something set-up-wise that disconnected the car between high and low speed in FP3”, in terms of final ride height adjustments over the track’s now considerable bumps. Horner said Red Bull then did “a little bit more tuning in that direction”. This, he explained, “brought the car back in to a little more normal operating window” and was a big factor in how Verstappen’s weekend overall played out. He’d also produced a theory after qualifying for why racing remains so tricky at F1 level around this track, that “the off-camber corners... [don’t] really help the racing”.

“More banked corners would help,” Verstappen added. “So, around the hotel, they need to bank that instead of off-camber. And at Turn 7, that little crest, it always throws you off a little bit and especially when you’re behind, you just lose a lot of traction.”

Given Abu Dhabi is set to return as F1’s season finale for an 11th straight year in 2024 and has embraced layout changes to improve its spectacle in recent years, that might just be worth a look for the organisers if Vegas voices continue to call for one of F1’s bigger moments to move home. 🏁

**F1 2023
SEASON REVIEW**

14 December
issue

ALONSO AND HAMILTON DISAGREE OVER TURN 5 'BRAKE-TEST'

Fernando Alonso and Lewis Hamilton rolled back the years with an on-track disagreement that led to Hamilton accusing the Spaniard of brake-testing him ahead of Turn 5.

This came after Alonso's lap 36 pitstop where his Aston Martin moved to the right upon rejoining the track, which caught Hamilton by surprise and almost led to contact between the two. The Mercedes subsequently overtook with DRS, but Alonso reclaimed the position and finished seventh, two positions ahead of his former team-mate.

Alonso contended that he was attempting to get Hamilton to pass before the corner, so that he could benefit from DRS instead on the run to Turn 6, citing a move from over a decade ago as an example. "Lewis is obviously very clever and understands the sport really good and has a lot of experience, but I have more," Alonso reckoned. "We did the same in Canada in 2012, so 11 years after that episode, we tried to give the DRS to the other guy, braking for Turn 5 but in both cases I won [the battle], so it's OK."

Hamilton was less than enthused with the close-quarters fight, and felt that Alonso had braked far too early for the corner: "We were flat-out at 400m, 300m before the corner and doing 180mph and the guy all of a sudden slows down drastically ahead of me."



Tsunoda shines, but can't help AlphaTauri to seventh

Yuki Tsunoda handed retiring AlphaTauri team boss Franz Tost a near-perfect send-off with a superb eighth place, but it was not enough to help the Italian squad overhaul Williams in the constructors' championship at the chequered flag.

AlphaTauri had started the weekend seven points short of Williams in their battle for seventh place in the overall standings, needing at least a sixth-place finish to claim a few million dollars extra in prize money.

Tsunoda had helped the team's cause by qualifying a career-best sixth, and remained there in the opening laps. He maintained a strong level of pace despite having to extend his medium-tyre stint to make a one-stop strategy possible, and moved up the order when the two-stoppers made their first stops. This gave him the lead for five laps to become only the second Japanese to lead a lap,

after Takuma Sato in 2004.

Although a drop out of the points occurred after his pitstop, Tsunoda's efforts on the hard tyre ensured that he was briefly in the frame for sixth, but passes from Oscar Piastri and Fernando Alonso knocked him back two places.

A late assault from Lewis Hamilton at Turn 9 on the final lap briefly put him down to ninth, but the Briton went slightly too deep on the brakes and Tsunoda reclaimed the place to cap off a fine drive. "I wasn't able to give probably the biggest gift to Franz, but at least hopefully, I gave it all – I showed at least my performance as a kind of appreciation for him," Tsunoda explained.

Williams pair Alex Albon and Logan Sargeant could not offer much in the way of defence – they finished 14th and 16th – but their points buffer heading into the race proved enough.

1325

The number of grand prix race laps Max Verstappen completed in 2023 – that's every single lap raced this year.



Q&A

CARLOS SAINZ
FERRARI DRIVER
How do you react to losing second in the constructors' to Mercedes?

This last weekend hasn't gone like I expected or like we wanted to finish the year. Honestly, very disappointed and obviously not happy given how close it was in the end with the constructors' championship. But we will have to sit down, analyse, see what we could have done better and



what was going on, because clearly the pace this weekend and the overall feeling with the car and everything wasn't good.

What was your strategy after starting down in 16th?

We started on the hard, expecting the hard to help us do a one-stop. Again, like we've seen many times this year, whenever we start on harder compounds with our car we struggle a lot and it was again today. We had nothing

to lose starting 16th and we gave it a go, but in the end again it didn't work for us. The harder compounds, at the beginning of the race with dirty air and the sliding, it just doesn't work for us. And once we saw that we had very little chance of scoring points. We left it out for a safety car and it didn't work out also. We had to retire in the end with a PU issue, so it's not like it would have changed much.

How to you reflect on the fight with Mercedes over the year?

I think we had our moments

where we were quicker, I think Mercedes had their moments when they were quicker. Overall, maybe a bit of reliability here and there [cost Ferrari] and probably overall I think we've been a quicker car, but they've been a little bit more consistent than us. Anyway, it's a season where the team has made a lot of progress. I think we've learned a lot from this car, from these tyres. We finished the season a lot stronger than where we started. And it's something we can bank on for next year hopefully, expecting a more competitive package.


GASLY FURIOUS AS ALPINE MISSES THE POINTS

Alpine driver Pierre Gasly was left frustrated by a clash with Mercedes' Lewis Hamilton that he claimed "destroyed the diffuser" on his A523, and was then unhappy with his team's pitstop strategy. This helped team-mate Esteban Ocon get ahead during the opening third of the race.

On lap 15, Gasly briefly locked up approaching Turn 6, and was hit from behind by the chasing Hamilton. The stewards decided that the incident didn't warrant a penalty because Gasly ended up "on a slightly different line at a slightly lower speed, which was obviously unexpected by [Hamilton]".

After this, Alpine pitted Ocon at the end of lap 15 to switch his medium tyres for hard Pirellis. Hamilton, running just ahead, did likewise.

When Gasly stopped two tours later, he rejoined behind the pair he had been leading and was vocally annoyed on his team radio. From there, Ocon completed a one-stop race and ended up 12th, lacking the pace to threaten the points. Gasly brought his hobbled car home on a two-stopper one place further back.

Teams investigated for possible pitlane infractions

The closing stages of the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix featured an unusual stewards' investigation – all the teams were suspected of having pitcrew members working on cars while wearing insufficient eye protection during tyre changes.

This started with specific investigations into the second round of pitstops involving Lewis Hamilton and Pierre Gasly, but by the end of the race Max Verstappen, Williams drivers Logan Sargeant and Alex Albon, and Alfa Romeo's Zhou Guanyu had also been cited. After the race, the stewards summoned all team managers to discuss the situation, which is understood to have been spotted by pitlane marshals and officials. It centred on Article 34.13 of F1's sporting regulations, which

specifies what headgear pitcrew mechanics must wear and states "the use of appropriate eye protection is compulsory".

While any possible penalty would have been a fine for the teams involved rather than a sporting sanction applied to a driver, the stewards decided "the video evidence was in some cases insufficiently clear to determine where, for example, a visor was open, [but] the team member concerned may have been wearing glasses or other eye protection". Therefore, no penalties were dished out. All teams and the officials have agreed to ensure "this Article is respected by all team members in the future", according to the stewards' bulletin.



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ABU DHABI

TEAM WORKED HARD TO
GET NEW FLOOR ONTO BOTH
CARS IN TIME FOR FINALE

ALPHATAURI PUSHES TO THE END

There was little in the way of upgrades at the season finale, as was perhaps to be expected this late into the season. That said, AlphaTauri sought to bolster its firepower in the race for seventh in the constructors' championship with a new floor design. This featured more distinct slots along its edges, a redefined forward portion, and new floor fences.

The team has made large changes to its aerodynamics line-up over the past two seasons after the disappointment generated by the 2022 AT03; following a downbeat start to 2023, the AT04 has made great strides since.

Chief race engineer Jonathan Eddolls revealed that the new floor was planned around the time of the United States Grand Prix in October, and that the team had decided to take an aggressive route in putting together two floor bodies for the season finale. "We've been updating the car all season, since Singapore, Austin, we've been bringing packages and we

found some interesting directions in the wind tunnel," he said. "We wanted to bring those on track to try, and the earliest we could get it was here. The factory did a very good job, they've made two, so we had no spares. We'll analyse all the data and it should then at least give us confidence with the development direction in the wind tunnel over the winter."

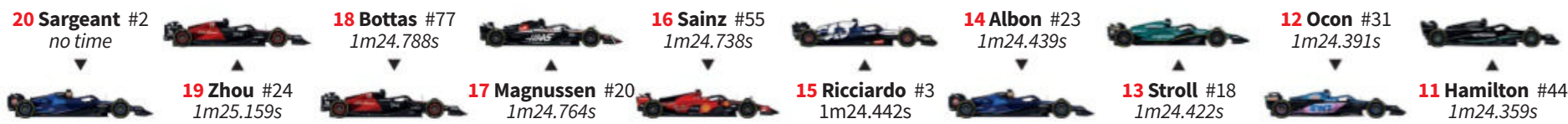
This comes amid suggestions that AlphaTauri now has one of the best cars in low-speed conditions, although Eddolls added that improving overall efficiency was top of the priority list for 2024: "Some of the focus has been on the slow-speed corners, as it was a bit of a weakness. We still need to address the aerodynamic efficiency because we are quite competitive in the slow-speed corners, but we've got the downside where we're one of the slowest cars on the straight."

JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE

LOW-SPEED WEAKNESS VERY
MUCH A THING OF THE PAST



GALLOWAY/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

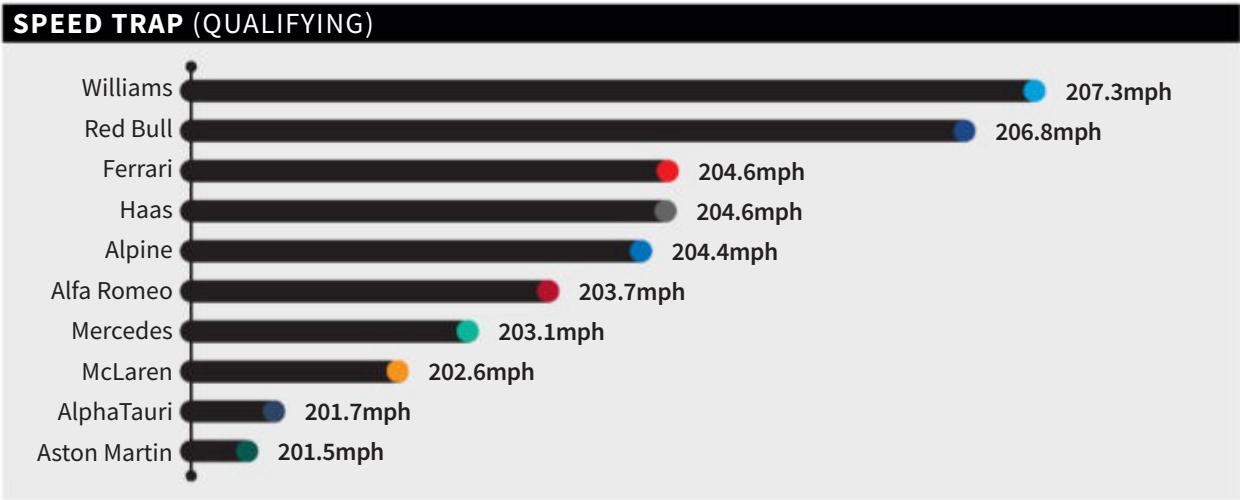


FREE PRACTICE 1			FREE PRACTICE 2			FREE PRACTICE 3		
POS	DRIVER	TIME	POS	DRIVER	TIME	POS	DRIVER	TIME
1	Russell	1m26.072s	1	Leclerc	1m24.809s	1	Russell	1m24.418s
2	Drugovich	1m26.360s	2	Norris	1m24.852s	2	Norris	1m24.513s
3	Ricciardo	1m26.433s	3	Verstappen	1m24.982s	3	Piastri	1m24.810s
4	Bottas	1m26.453s	4	Bottas	1m25.024s	4	Albon	1m24.929s
5	Stroll	1m26.631s	5	Perez	1m25.112s	5	Leclerc	1m25.099s
6	Piastri	1m26.665s	6	Russell	1m25.122s	6	Verstappen	1m25.153s
7	Sainz	1m26.676s	7	Zhou	1m25.223s	7	Ocon	1m25.194s
8	Shwartzman	1m26.703s	8	Hamilton	1m25.315s	8	Sargeant	1m25.205s
9	Gasly	1m26.720s	9	Gasly	1m25.321s	9	Tsunoda	1m25.222s
10	Tsunoda	1m26.725s	10	Piastri	1m25.361s	10	Zhou	1m25.258s
11	Sargeant	1m26.742s	11	Alonso	1m25.397s	11	Perez	1m25.259s
12	Vesti	1m26.815s	12	Ricciardo	1m25.467s	12	Hamilton	1m25.292s
13	Doohan	1m26.865s	13	Stroll	1m25.492s	13	Gasly	1m25.303s
14	Pourchaire	1m27.093s	14	Ocon	1m25.566s	14	Alonso	1m25.343s
15	O'Ward	1m27.114s	15	Tsunoda	1m25.669s	15	Stroll	1m25.405s
16	Dennis	1m27.208s	16	Albon	1m26.081s	16	Bottas	1m25.420s
17	Hadjar	1m27.244s	17	Magnussen	1m26.413s	17	Hulkenberg	1m25.584s
18	O'Sullivan	1m27.460s	18	Sargeant	1m26.659s	18	Ricciardo	1m25.597s
19	Magnussen	1m27.462s	19	Sainz	1m26.707s	19	Magnussen	1m25.652s
20	Bearman	1m27.569s	20	Hulkenberg	1m27.147s	20	Sainz	1m25.713s

WEATHER Sunny, air 28-31C track 40-42C

WEATHER Sunny then night, air 27-28C track 30-32C

WEATHER Sunny, air 30C track 39-40C



QUALIFYING 1			QUALIFYING 2			QUALIFYING 3		
POS	DRIVER	TIME	POS	DRIVER	TIME	POS	DRIVER	TIME
1	Verstappen	1m24.160s	1	Verstappen	1m23.740s	1	Verstappen	1m23.445s
2	Perez	1m24.209s	2	Norris	1m23.920s	2	Leclerc	1m23.584s
3	Tsunoda	1m24.286s	3	Leclerc	1m23.969s	3	Piastri	1m23.782s
4	Albon	1m24.298s	4	Russell	1m24.013s	4	Russell	1m23.788s
5	Russell	1m24.337s	5	Gasly	1m24.078s	5	Norris	1m23.816s
6	Norris	1m24.368s	6	Perez	1m24.116s	6	Tsunoda	1m23.968s
7	Stroll	1m24.405s	7	Alonso	1m24.131s	7	Alonso	1m24.084s
8	Hulkenberg	1m24.425s	8	Tsunoda	1m24.207s	8	Hulkenberg	1m24.108s
9	Hamilton	1m24.437s	9	Hulkenberg	1m24.213s	9	Perez	1m24.171s
10	Leclerc	1m24.459s	10	Piastri	1m24.278s	10	Gasly	1m24.548s
11	Ricciardo	1m24.461s	11	Hamilton	1m24.359s			
12	Piastri	1m24.487s	12	Ocon	1m24.391s			
13	Alonso	1m24.501s	13	Stroll	1m24.422s			
14	Ocon	1m24.565s	14	Albon	1m24.439s			
15	Gasly	1m24.600s	15	Ricciardo	1m24.442s			
16	Sainz	1m24.738s						
17	Magnussen	1m24.764s						
18	Bottas	1m24.788s						
19	Zhou	1m25.159s						
20	Sargeant	notime						



SEASON STATS			
DRIVERS' CHAMPIONSHIP	PTS	BEST FINISH	BEST QUAL
1 Verstappen	575	1	1
2 Perez	285	1	1
3 Hamilton	234	2	1
4 Alonso	206	2	2
5 Leclerc	206	2	1
6 Norris	205	2	2
7 Sainz	200	1	1
8 Russell	175	3	2
9 Piastri	97	2	2
10 Stroll	74	4	3
11 Gasly	62	3	4
12 Ocon	58	3	4
13 Albon	27	7	4
14 Tsunoda	17	8	6
15 Bottas	10	8	7
16 Hulkenberg	9	7	2
17 Ricciardo	6	7	4
18 Zhou	6	9	5
19 Magnussen	3	10	4
20 Lawson	2	9	10
21 Sargeant	1	10	7
22 deVries	0	12	12











CONSTRUCTORS' CHAMPIONSHIP	PTS
1 Red Bull	860
2 Mercedes	409
3 Ferrari	406
4 McLaren	302
5 Aston Martin	280
6 Alpine	120
7 Williams	28
8 AlphaTauri	25
9 Alfa Romeo	16
10 Haas	12

QUALIFYING BATTLE			
Verstappen	20	1	Perez
Leclerc	15	7	Sainz
Hamilton	11	11	Russell
Gasly	14	8	Ocon
Norris	15	7	Piastri
Zhou	7	15	Bottas
Alonso	19	3	Stroll
Magnussen	7	15	Hulkenberg
Ricciardo	2	4	Tsunoda
Tsunoda	4	1	Lawson
deVries	2	8	Tsunoda
Sargeant	0	22	Albon

WINS	FASTEST LAPS
Verstappen 19	Verstappen 9
Perez 2	Hamilton 4
Sainz 1	Perez 2
	Piastri 2

POLE POSITIONS	
Verstappen 12	Alonso 1
Leclerc 5	Norris 1
Perez 2	Russell 1
Sainz 2	Tsunoda 1
Hamilton 1	Zhou 1

STARTING GRID

10 Gasly #10 1m24.548s		8 Hulkenberg #27 1m24.108s		6 Tsunoda #22 1m23.968s		4 Russell #63 1m23.788s		2 Leclerc #16 1m23.584s	
	9 Perez #11 1m24.171s		7 Alonso #14 1m24.084s		5 Norris #4 1m23.816s		3 Piastri #81 1m23.782s		1 Verstappen #1 1m23.445s

RESULTS ROUND 22/22 (58 LAPS – 190.25 MILES)						FASTEST LAPS			
POS	DRIVER	TEAM	FINISHTIME	LED	TYRES	POS	DRIVER	TIME	GAP
1	MaxVerstappen (NLD)	Red Bull-Honda RBPT	1h27m02.624s	52	Mn, Hn, Hn	1	Verstappen	1m26.993s	-
2	CharlesLeclerc (MCO)	Ferrari	+17.993s	1	Mn, Hn, Hn	2	Perez	1m27.493s	+0.500s
3	GeorgeRussell (GBR)	Mercedes	+20.328s		Mn, Hn, Hn	3	Albon	1m27.845s	+0.852s
4	SergioPerez (MEX)	Red Bull-Honda RBPT	+21.453s		Mn, Hn, Hn	4	Stroll	1m28.050s	+1.057s
5	LandoNorris (GBR)	McLaren-Mercedes	+24.284s		Mn, Hn, Hn	5	Piastri	1m28.138s	+1.145s
6	OscarPiastri (AUS)	McLaren-Mercedes	+31.487s		Mn, Hn, Hn	6	Norris	1m28.164s	+1.171s
7	FernandoAlonso (ESP)	Aston Martin-Mercedes	+39.512s		Mn, Hu, Hu	7	Russell	1m28.187s	+1.194s
8	YukiTsunoda (JPN)	AlphaTauri-Honda RBPT	+43.088s	5	Mn, Hn	8	Leclerc	1m28.199s	+1.206s
9	LewisHamilton (GBR)	Mercedes	+44.424s		Mn, Hn, Hn	9	Alonso	1m28.256s	+1.263s
10	LanceStroll (CAN)	Aston Martin-Mercedes	+55.632s		Hu, Hu, Mn	10	Hamilton	1m28.372s	+1.379s
11	DanielRicciardo (AUS)	AlphaTauri-Honda RBPT	+56.229s		Mn, Hn, Hn	11	Ricciardo	1m28.571s	+1.578s
12	EstebanOcon (FRA)	Alpine-Renault	+1m06.373s		Mn, Hn	12	Sargeant	1m28.580s	+1.587s
13	PierreGasly (FRA)	Alpine-Renault	+1m10.360s		Mn, Hn, Hn	13	Zhou	1m28.746s	+1.753s
14	AlexanderAlbon (THA)	Williams-Mercedes	+1m13.184s		Mu, Hn, Hn	14	Gasly	1m29.016s	+2.023s
15	NicoHulkenberg (DEU)	Haas-Ferrari	+1m23.696s		Mn, Hn, Hn	15	Hulkenberg	1m29.217s	+2.224s
16	LoganSargeant (USA)	Williams-Mercedes	+1m27.791s		Mu, Hn, Hn	16	Tsunoda	1m29.256s	+2.263s
17	ZhouGuanyu (CHN)	Alfa Romeo-Ferrari	+1m29.422s		Mn, Hn, Mn	17	Sainz	1m29.452s	+2.459s
18	CarlosSainz (ESP)	Ferrari	57 laps-powerunit		Hn, Hn, Sn	18	Bottas	1m29.863s	+2.870s
19	ValtteriBottas (FIN)	Alfa Romeo-Ferrari	-1 lap/+12.411s		Hn, Mn	19	Magnussen	1m29.934s	+2.941s
20	KevinMagnussen (DNK)	Haas-Ferrari	-1 lap/+14.876s		Mn, Hn, Hn	20	Ocon	1m30.033s	+3.040s

WEATHER Sunny then night, air 26-27C track 30-33C

WINNER'S AVERAGE SPEED 131.143mph. FASTEST LAP AVERAGE SPEED 135.795mph.


TYRES

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

HARD

MEDIUM

SOFT



C0

C1

C2

C3

C4

C5

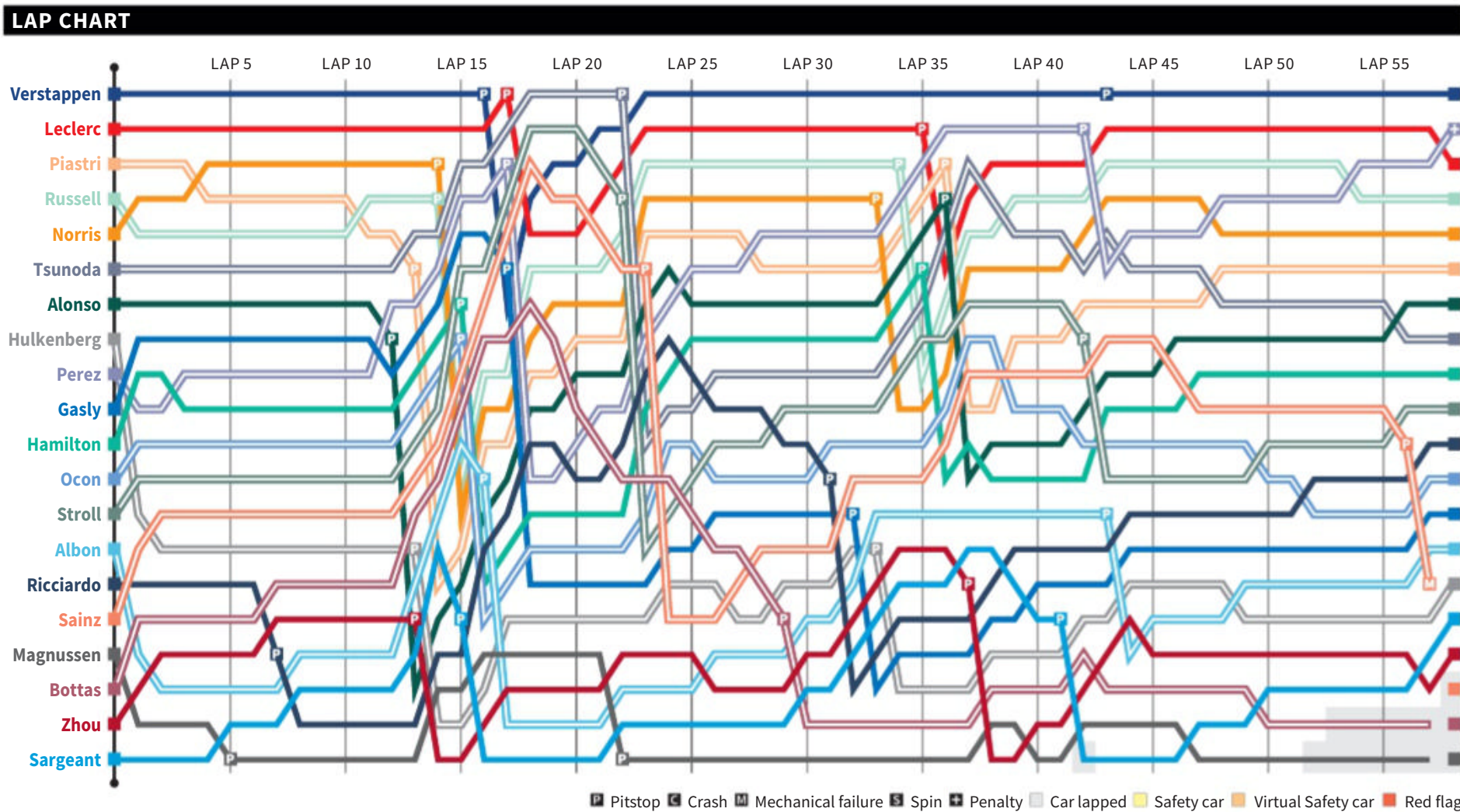
INTERMEDIATE

WET

RACE BRIEFING

FP1 FELIPE DRUGOVICH replaced Alonso at Aston Martin, ROBERT SHWARTZMAN replaced Leclerc at Ferrari, FREDERIK VESTI replaced Hamilton at Mercedes, JACK DOOHAN replaced Ocon at Alpine, THEO POURCHAIRE replaced Zhou at Alfa Romeo, PATO O'WARD replaced Norris at McLaren, JAKE DENNIS replaced Verstappen at Red Bull, ISACK HADJAR replaced Perez at Red Bull, ZAK O'SULLIVAN replaced Albon at Williams and OLLIE BEARMAN replaced Hulkenberg at Haas

RACE PENALTIES PEREZ Five-second penalty and two licence points for causing a collision with Norris

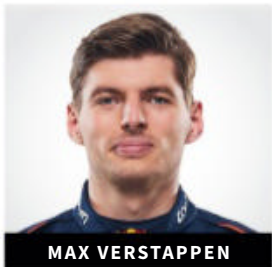


ABU DHABI GP DRIVER RATINGS

Abu Dhabi's top-scorers, and top finishers, Verstappen and Leclerc are matched by Tsunoda thanks to a terrific leave-nothing-on-the-table display

JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE

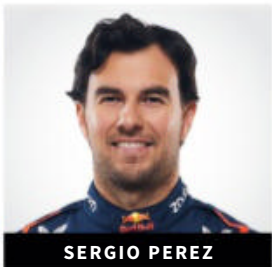
RED BULL



MAX VERSTAPPEN

Started **1st** — Result **1st**

9 Looked passable in opening phase while finding his feet on medium rubber, but switch to the hard tyre made it look rather easy. Early threat from Leclerc was ultimately given short shrift. A strong drive, but faced little in the way of challenges when Leclerc held off to focus on teams' championship battle.



SERGIO PEREZ

Started **9th** — Result **4th**

6 Took too long to pass Gasly at start. Went long on stints to move up field, resulting in strong final-stint pace. Was let go by Leclerc to mitigate penalty damage, which was largely his own making from blocking Norris's attempt to turn in at Turn 7, but could not find enough time to beat Russell.

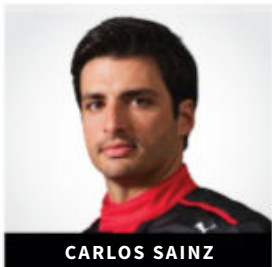
FERRARI



CHARLES LECLERC

Started **2nd** — Result **2nd**

9 Gave Verstappen fright on first lap but was nailed on for second thereafter. Wisely focused on tyre management, rather than going for first-lap glory. Had enough in hand to let penalty-encumbered Perez through in an effort to help Ferrari overhaul Mercedes in teams' stakes, but to no avail.



CARLOS SAINZ

Started **16th** — Result **18th**

4 Made little progress in opening stint and emerged from first pitstop where he'd started in 16th. Strategy then hinged on waiting for a safety car, and was left out on a second set of hard tyres, so needed an extra pitstop at the end. Retired with suspected engine issue.

MERCEDES



LEWIS HAMILTON

Started **11th** — Result **9th**

5 Grabbed two valuable points for Mercedes in constructors' championship race, but cut forlorn figure all weekend. Showed good pace over the middle stint, but could do little with it after breaking into the points. Overcooked last-lap move on Tsunoda at Turn 9 and was repassed.

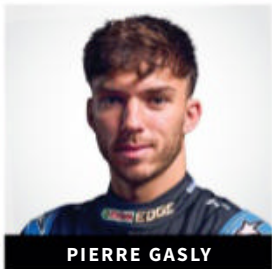


GEORGE RUSSELL

Started **4th** — Result **3rd**

8 Gets credit for claiming podium while slightly ill, albeit thanks to Perez's penalty. Lost a place at start to Norris, but reclaimed it amid first pitstops, granting him foundations for a top-three finish. Managed to stall Perez's attack for just long enough to ensure he benefited from the five-second addition.

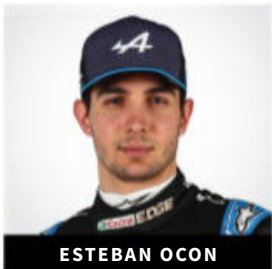
ALPINE



PIERRE GASLY

Started **10th** — Result **13th**

5 Wounded by damage to diffuser after lap 15 Hamilton clash, which he pinned on the Briton. Reckoned it cost him four tenths per lap. Was further aggrieved that Ocon had achieved an undercut during pit phase, so did about as well as expected given the circumstances.

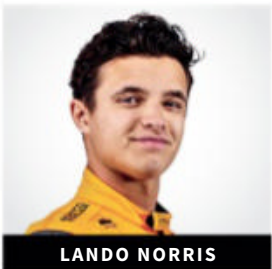


ESTEBAN OCON

Started **12th** — Result **12th**

4 Only four seconds clear of team-mate by the end after conducting long stint on hard tyres. Briefly looked on for points mid-race, but was ultimately easy meat for cars on conventional strategies. Gasly's diffuser damage stopped him losing a further position.

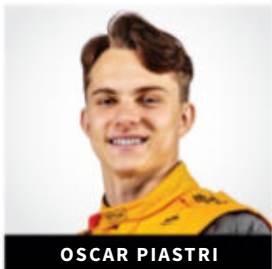
McLAREN



LANDO NORRIS

Started **5th** — Result **5th**

7 Started well to leapfrog Russell, then ushered in front of Piastri to start fighting Leclerc ahead. Pace didn't quite materialise after losing ground to front pair over first stint. Slow pitstop cost position to Russell, then was adjudged to have been shown the door too firmly by Perez on lap 47.



OSCAR PIASTRI

Started **3rd** — Result **6th**

6 Successfully kept third at start, but early pace shortfall to Norris prompted a swap. Held onto team-mate to keep Russell at bay, but vulnerable once out of DRS. Settled into managing his race and, once Perez passed, faced few further challenges as he was comfortably faster than cars behind.

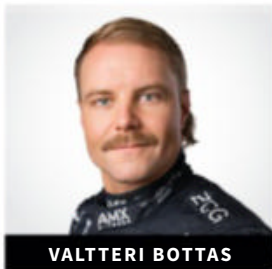
ALFA ROMEO



ZHOU GUANYU

Started **19th** — Result **17th**

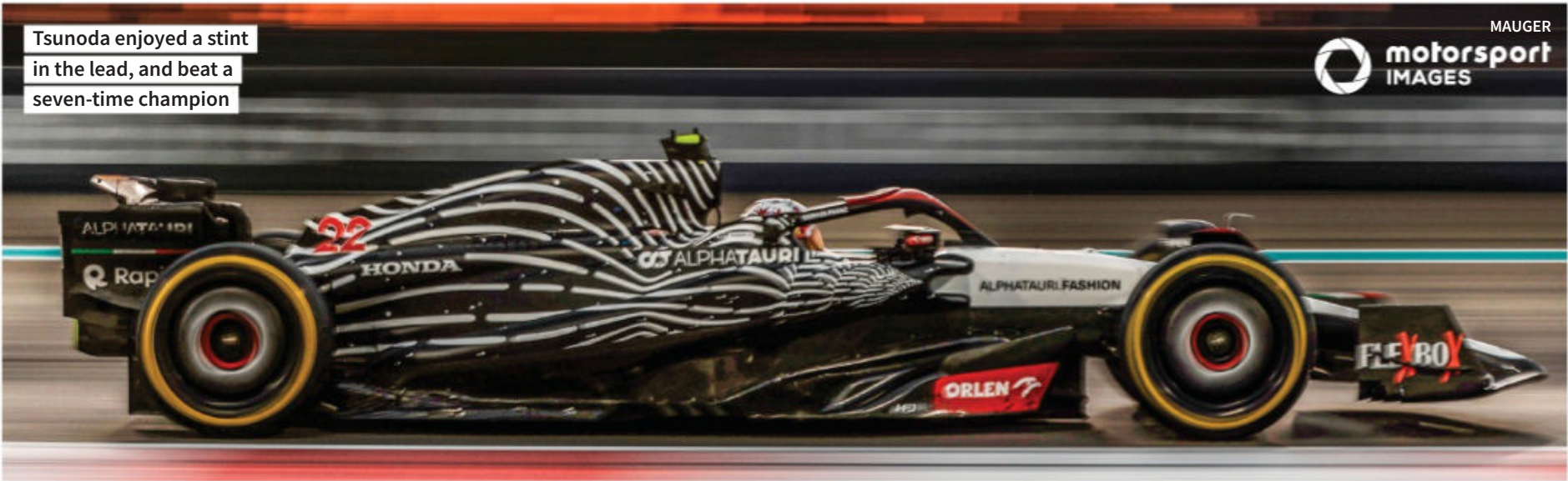
5 Like Bottas, had little pace in his Alfa Romeo but managed to move above his team-mate through a more conventional strategy and preserve his advantage. Felt overall lack of speed was consistent with qualifying, and lost a position to Sargeant at the end as he started to struggle.



VALTTERI BOTTAS

Started **18th** — Result **19th**

4 One-stopper gave him relatively little to play with; pace was poor on hard tyre and even worse as medium stint crawled on. Shipped 30s to leader's pace in final 10 laps, underlining trouble he faced in medium stint. Tried something different to make something happen, but fruitless.



ASTON MARTIN



Started 7th — Result 7th

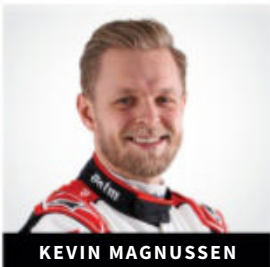
6 Late overtake on Tsunoda just enough to clinch fourth in drivers' championship. Complained of missing straightline speed, and "brake-test" on Hamilton was misjudged effort to gain DRS advantage. But he held off the Merc and succeeded in converting his grid position.



Started 13th — Result 10th

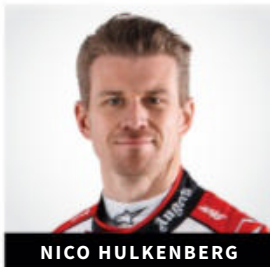
6 One of three drivers to start on hard tyres, allowing him to settle in for longer first stint while hassling Ocon ahead. Hard graft put him on cusp of points, which became 10th when Sainz pitted. Not quite the heroics of previous two races, but did well to break into the top 10.

HAAS



Started 17th — Result 20th

4 Ditched his medium tyres after five laps to try an offset strategy, falling down the order as a result. This merely consigned him to a day of racing at the back, and a long stint on the second set of hards left him very far behind his team-mate. Was glad to see the back of the season.



Started 8th — Result 15th

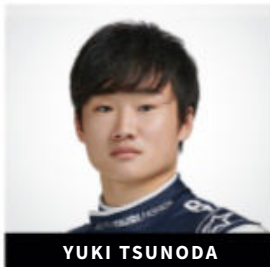
5 Dropped to 13th on opening lap, and lacked pace to make any further dents in the race. Much like the rest of the season, was the leading light for Haas and kept himself afloat in the lower midfield. Early fall largely accelerated the inevitable as Haas faced its usual 2023 issues in the finale.

ALPHATAURI



Started 15th — Result 11th

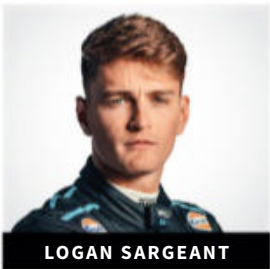
6 Hamstrung with early pitstop after encountering suspected tear-off in brake duct. Was hence forced into defensive middle stint to rescue something. Efforts rewarded with strong late pace that almost offered a point; cleared Ocon with seven laps to go and got within a second of Stroll at the flag.



Started 6th — Result 8th

9 Gave it his all to beat Williams in battle for seventh in constructors', but just fell short. Long stint on mediums ensured one-stopper was made possible, and led for a time before the chasing two-stoppers came through. Briefly lost position to Hamilton, but read situation well to reclaim the place.

WILLIAMS



Started 20th — Result 16th

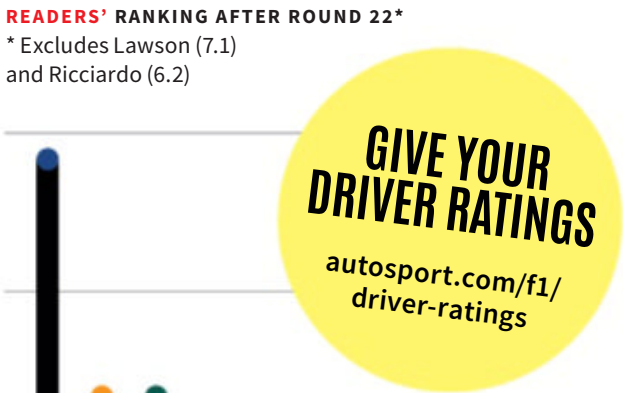
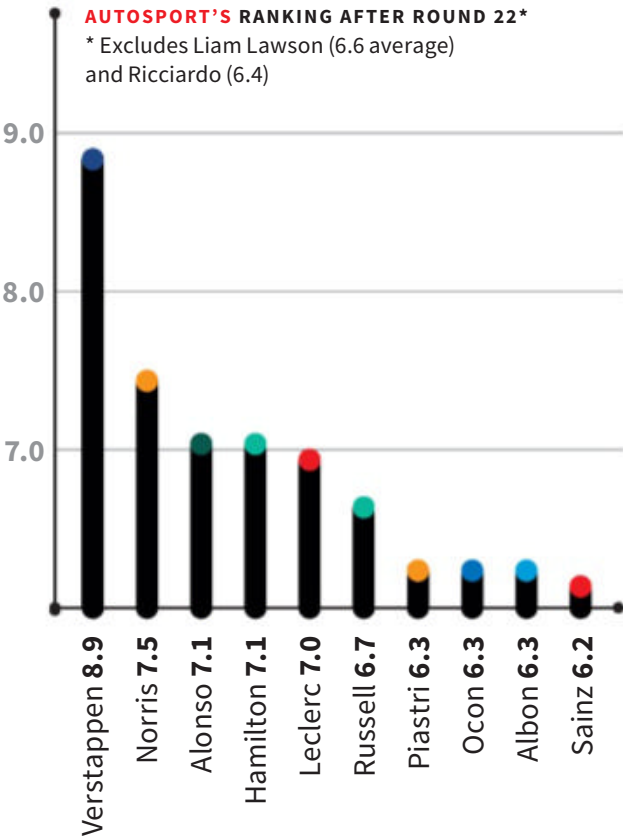
5 Admitted that strategy was compromised to defend from Ricciardo, which he managed successfully until his first pitstop. Solid hard-tyre pace at the end gave him opportunity to clear Zhou, and staved off being counted a lap down. Sixteenth was probably the expected return.



Started 14th — Result 14th

5 Poor start cost five positions, but was able to overcome expected thermal degradation to get back up the order. Ultimately didn't need pace to challenge AlphaTauris over their seventh-place constructors' battle, but was a way off regardless. Pace on hard tyre was solid.

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WORLD OF SPORT

Pourchaire celebrates with *tricolore* and Martins. Race winner Doohan is on left



Vesti's fightback can't scupper Pourchaire as Doohan takes finale

FORMULA 2
YAS MARINA (ARE)
25-26 NOVEMBER
ROUND 13/13

Theo Pourchaire clinched the Formula 2 title with an understated weekend at the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, finishing seventh in Saturday's sprint race and recovering to fifth in Sunday's feature instalment.

The ART Grand Prix-run Frenchman entered the season-ending weekend with a 25-point advantage over rival Frederik Vesti of Prema Racing, but saw his event get significantly more difficult when he qualified down in 14th for both races. With Mercedes junior Vesti qualifying ninth – and therefore second for the top-10 reversed-grid sprint race – this pain was further increased.

Saturday was all about Vesti, with the Dane making an aggressive move for the lead at Turn 5 on the opening lap before being slipstreamed by polesitter Enzo Fittipaldi (Rodin Carlin), Isack Hadjar (Hitech GP) and Richard Verschoor

(Van Amersfoort Racing) into the heavy braking zone for Turn 6. After receiving the hurry-up call from his team instructing that he had “nothing to lose”, Vesti got his head down and steadily closed the gap before making a race-winning pass on Fittipaldi on lap 20 of 23.

Pourchaire made most of his progress at the start, climbing five places on the opening lap while narrowly avoiding the spinning Juan Manuel Correa. His points advantage was now slashed to 16, meaning a finish of at least third (with fastest lap) was required of Vesti. But starting ninth, this task was a far more difficult prospect than the sprint race.

Vesti ran the alternative strategy of starting on the medium-compound tyres and switching to the softs – something that would allow a late fastest-lap attempt – but he made hard work of his immediate rivals and only found clear air when those ahead on the regular strategy pitted. Although Pourchaire was also struggling to make progress, he was quickly inside the top 10 places. With Jack Doohan (Virtuosi Racing) dominating at the front and ART team-mate Victor Martins in second and matching Vesti's strategy, things appeared to be falling Pourchaire's way from an early stage.

When Vesti eventually stopped to fit soft tyres on lap 22 of 33, he needed to make up over 13 seconds to put himself in position to deny his rival. What he really needed was clear air, but what he found instead was Pourchaire, who was not in the mood to concede a position. Twice in succession, Vesti overtook with DRS on the run to

Turn 6 before losing out again on the next straight when Pourchaire used the same method to fight back.

On his third attempt, Vesti held back on the first straight, ensuring that he retained the advantage through the second DRS zone. But by now the damage was done and Vesti's charge was done.

A late, messy pass on Zane Maloney, in which both cars went off the track, put Vesti on the podium, but it also promoted Pourchaire to fifth, an outcome that confirmed the Sauber junior as the champion by 11 points.

Doohan's sublime drive to a third feature race victory of the season, with fellow Alpine F1 protege Martins second, went somewhat under the radar as he bade farewell to the series after two years. DAMS-run Red Bull junior Ayumu Iwasa, whose last title hopes vanished when he failed to get pole, finished in fourth.

SAM HALL

WEEKEND WINNERS

FORMULA 2

YAS MARINA (ARE)

Race 1 Frederik Vesti
Prema Racing

Race 2 Jack Doohan
Virtuosi Racing

AUSTRALIAN SUPERCARS

ADELAIDE (AUS)

Race 1 Cameron Waters
Tickford Racing (Ford Mustang GT)

Race 2 Matthew Payne
Grove Racing (Ford Mustang GT)



For full results visit motorsportstats.com



Kostecki is king; Waters, Payne in the window

AUSTRALIAN SUPERCARS
ADELAIDE (AUS)
25-26 NOVEMBER
ROUND 12/12

Brodie Kostecki and Erebus Motorsport secured the 2023 Supercars Championship at the Ford-dominated Adelaide 500. Mustangs took both 250km races around the Parklands circuit, with Tickford Racing's Cameron Waters leading a Blue Oval 1-2-3-4 on Saturday and rookie Matt Payne scoring a crushing maiden win on Sunday.

After a pair of impressive pole positions, Kostecki's battle with Shane van Gisbergen for the title ended within 30 seconds of the start of Saturday's race. In his final weekend as a Supercars driver, van Gisbergen was caught up in a clash involving Erebus's Will Brown (ironically, the man who will replace him at Triple Eight for next season). Both Chevrolet Camaros were out on the spot and the title fight was effectively over.

Under the circumstances, and with a race set-up not quite 100% to his liking, Kostecki drove to a conservative sixth place, behind the Ford train of Waters,



David Reynolds (Grove Racing), Thomas Randle (Tickford) and Chaz Mostert (Walkinshaw Andretti United). Triple Eight's Broc Feeney was fifth.

On Sunday, Payne beat Kostecki's Chevrolet at the start and simply drove away from the field, the 21-year-old New Zealander comfortably bettering his previous best finish of fourth place with a convincing win over Feeney by 8.55 seconds. In his last drive with Grove, Reynolds took third ahead of Waters, with Mostert fifth. Kostecki was eighth.

Van Gisbergen was again out of luck,

pitting immediately after a pitstop with what he thought was a loose wheel. When a fresh set of tyres did not fix the problem he pitted for good, with what the team diagnosed was a brake issue. "He's been the fastest guy all year and the team made no mistakes, so they deserved to have both championships," a magnanimous van Gisbergen said after his first weekend double DNF in over a decade.

So Perth-born Kostecki became the first Australian-born driver to take the title since 2017, and Erebus ticked two other boxes. Even eighth place boosted Kostecki's margin of victory to well beyond 150 points, rendering moot the many points van Gisbergen lost after a technical breach in the opening race of the season in Newcastle resulted in a double disqualification for himself and Feeney.

Erebus also secured the Teams' title and, with it, the prestigious final pitbox for the start of the 2024 season, although Supercars has controversially announced a 'Live Pitlane' in which the positions will be updated race to race, according to series points.

PHIL BRANAGAN



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Bagnaia sees off Martin for second crown

MOTOGP
VALENCIA (ESP)
26 NOVEMBER
ROUND 20/20

Just six times has the championship gone down to the wire in the modern era of MotoGP; Francesco Bagnaia has been involved in two of them, and ended up triumphant in both. His success over Fabio Quartararo in 2022 was a nervous-but-assured affair, and a 23-point gap with only one race to consider stacked the odds in the Ducati rider's favour.

While he led arriving at the 2023 Valencia Grand Prix finale, that was nothing to take for granted. Rival Jorge Martin, 21 points adrift, was on an identical Ducati package – albeit in Pramac colours – and had arguably been the fastest of the two since September's San Marino GP.

On Saturday, Bagnaia had to fight through Q1 but recovered to qualify second on the grid, with Martin sixth after another tyre issue – this time on the front – in Q2. In the sprint, he made Bagnaia pay for his poor decision to run the medium rear tyre. Martin's victory, with Bagnaia fifth, cut the gap to 14 points. Martin's "big balls" approach to the sprint was needed for the GP, but a repeat result for the pair wouldn't be enough for the Pramac rider to win the title.

It almost seemed from the off on Sunday that Martin would not be walking away with the title. A grid penalty for poleman Maverick Vinales after he ignored the meatball flag in warm-up promoted Bagnaia to the head of the grid, but

did nothing to change Martin's starting position. Regardless, Martin scythed his way through to second by Turn 2 as Bagnaia seized the holeshot from pole.

Martin knew that nothing less than a victory would really do to give himself options to win the championship. Bagnaia held firm over Martin on laps one and two, but just 0.074 seconds split them as they tripped the timing beam to begin the third tour. Sucked into Bagnaia's slipstream, Martin outbraked himself into Turn 1 and almost collected the factory Ducati rider. He just about kept his machine out of the gravel, but he tumbled to eighth.

Ruthlessly, Martin took seventh from Alex Marquez at Turn 4 on lap four before engaging with Vinales on the fifth tour. The Aprilia rider retaliated through Turns 4 and 5 and again at Turn 11, before succumbing at Turn 2 on lap six. Ahead, Johann Zarco on the sister Pramac bike and Marc Marquez were squabbling over fourth, with the

departing Honda star Martin's next victim.

Into Turn 4, Martin went for the inside, but Marquez was taking the line into the corner. The pair connected at the apex, the Honda rider sent violently into a highside as Martin tumbled off in the gravel. The championship was over, Bagnaia the victor.

As he looked behind to see where Martin was, KTM rider Brad Binder seized the lead from Bagnaia, and Jack Miller on the sister KTM moved into second at the same corner on lap seven. It mattered little – Bagnaia would find himself in the lead again on lap 19 of 27 when Miller, who had taken over the lead from Binder when the South African ran off at Turn 11 four tours prior and dropped to fourth, crashed at Turn 10.

Zarco remained glued to Bagnaia's rear end until the penultimate lap, when the Gresini Ducati of Fabio Di Giannantonio moved into second. After starting 11th, Di Giannantonio hounded Bagnaia over the final tour in his bid to become the



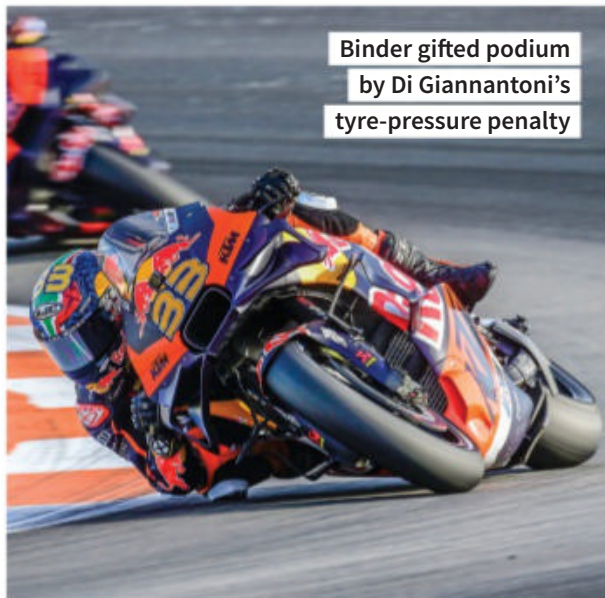
Zarco put Bagnaia under pressure in late stages of race



Marc Marquez tumbled out of his Honda career



ALL PICS: GOLD AND GOOSE
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Binder gifted podium
by Di Giannantonio's
tyre-pressure penalty

only back-to-back GP winner of 2023. But 0.176s would remain between the pair on the run to the chequered flag, a seventh grand prix victory capping off Bagnaia's 2023 championship campaign.

The dreaded tyre pressure rule had no bearing on the championship fight. But it would rob Di Giannantonio of second – a three-second penalty for riding underneath the stipulated minimum front pressure dropped him to fourth.

Zarco was promoted to second, with Binder gaining a podium in a hideously underwhelming manner courtesy of the FIM stewards. Cold temperatures wreaked havoc, with only 14 riders making it to the chequered flag in a crash-strewn race.

Although his time with Honda ended in an unceremonious 29th crash of a miserable season, Marquez bowed out from the Japanese marque with his head held high and a few tears in his eyes. He noted that he pushed throughout the weekend “like I was fighting for the world championship”, and did end up with a final podium for the team he considers family with a third in Saturday's sprint contest.

LEWIS DUNCAN

RESULTS ROUND 20/20, VALENCIA (ESP), 26 NOVEMBER (27 LAPS – 67.192 MILES)

POS	RIDER	TEAM	TIME
1	Francesco Bagnaia (ITA)	Ducati	40m58.535s
2	Johann Zarco (FRA)	Pramac Ducati	+0.360s
3	Brad Binder (ZAF)	KTM	+2.347s
4	Fabio Di Giannantonio (ITA)	Gresini Ducati	+3.176s
5	Raul Fernandez (ESP)	RNF Aprilia	+4.636s
6	Alex Marquez (ESP)	Gresini Ducati	+4.708s
7	Franco Morbidelli (ITA)	Yamaha	+4.736s
8	Aleix Espargaro (ESP)	Aprilia	+8.014s
9	Luca Marini (ITA)	VR46 Ducati	+9.486s
10	Maverick Vinales (ESP)	Aprilia	+10.556s
11	Fabio Quartararo (FRA)	Yamaha	+12.001s
12	Takaaki Nakagami (JPN)	LCR Honda	+21.695s
13	Lorenzo Savadori (ITA)	RNF Aprilia	+43.297s
14	Pol Espargaro (ESP)	Tech3 KTM	-2 laps
R	Alex Rins (ESP)	LCR Honda	19 laps-accident
R	Jack Miller (AUS)	KTM	18 laps-accident
R	Enea Bastianini (ITA)	Ducati	9 laps-accident
R	Augusto Fernandez (ESP)	Tech3 KTM	9 laps-accident
R	Marc Marquez (ESP)	Honda	5 laps-accident
R	Jorge Martin (ESP)	Pramac Ducati	5 laps-accident
R	Marco Bezzecchi (ITA)	VR46 Ducati	0 laps-accident
NS	Joan Mir (ESP)	Honda	neck injury

Winner's average speed 98.388mph. Fastest lap Binder 1m30.145s, 99.383mph.

QUALIFYING 2 1 Vinales 1m28.931s; 2 Bagnaia 1m29.023s; 3 Zarco 1m29.144s; 4 Miller 1m29.161s; 5 Binder 1m29.171s; 6 Martin 1m29.182s; 7 Bezzecchi 1m29.223s; 8 A Marquez 1m29.261s; 9 M Marquez 1m29.275s; 10 R Fernandez 1m29.438s; 11 Di Giannantonio 1m29.510s; 12 A Espargaro 1m29.797s.

QUALIFYING 1 Bagnaia 1m29.054s; A Marquez 1m29.196s; 13 A Fernandez 1m29.233s; 14 Bastianini 1m29.389s; 15 Quartararo 1m29.613s; 16 Nakagami 1m29.864s; 17 Marini 1m29.901s; 18 P Espargaro 1m29.953s; 19 Morbidelli 1m30.045s; 20 Rins 1m30.257s; 21 Savadori 1m31.044s.

SPRINT RACE (13 LAPS – 32.352 MILES)

1 Martin 19m38.827s; 2 Binder +0.190s; 3 M Marquez +2.122s; 4 Vinales +3.106s; 5 Bagnaia +4.253s; 6 Di Giannantonio +4.400s; 7 Bezzecchi +4.502s; 8 A Marquez +5.578s; 9 Zarco +5.910s; 10 A Fernandez +6.095s; 11 R Fernandez +7.674s; 12 Miller +8.098s; 13 A Espargaro +9.513s; 14 P Espargaro +12.453s; 15 Bastianini +12.599s; 16 Nakagami +13.787s; 17 Marini +13.887s; 18 Morbidelli +14.943s; 19 Rins +20.378s; 20 Savadori +25.017s; R Quartararo 4 laps-accident.

Winner's average speed 98.798mph. Fastest lap M Marquez 1m29.809s, 99.755mph.

RIDERS' CHAMPIONSHIP 1 Bagnaia 467; 2 Martin 428; 3 Bezzecchi 329; 4 Binder 293; 5 Zarco 225; 6 A Espargaro 206; 7 Vinales 204; 8 Marini 201; 9 A Marquez 177; 10 Quartararo 172.

CONSTRUCTORS' CHAMPIONSHIP 1 Ducati 700; 2 KTM 373; 3 Aprilia 326; 4 Yamaha 196; 5 Honda 185.

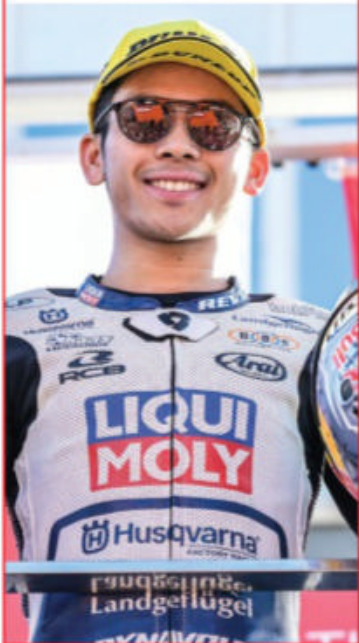


Back-to-back title
winner Bagnaia
savours the moment

WEEKEND
WINNERS

MOTO2
Fermin Aldeguer
Speed Up Racing
(Boscoscuro)

MOTO3
Ayumu Sasaki (below)
Intact GP
(Husqvarna)



SEASON
REVIEW
21-28 December
issue



BTCC

Premier league Alliance



*The team formerly known as Motorbase swept Ash Sutton to the BTCC title in a Ford Focus that no one could make work in 2022. How did they do it?
Time to sit down with some of the squad's key figures*

MARCUS SIMMONS

PHOTOGRAPHY JEP

M

otorbase Performance is no more. But, then again, it hadn't really been pure Motorbase anyway. Since 2021, the team had been operating in the British Touring Car Championship with a significant contingent from the old AmD squad; since 2022, with the addition of the nucleus behind Ash Sutton's three titles at BMR.

'Time for a new name', thought owner Pete Osborne as he neared the end of his third year at the helm of the company.

"We decided to sit down, looked at lots of different things, looked at everybody's names and initials to try and put them together," smiles Osborne. "And then we said, 'Hold on, we're an alliance of people, we're together, and it works for us'. Hence why Oly came up with this great idea of Alliance Racing."

The 'Oly' to whom Osborne refers is long-time Motorbase team manager Oly Collins, and Autosport is sitting down on the eve of the Brands Hatch season finale – the team's first weekend under the Alliance name – with him, Osborne and engineering wizard Antonio Carrozza to discuss what has become a BTCC phenomenon. In 2023, this Motorbase/AmD/BMR supergroup gelled spectacularly under the banner of NAPA Racing (logistics magnate Osborne is adamant that his team's commercial partners are an equal part of his 'Alliance'), and the previously unloved Ford Focus ST sledgehammered its way to 16 race wins out of 30, a fourth drivers' title for Sutton, a convincing teams' crown, and a narrow manufacturers' victory over BMW.

Who would have thought *that* in 2022, when Sutton drove the wheels off an unwieldy beast of a Focus to finish as championship runner-up? Towards the end of that season, paddock gossip was rife that Carrozza was to be charged with a return to his and Sutton's rear-wheel-drive roots by developing a car to bring Audi back to the BTCC. "We'd got a great dialogue going with Audi, which was really positive," recalls Osborne. "We weren't going to be the usual team asking for a big payout; we wanted their support, expertise and their cars, a bit of a nod for what Tony needed to get on the table to get going. And we got all that, and it was looking very, very close that we'd be running Audis, and then we came up against the other teams."

The target was the Audi A5, which is available for the road in four-wheel-drive and front-wheel-drive formats. The problem was two conflicting regulations within the BTCC's NGTC ruleset that made it impossible for the car to comply: one states that if a base model has a two-wheel-drive derivative, the racing version must adopt that format, in this case FWD; the other is that a base model with an in-line engine, such as the A5, must be RWD. Motorbase therefore needed the blessing of the other teams to press on with a RWD version of a car that wasn't available in RWD format for the road. Unsurprisingly, some weren't keen. They are perhaps regretting this in light of what happened with the Focus...

"We've got such a wealth of experience, and these people have worked in motorsport for a combined 200 years or something"



Osborne took over Motorbase in the winter of 2020-21

Carrozza laughs at the thought of Sutton getting out of the Focus for what he hoped would be the last time at the 2022 finale: "When it went in the truck last year, I remember the door shutting, I looked at Ash, and he said, 'Thank God I'm not going to drive that thing again!'" Osborne jests: "At one point we wanted to set it on fire, didn't we?"

So, with the Audi plan foiled, what were they going to do now? Sutton, Carrozza, Collins and Osborne sat up late at night on their computers. "That Zoom meeting that we had, I think we started it at half eight in the evening, and we were still on it at about half 11, and we were trying to find every bloody rear-wheel-drive car we could," chortles Collins. "Everyone was on Google: 'Oh what about this car? What about *this* one?' We went round and round and round and there was this air of reluctance. Pete got to the point where he needed to wrap the meeting up, and really subtly had to say, I think we *might* have to reserve the idea that we *might* have to end up running the Focus..."

Osborne takes up the story: "And then it was, 'Tony, what can you do?' And I expected like, 'Not bloody run that Focus'. But he went, 'Leave it with me, I'll come back to you'. And I said, 'Don't worry about the money, just go away and tell me what you can do'. And that was the nice thing – he came back and said, 'This, this, this and this, and that's how much it's going to cost you'. And I'm like, 'All right, I can make a decision now'."

Key to the development of the Focus was the implementation of the BMR quartet of Sutton, Carrozza, support engineer Tom Powell and number-one mechanic Brent Yule into a team whose technical leadership had for some years been in the hands of James Mundy, who still engineers Dan Cammish. Collins, addressing Carrozza, points out: "You came into an open environment and offered an equally open environment, and one thing that us as a team have always been is very transparent, nothing's secret, no one's allowed to run on their own agenda."

"It was a relief when Tony and that car crew came in and it was, 'I hope they're going to be as open as we've always been'. And from day one it was a very easy and open atmosphere to work in, where everybody was happy to listen to each other. Tony said, 'I will listen to every single person here, I won't necessarily take your view as gospel, but I will always listen to it and I will make my own mind up as to whether or not I agree with it'. So it's very open to suggestion, but equally we'll take ideas from anybody else, compute them in Tony's way, and then implement them in the way we've seen that's been successful."

Of the start to work over the 2022-23 winter, Carrozza explains: "We sat down with everybody at the factory, all of the full-time staff around the car, and I just had a pen and paper, and we went through every area of development we could possibly go and I took suggestions from *everyone*, and that included operational things, things people have seen on previous cars that they've done. We've got such a wealth of experience, and these people have worked in motorsport for a combined 200 years or something. So somewhere in there are >>



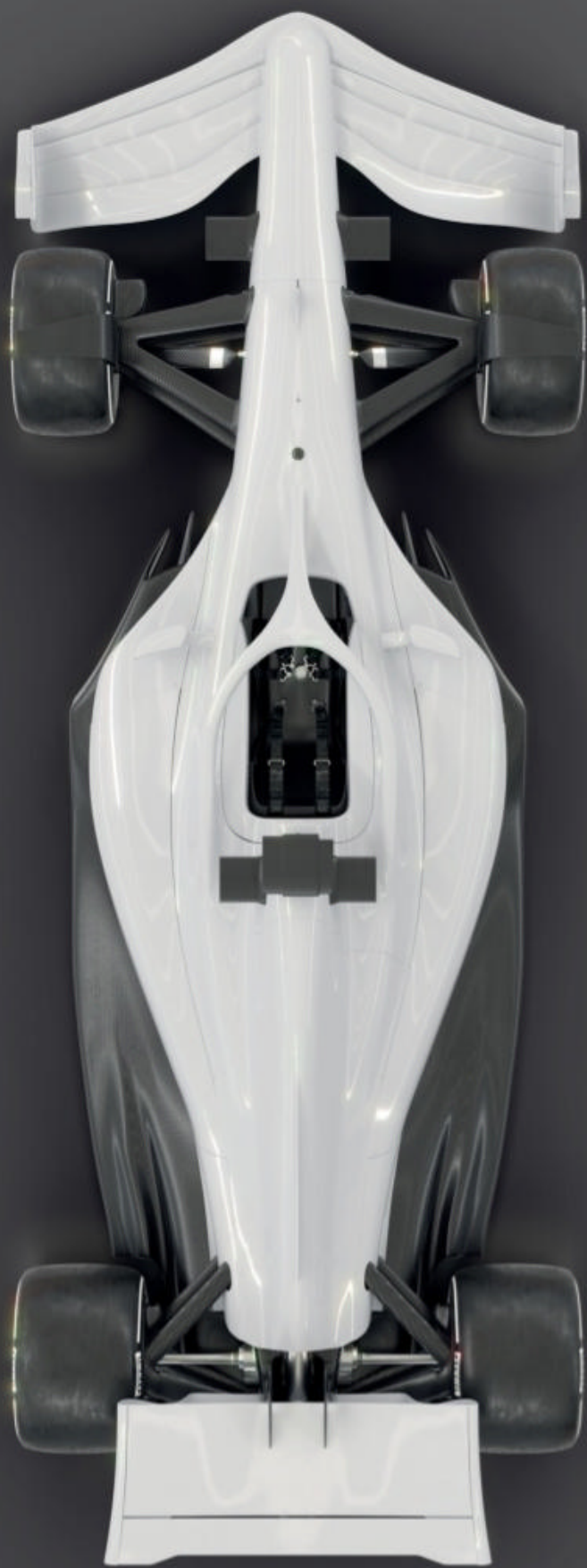


Sutton celebrates
winning title
number four



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Osborne Jr battling
away in the BTCC's
hectic midfield...

nuggets of what people have done that have worked. I'm not too proud to say, 'Oh well I'm not going to do that, because someone else has already done it'. If it's a good idea, it's a good idea. That was a completely open book; anyone can put an idea in. We didn't use all of them, because you never would, but we don't want to be excluding anyone from the development we've had – it's been a proper team effort."

Is it true that every single bodywork panel on the Focus was changed and re-homologated for 2023? "Well..." pauses Collins, looking at Carrozza. "Nearly. A couple were left alone. Rear wheelarches you didn't re-homologate, rear bumper we kept the same. But other than that they looked at every panel, every inlet duct, every location of every header tank, every catchtank, floor. A lot of it was actually the application of it, of how it was fitted and the reliability of the fitment. Some real back-to-basics stuff that was brought in. Again, that came from that meeting where we had everybody in the workshop. It meant that the guys who are actually fitting the components could say simple things, like, 'I really like this, but if you could just change those bolts for these kind of bolts, could we do that?' 'Well yeah, why?' And then there'd be an explanation as to why. It was details."

"I could stand here now and, hand on heart, probably add up 10 things that bring us to where we are, the real major ones," adds Carrozza. "None of them are enormous, but you combine lots of incremental gains together, you do find this overall package. We sat and looked at where we struggled last year, Croft being one of them. That Croft weekend was very disheartening for us. We couldn't move forwards, we couldn't race, we didn't qualify well. 'What do we need from the car at Croft? What do we need from the car at Thruxton? It was obviously very good there, but *why* was it good?' And you're just investigating all of these different areas and trying to combine them



Collins has been at
team since 2009, and
in BTCC for 26 seasons



all together to make a package that works at every circuit. It's very easy to go, 'We're going to make a car that goes round Silverstone'. That's brilliant, but you need it to work at nine other places."

Another key was the engine work carried out by Mountune. The company is owned these days by the family of former Motorbase driver Ollie Jackson, who stood down from the BTCC for 2023 to return to the Carrera Cup GB. He was replaced by Dan Rowbottom, who brought his Cataclean budget – another feather in the commercial cap for the team – alongside the incumbent Sutton, Cammish, and Osborne's son Sam. "A massive amount," enthuses Carrozza when asked about the significance of Mountune's development. "We looked last year inwardly, but also you have to look at who your competition is. We looked at everywhere that Hyundai was strong and the reasons we thought it was strong, and you start to come up with your own package of weaknesses, and that list we came up with, it had engine in there as a big part.

"But it wasn't just top-end power, because often that's not the be-all and end-all. You need driveability, you need something that the driver's comfortable with wherever they are in the rev range, and that formed a big part of our, almost, scope of work to Mountune. 'Here's what we need. How we achieve that... we've got a few different things that I can propose and we'd like to do, but you are the engine supplier.' Obviously I had no influence on cam design, but I had an influence on what I wanted shape of torque curves to look like. But they're the ones that have done the work and come up with essentially where they are."

"Mountune are as passionate as we are," endorses Osborne. "Their whole team are integrated into us as a business as one. Every single supplier that we've got, we consider them part of us as a business, and we can't deliver what we're delivering on the track without their help and support. Mountune are imperative to that and

"It's easy to go, 'We're going to make a car that goes round Silverstone'. That's brilliant, but you need it to work at nine other places"

all their guys are just phenomenal."

The perception among some is that Osborne's passion has fired limitless resources into his family's hobby. The guy radiates cheerful Yorkshire bonhomie, but the stereotype is that northerners don't like being separated from their brass without good reason, and he's no exception. "The thing was, it wasn't a bottomless budget," asserts Carrozza. "It was, 'Here's my wish list, and here's what the wish list will cost'.

Collins: "And there were a few things on there that you said, 'In an absolutely mindblowingly ideal world we'd do that, but the amount of money that's going to cost to achieve that, I don't think that's wise because it's too much money for too small a gain'. So there was an element of reality that came with it." >>

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THE BTCC – IT’S BETTER THAN NASCAR

British motorsport’s past – and present – is full of teams helmed by a figure who is absolutely ingrained in motor racing, and is trying to make a living from doing what they love.

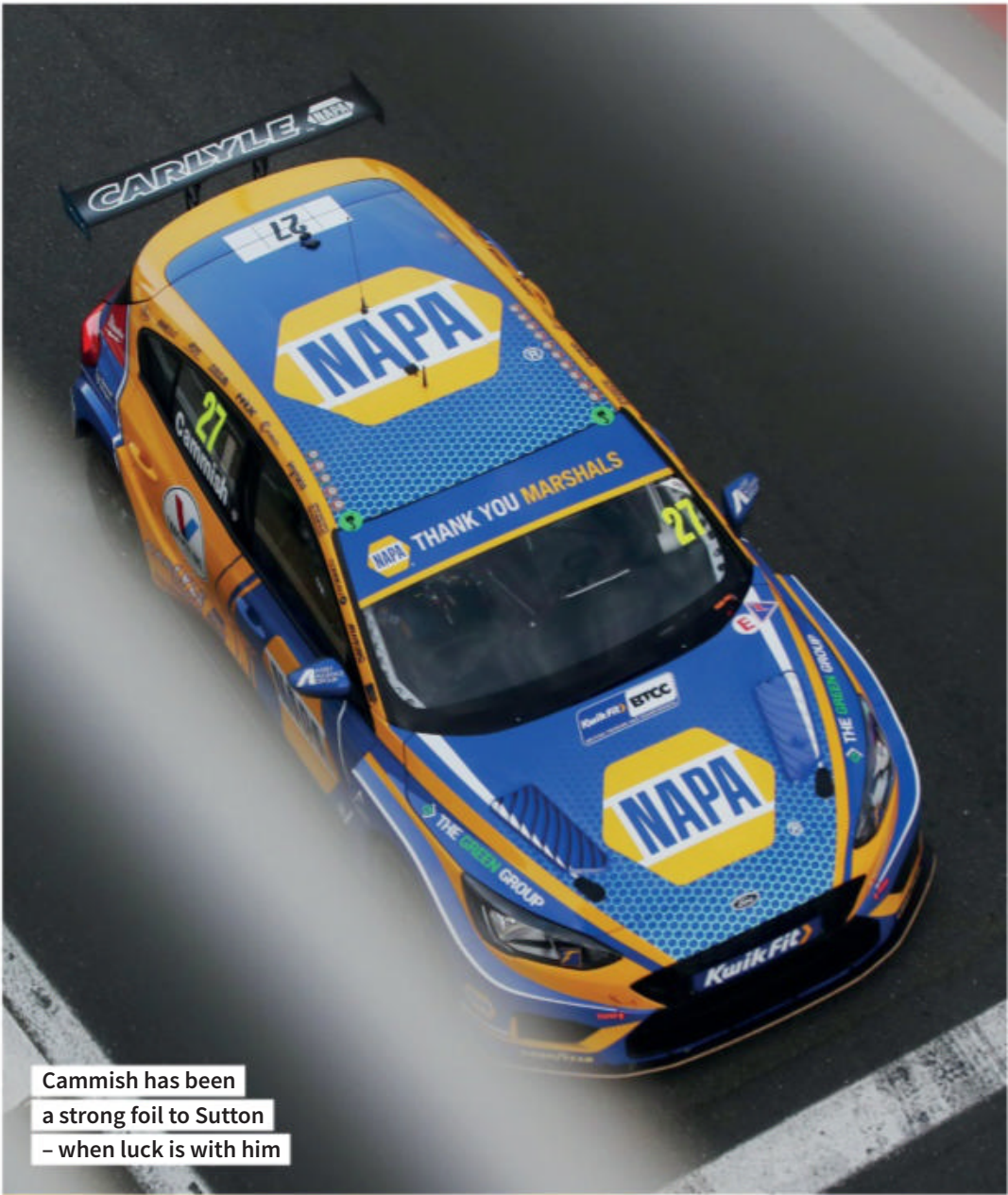
Alliance Racing chief Pete Osborne, on the other hand, is a hugely successful businessman who fell in love with the sport, had a go as a driver, and is now using his commercial skills to bring success and security to those for whom he is responsible: his employees.

The title sponsorship from NAPA Racing is a partnership, Osborne insists. Alliance has a BTCC Ford Focus for passenger rides, which plays its part in that relationship. “We had a customer day at Anglesey, and the main man came from Valvoline,” Osborne chuckles. “We threw him in the car with Ash [Sutton], as you do, and we said, ‘Right Ash, go and take

“WE THREW HIM IN THE CAR AND SAID, ‘RIGHT ASH, GO AND SCARE HIM TO DEATH’”

him out and scare him to death’. And Ash was like, ‘Right, OK’. He set off out of the pits, and bear in mind this guy had the week before been in the States going round in a NASCAR, and he came back in and his face was just white. And he said, ‘Man, that’s the best thing I’ve ever done. I was in a NASCAR last week and it was rubbish. This car can go around a corner, and the views of the cliffs and scenery...’ And we were like, ‘Hang on a minute, you were supposed to scare him Ash!’

“For somebody to say that about a British Touring Car, and about us as a team, that’s phenomenal. That’s the thing we really enjoy. To see the smiles on these guys’ faces. If you come into our garage on a Sunday, we’ve got the head of NAPA UK with us, and he’s smiling like a Cheshire cat. He’s a phenomenal guy to be around because he’s thriving and he gets us all. I lead the team, but he leads us all. I’m not just kissing arse, he’s that type of guy and will do anything to support us.”



Cammish has been a strong foil to Sutton – when luck is with him



Rowbottom is another to have won in the Focus in 2023

Carrozza: "I put it as 'cost per tenth'. It's value of everything."

Collins, now addressing Osborne: "You'll moan about spending a fiver on something that's a waste; you won't moan about spending £50,000 on something that's actually turned our fortunes around. And that's the key."

Osborne: "That's the thing that we do. The moment you start wasting it, then forget it, you've lost the plot, we're just wasting our time. I got a bit of a lesson. I had a coffee with Jeff Smith [former Eurotech owner/driver] and asked how he did it, and he said, 'The biggest mistake I ever made was just basically opening the cheque book and saying do what you need to do'. I sat these guys down, our management team, and said, 'Look, it's not a bottomless pit, if you're going to do it you're going to do it properly, but the moment I see you waste it, forget it, I'm out, I'm disengaged from the project.'"

Now that BTCC supremacy is accomplished, Osborne has further exciting plans for Alliance, which is moving this winter into new premises in Northampton. He's an ex-GT and Carrera Cup racer himself, and has always loved sportscars: "I would love for us as a team to go to Le Mans. That's just my dream. I've never been there, ever. I've sat and watched it on the telly lots of times, and I always promised myself that I would go there as a team owner. And that's the ambition I've got. I've got these boys behind me to make that happen, but you've got to do it at the right time, with the right finances in place, and do it properly."

Of course, there's a long way to go to fulfil that dream, and the first is a step into GT3 competition. "We're in talks with manufacturers at the moment, one of them being our partner Ford [whose new Mustang is coming on stream], about running GT3 cars," continues Osborne. "Unfortunately they can't build one until the middle of next year, which is a bit disappointing because that means any project that we're doing would have to be put on hold for another 12 months. But having said that we've got enough on our plate at the moment."

Carrozza, for one, is keen to get his hands on a GT3 machine: "I'd like to expand on what we did with the rear-wheel-drive car [with Sutton's title-winning Infiniti] and see what you can move to a GT3. You can run with so much more aero in that and it's a change of philosophy, but then the change of philosophy from rear-wheel drive to front-wheel drive was straightforward once you understand it and you can apply physics."

"I'm not sure how many laps I could stand with Ash driving a GT3 car!" laughs Osborne. "Stick 'Cammo' in it and he'd be absolutely bang on, 'Rowbo' the same, Ash I'd be like 'oh no.'"

He's joking about Sutton, of course. In his heart, Osborne would love to take some of his BTCC boys to a new level. And this is partly why Alliance is helping out young drivers in junior series. "We're giving money – not massive money – to kids who've got some great talent and can't quite afford the budget and need a little leg-up," says Osborne.

"I would love for us as a team to go to Le Mans. That's just my dream. But you've got to do it properly"

"Ash has earned his spurs, Cammo's earned his spurs, Rowbo has, Sam has. They've all worked hard to get where they've got to, even from the point of view of everyone saying Sam's me lad and his dad pays for him. But I work Sam like a dog – he gets very little pay! I've always wanted to help these youngsters come through, but I'm also thinking, 'Where's the next Ash, Dan coming from, where are they going to?' So for me, when Ash gets to the point where he says, 'You know what, I'm done with BTCC,' where does he go? The natural place for me is to go to GTs and Le Mans, and really finish his career off on a high. Same with Dan Cammish, same with Dan Rowbottom, same with Sam to a point. And how do we get a youngster into BTCC? Because up and down this pitlane we're lacking some young, new, enthusiastic people. And that's one of our key pillars to grow with."

Collins interjects: "It's not just drivers either. It's the young people programme that we're working with, with Wera and Loughborough College. Yes, we have a nice pool of young drivers that we're working



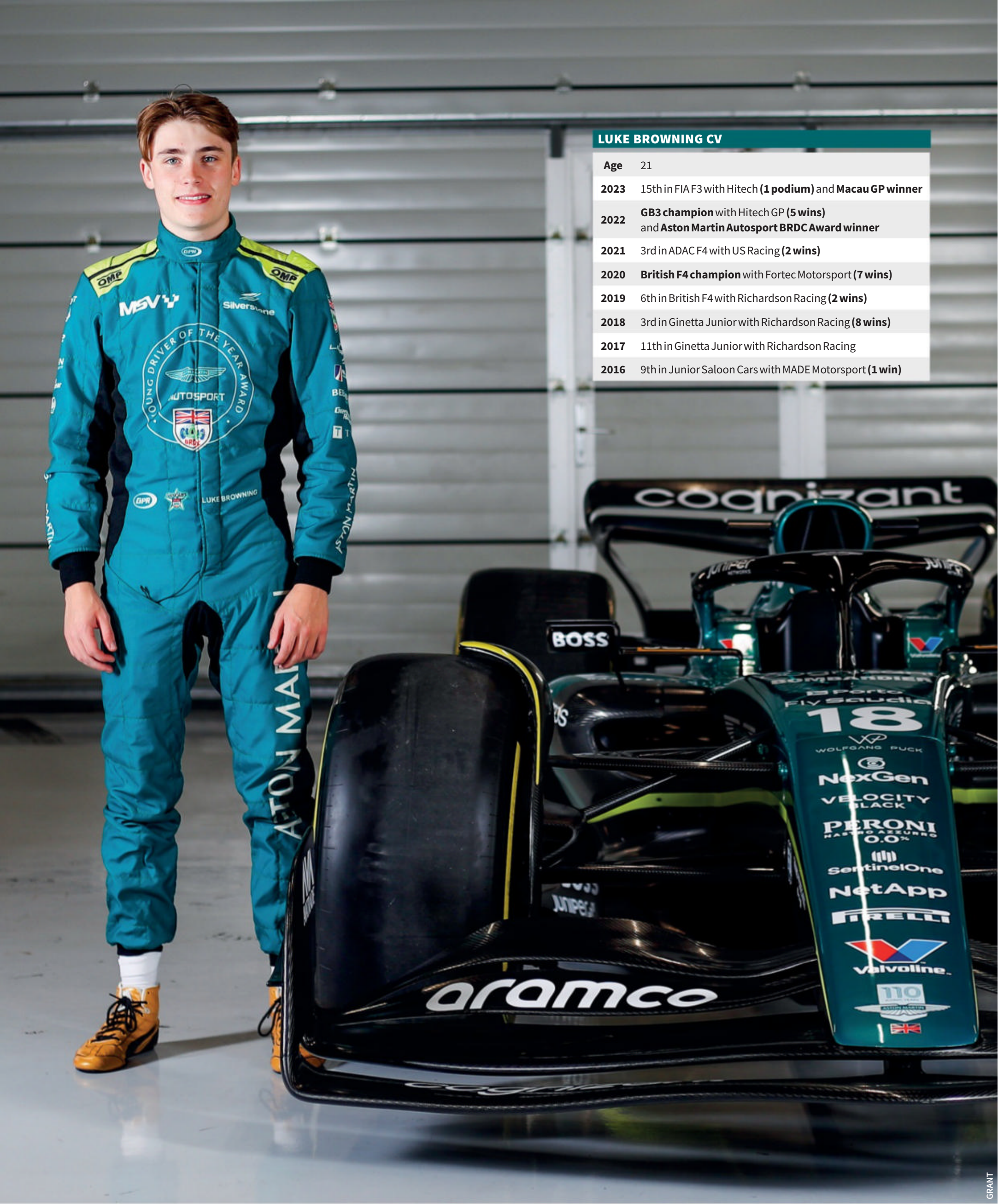
with this year, but it's also about finding the next Tony, the next James, the next Rob [Tickner, the ex-AmD man who manages operations at Alliance], the next Brent, finding the guys actually in the workshop, or in the media section, in every role in motorsport – there are so many roles to be filled and they all need a bit of a leg-up. We've got four students this weekend [at Brands] working with us, we had three at the last one, so that young person programme is not just aimed at drivers anymore – it's aimed at every role within the team and hopefully we can shape a few youngsters into the next Tony or whoever."

There's a kind of philanthropy here then, but on the basis that it makes commercial sense. Osborne made no bones when he bought the team from founder David Bartrum (initially with AmD boss Shaun Hollamby, who soon departed the squad but left his staff on board) that one driving force was the family's sheer enthusiasm for the sport – as well as older son Sam, younger boy Jamie competes in the Mini Challenge. But, longer term, it can't just leak money. "I put quite a lot of my own cash into the business, but I would have been doing some of that anyway because obviously I have Sam and James," he reasons. "I will carry on investing in the business, but this year it's got better, and next year it's certainly got better because we've just sat down with NAPA and reviewed our budgets. We're open-book with our partners so they can see what we're spending and everything, and how we spend their well-earned money on us as a team."

"Without that investment you can't grow any business. You have to invest in people, equipment; everything that's taken us to where we are today we've had to invest in. The difference between how I run it and how David ran it is I don't run it as a profit centre; it's a cost centre to me. If it draws even, I've done a great job. If it doesn't, then unfortunately I pay for that privilege. But that's how I wanted to run the business and that's how I am running the business."

And the reward comes from far more than the numbers on the balance sheet; it's in helping people establish themselves. Yule, for example, left the team in the middle of the summer for a new job in Australia's Supercars series. When the BTCC convened at Brands for its season finale, he was at the Bathurst 1000. "One of my mechanics from my Radical days is now one of the top guys at the FIA in Formula 1," grins Osborne. "And I got a little message from Brent this week saying, 'Hi gaffer, hope everything goes really well, hope Ash wins it'. And I sent him back saying, 'Yeah love you too mate, wish I were at Bathurst!' And I got a little heart back. He was actually in tears when he was telling me he'd got this opportunity to go to Australia. That's the nice part of this job. The winning's great, it's what we do it for, but you know when you see some of these guys and they've progressed and they're going on... you pinch yourself. We've got two or three lovely kids who are the next Brents coming through, and that to me is as rewarding. I'm very proud of that."

And that, folks, is what you'd define as an alliance. It's not just a base for some motors anymore. 🏁



LUKE BROWNING CV

Age	21
2023	15th in FIA F3 with Hitech (1 podium) and Macau GP winner
2022	GB3 champion with Hitech GP (5 wins) and Aston Martin Autosport BRDC Award winner
2021	3rd in ADAC F4 with US Racing (2 wins)
2020	British F4 champion with Fortec Motorsport (7 wins)
2019	6th in British F4 with Richardson Racing (2 wins)
2018	3rd in Ginetta Junior with Richardson Racing (8 wins)
2017	11th in Ginetta Junior with Richardson Racing
2016	9th in Junior Saloon Cars with MADE Motorsport (1 win)





A RISING STAR'S FIRST DAY IN AN F1 CAR

Luke Browning won the 2022 Aston Martin Autosport BRDC Award and, last month, got his prize drive in machinery from the pinnacle of the sport

MEGAN WHITE

PHOTOGRAPHY motorsport
IMAGES

The day began like many others at Silverstone do, especially in late October: damp and grey. But, unlike most others, this day marked a first. For Luke Browning, stepping into a Formula 1 car for his maiden outing, this was the culmination of a lifetime's work.

On his climb through the ranks of the British junior series, from Ginetta Junior to British F4 (which he won in 2020) before his move up to GB3 and taking that title too in 2022, then competing on the international stage in FIA Formula 3 this season, the 21-year-old had been aspiring to this very moment.

Winning the 2022 Aston Martin Autosport BRDC Young Driver of the Year Award was a turning point for the Cheshire-born driver, helping him into that Hitech F3 seat and bringing a test in Aston Martin's AMR21, the same Mercedes-powered car that took Sebastian Vettel to his final F1 podium in Baku.

Entering the garage to see an F1 car adorned with your name, packed with people including your family and famous faces such as Derek Warwick and Johnny Herbert, might be daunting for most, but Browning takes it in his stride.

Given the characteristic drizzle, he heads out in a DBX707 road car first to remind himself of the Grand Prix circuit's 18 corners – not that he needs it, given his extensive experience at the track.

Next, tentatively, comes his first outing in the F1 car, with two series of installation laps on wet tyres as the rain clears. Even after those runs, Browning is awestruck. "It was only an install but from what I felt, it's quick," he says, moments after jumping out of the car for the first time. "I took off the pit limiter when I released and it was quick. I'm looking forward to really unleashing it in a few

**"IT'S A LOT SMOOTHER THAN I
THOUGHT – LIKE YOU'RE DRIVING
A SPORTSCAR ON THE ROAD"**



Derek Warwick was on hand for Browning's test

push laps, but for the moment I was just building up. I was only cruising on the out-lap on wets, but the downforce is immediate. You point and it goes and it feels really direct.

"Through the low-speed stuff is pretty exciting, actually. It's a lot quicker through the low-speed than I expected. I'm really looking forward to unleashing it through Copse once it dries up a little bit, that's going to be the really exciting part, so that's what I'm looking forward to.

"It's a lot smoother, the ride so much more smooth than I thought. The bottoming is there, but in a normal single-seater you feel like you're fluctuating a bit more. In F3, it feels a bit more bouncy and it feels a bit less refined. In an F1 car, it feels like you're driving a sportscar on the road. It's just everything is incredible – the ride, the power steering – and I'm really looking forward to smashing the brakes later on as well."

As the track dries, Browning moves onto the slick Pirelli tyres, sampling both hard and soft compounds across four runs, taking in 44 laps – around 150 miles – of running. It's an almighty jump from F3 to this F1 beast, but Browning takes it in his stride. »



A SPECIAL PERSPECTIVE

Aston Martin trainee performance engineer and GB4 race winner Megan Gilkes offered a unique perspective during Luke Browning’s test.

The former F1 Academy driver is working towards an aeronautical engineering degree at Imperial College London, and will return to the team full-time once she graduates next June.

For now, Gilkes is working with the team’s testing programme part-time, as part of which she also engineered on fellow W Series alumna

“I LOOK AT THE DATA WITH THE ENGINEERING MIND AND A BIT OF THE DRIVER’S MIND”

Jessica Hawkins’s Hungaroring F1 outing.

“It’s been a fantastic day,” she says after Browning’s runs. “Luke performed really well, he looked after the car, really got down in the lap times as well, so he did a fantastic job. It was great to see him adapt so quickly to something that’s so new, stepping up from F3 for him into an F1 car.

“All the mechanics worked

really hard to get it ready for this test. The car ran well, driver went really well, so it’s a happy day for us.”

Having recently announced her retirement from racing, Gilkes is able to help drivers in a different way than most other behind-the-scenes team members. The 23-year-old drove in the first season of W Series in 2019 before returning to her native Canada to race in F1600. In 2022, she drove in GB4 with Hillspeed, finishing sixth with two wins and a third place.

“I think that really does help for a different perspective, from the very experienced and very knowledgeable engineers,” she says. “I’m just starting out in my engineering career, and I’m learning all the time from the performance engineers and the race engineers in the testing programme.

“I try and look at the data with both the engineering mind and a bit of the driver’s mind so I can try and figure out, ‘What was the driver doing here? Why were they doing that?’ What might be driver related, what might be some car and set-up related, and try and put everything together from both sides of the picture.”



Despite a lingering neck injury, Browning manages to go flat through Copse, a goal he had heading into the test and says was “mission accomplished”. “I knew not many people are taking Copse flat on the data, they weren’t quite flat, and I just went to bed last night thinking I want to take it flat,” he enthuses. “I went out for the first time on new tyres and bam, I committed and the grip was there and it was available.

“It felt so refined, and that’s just what I wasn’t expecting at all. I thought it was gonna be more raw, but it’s like the best sportscar on the market. You get in it, and it’s incredibly powerful, but it’s smooth, it feels driveable. It’s confidence inducing. And that’s what a Formula 1 car is – it’s not to be afraid of. OK, it’s a bit scary initially when you turn into Copse and you’re doing nearly 200mph. But equally, the point at which you’re most loaded feels the most comfortable. So once you get past that phase of being scared, it’s just there. It’s a bit like dropping off a ramp on a skateboard. It’s a similar thing.”

Reflecting after his runs, Browning says the experience was “like a dream” and “a day I’ll always remember”. “Little boy’s dream come true, that’s for sure,” he remarks. “It was just as fast as anyone might think it could be, it was absolutely ballistic. The power, the brakes, the high-speed downforce is just absolutely incredible.

“It’s a day I’ll always remember and I have to say I’m just so





As conditions improved, Browning recorded some quick laps on slicks

“HIS FEEDBACK WAS OUTSTANDING AND HE WAS ABLE TO FIND WAYS OF IMPROVING PERFORMANCE”

grateful to the BRDC, to Aston Martin, to Derek [Warwick], to Autosport and to everyone involved who makes this possible for young racing drivers. It's the biggest prize for a junior youngster coming up and I'm very grateful. Just lost for words.

“Even only last week, I was thinking this is coming by pretty quickly now, and I can't really believe it's going to happen. It only sunk in when I walked into the garage today, everything set up and there's an F1 car sat there. You just can't quite believe it's your seat, and it's got my name on the halo. It's an absolute dream, just very, very thankful.”

Though he is a member of the rival Williams Junior Academy, Browning says he was “very grateful for the support [from Aston Martin], because obviously, being part of the Williams junior programme, it's not necessarily in their interest to really put it into me and make the most out of this test”.

Williams F1 team boss James Vowles says he received feedback from those at the test, telling Autosport that he heard Browning had “performed very well”. “I think they were incredibly happy with what he did, given he'd never been in that car before,” offers Vowles. “There was no other driver, as far as I understand, on the day. So the reference that they're comparing to his data is from a year ago. Once you start migrating that far away, it becomes really tough. But he performed very well, to the extent where Aston were



Aston crew was impressed with Browning's feedback

very, very happy and said congratulations to us. So I think that gives you a knowledge of what's going on.”

Aston Martin's F1 Evolution Programme Director Robert Sattler was one of those impressed with Browning's run, adding that his feedback was “outstanding”. “We were impressed with Luke, who adapted extremely well to the demands of driving an F1 car for the first time,” says Sattler. “Although he has a proven track record of winning junior single-seater championships, the Aston Martin AMR21 is a big step up from what he's been used to driving in F3, and there are a lot more engineers and other staff involved in running a test like this than he'll ever have experienced before.

“His feedback was outstanding and he was able to translate what we discussed off-track into ways of improving performance on it, and consistently. That was no great surprise because if you're talented enough to win the Aston Martin Autosport BRDC Young Driver of the Year Award, then we expect you to have the potential to go all the way to the top in your racing career.

“Luke has certainly made a very good step on his journey and we wish him all the best for the future.”

But what does that future hold? Well, Browning's dominant performance at the recent Macau GP suggests great things lie ahead, taking victory on his first visit to the tricky street circuit.

Although he admits his rookie F3 season was “tough”, he has high hopes for his planned return in 2024 and, although he hasn't yet got a deal set in stone, is gunning for the title.

“I think we only had six points finishes,” he says of his season with Hitech that yielded 15th in the championship. “Considering we were top five in pace – I think we were in the top three in race pace overall throughout the year – it was just a really, really unlucky season.”

Though he points to a race-ending mistake in Australia and two crashes that were not his fault in Austria as low points, he continues: “These things happen, it's been on either part of the spectrum, but I think we've probably learned the most this year of anyone on the F3 grid and that's the biggest thing to take away. The more that you learn, the more you can progress, and the better chance we'll have next year if we go for it.”

Whatever happens, Browning's landmark test represents an important rung on the ladder towards the very top and, if he can replicate wins like that in Macau, perhaps he is destined for a coveted F1 seat in the future. 🏁

➡ P46 THE 2023 AWARD TESTS



'IT WAS INCREDIBLY TIGHT, BUT THERE CAN ONLY BE ONE WINNER'

The 2023 Aston Martin Autosport BRDC Award victor will be announced this weekend and, as Derek Warwick's quote suggests, they'll really have earned it. Here's the rigorous process that decides who wins an F1 test and £200,000

KEVIN TURNER

PHOTOGRAPHY



The time has come. This Sunday at the Autosport Awards at Grosvenor House, the winner of the 2023 Aston Martin Autosport BRDC Young Driver of the Year Award will be revealed. Teenagers Taylor Barnard, Arvid Lindblad, Joseph Loake and Callum Voisin all stand a chance of becoming the 34th winner of the programme to find and assist the best British rising stars in single-seater motorsport.

As well as joining a list of previous winners that includes 2009 Formula 1 world champion Jenson Button, current frontrunners Lando Norris and George Russell, and 13-time grand prix victor David Coulthard, the successful finalist will earn an Aston Martin F1 test, £200,000, full membership of the British Racing Drivers' Club, an Arai helmet and Jordan Bespoke personalised helmet bag.

Strong campaigns in F3, F4 and GB3 got the quartet selected, an initial 10 finalists being whittled down by the judging panel led by Derek Warwick in September. Then there was a reset. The scores for each were zero when they began the process in October: it's all about what they did during the assessments that followed, though the level of experience each finalist brings into the competition is always considered.

As usual, the finalists conducted simulator tests courtesy of the Mercedes-AMG Petronas F1 Team before getting their hands on real racing cars. Each was given 40 laps on the Silverstone Grand Prix circuit with a virtual Mercedes W14. Three runs were done with a baseline set-up, while in the final one a blind set-up change was done to test the drivers' feedback and ability to adapt. A full simulator report was sent to the judges, with the finalists scored across pace, consistency, feedback and approach/attitude. As a sign of things to come, this year's quartet were covered by just three points out of 20, with one scoring 18/20.

Due to tight schedules, the fitness tests – conducted by Athletic Thinking – had to wait until after the driving element in 2023, so the next stop was Silverstone.

Seat fittings, briefings and media sessions aside, the drivers first

got sighter laps at the start of day one in Silverstone's Aston Martin school cars before settling in with their F2 machine and engineer.

The Williams-built JPH1B may now be more than a decade old, but it holds many benefits for the Award. Quite aside from having them all centrally run to ensure parity, the turbocharged F2 cars are also alien to all the finalists – they can't 'sneak' in a random test day at Pembrey with one, for example. Set-ups are well known, and the 425bhp cars are a real challenge for those used to junior single-seaters with little more than half that, such as GB3. And, as one of the finalists said, "these F2 cars in the wet are pretty crazy"!

After a familiarisation run using wet tyres on a drying track, the proper action got under way with a series of qualifying-style sessions on both used and new Pirelli slicks. Towards the end of the day there was also a pursuit run, in which the lowest overall 'race' time was the goal, before a final qualifying push that





MSV-run F2 cars again provided the backbone of the test

“ONE DRIVER WOULD SHINE, THEN ANOTHER AND ANOTHER – FOR THE WHOLE DAMN PROCESS!”

produced the fastest times of the entire test.

Thanks to having four MotorSport Vision-run F2 cars, the finalists were all on track at the same time for the single-seater running. Remarkably, in 2023 all four of them topped at least one of the sessions during day one and were normally separated by a handful of tenths around the 3.7-mile circuit, which was taking around 1m45-46s for the F2 cars to circulate.

The weather was nastier at the start of day two, providing a difficult challenge for the drivers and engineers but yet more data for the judges. Except that the order was completely different in the second wet run compared to the first!

“It was more complicated than I expected because it was so close,” says new guest judge Johnny Herbert. “One driver would shine, then another and another – for the whole damn process!”

“Being part of it was nice from my point of view because I’ve always enjoyed analysing other people’s styles. We could look at what was going on and it was interesting to see how they responded after a good or bad session.”

With the F2 running complete, attention turned to the GT3 and LMP3 racers. Benchmark drivers Wayne Boyd and Jonny Adam recorded baseline laps first, something they repeated later in the day to account for track evolution. With only one United >>



Judges and drivers chat during rare breaks



Rain provided another challenge on day two

YOUNG DRIVER TESTS

Autosports Ligier and Beechdean Aston Martin, each finalist experienced slightly different circuit conditions as the track dried. Using the benchmark drivers as the circuit changed allowed the lap times to be ‘corrected’ to take that into account, negating the disadvantage for those running first.

Each finalist got two runs in the Ligier and two in the Aston Martin, with time for a quick word with the teams in between. The star performances of past winners have often come in the non-single-seaters – think Button in the Nissan Primera Super Tourer or Norris in Mercedes DTM – and these elements can be crucial when the F2 running is close.

During all this, the various judges did a mix of talking to the drivers and engineers, watching trackside at various vantage points, and looking at the lap times provided by TSL and data coming into the judges’ room in the Wing.

Once all the running was completed, MSV, United Autosports and Beechdean engineers reported back to the judges, while the finalists were also interviewed before having their phones handed back and finally being allowed to escape! The benchmark drivers were also asked who they’d want to share their cars with if they were going into a race meeting the next day...

As the finalists’ long wait until 3 December began, the judges settled in for a long discussion. Lap times, improvement during the two days, mistakes, driver feedback and the views of the



teams running the cars are just some of the things taken into account. There’s also reams of data and onboard footage, which can be called upon to assess anything from driving styles to (whisper it) track-limits transgressions.

“All the judges had slightly different views, but that was good because then you work through everything,” adds Herbert. “The Award can be very important to the career of a racing driver and it gives the opportunity for them to shine.”

As usual, the 2023 process was rigorous – but hopefully enjoyable – for everyone involved. Which is how it should be before the winner of an F1 test and £200,000 is announced in front of a room full of motorsport experts in London. ✎

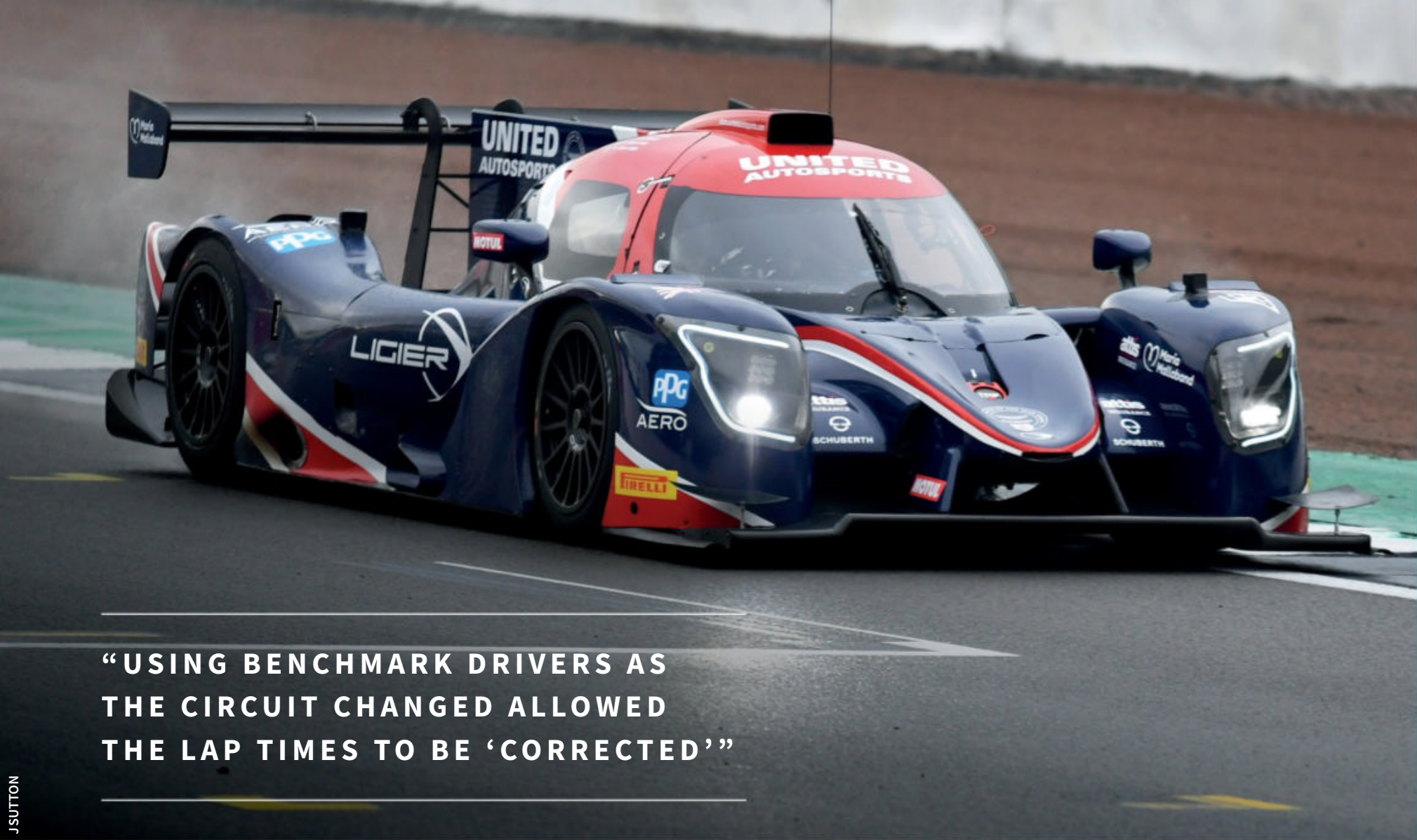
GRANT

THE 2023 CARS AND JUDGES

LIGIER JSP320 (LMP3)
Run by United Autosports
Engine Naturally aspirated 5.6-litre V8
Power 455bhp
Tyres Pirelli
2023 benchmark driver Wayne Boyd

WILLIAMS JPH1B (F2)
Run by MotorSport Vision
Engine 1.8-litre turbo R4
Power 425bhp
Tyres Pirelli
2023 benchmark driver N/A

ASTON MARTIN VANTAGE (GT3)
Run by Beechdean AMR Motorsport
Engine Four-litre turbo V8
Power Over 500bhp
Tyres Pirelli
2023 benchmark driver Jonny Adam



“USING BENCHMARK DRIVERS AS THE CIRCUIT CHANGED ALLOWED THE LAP TIMES TO BE ‘CORRECTED’”

JSUTTON

Herbert enjoyed role as 2023 guest judge

Ex-Formula 1 driver and 1992 world sportscar champion Derek Warwick is the chairman of the judging panel. This year’s panel also included Award winners Dario Franchitti, Darren Turner, Andrew Kirkaldy and Alexander Sims, successful

Lola and McLaren designer Mark Williams, Le Mans-winning engineer Leena Gade, leading commentator Ian Titchmarsh, and Autosport Chief Editor Kevin Turner. The guest judge was three-time grand prix winner and 1991 Le Mans victor Johnny Herbert.

THE PREVIOUS WINNERS

Thanks to Jake Dennis’s success in Formula E this year, former Award winners have now won three FIA world championships, Jenson Button (2009 F1) and Anthony Davidson (2014 World Endurance Championship) being the others. Alexander Sims also took the IMSA GTP title this season to add to the list of achievements of previous winners that also includes multiple F1, Le Mans, Macau Grand Prix and Indianapolis 500 successes.

2022	Luke Browning	2005	Oliver Jarvis
2021	Zak O’Sullivan	2004	Paul di Resta
2020	Not held (COVID-19)	2003	Alex Lloyd
2019	Johnathan Hoggard	2002	Jamie Green
2018	Tom Gamble	2001	Steven Kane
2017	Dan Ticktum	2000	Anthony Davidson
2016	Lando Norris	1999	Gary Paffett
2015	Will Palmer	1998	Jenson Button
2014	George Russell	1997	Andrew Kirkaldy
2013	Matt Parry	1996	Darren Turner
2012	Jake Dennis	1995	Jonny Kane
2011	Oliver Rowland	1994	Jamie Davies
2010	Lewis Williamson	1993	Ralph Firman Jr
2009	Dean Smith	1992	Dario Franchitti
2008	Alexander Sims	1991	Oliver Gavin
2007	Stefan Wilson	1990	Gareth Rees
2006	Oliver Turvey	1989	David Coulthard



THE FINALISTS

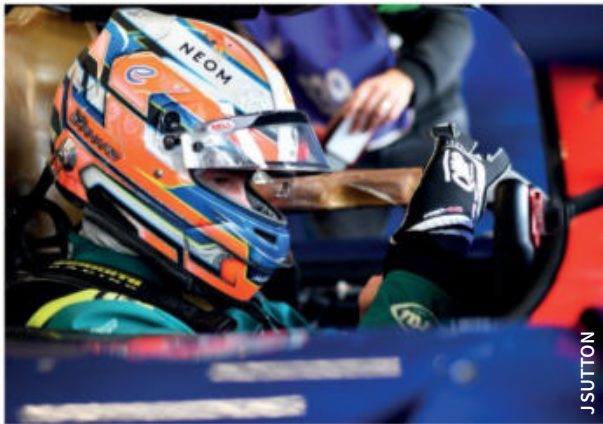
TAYLOR BARNARD

AGE 19 2023 10th in FIA Formula 3
with Jenzer Motorsport

“It’s an experience that I’ll never have again and I had to make the most of it. Everyone was friendly and helpful but it was very high pressure as well.

“I’m happy with what I’ve done. We did a pursuit run and in that I got a puncture and had to get the car back to the pits. I got back out there and finished the run really strong. To have that hiccup and come back I think I did a good job.

“When you look at the names of the people who have won the Award, to add my name to that list would mean so much to me. It’s hard to take my mind off it to be honest!”



ARVID LINDBLAD

AGE 16 2023 3rd in Italian F4 and
4th in Euro 4 with Prema Racing

“I really enjoyed the opportunity and loved driving all three cars. They were great and it’s an all-new experience. Being a single-seater, the F2 was more familiar but it’s a completely different level to F4.

“I loved the GT3 and LMP3 cars, it was just a shame it was wet. The F2 in the dry, when the track temperature went up and we could get heat into the tyres, felt really good.

“To win the Award, I can’t quite put what it would mean into words. It’s such a prestigious Award with an incredible list of winners. It would be an honour, and I tried my best in all the tests.”





JOSEPH LOAKE

AGE 18 2023 3rd in GB3
with JHR Developments

“The whole thing was such a privilege and I’m proud to have done enough to be there.
“My pursuit run and F2 qualifying were strong and I know I was quick in the wet. I was nervous because the last two wet GB3 rounds hadn’t gone well, but Silverstone in the wet is good for me. It would have been nice to drive the GT3 and LMP3 in the dry to see what they could do, but it was still cool to drive them.
“It’d be incredible to win the Award and prove to myself that I can achieve more in motorsport. The prizes are good, but the biggest thing would be having my name on the winners’ list.”



CALLUM VOISIN

AGE 17 2023 GB3 champion
with Rodin Carlin

“It’s a weird experience because you don’t know how other people are doing. The environment was completely different, but I liked it.
“The last run we got in the F2 car in the wet felt really good. The first run didn’t go so well but the second was a big step – I got the tyres switched on and it was a night-and-day different.
“I really enjoyed the LMP3 – it was faster and more nimble than I expected – and the GT3 was cool. The number of buttons in that car!
“The Award is something I’ve had in the back of my mind and I really wanted to show what I can do.”



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- Maintaining customer and event ticketing systems
- Using the Content Management System (CMS) to provide content and updates to our group of company websites, including event details, company news, blogs and product updates
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- Allocate volunteers efficiently in advance of all race meetings and ensure supporting information and reports are generated and available; briefing documents, sign on information, timetables, location/allocation sheets, sign on sheets and radio sheets
- Manage communication between SCL and its volunteers via all channels of communication
- Consistent monitoring of marshal numbers for all events, ensuring we are providing the appropriate marshal cover levels to meet Track Licenses
- Booking of recovery units for all events ensuring appropriate cover for all event types/circuit configurations to meet Track Licenses
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- Challenge and seek to continuously improve processes, procedures and protocols related to Social and Digital as well as wider content production and at Williams.

Required Skills:

- Experience managing social media channels for large brands or sports teams, including community management experience.
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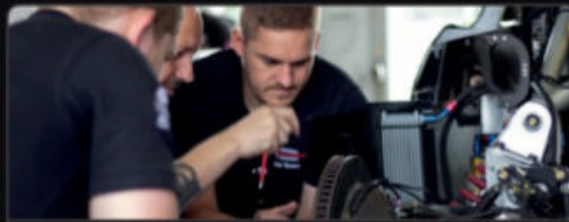
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Sustainable fuels for all at 2024 Revival

GOODWOOD

The entirety of the Goodwood Revival is set to run using sustainable fuels for the first time next year.

The popular annual event, which will take place on 6-8 September at the Goodwood Motor Circuit, will require all competitors to use a fuel that has a minimum of 70% advanced sustainable components, in accordance with the FIA's current requirements for sustainable fuel.

Despite the changes to the fuel, no modifications to the cars will be required and on-track performance is expected to remain unchanged.

The Duke of Richmond, founder of the

Festival of Speed and Goodwood Revival, said: "Goodwood has an illustrious motorsport history and one which we are delighted to continue with the announcement that at next year's Revival, all of our races will run on sustainable fuel."

"I am proud that we are the first to be mandating the use of sustainable fuels at the event and would like to thank all of the participating owners, drivers and preparers for their support."

Ben Collings and Gareth Graham became the first drivers to take a win at this year's Revival using sustainable fuel aboard their 1925 Bentley Speed Model in the Rudge-Whitworth Cup, and the use of sustainable fuels will be mandated for the Ken Miles Cup

and Gordon Spice Trophy at the Goodwood Members' Meeting next year (13-14 April).

Four-time Formula 1 champion Sebastian Vettel drove his ex-Nigel Mansell 1992 Williams FW14B and ex-Ayrton Senna 1993 McLaren MP4/8 on sustainable fuel at this year's Festival of Speed. He said: "It was clear to me at the Festival of Speed that the team at Goodwood share my love of motor racing."

"I enjoyed sharing my 'Race Without Trace' initiative with the fans at the Festival of Speed and having the opportunity to show that sustainable fuels are a fantastic way to ensure a possible future pathway for the sport that we love. It's great that Goodwood is leading the way in promoting the use of sustainable fuels at historic racing events."

Autumn Classic wins prestigious RAC award

CASTLE COMBE

Castle Combe's Autumn Classic was named Competitive Event of the Year at the Royal Automobile Club's 2023 Historic Awards dinner last week.

Brainchild of the Wiltshire circuit's late marketing director Rodney Gooch, the Autumn Classic has been run annually since 2012. This

season's offering was adjudged exceptional by the dedicated panel, chaired by veteran commentator Ian Titchmarsh.

Super Touring Power at Brands Hatch and the Vintage Hot Rod Association's Pendine Sands races were shortlisted for the award, previously won by Chateau Impney Hillclimb, the Historic Sports Car Club's Legends



Castle Combe event has
proved a hit with fans

OLLIEREAD

of Brands Hatch Superprix, the Vintage Sports-Car Club's Light Car Race and Rally the Globe Generations Rally.

"On behalf of the circuit and the Autumn Classic team, we are honoured to win the RAC Competitive

Event award," said Castle Combe Racing Club chair Ken Davies. "This recognition justifies our decision to run a two-day event next year, the grid slots for which are already sold out."

MARCUS PYE

Pre-'66 Touring Cars to support BTCC at Croft

CTCRC

The Classic Touring Car Racing Club's Pre-'66 Touring Car category will make a guest appearance on the British Touring Car Championship's support package at Croft next summer.

The event, on 27-28 July, will feature three non-championship races for the Pre-'66 field, taking the place of British Formula 4, which has instead added an overseas round at Zandvoort to its schedule (see right).

Guest categories have been a regular element of the BTCC support bill since Ginetta switched its series to the British GT package ahead of the 2023 season. But this will represent the first time that historic tin-tops from a variety of marques have featured since the Historic Sports Car Club's Super Touring Challenge made single appearances in 2014 and 2015. Prior to that, the Scottish Classic Sports & Saloons series occasionally featured at the BTCC's Knockhill round, while Heritage GT – which included classic touring cars – made semi-regular appearances on the bill in the 2000s.

The Pre-'66 Touring Car Championship's appearance will form part of the CTCRC's 50th anniversary celebrations – the club



was formed in 1974 before running its first championship for Pre-'57 Classic Saloons the following year.

"We're absolutely delighted that our Pre-'66 championship has been invited to race alongside British Touring Cars at Croft," said CTCRC chairman Stuart Caie. "It's a fitting way for the club to celebrate its 50th anniversary by showcasing the kind of cars that raced in the early years of the BTCC alongside their modern counterparts. It's fantastic recognition for our club, the drivers and all our volunteers who work hard to provide a home for touring cars of all ages to race."

"It's also appropriate that it's at Croft, a BARC circuit, given our long association with the club. The Pre-'66 cars always produce great racing and we feel sure that the BTCC crowd will love the little-and-large battles of Minis versus big American V8s and everything in between. It should be a wonderful weekend."

The Pre-'66 Touring Car Championship raced at Croft in August this year, when circuit instructor Barry Sime won both races in his father Jimmy's Morris Mini Cooper S, holding off James Everard's Alfa Romeo Sprint GT.

MARK PAULSON

Hungaroring to be third European GB3 event

GB3

The GB3 Championship has included a visit to the Hungaroring for the first time on its 2024 calendar.

The eight-round schedule will begin at Oulton Park on 30 March-1 April, before the first of two trips to Silverstone's Grand Prix layout (27-28 April and 27-28 July). It will then embark on a trio of overseas events, beginning with Spa in Belgium (1-2 June), the Hungarian round, where it will be on the support bill of International GT Open (22-23

June), and Zandvoort in the Netherlands (13-14 July).

The final two rounds will take place at Donington Park (7-8 September) and Brands Hatch (28-29 September), both in support of British GT, as are the first two events.

"It's an exciting new chapter for the championship," said CDR team boss Chris Dittmann. "It's gone from strength to strength over the years and to have three European rounds on Formula 1 circuits is fantastic. It can only help sell the championship to drivers."



Hillspeed chief Richard Ollerenshaw added: "I think GB3 is back exactly where British Formula 3 was in its heyday. The level of performance and reliability that the package offers is exceptional."

GB4 has also announced its 2024 calendar, which features races at five

locations across seven meetings. It will support GB3 at Oulton Park, both Silverstone events and the final rounds at Donington and Brands Hatch.

Additional contests will run at Donington (25-26 May) and Snetterton (13-14 June), both in support of British GT.

STEFAN MACKLEY

Silverstone GP is another
F1 circuit on F4 schedule



British F4 to get its first overseas round as it joins GB3 at Zandvoort

BRITISH F4

British Formula 4 is set to make its first-ever trip overseas next season now that a round at Zandvoort has been added to its 2024 calendar.

While the bulk of the category's schedule remains in support of British Touring Cars, British F4 will now have two rounds away from the TOCA package. It will again visit the Silverstone Grand Prix circuit alongside the British Endurance Championship in June, in place of BTCC's Oulton Park outing, while F4 will also be absent at Croft to make way for the July Zandvoort event, where it will join GB3 in the Netherlands.

"I am very proud that we continue to

innovate with British F4," said Hugh Chambers, CEO of British F4 promoter Motorsport UK. "The addition to the calendar of the F1 track at Zandvoort, on top of our existing Silverstone F1 track weekend, perfectly complements our eight weekends as part of BTCC rounds.

"With four GP track layouts in 2024 – two historic and two current tracks – our commitment to preparing and developing British F4 drivers for future single-seater careers is evident. We have placed great emphasis on listening to the market, and working with the teams to refine our offering, and I am certain that the shape of our 2024 calendar will prove an attractive proposition to domestic and overseas drivers alike."

Mercedes junior Cui to F4 with Argenti

BRITISH F4

Mercedes Formula 1 junior Yuanpu Cui and Ginetta Junior race winner Reza Seewooruthun are the latest drivers to be announced as part of the British Formula 4 grid for next year.

Chinese racer Cui, 15, has impressed in karting, joining Mercedes' programme this year, and his move into single-seaters will be made

with Argenti Motorsport.

"We are very happy to welcome Yuanpu to the team," said Argenti boss Michael Meadows. "He has been working hard in testing, and we are excited to see his development and where this will take him."

Seewooruthun, meanwhile, finished third in this year's Ginetta Junior standings after taking four wins. He will take his first single-seater

steps with Hitech GP in the UAE F4 series before the British championship begins.

"Working with a world-class team is a real privilege," said Seewooruthun. "In the short time we have been working together, they've helped me to further develop my skills as a driver."

These latest additions mean that five drivers have already been confirmed in British F4 for 2024.

QUEEN ASCENDS TO GB3

GB4 frontrunner Colin Queen will remain with Fortec Motorsport for his step up to GB3 next season. The American, who was previously a leading contender in Formula Ford 1600, finished fourth in the GB4 standings this year. "I am thrilled to be part of the Fortec family once again and am looking to build on the strong foundation we have built together," said Queen.

PAUL TRIES F4 MACHINERY

Former GT Cup champion Dominic Paul tested a Chris Dittmann Racing Formula 4 car at Donington Park recently. "I was a bit rusty having only done one Praga race this season," he said. "But I did race for Chris in the F3 Cup, so thought I would see what the F4 was like."

GARLICK STEPS UP TO G56

Ginetta GT5 Challenge champion Luke Garlick will step up to the top GT Pro class of the Ginetta GT series next year, continuing with Xentek Motorsport after a successful first full season of racing. "Luke was fantastic this year in the GT5 Challenge and richly deserved his title," said Xentek boss Christopher Richards. "He's conducted an initial test in the G56 GT Pro car, and his pace was quick from the off, so we're excited to see what he can achieve."

HALSTEAD TO DUBAI 24

British Touring Car and British GT racer Nick Halstead is to contest the Dubai 24 Hours in the New Year in a Century Motorsport BMW M4 GT4. He tested the car for the first time at Donington Park last week and is due to share the M4 with Piers Johnson, David Holloway and another driver to be announced.

CAISLEY TRIES OUT ASTON

Radical Cup UK runner-up Ben Caisley tested a Blackthorn Racing Aston Martin GT3 at Donington Park last week. He was partnered by Nielsen boss Sven Thompson and it was the first time either had driven anything other than a Radical. "I hope to move into endurance racing and this is one of the options we're looking at," said Caisley (below).



Lotus Elan 26R 60th anniversary to be celebrated

EQUIPE

Equipe Classic Racing is set to run a special race celebrating the 60th anniversary of the Lotus Elan 26R at its Silverstone Grand Prix circuit meeting next June.

While the first Elans rolled off the production line in 1962, the 26R version that came along two years later was created specifically for motorsport. Equipe, which has run celebration contests for the MGB, plans to commemorate the 26R with a packed grid at Silverstone for an hour-long race for cars shared by two or driven solo. A number of special cars are due to take part, including all three original Shapecraft models.

"We will be trying to get a world record of 26Rs in one place at one time – that will be the MGB 50 and 60 races we've done on steroids!" said Equipe partner Rob Cull. "For our racing, the 26R is one of the best pound-for-pound cars out there. From the way they were designed and built, they're just a pure



More than 40 Elan 26Rs are expected for the Silverstone event

racing car. Every part is there for its function to go fast and be light."

Equipe normally does not allow Pro drivers to tackle its races, but will relax those rules for the one-off Silverstone mini-enduro, which is being sponsored and supported by leading Elan restorer and parts supplier Tony Thompson Racing. It aims to have more than 40 26Rs taking part.

There is also a special connection to the model for Cull. "My dad did a lot of the development work on the 26R back in the day

because he was Jim Clark's mechanic – he went out to Germany with Jochen Neerpasch and became very good friends," said Cull Jr, who is now rebuilding a 26R in tribute to his father, Bob, after his death earlier this year.

Alongside the Silverstone meeting, Equipe is due to run seven other UK events next year, starting at Brands Hatch in March, and also taking in trips to Cadwell Park, Oulton Park, Donington Park and Snetterton. An overseas visit to Zandvoort is also scheduled for July.

STEPHEN LICKORISH

Wilson graduates to Porsche Sprint Challenge



PORSCHE

TCR UK race winner Darelle Wilson will switch to the Porsche Sprint Challenge GB next year as part of a two-car team alongside George Jaxon at JWB Motorsport.

Wilson has been a mainstay of TCR UK since its inaugural season

in 2018, twice placing third in the standings. But, with his Vauxhall Astra less competitive against second-generation cars, the 34-year-old is returning to rear-wheel-drive machinery for the first time since his Britcar campaigns with former British Touring Car driver Ian Heward's

Porschesport entry.

"It's time for me to step up now," said Wilson, who plans to continue running two cars in TCR UK for customers. "I've been racing for 17 years and I've always been doing it all myself. It's time to make some noise and prove myself."

MARK PAULSON

ANGELO R. DRIVE

WHAT ARE YOU WRITING ANGELO?

A LETTER TO SANTA, HE DOES EXIST - I SAW HIM ON THE HIGH STREET...

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Formula Junior (inset) will race at historic Enna, which hosted GTs in 1960s (below)



New Enna historic festival draws the attention of UK categories

HISTORICS

A new showpiece event at the Enna-Pergusa circuit in Sicily will put the Mediterranean island firmly on the historic racing map as members from long-established UK-based clubs look set to make the trip.

Sponsored by the municipality of Enna and the Sicilian tourist board, Settimana

Motoristica Ennese, the event running from 15-17 May, is billed as a sporting and cultural festival a week after the Monaco GP Historique, with fast ferry links to the home of the Targa Florio from Genoa and Livorno ideal for those attending both.

Celebrating the best of hospitality and history, racing on the fabled Autodromo di Pergusa – which has hosted motorsport around the nearby

lake since 1950 – will include the Gran Premio del Mediterraneo F1 events (Historic Grand Prix Cars Association), GP di Pergusa (Formula Junior Historic Racing Association) and Coppa Citta di Enna (GT & Sports Car Cup) of yore. Italian-organised touring car races are also on the bill, which features two races per grid.

The Formula Junior races are counters towards the five-round Lurani Trophy championship, named for Count Giovanni 'Johnny' Lurani, three-time Targa Florio participant and architect of the 1100cc production-engined training category, which reigned from 1958-63. Starting at Hockenheim (3-5 May), it also visits Zandvoort (21-23 June), Brno (12-14 July) and Dijon (4-6 October).

GTSCC's invitation series season-opener is a long-awaited return to Italy with pre-'66 GT, pre-'63 sports-racers and 1300cc touring cars. "We are delighted to be back, and very much hope this pioneering event attracts some stunning Italian entries," said promoters Flavien and Vanessa Marcais.

MARCUS PYE

Fitz-Simon shows strong pace in modern machines

PORSCHE

Lurani Trophy Historic Formula Junior champion Horatio Fitz-Simon is to make the switch to modern racing next season.

The British-born 23-year-old recently drove a Porsche Carrera Cup car and a Duqueine D08 LMP3 sports-prototype (right) at Silverstone and Barcelona's Catalunya circuit respectively.

"The Porsche Carrera Cup is really where my focus is," said Fitz-Simon. "I'm very deep into it with personal sponsors and have been offered a seat with a new team with great ambitions

for the future. My run at Silverstone was in extremely wet conditions, but I found the GT3 car surprisingly easy to drive in the rain. It had loads of grip and did not feel heavy. I can't wait to try it in the dry."

Fitz-Simon also received a call-up to take part in Muhlner Motorsport's junior driver shootout in Spain last week, aimed at filling seats in the Spa-based family's 2024 programmes in Europe and the US. "The Duqueine was very different to anything I'd driven before, with so much power [the 5.6-litre Nissan V8 engine develops circa



455bhp] and downforce, but I did 45 to 50 laps on a circuit I'd not seen before," he said.

"The guys I was up against were from GT backgrounds and had significantly more experience, but, at the end of the day, I was quickest.

"Coming from a Formula

Junior background, the only place I struggled was under braking. The technique of using a lot of pressure initially, then bleeding it off quickly, was alien to me, but it has so much grip and is great to drive. I'm grateful for the opportunity."

MARCUS PYE

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Riding the crest of a wave

A third overseas round in 2024 is another boost for the GB3 Championship as it underlines its importance on the single-seater ladder

STEFAN MACKLEY

There is a lot of truth to Hillspeed team boss Richard Ollerenshaw's assessment that the GB3 Championship has returned to the halcyon days of British Formula 3, as mentioned in our story about next season's calendar (see News).

The UK single-seater category's 2024 schedule includes three international race meetings as the Hungaroring in Hungary joins Spa in Belgium and Zandvoort in the Netherlands as foreign destinations. Add in two visits to the Silverstone Grand Prix circuit here in the UK and five of the eight race meetings next term will be held at current Formula 1 venues – a vital aspect for any junior single-seater championship.

The past four champions in the category – Luke Browning, Zak O'Sullivan, Kaylen Frederick and Clement Novalak – have all progressed up the single-seater ladder into F3 and even F2, where prior knowledge of European circuits is crucial if these young drivers are to make the grade at the next level.

The fact that championship organiser MotorSport Vision has added a third overseas round has generally gone down well with team bosses and should ensure that GB3 remains a high priority for up-and-coming drivers on the career ladder.

Over the past three seasons, the series has gone from strength to strength, which at one point during the 2021 campaign did not quite look to be the case. This was after MSV was forced into a

“A competitive field is just as important as healthy grids, and this year 10 drivers took a win”

mid-season name change by the FIA, losing the F3 moniker and rebranding as GB3. Such a change in the middle of a campaign had the potential to derail momentum (especially in the immediate wake of the COVID-19 pandemic), spark confusion about where GB3's place was in the pecking order of junior single-seater championships, and just generally turn people away. But instead, numbers have continued to grow, never dipping below 20 entries this season, and a championship-record 25 cars took the start at several rounds. Just as important as healthy grids, though, is a competitive field, and this year no fewer than 10 drivers took at least one win, while the title battle between Callum Voisin and Alex Dunne went down to the finale.

The category headed to Zandvoort for the first time this season, where it was on the support bill alongside a direct

competitor – Formula Regional European Championship by Alpine. GB3's Tatuus MSV-022 machine proved to be on average two seconds a lap quicker than its European equivalent and, for significantly less budget, it showcased the strengths of the UK championship. All signs point to another strong entry next season, with Formula Ford frontrunner Ammonite Motorsport set to join the grid, creating the potential for 28 cars to line up at times.

But, while the championship continues to grow, nothing in motorsport stands still for long and plans are already being discussed about the next generation of car. Autosport understands that talks have been held with GB3 teams about when to introduce a new car, with suggestions it could be as early as the 2025 season. If such a move were to happen, it would mean the current car will have only been used for three years – hardly a long innings for such a well-received and competitive machine.

The reason to push through with the change is that it could in theory then allow the Tatuus MSV-022 to move down MSV's single-seater pathway and into GB4. This championship was created in 2022 as a low-budget entry into single-seaters, costing between £120,000 and £150,000 for a season, and currently uses the previous generation of F4 chassis.

Notably, the Tatuus F4-T014 chassis is without a halo, which is an area that has become a focal point for the next-generation of GB4 car. Arguably of more concern is that, while £50,000 has been awarded to the champion each year, there hasn't been the necessary backing for them to step up the career ladder.

Nikolas Taylor was the inaugural champion but made only a one-off appearance in the F4 CEZ Championship this season as well as being a driver coach for the Fortec squad. While this year's title winner, Tom Mills, believes it unlikely that he will be able to move up to GB3 in 2024 where budgets are close to £400,000.

It raises serious questions about GB4's place in UK motorsport, even after only two seasons of being in existence – especially with some of the privateers on the grid struggling to get near the pace of the established teams – although there are some glimmers of hope that it's providing a pathway. Last season's runner-up Jarrod Waberski moved up to GB3 this term with Fortec, and American Colin Queen is set to do the same in 2024.

If the current GB3 chassis were indeed moved into GB4, would the jump in performance prove too much for many young drivers new to slicks and wings? And what raw performance would the new GB3 car be required to have in order for it to be a significant level above that of GB4? They are questions that will be answered in time but, in GB3, MSV has created a successful championship that has the potential to attract some of the best junior talent in motorsport. But it must be careful to protect the future of this category at the expense of promoting another. 🏁



Fourth R.A.C. Rally win for McCormack as his Escort Mk2 experience was key

McCormack defies the international stars on R.A.C.

ROGER ALBERT CLARK RALLY
23-27 NOVEMBER

The big stars came and tried but it was event experts Martin McCormack and Barney Mitchell who finally triumphed on this year's Roger Albert Clark Rally.

This was the longest and toughest version to date in the rally's 20-year history, with 350 competitive miles in the forests of Wales, Scotland and England, and a record entry of 160 cars. In the field were international stars Oliver Solberg, Kris Meeke, Chris Ingram and Osian Pryce, and it was Solberg who built a big lead over the first days until a driveshaft failed. Instead, McCormack swept ahead for his fourth win in the same Ford Escort Mk2 as record crowds packed the forest stages.

McCormack said: "To do this for the

fourth time is unbelievable. We're just a team of part-timers. The whole world has been watching this event and it is a privilege to be part of it."

The action started from the word go, and big hitters were in trouble within the first three miles of the rally. Out went Roger Chilman with a sick engine. A few miles later, Matthew Robinson was also out of contention with a detached flywheel on his Escort Mk2.

Meeke and Noel O'Sullivan set a strong pace from the off but, before Thursday was out, so were they, first with a puncture and then with an engine timing issue that stopped their Escort Mk2 in the Cefn stage. Local ace Pryce and Rhodri Evans took over at the head of the pack and led through until the end of the second day in Wales, but only by a single second from the flying

Solberg and Elliott Edmondson.

Pryce was the next major casualty with engine woes in the Glengap stage in the Scottish leg on Saturday, and this was when Solberg really pressed home his advantage. He ended the Saturday leg over four minutes to the good and was able to set a pace through Sunday in the main block of Kielder forest that kept him in good shape and built his lead to over five minutes.

Now leading the chase was McCormack but, after a couple of big moments in Wales and several other car problems including an electrical short, he reined back his pace knowing trying to chase Solberg was probably only going to end with his Escort off the road.

However, in the darkness of Sunday evening, everything changed when Solberg ground to a halt in the final stage of the day, in Harwood forest. A broken halfshaft had stopped the Viking Motorsport Escort Mk2 and they were stranded in the stage. They took a stage maximum of 21 minutes compared to the leading crews' 11 minutes, effectively giving Solberg a 10-minute penalty and changing his 5m30s lead to a 4m30s deficit.

That left McCormack and Mitchell with a handsome lead and all they had to do was steer their way through Monday's 80 stage miles avoiding any significant problems.

McCormack eased back a little, kept the car in the middle of the Kielder tracks and came home for his fourth win and Mitchell's third. It was a hugely popular result and, though McCormack was quick to acknowledge the pace of Solberg, it was a well-deserved victory. Solberg restarted on Monday in a bid to claim second place but slid off early in the



Solberg enjoyed strong lead until halfshaft woes struck

ALL PHOTOGRAPHY: PAUL LAWRENCE

RALLY RESULTS

ROGER ALBERT CLARK RALLY

1 Martin McCormack/Barney Mitchell (Ford Escort Mk2) 5h48m26s; 2 Cathan McCourt/Liam Moynihan (Escort Mk2) +5m30s; 3 Jason Pritchard/Phil Clarke (Escort Mk2, **below**); 4 Dyfrig James/Emyr Jones (Escort Mk2); 5 Mike Stuart/Sinclair Young (Escort Mk1); 6 Vivian Hamill/Andrew Grennan (Escort Mk2).

Class winners Pete Stimson/Mark Butler (Ford Anglia); Martin Linden/Rickard Forsell (Volvo PV544); Steve Graham/Tony Graham (Lancia Fulvia); Alex Waterman/Chris Davies (Datsun 1600SSS); Ben Smith/Steven Smith (Escort Mk1); Robert Woodside/Dean Beckett (Porsche 911); Stuart/Young; David Hopkins/Richard Wise (Talbot Sunbeam); Adrian Young/Gwynfor Jones (Escort Mk2); Ben Jemison/Dean Kellett (Vauxhall Chevette HSR); Mark Constantine/Andrew Constantine (Vauxhall Nova Sport); Ian Tunney/Chris Sanderson (Mitsubishi Starion); Aaron McLure/Simon Taylor (Peugeot 205 GTI); Pritchard/Clarke; Frederico Polese/Nicola Arena (Porsche 911SC); Aaron Rix/Abi Haycock (Escort Mk2); Neil Weaver/Jack Morton (Opel Corsa S1600); Dave Hemingway/Simon Ashton (Escort Mk2); Gregory Perrard/Cesar Delbecque (Renault Clio).



For full results visit: results.djames.org.uk

day when on the attack.

While McCormack celebrated, there was disaster for Seb Perez and Gary McElhinney when their second-placed Lancia Stratos started smoking on the final stage and Perez eventually had to pull over. It was a crushing blow after an outstanding performance and they deserved so much more. However, a point had been made. The Stratos can mix it with the very best on gravel and second place would have been just reward.

Cathan McCourt and Liam Moynihan had chased the Stratos for several days and swept into second overall when the Lancia pulled out. That was another incredible result for a man on his second gravel rally in a Ford Escort. Despite punctures on each Kershope stage on Sunday morning, Jason Pritchard and Phil Clarke moved up to third with a typically polished performance to round out the overall podium.

In the concurrent, open rally for non-historic two-wheel-drive cars, Neil Weaver and Jack Morton repeated their 2021 victory with a huge winning margin in Weaver's Opel Corsa Super 1600.

PAUL LAWRENCE



McCOURT'S SURPRISE Northern Irishman Cathan McCourt was known for his pace in modern rally cars but his first attempt at the R.A.C. Rally delivered a result far beyond his ambition for the event. In only his second gravel rally in a Ford Escort Mk2, McCourt and Liam Moynihan ran third in pursuit of the Lancia Stratos of Seb Perez before moving up to second on the final stage. "It's mad! I've never done a rally of this size," said McCourt. "It's the best thing I could have done to get a bit of experience."



STRATOS STUNS Two decades ago, Steve Perez had his Lancia Stratos built with the prime aim of competing in this event. Perez had a run of strong results until the car was badly damaged in a fire in Belgium in 2017. With a stronger than ever Ferrari Dino engine, the Stratos was back for 2023 and looked and sounded the part as it thrilled fans. Perez's son Seb drove superbly and went into the final test in second. A last-gasp retirement was a cruel blow but its potential was well and truly proven.



YOUNG MICRA GUNS With a combined age of less than 37 years, James Rudd and Oliver Foster were the youngest crew on the rally, and probably in the event's history. The Yorkshire school friends always had the R.A.C. Rally as their target when they started competing in their Nissan Micra and built their 2023 around preparing for the event. It was not plain sailing and the car needed engine surgery but, with a strong team behind them, the teenagers took 21st and sixth in class in the Open Rally.

THE DRIVE FOR NEW RECRUITS

Autosport took to the wheel to find out about Motorsport UK's StreetCar initiative

STEFAN MACKLEY

First 12 Car Rally was an experience for Mackley in a standard road-going Mini Cooper

“Reverse?!? Sh*t! First? First!” In complete darkness and somewhere along a B-road on the outskirts of Basingstoke, it's been a shaky start to this writer's first exploits on a 12 Car Rally: only minutes into the event a three-point turn is being attempted after missing the required junction. Not helping is the maddening gearbox layout of the borrowed 2011 Mini Cooper I'm at the wheel of, which has reverse and first gear next to each other and means selecting the wrong gear becomes an unwelcome and frequent theme throughout the evening.

More important, and certainly on a more positive note, is that I'm competing in the event in a standard road-going vehicle, which is at the heart of governing body Motorsport UK's StreetCar initiative. The concept was launched in the middle of 2022 and has grown steadily over the past 18 months, with more than

50 affiliated clubs joining the scheme at the start of this year and more signing up. Events range from a 12 Car Rally – held for up to 12 crews on public roads – to autotests and autosolos, enjoyed in an enclosed environment around a small, designated course, as well as speed events, treasure hunts, gymkhanas and more.

“When we launched it, we didn't really know how big the uptake would be and whether it was going to be a marginal success or a storm of people coming into the sport,” says Motorsport UK CEO Hugh Chambers.

“One thing that I think was crucial was that we created a StreetCar charter for clubs, and in order for a club to become a StreetCar club it had to sign up to the charter and make sure it had certain things in place. Principally around welcoming newcomers, so if somebody does get in touch and says, ‘I'd love to do a 12 Car Rally’, there's somebody who's going to assist them and walk



“This form of motorsport can provide the buzz of being on a racing circuit but at a fraction of the cost”

Brown is able to expertly decipher throughout the evening.

To ensure competitors go a specific way, between each TC are marker signs on the side of the road with two letters, and missing any of them incurs a single ‘fail’, while competitors are also penalised for arriving too early or late to a time control. The crew with the fewest fails wins, followed by the least time penalties incurred. While this is my first event, many of the other competitors have years of experience, including 1986 Motorsport UK Asphalt Rally champion and 2004 Le Mans 24 Hours finisher Ian Donaldson. His entry showcases the appeal of club-level events like this even for those who have competed at a much higher level, and alongside navigator John Upham – returning after 20 years – they turn out to be our main rivals in the novice class.

Despite our shaky start we’re going well as we weave our way through country lanes, with Brown giving incredibly accurate corner-by-corner directions from only a 1/85 map. I slowly find a rhythm – gearbox ‘maladies’ aside.

To my shock, we’re the first crew to arrive at TC five and, with only one fail, we’re the outright leaders, eight minutes clear of the next crew! It’s easy to see why people become hooked on this form of motorsport, which at times can still provide the adrenaline buzz of being on an actual racing circuit but at a fraction of the cost.

Other disciplines on offer from clubs as part of the StreetCar initiative, including autotests and autosolos, allow teenagers as young as 14 – the future lifeblood of the sport – to take the wheel in a controlled environment.

“The idea of StreetCar is using a car that mum and dad use to do an autotest, an autosolo or a 12 Car, and I think that’s great because that’s the area that we need to pitch,” says Rob Willshire, chairman of BMC. “That’s the bottom of the triangle, that’s where you need to bring the people in, so things like treasure hunts, 12 Cars, gymkhana, it’s a lot easier for newcomers to take part.”

But as just important as having fun is ensuring that the event is conducted in a safe manner, while also respecting other road >>

them through the process and welcome them in.”

All of which brings me to the Basingstoke Motor Club and its Pumpkin 12 Car Rally last month. Having applied for a free RS Clubman licence through the Motorsport UK website, paid £20 for additional insurance specifically for the event and with no entry fee for any of the competitors, I’m good to go.

The premise of a 12 Car Rally is relatively simple. Twelve driver/navigators – in my case experienced club member Jeff Brown, who has been with BMC since its inception in the 1980s – have been given envelopes corresponding to the number of timed controls on this particular 70-mile route. Each one offers clues for the route to the next one, but can only be opened one at a time and having arrived at the previous TC. The clues themselves take various forms from numbers to markings that resemble something more akin to hieroglyphs that thankfully



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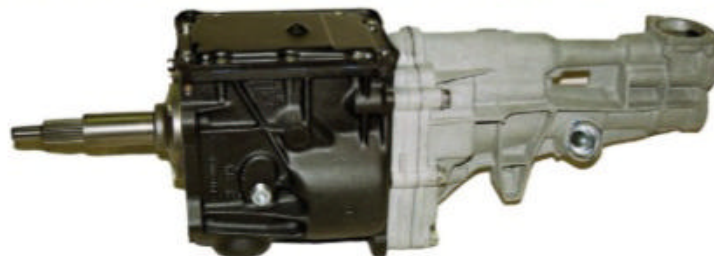
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Using a 1/85 map,
Brown plots out the
route to the next TC

OLLIE READ

users and those who live in the area. On this event a quiet zone has been put in place on a four-mile section of the course, predominantly through villages, and where a Motorsport UK steward operates. In essence, it's to make sure that all competitors obey the speed limit, and cars are required to run in a high gear to avoid unnecessary noise. The clerk of the event is positioned at one of the many junctions to ensure that competitors come to a complete stop before proceeding.

"In the club we always mention we need to protect our map," adds Willshire. "If we don't put checks in to control people's speed and abide by the regulations, then what happens is that areas become black spots that we're not allowed to drive through, so then that becomes harder and harder to put an event on."

"We need to keep other road users safe, be that pedestrians,

"The event has been an experience, the most surprising element of which is that I'm exhausted"



StreetCar also includes
events like autosolos

MOTORSPORT UK

cars, vans, trucks – especially in the dark. We need to ensure the event is run safely and we always try to make sure that we put time controls in safe places.

"I think the regulations we've got in place with Motorsport UK fit that. The average speed limit on events is 30mph, and that keeps the speed down considering on the country lanes you're going a bit quick. It's all about fun at the end of the day."

I find "going a bit quick" to be an understatement when on the narrow country lanes. Although it's signposted as the national speed limit, achieving that is not for the faint-hearted, with blind turns, undulations and the harrowing prospect of another vehicle coming the other way. Not only that, but your peripheral vision is working overtime in the darkness, looking out for the boards at the side of the road, taking some of the much-needed focus away from what's actually ahead.

Perhaps inevitably, fatigue, along with harder-to-plot routes, means our surprising lead soon slips away over the final two legs. Seeing water in the middle of the road, I take the decision to turn around, with Donaldson/Upham (Renault Clio 182) immediately behind doing the same – and while we continue to ignore the inevitable markers down that path, our rivals approach from the other side. The final leg proves even more costly as we miss several more marker boards, which leaves us with a total of seven fails, just one behind Donaldson/Upham, but second in class and fifth overall. More telling is that we rack up only six minutes of late penalties, the same as the winning crew of Chris Pratt/Glynn Hayward (Clio 197), showing the importance of patience over outright speed.

The event has been an experience, the most surprising element of which is that I'm exhausted after two hours and 20 minutes of driving, with almost no respite other than stopping at each TC, sometimes for no more than a minute.

But the event has provided an evening of entertainment and excitement among a welcoming group of enthusiasts, and all at the wheel of a standard road-going vehicle that, despite a slightly muddier exterior than when I started, was no worse for wear – the exact purpose of the StreetCar initiative. Just make sure to pick a car with a decent gearbox! 🚗

FINISHING STRAIGHT

It's snowy all year round at fictional Canadian venue Lake Louise

GRAN TURISMO



Upping its game with fresh content and much smarter AI



VIDEO GAME GRAN TURISMO SPEC II UPDATE

Gran Turismo 7's update 1.40 has been christened 'Spec II' and it includes several requested features

alongside fresh content. In what seems like a significant update, Spec II of *Gran Turismo 7* will include Sony-AI powered rival cars, a new track, seven additional cars, a new game intro and, surprise, a refreshed single-player structure.

Top of the list of changes is the reintroduction of GT Sophy, which reappeared in November's *Gran Turismo 7* update – only this time it's more adept. The AI learns your driving style and, in theory, is much smarter than previous single-player rivals seen in *GT7* or prior *GT* titles.



GRAN TURISMO

It has the possibility to not only be quick, but also learn your driving style and defend and attack in a more natural fashion. We've seen several demonstrations against the best *Gran Turismo* Esports drivers in the world, a drifting test at the recent Showdown event in Amsterdam and even played it earlier this year when a limited-time test was available to all in-game.

It now returns, on PlayStation 5 only. Instead of the limited set-up, now it's claimed that Sophy can drive 340 of the cars in the game around nine of the tracks, including Gr.3 cars around circuits such as Grand Valley Highway 1, Road Atlanta, Tsukuba and Circuit de la Sarthe, Le Mans.

Instead of a separate test area, Sophy is now integrated within the World Circuits single-player events, and on PS5 there will be the option of 'regular AI' or 'Sophy' pre-event.

Speaking of which, we enjoyed playing through the Cafe Menu books, alongside completing the Missions and Licence tests. But, once you'd completed all the volumes, the remaining World Circuits single-player races felt banal in comparison. Each month, a few more would be added to the game, and there didn't seem to be any real incentive to complete them.

That will hopefully change with Spec II, but let's see how it plays out in the fullness of time. What we know is that once you reach and watch the end credits (by

completing Cafe Menu Book No 39), Weekly Challenges are now playable.

Each weekly challenge combines events from World Circuits into a form of championship, but without points standings. Instead of the Sunday Cup, for example, events seemingly being disparate around the map, there is a challenge of completing all of the events within seven days. Rewards for finishing in the top three of these races include roulette tickets, cars, cash and parts.

Seven new events have been added to the existing roster, too, with smaller tweaks including 'Arcade Races' becoming 'Quick Races' and a new event directory menu.

Licence tests have been a staple since the first *Gran Turismo* game in 1997, with these providing a short, sharp, challenge with an online leaderboard to push you even further – if being awarded a gold rating wasn't enough in the first place.

Somewhat surprisingly, 50 more of these challenges have been added to the game with Spec II. Entitled 'Master Licence Tests', these are split into five categories: National B, National A, International B, International A and Super Licence. Once again, there will be rewards for achieving all bronze or all gold results.

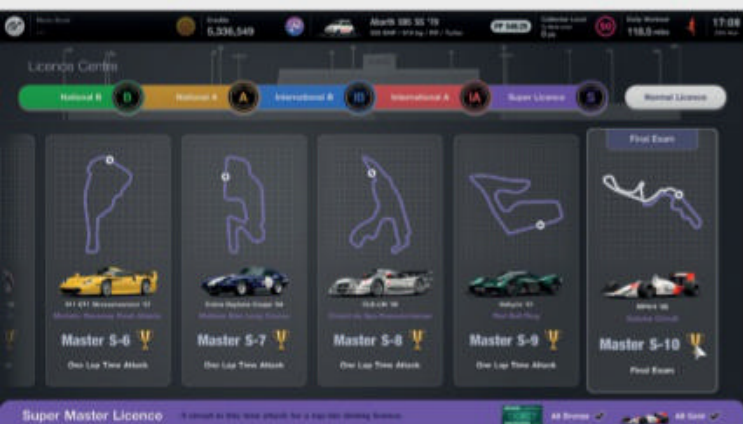
When you combine new World Circuits events, these additional licence tests and the weekly challenges, it sounds as if there's more reason to return to the single-player portions



GRAN TURISMO



GRAN TURISMO



GRAN TURISMO

of *Gran Turismo 7*, thankfully.

As ever with these updates, a list of new cars have been added to the roster including the Dodge Challenger SRT Demon '18, Lexus LFA '10 and the Tesla Motors Model 3 Performance '23.

Following on from recent additions to the track list, *Gran Turismo 7* has added a fictional snowy venue in Canada. The Lake Louise complex features three layouts: Short, Long and even Tri-Oval. No matter when you drive this track, it will always be covered in a layer of snow, reminding us of *Gran Turismo 4*'s Chamonix venue. At night, it looks as if there is moody blue and red lighting to boot.

To take part in an event at this new location, snow tyres must be equipped – a new addition to the Tuning Shop.

TOM HARRISON-LORD

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CLIVE ROSE/GETTY IMAGES/RED BULL CONTENT POOL

Abu Dhabi Grand Prix review

That's the 2023 Formula 1 season in the books, and the result in Abu Dhabi won't be a huge surprise to anyone. But there are plenty of other talking points, including the constructors' battle, the quality of racing in 2023 and the question of whether F1 is facing an issue with fans turned off by the lack of competition at the front.



WHAT'S ON



McMASTER

motorsport IMAGES

INTERNATIONAL MOTORSPORT

Copper X-Prix

Extreme E

Round 5/5

Antofagasta, Chile

2-3 December

TV Live ITV4, Sat 1800

TV Highlights ITV4,

Sun 2230

Livestream YouTube,

Sat 1200, Sun 1200

Asian Le Mans Series

Round 1/3

Sepang, Malaysia

2-3 December

Livestream

Motorsport.tv,

Sat 0545, Sun 0545



Its status as a GT-only round of the IMSA SportsCar Championship means that Virginia International Raceway doesn't get the same attention as some of the calendar's traditional heavy hitters. But to drivers who have sampled its 3.270 miles of narrow winding asphalt, VIR is a highly respected track that rewards commitment and accuracy.

Although he has never won there, factory Ferrari GT driver Toni Vilander holds VIR in the highest of esteem as it demands "a lot of dedication" to nail the lap. Calling it "a great place to test, great place to race as well", the Finn says the circuit "takes your breath away" because the margin of error is so small: "You have a very narrow racing line and all these long, long areas of green grass, so when you go off, you have a long time to think before you hit the barriers."

Track limits at VIR are defined by grass, and drivers are invited to ride the kerbs. At the tricky uphill Esses sequence, which Vilander compares to Spa's Eau Rouge-Raidillon section as a true test of nerve that places a premium on car placement, he says "there is no option" but to use them. But there's a fine line to tread and, as Vilander discovered on his very first visit to the track, there are "wrong ways" to go



about finding lap time. An innocuous moment when "I felt like I was not on it" and got off the racing line incurred damage to his Risi Competizione machine and a cutting remark. "I still remember our gearbox [technician]," chuckles Vilander. "He was like, 'Toni, really, on lap six in practice?'" The two-time GT World Challenge America champion has notched up four podiums at VIR, always racing in GT-only fields. He reckons it's a wise ploy since prototype drivers make up most of their time in traffic. "The reason not to race multi-class there is just the nature of the track," he points out. "Two wheels off and it's a big hit. So if a prototype car would hit a GT car, we have no option. Our racing line is our limit. You take us off the racing line, we don't have any option and time to react is actually zero."

JAMES NEWBOLD



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