

F1 2024 Big Questions Karun Chandhok is your guide

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Can Alonso and Aston Martin surprise F1 again in 2024?

Who, if anyone, will challenge Red Bull and Max Verstappen this season? We asked that question 12 months ago but Aston Martin would not have been many people's first (or second) answer. That the Silverstone-based team is now regarded as one of the main chasers says a lot about the big leap it made in 2023.

There were still two problems, though. The first was that, like everyone else, Aston Martin was still a significant chunk behind Red Bull. And the second was that it fell off the development pace during the campaign and ended up fifth in the constructors' championship when second had seemed possible early on.

This week, Alex Kalinauckas hears why the team in green is cautiously optimistic for 2024 (page 16), as well as Fernando Alonso's inevitably forthright (or should that be cheeky?) views about Lewis Hamilton's headline-grabbing move to Ferrari for 2025.

As usual at this time of year, we bring you news and views from the F1 launches, plus we've got our traditional Big Questions article with Karun Chandhok (p30). The hard-working Sky pundit has had to redraft the piece more than once thanks to all the recent breaking news, but it's beginning to become clear what the key stories will be...

Beyond F1, we talk to impressive rising star Arvid Lindblad ahead of his rookie F3 campaign (p40), take on the challenge of the gruelling Roger Albert Clark Rally (p44) and pick out the main themes of the 2024 NASCAR season ahead of the Daytona 500 blue-riband season-opener this weekend (p50).



Kevin Turner

Kevin Turner
Chief Editor

kevin.turner@autosport.com

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PIT + PADDOCK



Driver market shenanigans continue after

FORMULA 1

It's two weeks since the Formula 1 driver market was turned on its head by the news that Lewis Hamilton will swap Mercedes for Ferrari from 2025. That's ample time for representatives to phone team principals with seats going spare and for HR departments to check just how robust their existing paperwork is.

For example, Williams boss James Vowles used the team's New York City livery launch last week to confirm that Alex Albon is contracted until the end of 2025 – a year longer than thought. The Thai-Brit hasn't hidden away from the fact that, at 27, he's entering his prime, wants to battle at the front so might need to switch

employers. Autosport understands Red Bull has offered Albon a first option on his future. In other words, if he agrees, Red Bull will have the choice to bring him back for three years starting in 2026.

Plausibly, that would allow Daniel Ricciardo to replace Sergio Perez either partway through this season or next before Albon becomes available. But Albon must consider whether pledging his allegiances so early is too restrictive given the 'silly season' lying in wait. Despite the proposal from Red Bull, teams want a consistent line-up heading into 2026 to remove a variable as the new powertrain and chassis regulations come into play.

Albon said in NYC: "I would be denying it if I said there [haven't] been questions and

general chats surrounding [my future]... I feel like I am deserving of a car that can score podiums and fight for wins. That's just being totally honest with how I see myself. More than anything, I want that team to be Williams and that's where I put all my work and all my efforts into."

Former Alpine team-mates Esteban Ocon and Fernando Alonso haven't exactly poured cold water on their prospects of partnering George Russell. Ocon is out of contract at the end of this season. He was signed by the Mercedes driver programme during his 2015 title-winning GP3 campaign and, given his long-standing relationship with Toto Wolff, he is an outside candidate to replace Hamilton. Addressing the speculation, Ocon reminded everybody: "I've always had strong links with Mercedes. I'm still a Merc junior driver. This has always been, even if I'm not that junior anymore. I'm still contracted with them at some stage. We will see. At the moment, I'm totally dedicated to Alpine."

Meanwhile, Alonso notes that there are three F1 champions on the grid and he's the only one who will be available. While Aston Martin wants to retain the 42-year-old, and Alonso's "first priority" will be to speak to his current team, neither should forget how their marriage came to be. When Alpine dithered over offering the double champion a two-year contract, Aston swept in to lure Alonso into replacing the retiring Sebastian Vettel. In other words, the Spaniard has previous for



Williams says
Albon is staying
put... for now



HONE
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Hamilton move

catching his bosses off-guard. “I want to explore every possibility to race for many years,” he says. “First of all, I need to decide myself what I want to do for the future, if I want to commit my life, again, for few more years to this sport.”

As for the driver he replaced, Vettel is on the long list of viable Hamilton replacements to keep the Mercedes seat warm until rising star Andrea Kimi Antonelli is ready. Vettel is also talked about as a Christian Horner replacement should the Red Bull boss move aside amid the investigation into his behaviour. Sporting director Jonathan Wheatley is another contender there.

Meanwhile, Carlos Sainz has addressed his ousting for the first time. Speaking to Sky Italia, he admitted: “It’s certainly not the best feeling to start the season. Experiencing Ferrari from the inside, I already knew several things and I prepared myself with the team in view of future changes. I am aware of how much I am worth as a driver. For this reason, when I look to the future, I am very calm.”

When Sainz leaves Ferrari, it’s unlikely Hamilton will take a load of high-profile Mercedes staffers with him, including race engineer Peter Bonington, as it’s transpired that they have ‘anti-poaching’ clauses in their contracts.

**MATT KEW, CHRISTIAN NIMMERVOLL
& ROBERTO CHINCHERO**

P7 TOP FIVE HAMILTON REPLACEMENTS

MORE KEY FIA FIGURES HEAD FOR EXIT DOOR

FIA

The recent FIA exodus has continued with two legal executives, who are involved in Formula 1, leaving their jobs. Governance and regulatory director Pierre Ketterer plus head of commercial legal affairs Edward Floydd, both of whom had a hand in Concorde Agreement negotiations, are departing.

Ketterer joined in 2010 but is moving to the International Olympic Committee. Under ex-FIA president Jean Todt, he created the judicial and disciplinary rules in 2011 and was a key player in developing the COVID-19 code of conduct that

allowed F1 to resume in 2020.

Floydd was the primary civil and commercial legal adviser to the FIA and was the lead legal negotiator and adviser for championship promoter agreements.

Their departures follow F1 sporting director Steve Nielsen and technical director Tim Goss – recently named RB chief technical officer – out the door. Deborah Mayer, Women in Motorsport Commission president, opted not to renew her contract last year.

“The FIA has been undergoing a large-scale transformation over the past 12 months,” a governing body spokesperson told Autosport. “We have created 10 new departments, restructuring the Federation to be more



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fit for purpose for the future. While there are individuals departing for other opportunities, we have also welcomed new additions such as three new hires to the management team over the last few months, namely a chief legal officer, chief commercial officer and senior director for sustainability and equality, diversity and inclusion. We have also added numerous staff to key roles across sport and mobility.”

ADAM COOPER



Famin says Andretti needs an F1 entry for engine talks

FIAPOOL/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Renault: no Andretti talks yet

FORMULA 1

Renault will not resume talks with Andretti over a potential Formula 1 customer engine deal until the American outfit is granted permission to enter the championship.

The French manufacturer had a pre-contract agreement with Andretti, but that lapsed last year, meaning there’s now nothing formal in place. Andretti is evaluating its next steps after FOM recently rejected its bid to form an 11th grand prix team.

It is understood that Renault remains Andretti’s preferred

option for a customer deal if it gets the go-ahead to join from 2026. This would bridge the gap before General Motors firm Cadillac could construct its own power unit in time for 2028. However, Renault has made it clear that until Andretti officially secures an entry, there will be no point in discussing the matter.

Alpine VP of motorsport Bruno Famin said: “We had a pre-contract and after, nothing happened. But it was related to the [condition] for Andretti to have this entry. For the time being, they have no entry. I have had no discussions at all [since FOM denied Andretti].”

JONATHAN NOBLE

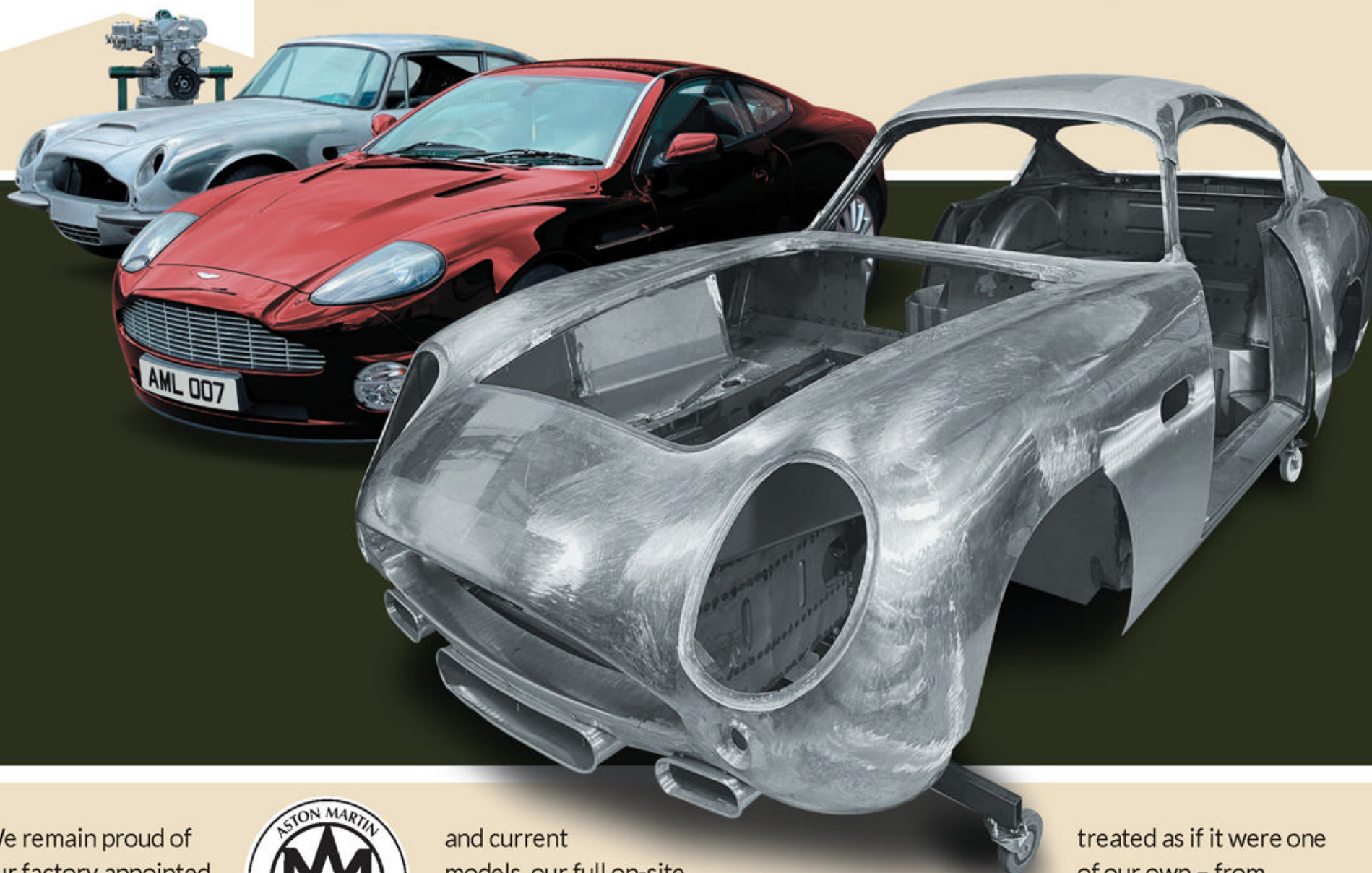


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TOP FIVE



HONEY

Who will take Hamilton's place alongside Russell at Mercedes in 2025 is the subject of much debate

HAMILTON REPLACEMENTS

One of the hottest seats in F1 is up for grabs come 2025. But should Mercedes opt for an old Lewis Hamilton foe, a shorter-term solution or put the pressure on its protege? This is Toto Wolff's dilemma...

MATT KEW

SEBASTIAN VETTEL

5 Vettel retired at the end of 2022 to pursue life outside of F1, so his interest is assumed rather than a given. But he's always left the door open when quizzed about a comeback. A competitive Mercedes berth would be tempting. He's in regular contact with Wolff, who can see the benefits of Vettel's experience alongside lead driver George Russell and who might need a short-term option until hotshot Andrea Kimi Antonelli is ready.



JEP/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

ALEX ALBON

4 When Albon signed a new contract with Williams in 2022, he finally cut formal ties with Red Bull. His independence, stellar performances, personability and knowledge of the Mercedes powertrain would all be assets. But he was chewed up and spat out by Max Verstappen so reservations may remain. Plus, Red Bull has already offered him a proposal for 2026 so Albon might not want to keep his options open for long.



MAUGER/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

CARLOS SAINZ

3 Hasn't Sainz had enough of being a number two driver? His standing at Ferrari has been obvious and he'd be destined for similar status behind Russell at Mercedes. He is quick, has kept Charles Leclerc honest and is fiercely intelligent, so Wolff could do a lot worse. But would Sainz accept being a seat warmer for Merc's true Hamilton heir? Audi and Aston Martin present better chances for Sainz to lead a team.



MOTORSPORT IMAGES

FERNANDO ALONSO

2 Alonso, 42, is no stranger to hyperbole. He reckons a new training regime and nutritionist have helped him record his best-ever pre-season fitness test results. Age is no barrier. He has also talked up his "marketing work" and 2023 performances, so is surely putting himself in the shop window to climb a few places up the grid. For Merc, he'd be a blockbuster placeholder, but might there be fears that he'd rock the boat?



BAGNALL/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

ANDREA KIMI ANTONELLI

1 The 17-year-old Italian is increasingly the favourite. He won both Italian and German F4 crowns in the same year, bagged the Formula Regional European title last season and now has his sights set on F2 spoils with Prema Racing. Wolff will wait to see how his campaign unfolds. If he's mega, Mercedes will promote, let him find his topflight feet in 2025 and then he can hopefully take the new 2026 regulations by storm.



ROZENDAAAL/DUTCH PHOTO AGENCY



Silverstone signs new deal to secure British GP until 2034

FORMULA 1

The British Grand Prix will remain at Silverstone until at least 2034 now that event organisers have agreed a new 10-year contract with Formula 1.

This summer's race weekend, scheduled for 4-7 July, was the last one covered by the previous five-year arrangement announced in 2019 – which came at the end of nearly two years of talks. After the deal for the Japanese GP to stay at Suzuka through to 2029 was announced earlier this month, Silverstone was the last venue on the current calendar waiting to be locked in. Now, it can boast a long-term agreement like Austria and Saudi Arabia (2030), Canada (2031), Hungary and Qatar (2032), Abu Dhabi and the new Spanish GP venue in Madrid (2035), Bahrain (2036) and Australia (2037).

Silverstone boss Stuart Pringle said: "This long-term commitment reflects the importance of the British Grand Prix to Formula 1 and their acknowledgement of our ability to deliver a world-class experience for the British fans who are among the most enthusiastic and knowledgeable

in the world. The cheers of support for the home teams, and particularly for the British drivers on the grid, makes the Silverstone atmosphere unique and I am looking forward to harnessing this passion for our sport and taking the event to the next level in the coming decade."

Silverstone famously didn't always enjoy a harmonious relationship with the championship during the Bernie Ecclestone era as it struggled to agree to financially sustainable terms. But this has improved under Liberty Media. The track helped its standing by being among the first to commit to running F1 events during the COVID-hit 2020 season, holding both a British GP and 70th Anniversary GP.

F1 CEO Stefano Domenicali said: "I am delighted to announce that the British Grand Prix will remain on the calendar for 10 more years with this agreement. Silverstone is an iconic venue at the heart of F1 history and, as it approaches its ninth decade hosting grands prix, the event continues to attract fans from around the world for fantastic racing on track and the amazing fan experience off it."

"I would like to thank Stuart Pringle and the Silverstone team for their hard work and dedication to take the British Grand Prix to new heights and I look forward to working closely with them as they look to further improve the facilities and fan experience over the next 10 years."

Only Monza and Monaco have hosted more world championship GPs than Silverstone and there has been a British round every season since the inauguration of the championship in 1950.

ADAM COOPER

Rovanpera to race Porsche

WRC/CARRERA CUP

World Rally champion Kalle Rovanpera will make the step into circuit racing with an entry into the Porsche Carrera Cup Benelux series this season.

The double World Rally champion had indicated a wish to broaden his motorsport horizons after announcing plans that he and co-driver Jonne Halttunen will contest a partial World Rally Championship campaign this year for Toyota, which begins in Sweden (round two) this week.

The 23-year-old has now confirmed he will run a partial programme in the one-make Porsche Carrera Cup Benelux series. The Finn will contest four of the six rounds with Red Ant Racing, managed by 1991 Formula Ford Festival winner and Le Mans veteran Marc Goossens. Two of the six Benelux rounds (the first at Spa on 9-11 May and the fourth at Assen on 2-4 August) clash with WRC rounds, Rally Portugal and Rally Finland respectively.

"I'm really excited to start this new challenge on the circuit," said Rovanpera, who is yet to confirm which Carrera Cup rounds he will contest. "It will be a big challenge for me but I'm really excited and I think the Benelux series is also quite good. There are young drivers and also those with a lot of experience, so it will be a big challenge for me against them. But it will be a good learning experience for me."

"It is going to be so different from rallying, but I will take it quite easy and I don't have big pressure on myself. I just want to go there and see how I do. But I'm still a racer, so I want to do well."

Rovanpera's move follows in the footsteps of fellow multiple WRC champions Sebastien Loeb and Sebastien Ogier, who have both proved competitive in circuit racing.

TOM HOWARD





GT3 Aston Martin expects to have approaching 30 of its Vantage GT3s racing in the new-for-2024 evo specification by the end of the season. That number will be made up of a mix of updated and new-build chassis. Aston has “a very strong order book” for the latest-spec car, said head of endurance Adam Carter ahead of the official launch of the car on Monday. “There will be 30 cars in the new spec by the end of the year, not all competing because some teams will have a spare,” he explained. “But it will be in the high 20s competing.” **Photograph by Aston Martin**

Experienced duo for Schuey Jr

WEC

Mick Schumacher has been teamed with Nicolas Lapierre and Matthieu Vaxiviere for his maiden season of sportscar racing with Alpine in this year’s World Endurance Championship.

Placing him with veteran Lapierre was an obvious choice, according to team boss Philippe Sinault. The Frenchman is the “perfect teacher” for the Mercedes Formula 1 reserve, according to Sinault. The decision was made, he said, for him to “be ready as soon as possible”.

Putting Schumacher with Lapierre and Vaxiviere, who raced together in the Alpine A480 grandfathered LMP1 in 2021-22, means that the sister A424 LMDh will be raced by Charles Milesi, Ferdinand Habsburg and Paul-Loup Chatin.

Jules Gounon was revealed as Alpine’s reserve driver on the launch of the 2024



WEC programme at the same time as the reveal of the A524 F1 car. The Frenchman, who has never raced a prototype, will dovetail the opportunity with his duties as a Mercedes-AMG factory driver in GT3.

Gounon described the chance “as a big break because I’m lacking in downforce experience” – he fell off the single-seater ladder after only a handful of races in Formula Renault. “I’m proud that I have got here from where I came from because it has always been my dream to be at the top step of endurance racing,” he said.

GARY WATKINS

PROTON’S 963 LINE-UP

Neel Jani and Julien Andlauer have completed the line-up in Proton Competition’s Porsche 963 LMDh for this year’s World Endurance Championship. They will share the Hypercar entry with Harry Tincknell.

ISOTTA DRIVERS CONFIRMED

Carl Wattana Bennett, who is part of Fernando Alonso’s A14 management stable, and former Indy Lights racer Antonio Serravalle will drive the Isotta Fraschini Tipo 6 LMH Competizione alongside Jean-Karl Vernay in the WEC this year.

BRIVIO’S MOTOGP RETURN

Ex-Alpine Formula 1 chief Davide Brivio will return to MotoGP as the team leader of the new Trackhouse Racing team. The 59-year-old former Suzuki boss will replace PJ Rashidi, who had initially been chosen as the director of the American outfit.

BAGNAIA TOPS SEPANG TEST

Double MotoGP world champion Francesco Bagnaia topped last week’s three-day pre-season test at Sepang. The factory rider recorded a best of 1m56.682s on the final day to lead a Ducati 1-2-3-4.

SLATER LOSES LEAD

Freddie Slater lost his Formula 4 UAE lead at Yas Marina last weekend. He tangled with title rival Keanu Al Azhari at the start of race one, the shunt forcing both out and consigning them to the back of the grid for the sequel. An accident for Slater in qualifying for race three, and the wrong choice of tyres, completed a disastrous event and leaves him 13 points behind Al Azhari with this weekend’s Dubai finale to go.

SCEATS WINS HOME PRIZE

Liam Sceats claimed New Zealand’s Lady Wigram Trophy thanks to his maiden Toyota Formula Regional Oceania victory at Ruapuna last weekend. The Kiwi got the jump on polesitter Roman Bilinski at the start, and held his M2 Competition colleague at bay throughout. Bilinski had won race one.

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Hamilton's team leaves while Johnson arrives

EXTREME E

Lewis Hamilton's X44 team will not compete in the final season of the all-electric Extreme E series before it morphs into its hydrogen-powered Extreme H guise.

X44 was run by Prodrive for the first two seasons of the off-road championship that began in 2021, and captured the drivers' title in 2022 with Sebastien Loeb and Cristina Gutierrez. Management of the programme switched to Rodin Carlin in 2023 as Gutierrez was partnered by Fraser McConnell, with the pair finishing fourth.

But on the eve of the championship's fourth season, which begins in Saudi Arabia this weekend, it was revealed that the squad would not return.

No reason for X44's departure was given in a statement outlining its exit.

"We've had an incredible three seasons competing as X44, winning multiple races and even a world championship," it said. "Even more than the results on track, we're proud to have been part of a bigger conversation about how to make motorsport more sustainable, of our success in giving people from all kinds of backgrounds an opportunity to thrive in this team, and of the legacy our team owner Lewis will leave behind with the Racing for All programme.

"Although we won't be competing ourselves in 2024, we'll be cheering on the series from the sidelines and keeping an eye on developments at Extreme H."

The championship in its current form will conclude at the end of 2024, as its organisers transition to hydrogen power with the launch of Extreme H in 2025.



LOPEZ/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

X44 took the 2022 title with Loeb and Gutierrez but is now departing

Current infrastructure and staff will be retained for the new venture.

Gutierrez had already signed for the McLaren team, partnering Mattias Ekstrom, while McConnell will take the Swede's place at the Acciona Sainz outfit alongside Laia Sanz.

Chip Ganassi Racing will also depart the series. It

means that three teams have decided to leave XE over the off-season, following Abt Cupra's withdrawal. However, the championship has gained an entry backed by Swiss food producer SUN AG and another this week as Legacy Motor Club in Association with Jimmie Johnson was confirmed.

JAMES NEWBOLD

Formula E and DTM get junior tin-top electric series

NXT GEN CUP

A new all-electric junior touring car series dubbed NXT Gen Cup will support Formula E and DTM at selected European rounds this year.

The category, which was founded and began in Sweden last year, will be open to drivers aged between 15 and 25 who are taking their first steps into racing. The

20 drivers, consisting of male and female participants, will compete across six 2024 rounds, each consisting of a 20-minute race.

This includes Misano, Berlin, Monaco and London for Formula E, while it will also support the DTM at the Norisring in July and Hockenheim in October.

The single-make series will use electric Mini Cooper SE road cars that have been developed by the Lestrup Racing Team

and will be run centrally for all 20 drivers. The front-wheel-drive cars produce 180bhp, which will increase by 60bhp with push-to-pass, and use Hankook semi-slick all-weather tyres. It marks the first time that Formula E has had a regular support series since the Jaguar I-Pace eTrophy disbanded in 2020 after two seasons.

Alberto Longo, co-founder and chief championship officer of Formula E, said: "The addition of an all-electric junior category to the European part of our calendar will further contribute to the essential nurturing of young talent, a key part to our sport and give them the opportunity to race on the same stage as our world-class drivers and teams."

Former touring car racer Fredrik Lestrup, series founder of NXT Gen Cup, added: "We have a spectacular calendar which will provide our junior drivers with a robust foundation to start their racing careers and show their talents to some of the best teams and partners in the world."

STEFAN MACKLEY



MARTINOBERG/NXT GEN CUP

Moffat joins Toyota as Ingram gets a boost

BTCC

The third piece in Speedworks Motorsport's British Touring Car jigsaw was completed earlier this week with the arrival of four-time race winner Aiden Moffat.

The Cheshire operation is expanding from three Toyota Corolla GR Sports to four for this season, and Moffat will form one half of the LKQ Euro Car Parts with Synetiq line-up alongside Josh Cook. Andrew Watson is the only driver confirmed for the parallel Toyota Gazoo Racing UK attack.

The presence of 27-year-old Moffat is little surprise. Following the withdrawal of the family's Laser Tools Racing Infiniti squad at the end of 2022, he raced last season with the One Motorsport Honda effort in LKQ colours, and became firm pals with team-mate Cook.

"Aiden is an established race winner in the BTCC and arrives with a rare blend of youth and experience – there are not many 27-year-olds with 10 full seasons under their belt!" said Speedworks chief Christian



Dick. "He is a fast and uncompromising racer who I have no doubt will get the very best out of the Toyota Corolla. His prior relationship with Josh is also clearly a benefit. We know how well they work together, and between them they tick every box for what it takes to be successful."

Elsewhere, leading team Excelr8 Motorsport has joined forces with multiple title-winning squad Team Dynamics. Excelr8, which carried Tom Ingram to the 2022 crown, has moved its squad of four

Hyundai i30 N Fastbacks into Dynamics' facility in Droitwich, from which the West Midlands operation won a total of six BTCC drivers' titles with Honda machinery in the hands of Matt Neal and Gordon Shedden. Ex-Dynamics technical director Barry Plowman will work with Ingram's long-time engineer Spencer Aldridge, and appears likely to look after Tom Chilton on race weekends, although Excelr8's drivers have yet to be officially confirmed.

MARCUS SIMMONS



Brit Barnard completes F2 field

FORMULA 2

Aston Martin Autosport BRDC Award finalist Taylor Barnard has secured the final vacant Formula 2 seat for 2024 at PHM Racing.

Barnard's F2 graduation comes after the 19-year-old finished 10th in his maiden season of F3 last term with Jenzer Motorsport. He ended the season strongly with a feature race win at Spa and a third in the Monza finale.

"It's another step up the ladder towards my dream and of course I wish to be more prepared, but I'll do everything in my power and more

to perform," said the 19-year-old, who joins fellow rookie Joshua Duerksen at the team that ran Roy Nissany, Brad Benavides and Josh Mason during its first season of F2 in 2023 after taking over the Charouz squad's entry.

Barnard has risen through the junior ranks with PHM and finished runner-up in the 2023 Formula Regional Middle East Championship, a position he currently holds in the 2024 mini-series as well (see page 55).

The last F3 seats have also been filled, with Nikita Bedrin in the final slot at PHM and Nikola Tsolov confirmed at ART.

SAM HALL

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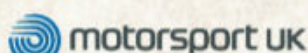
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Why Russell's 2024 is now harder

His seven-time world champion team-mate is heading off to pastures new, so life is looking good for George Russell, right? Things might not be that simple...

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

“George has the potential to be the next lead driver in the team.” How’s that for a vote of confidence from your boss? Toto Wolff, in the aftermath of Lewis Hamilton’s impending defection from Mercedes to Ferrari being announced, left

Formula 1 followers in no doubt what he thought about the standing of the other racer in his current line-up, George Russell.

The 26-year-old is now two seasons into works life at the team that signed him as a junior back in 2017. He’s registered an F1 pole position and, critically, is a grand prix winner thanks to his triumph in 2022’s Sao Paulo race. That victory sets him apart from Lando Norris and Alex Albon – his contemporaries in the class of 2019 F1 rookies. It also means he stands as Mercedes’ most recent race winner, with Hamilton’s drought stretching back to late 2021.

Russell’s early efforts at the Brackley-based team were quickly recognised. His 2022 successes and then impressive showings early in 2023 meant it had long been decided that the contract extension for 2025 it was announced he’d earned at last September’s Monza round was a formality.

Russell has been succeeding at one of only two F1 superteams that can boast a proven track record of title success in the last decade and a half. Yet soon, Hamilton will leave for the one that has so far failed to crack that hegemony – despite promising starts in 2017, 2018 and 2022. But the seven-time world champ’s

“Hamilton’s Ferrari choice has ratcheted up the pressure on Russell for this campaign”

decision to head to Ferrari actually makes Russell’s coming new season harder, in one important way. This is because of how his 2023 campaign went and how it’s viewed by those outside Merc.

Simply put, Russell’s brilliant start to last year – where he outshone Hamilton in qualifying, led brilliantly before the first red flag and his engine issue in Australia, plus being waved by his team-mate in Miami – is forgotten in those mistakes and crashes in Canada, Singapore and Las Vegas. At least Russell’s campaign ended on a fine moment in Abu Dhabi, where he secured a podium – his second of the year – while battling an illness picked up in F1’s mammoth transfer from Las Vegas to the Middle East.

Russell had come into that race dwelling on being “disappointed with myself in that there’s been a few on my shoulders” in squandered podium chances. He was left targeting a winter

“reset”. Now, he’s just a fortnight away from starting the job that follows such off-season reflections. Russell must banish the memories of those mid-2023 errors and extend the excellent early form he seemed to recapture in Abu Dhabi.

But Hamilton’s Ferrari choice has ratcheted up the pressure. Because, if Russell can’t create new positive reminders of his abilities for F1 fans and observers, and is again heading into 2025 off the back of another mistake-filled season, then questions over Wolff’s faith in him will mount.

Mercedes’ choice of who will be Russell’s team-mate for that season will be revealing. And it’s obvious the squad will be factoring in results from 2024 to its decision-making.

Signing the potentially hazardous Fernando Alonso (in terms of internal stability given his record of playing team politics games alongside his continuously offered media mantras), would match the boldness Wolff suggested he’s eyeing in replacing Hamilton. The logic of promoting its latest rising junior star – Formula 2 racer Andrea Kimi Antonelli – is gaining more traction in F1’s media circus. But such an audacious move can only really happen if the 17-year-old Italian shines immediately in a notoriously tricky championship for rookies. The chances of a convivial Albon-Russell line-up are at the same time starting to dim. This is because the possibility of Albon returning to Red Bull is real – he’s already been offered a first option for a 2026 drive once his current Williams deal has finished after wisely retaining strong links with the Thai side of the energy drink giant’s overarching company.

A straight Hamilton swap with soon-to-be-ex-Ferrari driver Carlos Sainz could be considered a sensible move for Mercedes given his mature attitude and technical nous. But the noise pointing to him being signed to lead Audi from 2026 is not petering out. It would therefore make more sense for Sainz to target an early arrival at Sauber – likely alongside Zhou Guanyu given Audi’s desire to improve its car sales numbers in China – as Mercedes wouldn’t want to offer a rival manufacturer any insight into its engine tech. That’s even if a rare one-year arrangement could be made.

But whether the pressure on Russell’s campaign is coming from within his own cockpit or his squad’s team-mate deliberations, he’s no stranger to such burdens. He had to win titles in each of his rookie GP3 and F2 seasons to earn his F1 break and did so brilliantly. Those 2017 and 2018 campaigns were where that no-nonsense, demanding style – of himself and a team around him – served Russell so well.

So, while 2024 has suddenly become even more important, and therefore naturally harder, he has a chance to seal something huge: his place as Mercedes’ long-term leading star. 🏆



The GT-X2 is the new generation of Cube Controls' GT Collection. This project comes from a long collaboration with JAS Motorsport, for which we developed a real steering wheel for the Honda Civic Type-R, which shares most of the components with the Sim one.

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YOUR SAY

There is so much money tied up in each team and its technology that it is nearly impossible for a new team to be competitive without mass raiding of staff

PETER CRAMB

The question of turnover in F1

I read with interest the comments in last week's magazine (Your Say, p23) about the lack of new drivers and teams in Formula 1.

The lack of turnover in drivers has arisen partly because of the safety work over the last six decades that fortunately has eliminated much of the 'natural wastage'. It is also due partly to the constructors' championship and thus prize money being weighted towards consistency which tends to favour experienced drivers.

One option would be a ruling whereby one driver in each team could be required to have less than say 50 F1 races' experience (two seasons plus one or two stand-in races). This would provide a significant turnover of drivers with only the very best surviving for the long term.

Another alternative would be simply to require the sprint races to take place with new drivers rather than them just helping in testing. The sprint races would then score points towards the constructors' but not the drivers' championship. Teams would also be able to compare the performance of the new drivers with the 'main' F1 drivers in the same cars on the same tracks, which might encourage more rapid promotion.

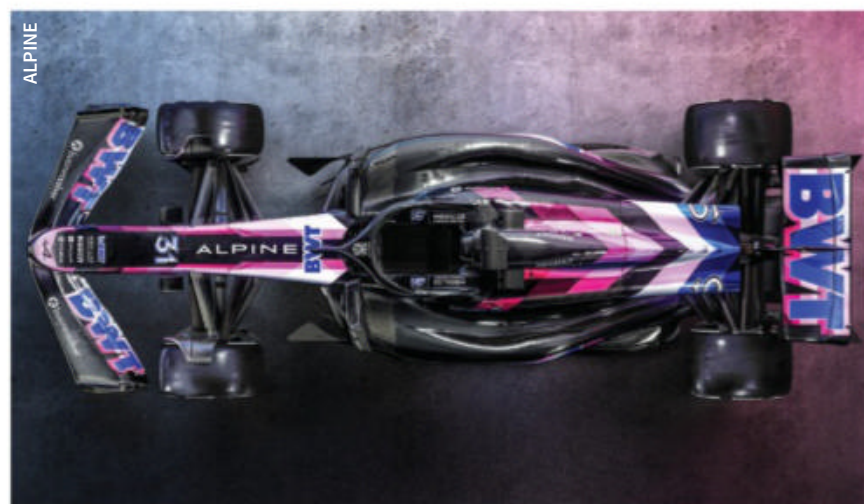
Turnover of teams is a different matter altogether. There is so much money tied up in each team and its technology that it is nearly impossible for a new team to be competitive without mass raiding of staff from existing ones, with the accompanying gardening leave.

I'd like to see Andretti in F1 and perhaps Red Bull could somehow be subtly encouraged to sell AlphaTauri (or whatever it is called now) to them so that a rule to prevent multiple team ownership by one owner or group could be applied. The new input from Andretti's personnel plus that of the existing team might lead to a very competitive car within a couple of seasons.

The other point in the magazine about wins versus consistency in the lower formulas (Club Autosport, p65) has an obvious answer, just tweak the points slightly to give a greater reward for race wins.

Peter Cramb

By email



The other carbon crisis

While we all talk about carbon from the climate crisis, we need to talk about F1's other carbon crisis. So far, teams have forgone their creativity with colour and gone with carbon fibre as their 'main colour'. Yes, black cars have raced in the past, but this current trend of the majority of teams running in carbon fibre is going to make it difficult for them to be told apart by fans and commentators alike.

The FIA and FOM need to mandate that the vast majority of the teams' cars (ie 75%) are painted in team colours. Thank goodness for the scarlet Ferraris; imagine what Enzo himself would think of Ferrari being run in 'carbon fibre colour'...

Stephen Yates

By email

Colour is part of the spectacle

Is it me or has the fashion of leaving the cars with swathes of bare carbon to save a little weight from the paint made all cars look the same with just a flash of corporate colour or sponsors' logos to differentiate them? When all cars look the same where's the marketing advantage? It also detracts from the overall spectacle, a key part of F1 and motorsport's appeal in general.

Alan Springle

St Albans

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Autosport editorial
Motorsport Network Media UK Ltd
The Power House
Isleworth
TW7 6QG

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WHY ASTON IS COMING OUT FIGHTING IN 2024

The statement that Red Bull is “absolutely beatable” raises expectations for another massive step forward

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

Formula 1 is soon going to hit some major anniversary moments. Next year, the championship, along with Autosport, is going to be celebrating 75 years of continuous history. Three months from now, it will be 30 years since the deaths of Ayrton Senna and Roland Ratzenberger on that awful weekend at Imola. But, in just three weeks, it will be one year since Aston Martin shocked its rivals by making what star driver Fernando Alonso calls a “once in a lifetime” car performance gain.

The Silverstone-based squad that had just finished seventh in the 2022 constructors’ championship made a step worth over a second a lap in one off-season. It resulted in Alonso’s first race alongside inevitable team stalwart Lance Stroll finishing with the Spaniard standing on the podium alongside the dominant Red Bull drivers (with a little help from poor Ferrari reliability for Charles Leclerc).

“PLEASINGLY, THE LIVERY DOES NOT OVER-INDULGE IN EXPOSED CARBON TO SAVE WEIGHT”

Aston ultimately slipped back in the pack in an almost exact mirror of McLaren’s rise to lead the chase behind Red Bull by 2023’s end, all around the massive Mercedes/Ferrari entanglement in the fight for what became second and third places in the constructors’ points ahead of McLaren’s fourth and Aston’s fifth.

But now, the expectation is of the green team making another massive step forwards. On Monday, it revealed its AMR24 challenger, which Aston technical director Dan Fallows calls “essentially a strong evolution of last year’s car”. The main visible changes include refined bodywork, featuring more sculpted sidepods and engine cover over its predecessor, along with push-rod rear suspension (see page 22). Pleasingly, the team’s take on a British Racing Green livery remains, which does not over-indulge in exposed carbon to save weight.

Fallows adds that “we have kind of built on the end of AMR23”, in terms of the specification Aston was running by last year’s climax, »



MAUGER/LAT/ASTON MARTIN



AMR24's first run at Silverstone shows more sculpted sidepods and engine cover

INSET: S BLOXHAM/LAT/ASTON MARTIN

plus the update path it committed to in the season run-in. This was a series of set-up experiments, plus a new floor at the Mexican race.

Finally, Fallows also promises “quite a lot of stuff [that’s different] under the hood, which hopefully you won’t see... we will obviously try and keep some of that under wraps”.

Given where Aston ended 2023, that isn’t exactly an inspiring starting tone for hopes of a second major winter gain in two years. Alonso even dashes that in the full version of his quote above: “What we did last year of gaining a second from one car to another was once in a lifetime, now I think you gain a few tenths from one year to the next, and I don’t know if those tenths are enough to close the gap that was already there last year.”

But Fallows nevertheless insists “we’ve made changes all over the car – it’s very different in many ways, the majority of the parts have changed on it”. Red Bull’s former aero chief even states outright: “We’re very pleased with the step that we’ve made over the winter, we think we have made a step on last year’s car, which is what we wanted.”

The main issue its previous car faced concerned how it lost competitiveness as the 2023 campaign wore on. It went from being Red Bull’s closest challenger through the year’s first third – and should’ve taken victory in the late Monaco rain – to its final result in large part because Aston’s in-season development couldn’t match those impressive off-season gains.

It had benefited from being the first team to join Red Bull’s downwash concept for the upper aerodynamic surfaces in this generation of ground-effect rules, and how this interlinks with the critical floor designs. But, before 2023’s first half was out, all the other frontrunning teams had this too.

Now that all the cars look the same – barring any launch shocks after Autosport has gone to press – Fallows claims the gains all the teams are seeking come down to nailing “things that are really smaller details”. He adds of the likelihood F1 faces a full year of homogenous designs that “with the regulations we have now, it is not particularly easy to have cars that are visually very different”.

But on where the gains can still be found – particularly concerning floor design

updates – Fallows reckons “there’s still a lot of lap time to come”.

As a result, the combination of his next statement and the mindset insight it implies is bullish: “We take the approach that Red Bull are absolutely beatable. That’s what we’re chasing after – we’re focusing on them. And that’s what we’re aiming for.”

“That he says that – puts a smile on my face,” Alonso replies when Autosport asks if he shares Fallows’ optimism. “I didn’t speak with Dan for few weeks now. But yeah, we have to be optimistic at this part of the season.”

“AVOIDING MID-SEASON DEVELOPMENT MISTAKES IS OF COURSE KEY FOR ASTON MARTIN’S 2024 CHANCES”

“We saw last year as well, Ferrari finished really strong and achieved a few pole positions in the last part of the year. McLaren also did a huge step during the season and got close to Red Bull in a few races. So, let’s see what happens.”

“We have to be regularly in the points first, fighting for podiums, or be a contender for podiums, as we did last year. And then, if we are in that position, it will be lovely to achieve the first victory in green, for Aston Martin, and hopefully I can be behind the wheel at that moment.”

Alonso was actually more downbeat when he addressed reporters from Spanish media shortly after his press call in English, saying “with an open mind, I don’t think we have closed that gap [to Red Bull]”.

A few things stand out here. One is that Alonso has now gone through the pre-season pecking order statements game 21 times in his recording-breaking career span. And he spoke with a weary tone that reflected how all he really wants to do at this time of year

Fallows says AMR24 will be capable of mounting a strong, consistent challenge at all circuits





The way last year's sensational early form tailed off has been a major focus for Aston

TEE/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

is drive the wheels off the AMR24 in pursuit of that first Aston victory and his 33rd overall.

He also revealed that, while he's sampled the new car in Aston's simulator, he feels it's too early "to really spot the differences between the cars, last year and this year" until he completes this week's Silverstone shakedown running and the upcoming pre-season test.

"But it should be a good step forward," he continues. "Some of the weaknesses that we saw last year, some of the inconsistencies that we had last year from track to track – that we were more or less competitive – we tried to tackle all those. So, yeah, I'm reasonably happy with what the intent of all those changes is. Let's see on track."

The sense of omniscience that comes with being an F1 driver set to hit 400 races at this year's Qatar event shines through. But so too should the feeling that he's no longer hyping up Aston to the extent he did during those early honeymoon rounds nearly a year ago.

But, overall, the tone from Aston's upper management was notably more uplifting.

"We have tried to focus on all areas of our [car] predecessor – the AMR23, which had a great season, full of positives, last year," says

Aston team principal Mike Krack, speaking alongside Fallows, their front-and-centre microphone placings creating an image of yet another podcast series about to take off. "But then we have not left any stone unturned – we have really tried to look at every area."

Krack also says that, in addition to the obvious attention paid to the AMR24's development, this has meant Aston assessing "operations" and "reliability" to "make a step forward in all directions". On the reliability point, with Aston losing three finishes in 2023 to mechanical maladies, this is also what Stroll is getting at when he comments "we had a lot of misfortune last year".

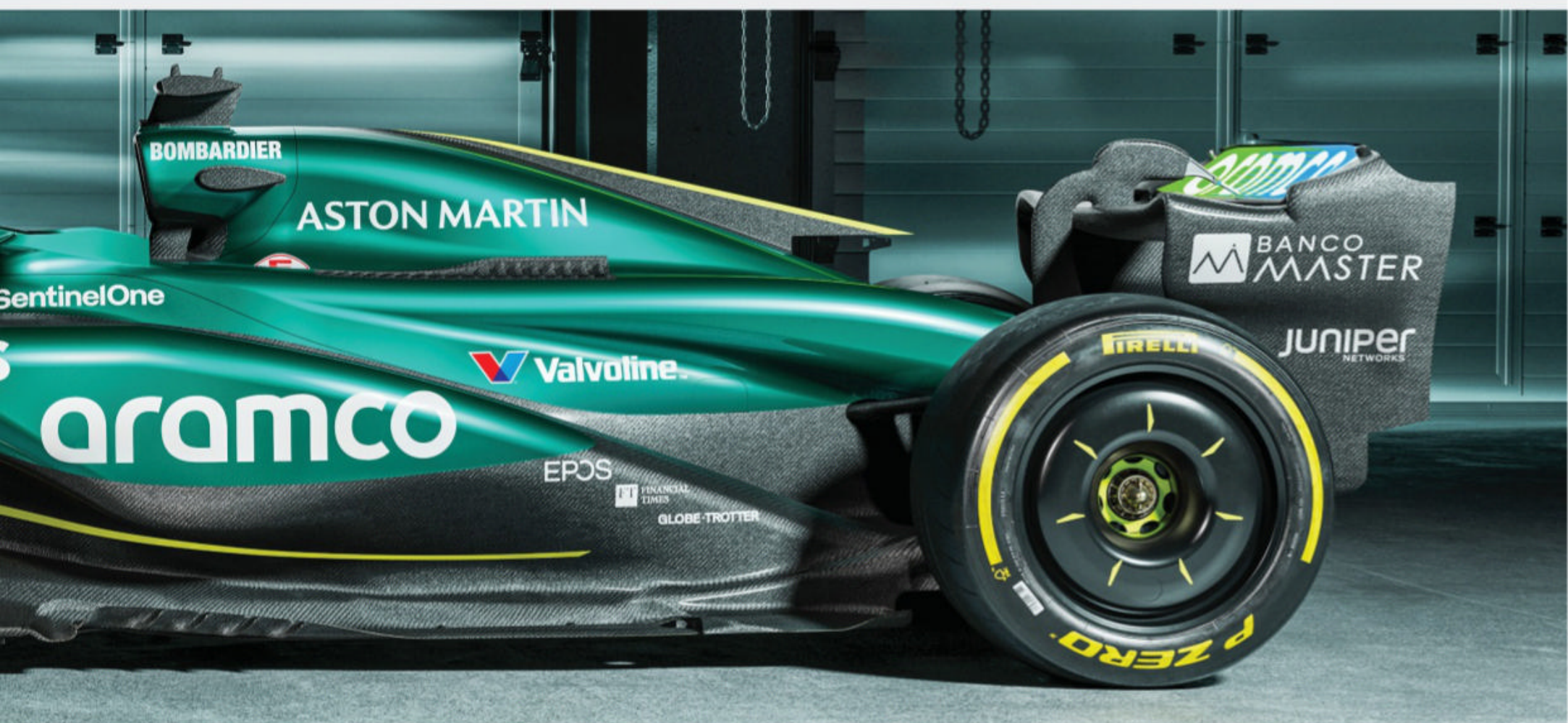
But avoiding the mid-season development mistakes the team introduced with its floor and sidepod changes at June's Montreal round – with part of the blame going on its aero simulation tools pointing to changes that actually hurt in-corner balance – is of course key for Aston's 2024 chances. It will also hope to avoid having to make tweaks in a technical rules probe, as insiders admitted it did when the FIA was looking into flexi wings after 2023's early rounds. Again, there is no suggestion anything Aston may or may not have been doing was illegal.

Fallows outlines how Aston has tried to make its in-season upgrade development path bulletproof for the coming year. In doing so, he also reveals why the team is viewing its new challenger as an evolution from its last.

"In truth, it's a short off-season and we were developing things that were relevant for this year quite late on into last season," he explains. "So, the main aim for us is really to make sure that this car is a good platform to put those developments on during the season."

"We've seen – particularly last season, but also the season before – the in-season development race is absolutely fierce and we want to be as competitive in that as we have been going into the new season. So, that's what we've been really focused on – to make sure that we've got a good, stable basis for us to go and develop the car and keep those updates coming and keep the performance coming."

The other standout points that Aston and Alonso closed 2023 discussing also came up in the context of how these have become new reality in the AMR24. Alonso had specifically targeted an improvement in straightline speed, which Fallows says has been "a big focus over the winter and I think that is something we've managed to achieve on this year's car, to make a step on that". >>



The Aston press release contains the following description, how “the continuous refinement of the AMR24 has resulted in a lighter, more aerodynamically efficient race car, designed to operate across a wider range of circuits”.

Fallows, in response to a question seeking clarity on whether his “Red Bull are absolutely beatable” comment meant sniped race wins or a full title tilt, actually reveals more on this point.

“Rather than thinking about individual races, from an engineering point of view, we have to make a car that’s capable of operating at any circuit and being competitive,” he continues. “And that’s really what we’re focused on – making a car that’s usable, that’s good for the drivers.”

Given how good Red Bull’s RB19 was in both the straightline speed stakes and its virtuosity across all of F1’s differing track types, these comments should be a boost to Alonso. He also claims where Aston was “a bit weak last year, in fast cornering”, that “this year looks like

“IF YOU ARE MOTIVATED, AND IF YOU WANT TO COMMIT, YOU CAN DRIVE MAYBE UNTIL 48 OR 49, OR EVEN 50”

we will be more competitive”. “We have to keep the strengths that we had in 2023,” Alonso continues. “Which was traction, tyre care, and there were things that maybe we lost [in the mid-season updates]. But the work is done, and until we compare it with the others we won’t know if it will be good enough.”

How the AMR24 stacks up against the rest will also have a direct impact into a new challenge that has suddenly arisen in the aftermath of Lewis Hamilton’s decision to join Ferrari for 2025. Right now, there is a plum seat available at a team that has only had one non-winning season since 2011 and possesses a proven track record of recent championship success. In all its iterations since starting out as Jordan, Aston has never had such accolades and achievements.

Alonso’s part in the 2007 Spygate scandal that is still recalled at



Krack stresses how no stone was left unturned to make progress in all areas, including reliability



the top echelons of Mercedes’ OEM management that at the time had the works engine supply deal with McLaren might mean a call from Toto Wolff never comes. And he also might never want to be a successor for his great F1 career rival. But it would be logical to expect Alonso to have an interest in what happens at Mercedes for 2025. Adding the third title he believes should have been his so long ago, after all, remains his primary concern.

And so, the question now posed to Krack, team owner Lawrence Stroll and co at Aston came up again and again for Alonso. In total, he was asked eight questions (from a total of 21 in English and Spanish) relating to his driving future beyond this season.

Aston’s position came via Krack, stating: “We love Fernando. We have a very good relationship with Fernando. He’s an integral member of the team. We have a relationship that is based on trust and openness. And we would be delighted, honestly, to continue with Fernando into 2025 and the years after.

“The silly season is in full swing [early]. But we are quite confident that we can achieve what we want, which is continue with both drivers in 2025 and the future.”

Alonso has clearly prepared his answers – the canny operator in F1’s political sphere come to pass judgement and create headlines once again. First, he outlines how “the numbers that [I] achieved in all the physical tests that we do every season, they were the best ever this year”, in the context that primarily his career will last as long as he feels he can keep producing his breathtaking best. Plus, then deciding whenever he wants to discover “other things in life that I’m curious [about]” and that he’s sacrificed knowing these so far because “F1 needs total dedication”.

The 42-year-old clearly relishes stating that “if you are motivated, and if you want to commit, you can drive maybe until 48 or 49, or



ASTON MARTIN

whatever, or even 50". The subtext here is that his final F1 years will be determined on his terms alone.

Of all that Mercedes interest, he says: "I'm preparing for... the eventuality that I want to keep racing. And if I want to keep racing, let's see what the options are. My first priority will be always to sit down and discuss with Aston. I want to explore every possibility to race for many years here.

"If we cannot reach an agreement, and I want to commit to race in F1, I know that I have a privileged position. I'm probably attractive to other teams – the performance that they saw last year, the commitment. There are only three world champions on the grid. And there is only one available."

That's quite an advertisement, one all the other F1 racers bar Hamilton and Max Verstappen cannot make right now. It shows Alonso's worth to Aston, but, critically to its rivals too. That, then, sets up how the team that produced one of 2023's biggest stories is surely set to do battle on rather differing fronts in 2024...

[P22 AMR24 TECH ANALYSIS](#)



ETHERINGTON/MOTORSPORTIMAGES

ALONSO ON HAMILTON'S FERRARI MOVE

Fernando Alonso's thoughts on Lewis Hamilton's impending move to Ferrari are clear. They exude contemptuously from his manner long before he says: "I don't care what Lewis Hamilton is doing." Alonso claims he "didn't spend too much time [thinking about it]" because "I was training actually that day, so I missed all the stress from everybody".

"I was just one day late on the news," he adds. "Probably [it] was a surprise. I will not lie, but not because the change itself [is surprising], it was just because he... from the outside, it seemed like he was very linked with Mercedes and very loyal to them and things like that.

"And it was a little bit unexpected, but I don't know the reasons behind. So, it's more a question for him. But yeah, I didn't pay too much attention. And probably next winter it's going to be more of a theme. But because it's still one year ahead, I didn't spend much time thinking."

But he can't resist the chance to take a shot for too long. In response to a question that referenced Hamilton's desire to "fulfil another childhood dream" of "driving in Ferrari red", Alonso replies: "It was not his childhood dream 12 months ago, no? Or two months ago, I guess. Because it was a different dream..."

But there's a classy ending, from the driver who came so close to claiming the 2010 and 2012 titles with Ferrari. "I hope he enjoys the experience," says Alonso.

"I think it's a very special team. But it's more special when you win. And that's the thing: you need to win and it's a few years already that they have a very fast car, and they were fighting for big things [but haven't won the top prizes].

"Maybe Lewis can bring that extra to fight for the championship, because I think the car is there. At the end of last year, even with a very dominant Red Bull car, Ferrari [was] still able to match the lap time and be faster than them in most of the qualifying. So, I think the car should be fast enough."

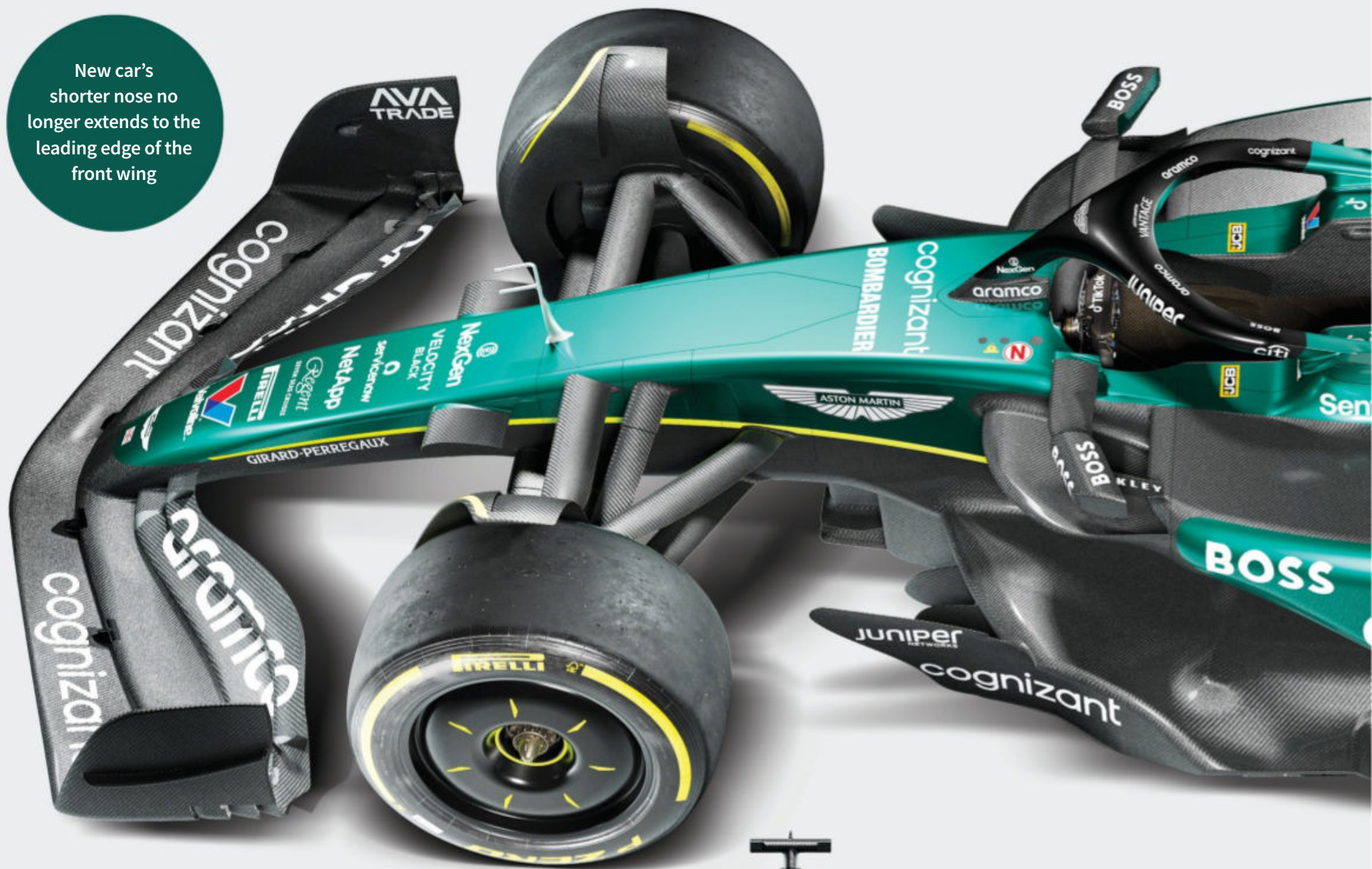
ALONSO INSET: McDONNELL/ASTON MARTIN

ASTON MARTIN AMR24

Refinements across the board for the green team's 2024 challenger, building in the development potential essential to contend throughout the season

JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE

New car's shorter nose no longer extends to the leading edge of the front wing



FRONT WING

The AMR24 has a shorter nose this term; its predecessor featured a version where the nose extended to the leading edge of the front wing. This has been cut back for 2024, now leaving the bottom front-wing element free to generate extra downforce and the open slot gap can trim back any pockets of flow separation from under the nose. Both Red Bull and McLaren managed to push their nose-wing attachment points to a similar configuration last year.



ALL PICS: ASTON MARTIN



Waterslide channels remain along the top of Aston's characteristic sidepod design

SIDEPOD INLET

Further refinements can be found around the front of the sidepods, and Aston Martin has followed the trend of adding a protruding bottom 'lip' on the sidepod inlets. This contains one of the side impact structures, and helps to split any slightly turbulent airflow emerging from the suspension elements from the cleaner air that it hopes to direct into the inlets. The air shed from the suspension is directed underneath that lip and fired at the undercut, increased in size for this season.



SIDEPODS

Aston continues to plough its own furrow with its sidepod design, although there are small Red Bull influences here and there, particularly in shaping the underside. The bulge underneath the sidepod helps to eliminate any lift effects produced by the sidepod geometry; this is something that was featured to an extent on the AMR23, but the larger undercut for this year makes it more noticeable. Along the top, the waterslide channels remain to aggressively direct airflow to the top of the floor and around the rear suspension.



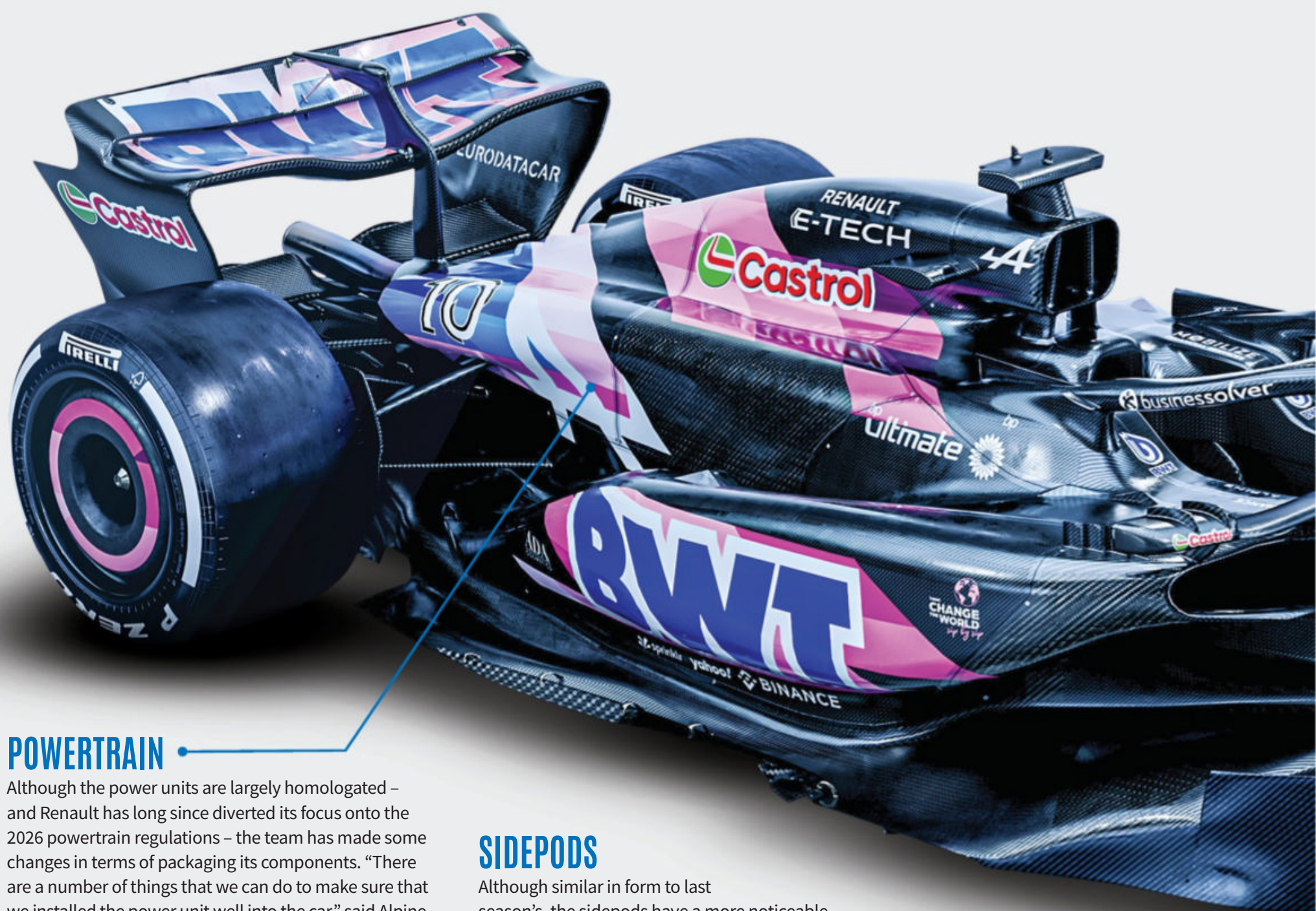
SUSPENSION

Mercedes supplies the rear suspension package to Aston Martin, which makes sense given that it already does the team's powertrain and gearbox, and it appears both squads have switched to push-rod rear suspension. Pull-rods have been in use at the rear for well over a decade, but there are clear packaging benefits behind the push-rod rear suspension layout. The need to house rockers and dampers low down in a pull-rod layout means that this can often take expansion space away from the floor; moving them higher up will come with a slight centre of gravity penalty, but evidently this is worth the trade-off.

ALPINE A524

Targeting a performance breakthrough, the French team has taken a comprehensively aggressive approach to its new car's design

JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE

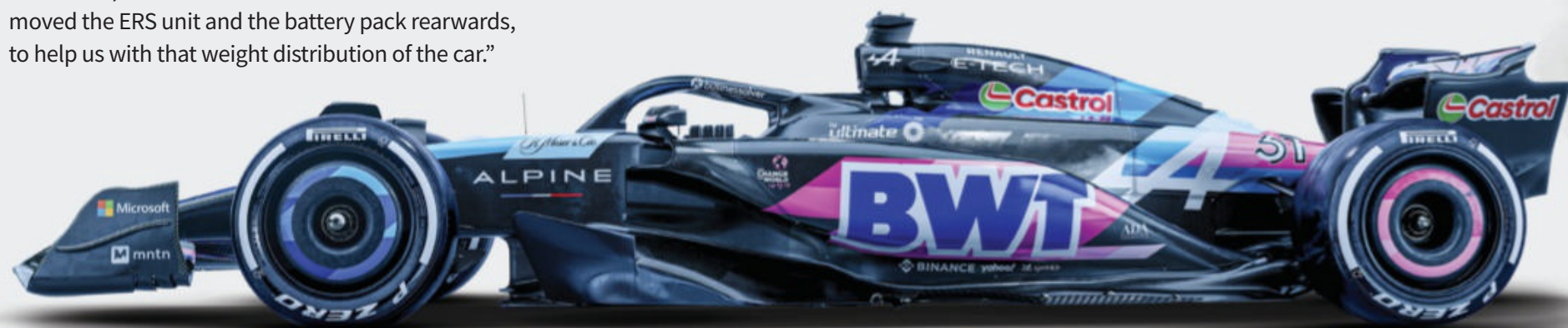


POWERTRAIN

Although the power units are largely homologated – and Renault has long since diverted its focus onto the 2026 powertrain regulations – the team has made some changes in terms of packaging its components. “There are a number of things that we can do to make sure that we installed the power unit well into the car,” said Alpine technical director Matt Harman. “We’ve integrated the tailpipe around the transmission to reduce the pressure drop across that, making sure that every single bit of work done by the power unit is delivered at the crankshaft, and therefore the rear wheels. We’ve also moved the ERS unit and the battery pack rearwards, to help us with that weight distribution of the car.”

SIDEPODS

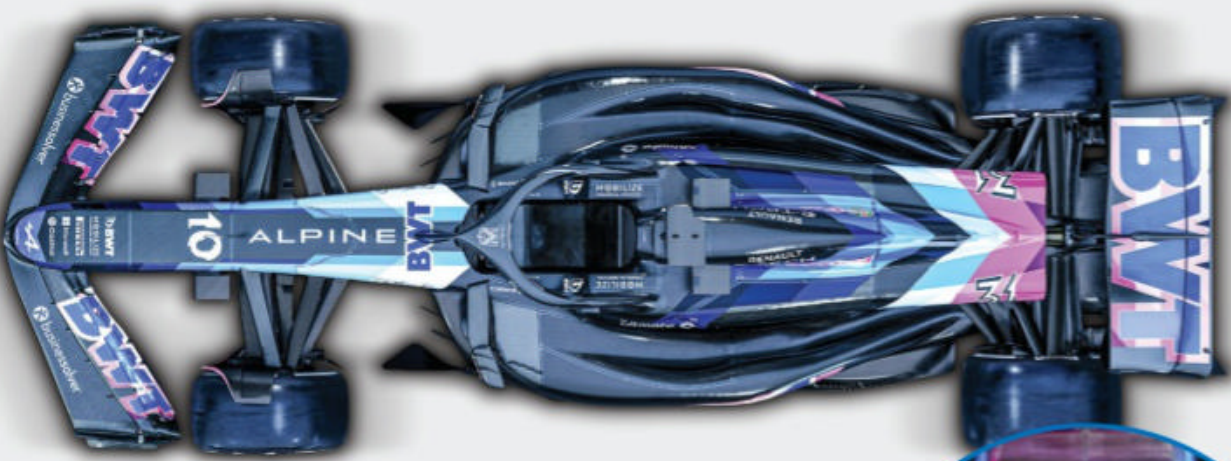
Although similar in form to last season’s, the sidepods have a more noticeable undercut to them to increase the airflow transit over the floor area and reduce its overall path. The channels along the top surface remain, assisting the passage of air being collected from the upper areas to be directed to the floor. A small underbite is present on the inlets, albeit not as dramatic as others seen thus far over the 2024 launch season.



ALL PICS: ALPINE

CHASSIS

Alpine produced an entirely new chassis for 2024, citing the need to be more aggressive across all facets: aerodynamics, packaging, and structures inside have all been improved. Pierre Gasly had noted last season that he hoped for a smaller cockpit, joking that Esteban Ocon's lankier frame might not be so conducive to this, but the team has attempted to work around its drivers and optimise the overall geometry. The air intake is noticeably squarer compared to last season's, using a larger inlet to ensure the sidepod apertures can be smaller.



SUSPENSION

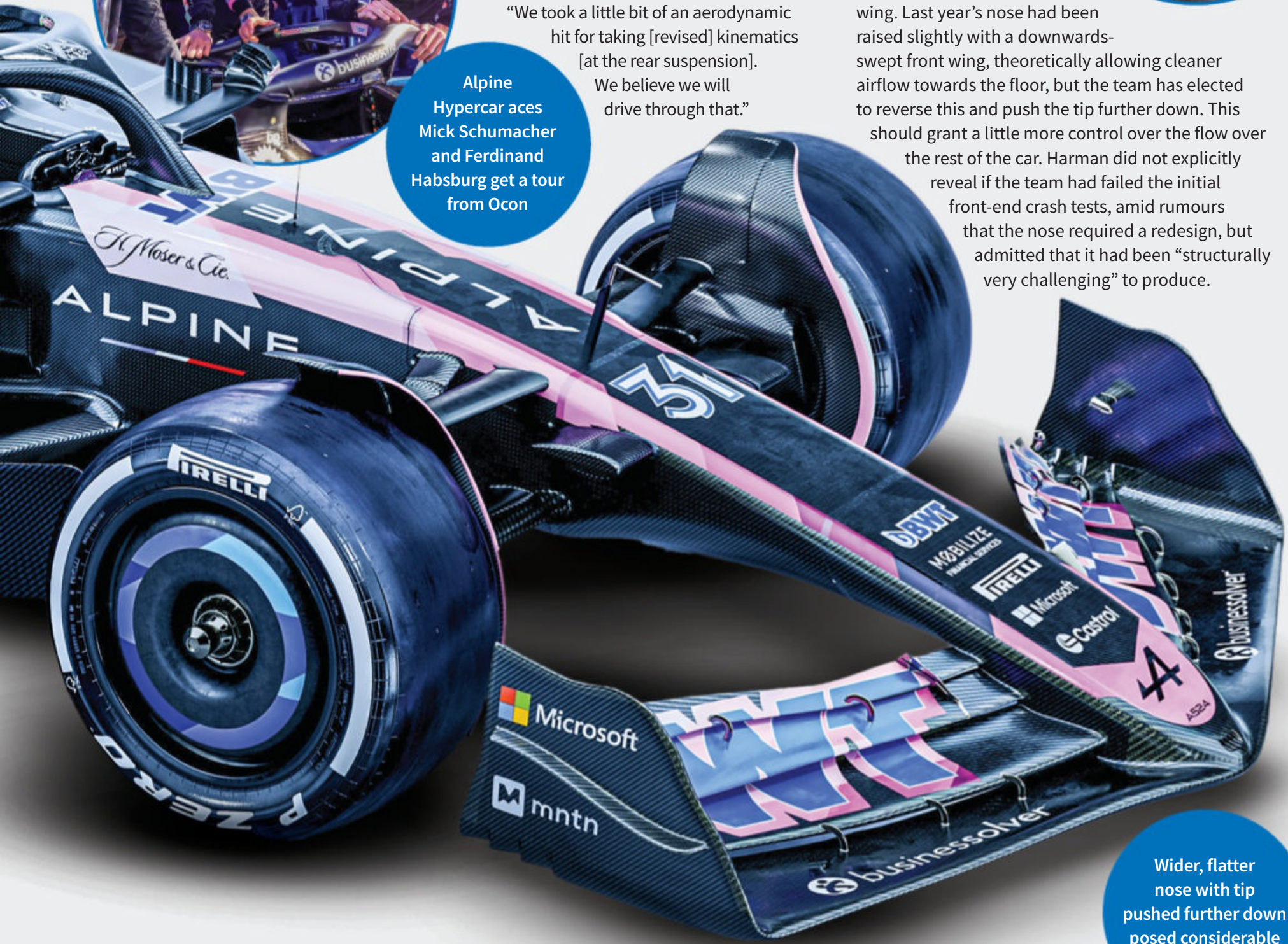
The team has retained the pushrod-front, pushrod-rear formula that it used last season, but with revised suspension components. "The kinematics are very different – the inboard suspension is slightly changed to give us more flexibility and understanding of how we can control that," explained Harman. "We took a little bit of an aerodynamic hit for taking [revised] kinematics [at the rear suspension]. We believe we will drive through that."



Alpine Hypercar aces Mick Schumacher and Ferdinand Habsburg get a tour from Ocon

FRONT END

One of the more immediately obvious changes to Alpine's 2024 car is the wider, flatter nose, which is chiselled into a point that extends to the leading edge of the front wing. Last year's nose had been raised slightly with a downwards-swept front wing, theoretically allowing cleaner airflow towards the floor, but the team has elected to reverse this and push the tip further down. This should grant a little more control over the flow over the rest of the car. Harman did not explicitly reveal if the team had failed the initial front-end crash tests, amid rumours that the nose required a redesign, but admitted that it had been "structurally very challenging" to produce.



Wider, flatter nose with tip pushed further down posed considerable design challenge

AN OPPORTUNITY MISSED BUT BETTER TIMES AHEAD

A new name, a new car and a fresh livery – although the new launch time may not have done RB any favours

MATT KEW

Red Bull is a marketing colossus, and its junior Formula 1 team is embracing a new era under a new identity. But you weren't to know that from last Friday's launch of the daftly named VCARB 01. The unveiling was held on the Las Vegas Boulevard and featured American rap sensation Kendrick Lamar. It should've been spectacular. Instead, it passed with little fanfare.

Partly, that's because the covers came off around 0630GMT. Although F1 doesn't revolve around the UK and the series is targeting growth in the USA, the major audience remains hardcore fans based in Europe. They were neglected in favour of the 1000 who turned up in person. For those that did set an alarm, there was no livestream, little communication, no Q&A session with new team boss Laurent Mekies or CEO Peter Bayer. Considering the outfit formerly known as AlphaTauri now carries blue-chip sponsorship from Visa, Cash App and Hugo Boss – who will want a return on their investment – this felt like an opportunity missed.

While the preceding Sauber and Alpine events set the launch benchmark, neither of their cars can boast a livery like RB. The increasingly customary swathes of exposed carbon fibre on the main bodywork have been banished – at least in launch trim – in favour of a bold scheme that those commercial partners will instantly pick out on TV. Arguably, though, a throwback to a metallic blue-and-red paint job, as worn by the 2017-19 Toro Rosso challengers, undermines the rebrand that bit more.

This year more than most, RB is paying attention to what's going on under the surface. Even if Red Bull CEO Oliver Mintzlaff has been distracted by developments among the leadership at his other F1 team recently, this marks the first full year when RB will operate under the restructure he called for. Following the 2022 death of company co-founder Dietrich Mateschitz, the team's headquarters in Faenza has lost

its gravitational pull. To save costs and improve performance, the RB operation will centralise in Bicester so it can lean on Red Bull's technical resource. Given the team has undergone an identity crisis in recent years with it no longer being a clear training ground for young drivers, this more streamlined approach will make it more sustainable to justify an existence. It's no longer sufficient to be a lower-midfield competitor that fails to boost sales of in-house clothing brand AlphaTauri.

In a brief speech, Bayer said of the revised model: "Formula 1 is a race for efficiency but it's also a race for funding because ultimately you need to make sure that you can develop the



CEO Bayer (left) and team boss Mekies have stints with the FIA on their CVs





In launch trim at least, the new car kept bare carbon to a minimum



Will Tsunoda and Ricciardo remain teammates throughout 2024?

ALL PICS: GRANT/GETTY IMAGES/RED BULL CONTENT POOL

right tools, the right processes. That needs money.”

RB will face intense scrutiny from rivals given its tighter relationship with Red Bull, regardless of the FIA having found the team to be fully compliant with legislation governing the share of intellectual property – which restricts transferrable parts to the gearbox and suspension most notably. AlphaTauri’s aggressive late-2023 run of upgrades propelled the AT04 from backmarker to pacesetter through tight corners, duly climbing from last to eighth in the constructors’ standings. Since slow-speed handling was a weakness of the RB19, there are fears AlphaTauri’s belated prowess was owed to it effectively becoming a testbed for parts that will soon find their way onto the Red Bull. This is vehemently denied.

The team should know the letter of the law given key staffers worked for the FIA. Mekies’ move from the governing body to Ferrari in 2018

“WE’RE TRYING TO BUILD SOMETHING THAT’S GOING TO FIGHT, WE ALL HOPE, AT THE FRONT OF THE MIDFIELD”

ruffled Christian Horner’s feathers before the Red Bull boss ultimately nominated him to head up the sister team. Bayer was the FIA’s secretary general and F1 executive director between 2017 and 2022. And since their appointments, the squad has completed the coup signing of Tim Goss, FIA F1 technical director. Even if the latter won’t start work until October owing to a period of gardening leave, it’s a strong ensemble. RB can also count on Alan Permane’s experience, having hired the long-time Enstone sporting director after his falling out with Alpine-Renault management.

Goss might end up missing driver Daniel Ricciardo, should the Red Bull axe swing mid-season to force Sergio Perez to vacate his RB20. Despite Lewis Hamilton’s Ferrari switch shaking up the driver market, the Australian remains the favourite to partner Max Verstappen.

That would present a full-time berth to 2023 AlphaTauri supersub Liam Lawson. As for Yuki Tsunoda, if he somehow dominates his smiling team-mate, it will hurt Ricciardo’s promotion chances no end. But it’s tough to envisage any scenario that lands the Japanese a drive at the top team. He must therefore earn another contract to remain in a Red Bull holding pattern or put himself in the shop window to secure a similar midfield gig.

Ricciardo says: “For people who think it’s just a Red Bull junior team, it’s a way for everyone to take us more seriously. It’s a year where we feel like we stand on our own two feet and have some serious partners on board. The structure has changed a lot, a lot of new personnel coming in. We’re trying to build something that’s going to fight, we all hope, at the front of the midfield.”

As the eight-time grand prix winner says, RB looks altogether more convincing for this new chapter. Just a shame the launch wasn’t at all befitting of that. ✎

➔ P28 VCARB TECH ANALYSIS

VCARB 01

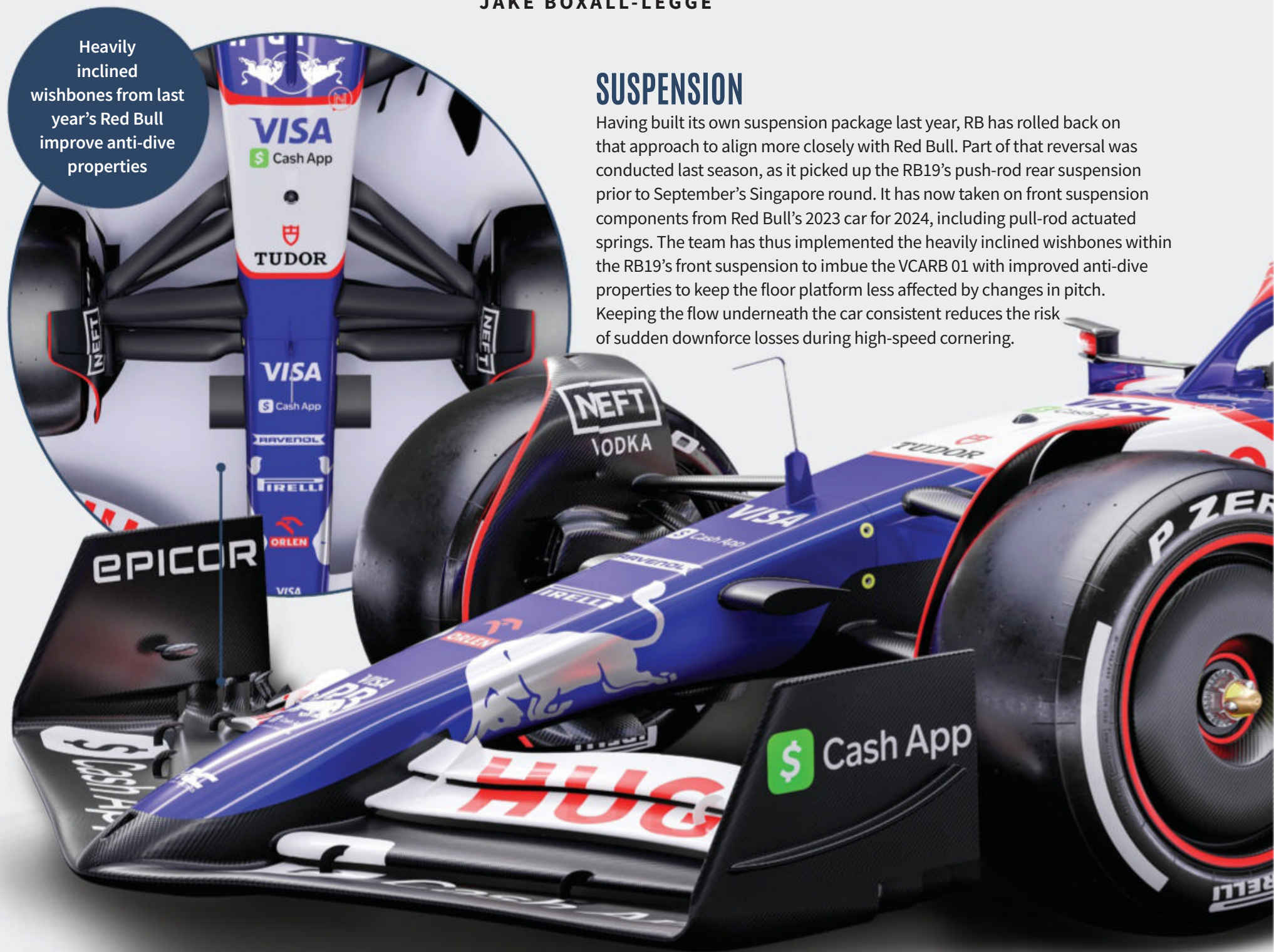
A new identity for the team now known as RB brings with it various design cues that demonstrate the closer alignment with its (big) sister squad

JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE

Heavily inclined wishbones from last year's Red Bull improve anti-dive properties

SUSPENSION

Having built its own suspension package last year, RB has rolled back on that approach to align more closely with Red Bull. Part of that reversal was conducted last season, as it picked up the RB19's push-rod rear suspension prior to September's Singapore round. It has now taken on front suspension components from Red Bull's 2023 car for 2024, including pull-rod actuated springs. The team has thus implemented the heavily inclined wishbones within the RB19's front suspension to imbue the VCARB 01 with improved anti-dive properties to keep the floor platform less affected by changes in pitch. Keeping the flow underneath the car consistent reduces the risk of sudden downforce losses during high-speed cornering.



FLOOR

There are similarities to the AT04's very late-spec floor. That's perhaps to be expected given that it was added to last year's Abu Dhabi package with a view to developing it for this season and the stability of the regulations. This yielded a greatly improved performance in low-speed conditions, so much so that paddock suggestions were that AlphaTauri (as-was) developed it to help its sister team amid Red Bull's uneasiness in slower speed corners. It's likely that the real VCARB 01 will feature further developments based on the team's findings at Yas Marina, particularly in ensuring that it works with the 'new' suspension package at the front.



REAR WING

The late-season rear wing has also been included, with the exposed-tip upper element that became a prevailing trend last year. A small bracket near the front corners of that upper element helps to keep the wing within the legality window set by the FIA but skirts the intent of the rules governing the rear wing to increase vorticity at the tips. Ultimately, this is a boost to rear-wing performance. The mainplane is also spoon-shaped on the launch renders, as the centre portion of the wing produces the majority of the downforce, and trimming the drag from the outboard parts improves efficiency. As always, this is open to change depending on the demands of the circuit, and variations of the exposed-tip upper plane should remain part of its high-to-medium downforce set of wings.



Small bracket near front corners of upper element helps ensure wing's legality

ALL PICS: DIGITAL LIGHTHOUSE/RED BULL CONTENT POOL



Evolution of last year's end-of-season sidepods features underbiting leading edge

SIDEPODS

Continuing with an evolution of how the AlphaTauri AT04 ended the season, the sidepods retain their shape with the topside blister generating a channel to offer the downwashing airflow some direction. But the inlet here is different, slightly more Red Bull-like, with an underbiting leading edge built to help enlarge the undercut. This is notably deep to make the most of the airflow transit towards the top of the floor and diffuser, helped by changing the aspect ratio. Widening the inlet so that it can be made shorter ensures there's more latitude to play with the undercut size.

“Lewis Hamilton’s move has added a whole new dimension to the battle behind Red Bull”





The big F1 questions of 2024

It's time for our annual look at the Formula 1 season to come with the Sky pundit. Here are the big themes heading in to 2024...

KARUN CHANDHOK

PHOTOGRAPHY  **motorsport**
IMAGES



How crucial is it that someone closes the gap to Red Bull?

There's no doubt that neutral Formula 1 fans around the world were getting a bit bored of the dominance shown by Max Verstappen and Red Bull last season. It's not their fault – they did the best job by far and it really is up to the others to catch up.

A little look at TV viewership, social media and forum engagement numbers shows that F1 peaked around the second half of 2021. That of course was one of the most extraordinary seasons of the past 74 years of the series, and not every year can be like that, but we still want to wake up on Sunday morning and genuinely not know who is going to win the race. That's what gets people to tune in, and it's what we lacked in 2023.

If you rewind two decades, Michael Schumacher and Ferrari had a superb battle with Mika Hakkinen in 2000, had some decent competition in 2001, and then crushed the opposition in 2002, which is a similar trend to the past three years with Max and Red Bull. The difference then of course was that Bernie Ecclestone and Max Mosley worked closely together to change the technical rules to break a dominant cycle, whereas the current infighting between F1 and the FIA, plus the power

that the teams seem to wield over the series, prevents that from happening. Essentially, Liberty and F1 are counting on Mercedes, Ferrari, McLaren and the rest to raise their game and take the fight to Red Bull.

It's a big year for Mercedes after its first winless season in over a decade. Lewis Hamilton, the team's biggest star, has given a 'vote of no-confidence' by leaving for its Italian rival even before he drove the W15 but, for this year at least, the team still has the best collective driver line-up in my opinion. The facilities and budget are top-notch, the trackside engineering and race team are as strong as ever, and therefore the pressure is on the design team to deliver the goods.

There were obviously some big changes at the top last year, with James Allison taking back the hands-on leadership role from Mike Elliott. James is a brilliant leader of a team, and his wealth of experience in the sport allied to his personal aero background gives cause for optimism. Hearing his comments towards the end of last year, it does sound like the team has a decent understanding of where it went wrong in terms of getting the car working in the optimum ride-height window to balance downforce and porpoising. Truly understanding a problem, rather than *thinking* you've understood the problem, is the first big hurdle to cross but it sounds like Mercedes has done that.

Ferrari failed to build on 2022, when it had a fast car but made errors. Last year, the car started off the season too far away from the Red Bull and with much higher tyre wear than its immediate rivals. The in-season development was impressive, however, and the team did seem to find a way to widen the envelope of performance, resulting in both drivers having a better second half to the season.

Ferrari has got an issue in that the two drivers seem to have different driving styles, and that can create problems in terms of direction for development and set-up of the car. With the margin between those top teams being so small, Ferrari really needs to find a way to make the car less peaky and kinder to its tyres to give both drivers a chance to be competitive all the time.

Hamilton's move has added a whole new dimension to this battle behind Red Bull. If Ferrari ends up stronger than Mercedes, as it seemed to be towards the end of 2023, then the Brit has once again made a superb career move. If it's the other way around and Mercedes unlocks the potential the team has been talking about for two years, Lewis will be a bit worried at the sight of the red car disappearing in his mirrors. >>

Will Perez keep his drive or Ricciardo take his seat?

Red Bull is the only organisation on the grid that doesn't seem afraid of a mid-season shake-up, and that keeps the pressure on all the drivers to perform. Being team-mate to Max Verstappen is a real poisoned chalice. Of course, it means you're probably in a top car, but competing against him at the moment must be brutal.

Sergio Perez started last season well but, as the year unfolded, qualifying became a bit of a problem. He only had one top-four qualifying position in the last 17 races, which put him on the back foot. So although he could come through the pack, he was never really going to be a contender for a win.

After two early victories, the momentum firmly shifted in Miami when, despite starting on pole, he was beaten by Verstappen, who came through from ninth on the grid. Perez ended the year with just two podiums in the last 10 races while his team-mate won nine of them. The fact that Verstappen would have won the constructors' championship by himself by 166 points meant that Red Bull didn't really need Perez to be finishing second every time, but if Mercedes, Ferrari or McLaren get their act together, that may become a requirement.

On the flip side, it's really hard to decide whether Daniel Ricciardo is going to genuinely be a better option than Perez. He had an outstanding performance in Mexico but, apart from that, across his run of races against Yuki Tsunoda he was outqualified 4-3 and didn't really blow the young Japanese driver away any more than Liam Lawson did.

Are Lawson or Tsunoda ready to go into the big team? I don't believe so, which means that really it's up to Checo to show that he deserves to stay in that seat, while Ricciardo needs to completely trounce Tsunoda and stake his claim to be promoted once again.

Will McLaren or Aston Martin break into the top three?

Alongside Mercedes, McLaren is the team that I am most intrigued by heading into 2024. Its turn of form in the middle of last year was one of the most extraordinary flips we've seen in recent times, made even more impressive with the cost-cap and wind-tunnel restrictions we have these days.

With David Sanchez returning from Ferrari and Rob Marshall joining from Red Bull in the first major defection of a top technical person from 'Team Newey' for a while, Andrea Stella and Zak Brown have shown they mean business. The new wind tunnel has been up and running since August, and the team says that it's a huge improvement in terms of the information it was getting compared to the old Toyota wind tunnel that it had been using in Cologne.



Lando Norris and Oscar Piastri seem to work well together, want similar things from the car and, while they may not yet be at the level of Max Verstappen, Lewis Hamilton or Fernando Alonso for consistent brilliance, you do feel that they will be ready to fight for wins if the car is capable of it. Norris admitted to making too many errors in qualifying last year, while Piastri's inexperience showed in terms of race pace and tyre management. Both of them are self-critical and smart enough to know what to do better in 2024, and I can't wait to see if they can grab their first grand prix wins.

Aston Martin's season started off as a fantastic 'feel good story' for 2023. Watching Alonso rediscover the old magic early in the season was brilliant, but the team seemed to lose its way a bit from June's Spanish GP onwards. Aston started the season only 0.510% off the Red Bull in qualifying until Spain – a huge gain considering in 2022 it was 2.06% off. From Spain onwards, that grew to 0.867% and the low point was in Mexico when the Aston seemed like the slowest car on track at times in the race. Lance Stroll had a terrible run in qualifying from Monza to Las Vegas, with seven Q1 eliminations out of eight races, but seemed to recover solidly in the final four events.

At various points of the season, Aston Martin and McLaren looked like they had the second-fastest car, quicker than Ferrari and Mercedes, but breaking into the top three involves consistency. If I had to put money on it, I would say that McLaren is more likely to break into that top three based on the momentum it built up in the second half of last year. But if Aston manages to correct the slide and steer back onto its early season development path, it could well be up there.

Which team-mate contests will be the fiercest?

The intra-team battles at Mercedes, Ferrari, McLaren and Alpine will be fun to watch. George Russell had an outstanding 2022 but, by his own admission, 2023 didn't really build on that. Going up against a driver of Lewis Hamilton's calibre is always a tall order. We didn't see the best of Hamilton in 2022, whereas last season the real Hamilton reappeared and it was a bit of a wake-up call for George. The younger Brit made a couple of key errors from good points positions in Canada and Singapore, and he will be hungry to put last season behind him, especially if the car is more competitive.

The Ferrari battle seemed to ebb and flow depending on whether the car set-up suited one driver or the other. On any given weekend, one of the drivers seemed unhappy with the balance but, across the season, they ended up pretty close on points. I was criticised by some people last year for saying that I believed Charles Leclerc was the fastest driver over one lap, but the fact that he was in the top four in eight of the last nine (GP) sessions in a car that wasn't always one of the two best underlines my point.

The pressure on Carlos Sainz this season has just gone up a notch. With a potential seat at each of Mercedes, Red Bull and Aston Martin being open for 2025, he needs to find the mental strength to block out the noise and deliver a strong season. Many people have linked him to Audi for 2026 because of his illustrious father's relationship with the German manufacturer, but I don't think that's where he would want to go. Audi is at least five years away from being a top team in F1, and Sainz won't want to waste his prime years building a start-up.

At McLaren, Piastri showed that he's got plenty of one-lap speed and outqualified Norris 8-7 in the final 15 representative sessions of the season. With a year of racing and tyre management under his belt, he should be a stronger contender, while Norris continues to impress – his race from the back of the grid in Mexico last year was one of the best drives of the season in my opinion. »



Perez needs to redouble his efforts if he's to prevent Ricciardo nicking his seat

GALLOWAY



Pressure is on Sainz to shade team-mate Leclerc to ensure a top-notch ride come 2025

TEE
HONE



Last year was a wake-up call for Russell – can he see off the departing Hamilton?

ETHERINGTON
ETHERINGTON





Gasly has settled in well at Alpine, a squad that will be under pressure to improve

SUTTON



“Alex Albon was one of the stars of 2023 and really seems to have found his feet since Red Bull”

GALLOWAY



Why is Alpine marooned in the midfield?

Alpine was probably the big disappointment of last season. Its marketing department may be delighted to have a glittering roster of stars from other sports and Hollywood as investors, but ultimately the only thing that really matters is on-track performance. The rest is just noise, and for the third-biggest automotive manufacturer group to have a team slip from fourth to sixth last year wasn't good. It was a turbulent year for the team, with Otmar Szafnauer, Alan Permane and Pat Fry being the most high-profile exits.

It had the sixth-fastest car and was in a bit of limbo without anyone to fight against in the constructors' table, racking up 120 points versus 280 for Aston Martin and 302 for McLaren. The argument about it taking time to turn things around has been blown out of the water by these two teams, and really the rules reset in 2022 should have presented Alpine with an opportunity to leap into the top three, which is where a works Renault-owned team should expect to be.

Renault-Nissan alliance boss Luca de Meo seems to be someone who doesn't suffer fools, and the pressure will be on the design team in Enstone and the engine department in Viry to get Alpine back in the fight with Aston and McLaren.

The team says that it's been bold with the design of the A524 but there have already been rumours of delays to the chassis homologation from a failed crash test, which has been a setback. Perhaps these ambitious ideas will yield the results despite the delays but it's never a good sign when a team has to miss doing a shakedown in Europe before shipping the cars to Bahrain.

Both cars getting knocked out in Q1 at Monza highlighted a weakness in the power unit, and I'd be interested to see what the engine department can do given the limitations of the rules.

Esteban Ocon is one of the nicest people you will meet in the paddock. Frustratingly, he started the season with a run of three penalties in Bahrain, which sort of set the tone for his year. He had excellent drives in Monaco and Las Vegas, but seven non-finishes in total for the season, including three caused by unreliability – plus first-lap clashes at the Hungaroring and Austin and an expensive crash in Australia with his team-mate – somewhat ruined his season.

Pierre Gasly settled into the team quickly and had some very good drives. He was in the train pushing Carlos Sainz hard in Melbourne until the crash at the end, and his performances in difficult circumstances in the Netherlands and over the bumps at Austin were superb.

Overall, it feels like Alpine needs a year of stability and calmness, but there's no doubt that the pressure will be on the team to move up in the constructors' championship this year.

How high can Williams climb?

The way the constructors' table shook out last year clearly broke the pack up into groups. Williams ended up in seventh but it could quite easily have been eighth or maybe even ninth. The gap between Williams and Alpine last year was 92 points, a not insignificant number, but it does feel like the 2023 season was the most positive one for the Dorilton era of Williams.

James Vowles has brought a wave of new energy into Grove, and his engineering-led management has a very good Williams-Patrick Head sort of feel to it. He's been very open and honest about the journey the team is on and the investment and upgrades that have to happen back at the factory. Roping in Pat Fry is an excellent move as I honestly believe he is one of the most underrated people in the paddock.

Realistically, if Williams can cement seventh place but close the gap to the pack ahead, I think that will be a very good result for 2024. There were weekends like Silverstone, Zandvoort, Montreal and Las Vegas where the car seemed very competitive, but there were others like Monaco, Qatar and Abu Dhabi that seemed like a slog.

Alex Albon was one of the stars of last season and really seems to have found his feet in his post-Red Bull life. If the team can give him the support, confidence and car to perform, they can really build a recovery together over the next few years. Vowles said last week that the team has him under contract for 2025, but it's not impossible that Lewis Hamilton's move could trigger a chain reaction where Albon goes to Mercedes alongside his close friend George Russell. Williams will do well to hang on to Albon, and this year could be a really interesting one at the negotiating table for both sides. >>





Gene Haas's patience
ran out with Steiner's
tenure as team principal

HONEY

What's going on at Haas?

Changing your team principal or, frankly, any senior figure in a team this close to the start of the season doesn't seem like a good idea. It destabilises the team and doesn't give the new person stepping in enough time to make all the changes they may want before the season. Even on the weekends when Gene Haas was present, to close observers this seemed like Guenther Steiner's team. He was a big personality and was unquestionably the standout star of the Netflix *Drive to Survive* show.

Perhaps that was the issue and, after finishing last or second to last for the past couple of seasons, Gene Haas had had enough. The additional publicity that Guenther brought was probably quite powerful in attracting a title sponsor like MoneyGram but, with every position in the constructors' table worth about \$10million, all of a sudden Williams in seventh is \$30million better off than Haas in terms of cash from F1.

The team entered F1 with a bang, scoring points on its debut in Melbourne in 2016 but, nearly a decade later, it is yet to get a podium finish. Of course, Steiner's job was not to design the car and he had to work with the budget he was given, but it was his job to look at weaknesses in the organisation, search for talented people in other teams and steer the ship. When you have a modest budget, you can't expect to be winning, but you get the feeling Gene expects them to be in the midfield whereas Guenther felt he needed more funding to deliver.



Komatsu's passion
for motorsport will be
tested in his new role

HONEY

Ayao Komatsu is a bright, no-nonsense engineer. He's been around motor racing for a very long time – in fact, I first met him when he was helping Takuma Sato out in Formula 3 back in 2000-01. Stepping up to team principal is a whole other challenge, and all of a sudden the pressure of the media, the political games with F1 and the FIA, sponsorship and commercial obligations, as well as driver contracts, are all going to end up on his table. Steiner has left big shoes to fill in terms of a character and a presence in the paddock. Ayao will be a more introverted team boss (frankly, anybody is compared to Guenther!), but he's got a tenacious work ethic and passion for the sport, which will be tested.

How much fun is the silly season going to be this time?

Lewis Hamilton's shock move to Ferrari has really energised the whole sport. Everywhere I went in the days following the announcement, people wanted to talk about it. Mercedes has been his natural home for so many of F1's new fans, and there's a real curiosity about why he left and also who replaces him.

For the first time in F1 history, in 2024 we're heading to the opening race with exactly the same driver line-up as the one that finished the previous season. Having a flat driver market with boring renewals was pretty dull, so the sport should collectively be thanking Lewis for pulling the trigger.

The fun of silly season creates interesting storylines and subplots and, when we had a season where one driver won 19 races, we really did need some more stories to talk about!

Zak Brown has done an excellent job in locking down Lando Norris and Oscar Piastri at McLaren. With over half the contracts up for renewal at the end of 2024, including at three of the top five teams, there are going to be lots of covert meetings and negotiations over the next few months.

By the summer break, I imagine Mercedes, Red Bull and Aston Martin would want to lock their drivers down. Carlos Sainz is the big one to watch in the market, with Alex Albon and Sergio Perez the other key players. As a race winner and someone who has proved he can cope with the pressure of a top drive, Sainz is surely ahead of Albon in the queue. Liam Lawson did a superb job in his cameo appearances at AlphaTauri and I would be very disappointed if he didn't get a proper shot at an F1 season in the future.

Andrea Kimi Antonelli is being touted as the next Max Verstappen or Charles Leclerc, and certainly his karting and junior career has been impressive so far. He has a good benchmark in the highly rated Oliver Bearman at the top F2 squad Prema Racing and I wonder if Mercedes will do with him what Ron Dennis did with Lewis Hamilton in 2007 and stick him in the deep end at the earliest opportunity. »



Netflix crews are unlikely to be spending as much time as before in the Haas pit garage



Static driver line-up from 2023-24 means hopes are high for silly season entertainment



TV audiences increase over sprint weekends. Steps have been taken to improve the format

SBLOXHAM



Wolff and Ben Sulayem locked horns in December. Further political turmoil may follow

SUTTON

“I really hope that the biggest story is an on-track battle for the world championship”



What should be done to improve the sprint races?

As Martin Brundle rightly says, the worst sprint is still going to be better than the best FP2. Fundamentally, there is no such thing as a ‘great’ practice session to watch, but the sprints can be excellent, like in Qatar last year. Overall, the TV viewership over a sprint weekend is 30% higher than a like-for-like non-sprint weekend in the same time zone, so surely that’s the reason to be doing it.

In principle, I have been a fan of doing six sprint weekends, and it honestly confuses me that we have so much negativity around it. The beauty of the world we live in is that people have choices in terms of what to watch, so if you don’t like the sprint or the shootout, then don’t watch it!

The format is far from perfect, of course, and the obvious thing to tweak is the order in which the sessions are run. Qualifying on a Friday for a Sunday race was a bit confusing, but that’s been an easy fix and I’m glad that they have re-ordered the sessions now.

In theory, with the sprint qualifying on a Friday evening and sprint on a Saturday morning, it should mean that the teams will be able to modify their cars ahead of qualifying for the main grand prix on Saturday. This is a really good step because we had six weekends when the highly intelligent and well-paid engineers were lift twiddling their thumbs as they couldn’t change the cars.

I would also have sprint tyres that would basically be the softest compound normally nominated for the weekend plus one step softer, which is used just for the sprint race, mandating a one-stop race. This way we will see some proper tyre degradation and intrigue around the pitstops.

Outside of the driver market, what will be the biggest story of 2024?

Obviously, I have no solid answer to this question, but it’s fun to play ‘fantasy F1 stories’. Last year, we seemed to spend most of the season talking about Las Vegas’s return to the calendar.

I really hope that the biggest story of 2024 is an on-track battle for the world championship. People talk about the ‘Netflix effect’ on F1, but the stats we see at Sky are pretty clear that the single biggest boost in viewership in the past decade came in the second half of 2021 when we had that titanic battle between Lewis Hamilton and Max Verstappen. If the racing is good, nothing else matters. If we don’t get a title battle, watching Lando Norris and Oscar Piastri chase their first wins will be fun, or perhaps Lewis Hamilton and Fernando Alonso winning again. The Mercedes-versus-Ferrari battle this year, keeping in mind Hamilton’s situation, will be fascinating.

The FIA seems to have a lot of issues at the moment, with Steve Nielsen and Tim Goss the latest to leave. President Mohammed Ben Sulayem got into a personal battle with Toto and Susie Wolff in December, which resulted in a clear division in the sport, putting F1 and the teams on one side of the line and the FIA on the other. The Andretti issue, where the FIA approved and F1 later somewhat emphatically rejected the entry, has also been a clear divider. This political battle looks like it’s going to escalate throughout 2024.

The governing body is looking to establish more control over something that the commercial rights holder believes it should be in charge of. With 70% of the FIA’s income coming from F1, it’s a very complicated balance of everyone working together without egos getting in the way. I feel like there are some real fireworks to come in this particular battle in 2024. ✎

The F1 world will be watching as Lindblad makes the graduation to F3 for the 2024 season





FORMULA 3

LINDBLAD STEPS INTO THE SPOTLIGHT

Arvid Lindblad has been a Red Bull Junior since he was 13. Now, at 16, he's ready for a rookie F3 season under the noses of the F1 elite.

Pressure? Sure, but it's all about handling it

MARCUS SIMMONS

It's early morning in Portugal. A 13-year-old English lad, ready for a day of karting, is sitting with his father. The phone rings. "I remember me and my dad were at breakfast at a hotel near Portimao," recalls Arvid Lindblad. "I was doing some testing there before the world champs. My dad's phone was on the table and it rang, and it said 'Graz, Austria' on the screen."

Lindblad Senior walked away to take the call: "When he came back he told me that Helmut wanted us to meet him and have a sitdown about joining the Red Bull programme. F1 that year was racing in Portimao, and because we had the world champs there it worked quite well, so we actually met him on the Sunday morning in the hotel that Red Bull were staying in at the Portuguese Grand Prix. That was where we agreed that I was going to join."

Three years on, Red Bull chief Helmut Marko has fast-tracked young Lindblad to the FIA Formula 3 Championship, upon which he will embark with Prema Racing in a couple of weeks' time in the Bahrain opener. It's just a year and six months since he celebrated his 15th birthday in August 2022 and was able to take his fledgling steps in car racing in some late-season Italian Formula 4 outings.

Ask Lindblad about how he cropped up on Marko's radar, and he responds: "Even now I still don't know 100% the ins and outs of it. Helmut is in charge of the cars side and he's very close with Jos Verstappen, who looks more at the karting. There were quite a few people in the paddock who Jos would talk to, asking, 'Is there anyone good coming through?' My engine builder at the time I had a really good relationship with, and he also had a good relationship with Jos, because he did Max's engines in karting. Jos asked around the paddock and I guess my name was mentioned a few times, and he passed it on to Helmut and it went like that."

Nissan Formula E star Oliver Rowland, who acts as a mentor and coach to Lindblad – with a bit of management thrown in – also played a part. "I'm quite good friends with Max and also Jos," Rowland explains. "I was always trying to keep them informed of Arvid's results. I was told that he needed to win something first



"Jos asked around the paddock and I guess my name was mentioned, and he passed it on to Helmut"

before anything would come about, and when he did we'd knock on the door again. I was just telling everybody what I thought of him, you know? That in my opinion he needs a chance. I was karting at the same time as Max, so we hung out a bit. Then when he went to single-seaters, I helped him a couple of times in his first few days in Formula Renault [the three-time world champion's first outing in a car came in a test at Pembrey in 2013, with the Manor MP Motorsport team that was running Rowland in the Eurocup at the time], and then we just stayed pretty good friends from then."

Lindblad grew up in Virginia Water, on the doorstep of Windsor Park, the son of a Swedish dad and a mum of Indian heritage. Lindblad Sr dabbled in motocross as a youngster, "but he didn't »



“He has a really good attitude. We realised he’s the real deal and he has a chance to go all the way”

have the budget to make it into a full-time commitment. From my dad’s side of the family there’s always been this real passion for motorsport – my grandad, anything with an engine and wheels he’ll watch. When I was three I got a motocross bike, but I didn’t really enjoy it. Then when I was five we did some rental karting [at the local Sandown Park track] and I really loved it, and it all kind of started from there.”

Soon Lindblad was racing seriously with the Zip team, and its connections – emanating from Zip’s late founder Martin Hines – with the Racing Steps Foundation that steered Rowland’s career led to the Yorkshireman coaching its little karting mites. One of them stood out... During 2016, Lindblad switched teams and was racing happily there when the owner decided he wanted to withdraw from karting. In 2017, Oliver Rowland Motorsport was born, and in 2018 Lindblad won a National Cadet title with the squad.

“He was actually the reason that I started it,” states Rowland. “They were coming into a new season and weren’t really sure what they wanted to do with teams and stuff like that, so I was trying to help and advise them on where to go, and then it came up in conversation about potentially starting a team. To be honest it was something that I always wanted to do, but not that early on because I was still doing F2 that year, so I knew taking that responsibility on and doing F2 was going to be quite challenging, but also I knew that you don’t get the opportunity to start a team with someone as good as that very often, so we took a punt. He was nine years old, we were vice British champion in our first year as a single-man team, which was super-impressive. It was just him and me and a couple of other guys – one mechanic who helped me in F2 – and we finished second



to Taylor Barnard. The next year we won everything, and then he went off to Europe and was super-successful.”

As well as Barnard, Lindblad’s Cadet crop included fellow F3 newcomer Alex Dunne, F4 golden boy Freddie Slater, 2023 British F4 runner-up Will Macintyre and 2022 Ginetta Junior ruler Josh Rowledge. In hindsight, that’s a glut of talent there. “Yeah, 100%,” agrees Lindblad. “Even now we’re all developing still, but especially at such a young age it’s so crucial to have good people around you, good competitors that you can learn from. You see in the past there’s been generations that come through together and get better and better, like you’ve seen with Verstappen, Leclerc, Norris, Albon, Russell. All of them, they came through together in the span of a couple of years. I’m not saying we’re like that, but you know what I mean.”

It was a similar story in Europe. “To be honest, most of the guys I raced in 2019 I’m still racing now,” points out Lindblad. He became pals quite quickly with James Wharton, and it would be the Australian and his fellow Ferrari Driver Academy protege Tuukka Taponen, plus McLaren junior Ugo Ugochukwu, who would be the leading quartet among Prema’s 2023 Italian F4 line-up. Wharton and Ugochukwu already had a season under their belts, while for Lindblad – whose late 2022 outings came with Van Amersfoort Racing – and Finn Taponen it was a first full year in cars. Even so, Lindblad shot out of the blocks with a win at Imola,





DUTCH PHOTO AGENCY/REDBULL CONTENT POOL

two at Misano and a hat-trick at Monza to hold a comfortable points advantage after four of the seven rounds. Then it all went wrong. US Racing's Polish talent Kacper Sztuka went on a late-season run of victories to grab the title – and join Lindblad on the Red Bull scheme – and Ugochukwu snatched the runner-up spot.

Lindblad describes the crumble as “a bit of a touchy topic”, although there have been reports of engine and brake troubles. “It was really heartbreaking,” he continues. “I had such an incredible start to the year, winning six out of the first 12 races, and had a massive lead in the championship, and then it went downhill pretty quickly. To be honest none of us still know fully the issues.”

Come November, when he also took part in the Aston Martin Autosport BRDC Young Driver of the Year finals, he was given a new car for the Macau F4 event, qualified on pole and won both races. “It fixed everything and the performance was really strong again,” he says. “There’s so many things to learn from it. I don’t think I could have won the championship, but I definitely could have been P2 if I’d handled it better. Excuse the language, but ‘shit happens’! I learned a lot from the experience, so I don’t regret it happened and that I had the opportunity to learn those lessons.”

That’s a remarkably mature stance for one so young. No wonder Rowland is impressed: “He has a really good attitude, I liked him, so I wanted to help him. As we realised he’s the real deal and he has a chance to potentially go all the way, then over the years my involvement’s kind of stepped up to the point now where we talk every day, we’re constantly on the hunt for more performance. I believe in him so I want to be involved, I want him to succeed. There’s not enough people out there that really give help to the kids to get to the top from such a young age. It’s something that I’m interested in doing. Maybe after my career finishes this is a perfect progression towards that.”

While Taponen, Wharton (now off the Ferrari scheme) and



Ugochukwu are all making the logical move to Formula Regional European Championship by Alpine, F3 is a considerably bigger step from F4. Even so, Lindblad has done a little bit of FRegional in the Middle East series, and took a reversed-grid win last month, but suffered from a comparative lack of seat time to get used to the peculiarities of the car. “In the middle of the year there was discussion between going to FRECA or F3, and Helmut said he wanted me to go to F3 with Prema,” laughs Lindblad. “There wasn’t room for discussion on that when he’d made his mind up!”

Ironically, this Brit with a Swedish name now finds himself partnering a genuine Swede but with Bosnian heritage in the form of Ferrari-backed Dino Beganovic. Sicilian Alpine F1 junior Gabriele Mini completes a potent line-up at Prema. “I’ve got two really good team-mates and I’m really happy about that,” reckons Lindblad. “There’s so much to learn from them, which can help. It’s a double-edged sword, isn’t it? They’ll help me to learn, but they can also make my life more difficult. I’ve got to have a good mindset and try to use them in the right way, but I’m not just going to sit around and let them have the fight – I want to be there at times and be part of that.”

“They’re going into their second year, they did two years of FRECA as well so they’re really experienced and need to perform – this is a really important year for them so expectation and pressure will be high. Me being the underdog, the new guy, the way I see it I’m almost expected not to do so well, so that kind of takes the pressure off, but if I do, it’s huge for me and it’s a great opportunity. I’m really excited being the underdog – I’m happy to try and rise to the challenge.”

Unsurprisingly, he has revelled in the performance of the Mecachrome V6-powered F3 Dallara during the trio of 2023 post-season tests. “It’s my favourite car I’ve driven so far,” Lindblad declares. “The feeling of the downforce and the power, everything – it’s a real pleasure to drive. The testing went quite well, there was a real positive trajectory. Jerez was a little bit weak, I struggled a bit, but I made a good step forward at Barcelona, in the top 10 always. And then Imola I was at the bottom end of the top five or six, so that was positive – constant improvement.”

“What’s really important is that he’s still so young that we don’t put too much pressure on pure results,” points out Rowland. “The step’s massive, and he’s only just 16. He has a lot of weight on his shoulders, I guess a certain element of expectation from Red Bull, but from our perspective we have to focus on improving every time we drive. We know that he’s in a super-strong team, he has some good people around him, so if he can start off solid, well within the top 10, and then throughout the season keep improving step by step, then hopefully podiums and perhaps the odd win can come towards the end of the season, and who knows? I think that has to be a realistic target and, if it’s any better, then that’s a bonus I guess.” ✎



Jardine and Harryman in 1973 Chrysler Avenger one of 155 crews to tackle marathon event

THE APPEAL OF A NEW 'OLD' CHALLENGE

The UK no longer has a round on the World Rally Championship calendar, but the spirit of the RAC lives on – and shows there's still a strong appetite for this gritty branch of motorsport

TOM HOWARD



COLIN GREEN

ext year will be the 30th anniversary of Colin McRae famously winning the 1995 RAC Rally to become Britain's first world rally champion in front of an estimated two million fans stage-side, propelling the sport to incredible heights in the UK.

McRae's exploits, coupled with the nature of the RAC Rally – thanks to the unique gravel challenges posed by famed Welsh stages such as Crychan, Myherin, Hafren and Sweet Lamb – added to the RAC's standing as a revered event.

Sadly, the original RAC Rally (1932-97), which morphed into Rally of Great Britain and latterly Rally GB (1998-2019), no longer exists – the UK lost its place on the WRC calendar after 2019. But the event's beating heart and its bespoke challenge live on through the Roger Albert Clark Rally – named after the 1972/1976 winner – which aims to encapsulate the charm of the original RAC through its 350-mile, five-day marathon for historic cars.

Last November represented a milestone for the 'new' RAC, which first ran in 2004. It hit new heights in popularity, with enthusiasts flocking to the stages in their droves and thousands watching online as 155 crews gathered, including five-time WRC winner Kris Meeke and rising star Oliver Solberg.

Among those trying to conquer this event was former Formula 1 pundit and accomplished rally driver Tony Jardine. He invited Autosport to join him to live the trials and tribulations of trying to overcome arguably the UK's toughest rally, piloting a stunning 1973 Chrysler Avenger prepared by the TradOak Rally Team. Jardine was partnered by experienced co-driver Allan Harryman, son of the legendary Terry Harryman, Ari Vatanen's former co-driver.

Jardine's association and passion for rallying goes all the way back to 1975, when he drove a Datsun to eighth in the Kuwait »



Competitor camaraderie and openness of service park all part of RAC's appeal

PAUL LAWRENCE



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International Rally while working as an art teacher in the Middle East. Jardine has become a regular, and competed on the original RAC and Rally GB, but last year’s Roger Albert Clark Rally was an altogether different challenge.

“It is the toughest RAC I’ve been on – I’ve done 27 and I have done some big events, but I think this is the toughest,” reckons Jardine. His words are no exaggeration. The extent of the challenge is only truly realised when the RAC’s itinerary is mapped out and put into context. A standard WRC event is usually contested over four days, with crews navigating approximately 300 stage kilometres (200 miles). The RAC, held every two years, demands that crews cover 150 miles more than a WRC event across five days. The rally features stages in Wales, Scotland and England, beginning in Carmarthen and ending in Carlisle.

This epic journey is completed by ageing and at times fragile classics. The cast featured a plethora of throaty Ford Escort Mk2s (including entries driven by Solberg, Meeke and 2022 British champion Osian Pryce), a screaming Lancia Stratos piloted by Seb Perez, Chris Ingram in his beautifully presented





Rally nut and veteran of 27 RACs Jardine reckons this was the toughest yet

COLIN GREEN

“I love the Ford Escorts. There are no buttons, so you just put it in first and go. That part is easier...”

Triumph TR7, plus a smattering of Porsches.

This enormous dose of nostalgia could from the outside be seen as targeting a certain demographic but, if anything, the younger drivers and fans were perhaps more excited and attracted to this rally. Among those was one of the WRC's brightest young talents in the form of Solberg.

“First of all, it is fantastic to be back in Wales,” grins Solberg. “I have missed going rallying here and it has always been a dream. My grandfather did the RAC back in the 1970s and there are a lot of special memories from then with Lancia Stratos and the Volvos and the Toyotas.

“It's the heritage of rallying. I love the Ford Escorts, it has proper revs and there are no buttons, so you just put it in first and go. That part is easier, but driving it is much more difficult. It brings a completely different challenge, which I like.”

If anyone needed reminding of the passion for rallying in Wales, then the hordes of fans that lined the streets of Carmarthen for the ceremonial start under lights emphasised how this region has been starved of top-level competition in recent years.

But as Autosport trekked into the Crychan forest to go full ‘bobble-hatter’ to watch the action the following morning, the challenge this rally poses became all too real. The Avenger was missing: less than two miles into the stage, Jardine's car had hit trouble.

“It was probably one of my shortest ever rallies, we just lost power and then the car started to sound like an old tractor,” explains Jardine. “It was a heck of a noise and eventually we ground to a halt and it didn't look good. I thought the engine had totally gone. But it was a problem with cylinder one and it had actually blown out the whole spark plug and broken part of it.”

Jardine wasn't the only driver to suffer engine trouble, as Meeke's Castrol-liveried Escort cried enough at the end of stage six while in the lead, after dicing with Solberg and Pryce at the »

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top of the times. “To say I’m disappointed would be an understatement,” said Meeke. “Huge thanks for all the effort from Wales Motorsport to make this event a reality and again to all my sponsors that made it possible. We will be back!”

Meeke’s words summed up the passion that ignited around the event, with talk of a comeback in 2025. Luckily for Jardine, he didn’t have to wait that long. The team were not willing to give up, and the Avenger was recovered before heading back to Carmarthen for a repair in a pub car park – the Boars Head, to be precise. This, as they say, is rallying and evidence that the spirit of the original RAC is very much alive and kicking. The squad, led by team manager and ex-M-Sport engineer Phil Bradshaw, aided by the lights from pub benches, worked their magic to revive the Avenger. The rally was back on.

But the RAC continued to bite as more and more competitors fell by the wayside. While Solberg stormed into a healthy lead by dancing his Escort through the rolling Welsh hills that envelope



Sweet Lamb, one of rallying’s most revered stages, the infamous ribbon of gravel took its toll on the Avenger. This time the clutch gave way, but it prompted a moment of magic that seemingly only rallying can provide.

Step forward co-driver Harryman, who has seen it all over the years, and from a young age too, having witnessed his father call the notes for luminaries including 1981 world champion Vatanen, Michele Mouton and Malcolm Wilson. The Avenger’s saviour on this occasion was a bottle of Lucozade and Harryman’s honed engineering skills. In order to limp the car back to the team’s mechanics, Harryman displayed how valuable it is to carry cable ties and energy drinks.

“I’m quite fortunate that I’ve grown up [in rallying] and served as an engineer and worked on rally cars for 10 years,” explains Harryman. “The Lucozade trick came from seeing somebody doing something similar, pouring liquid into the bell housing to get the clutch to stick. It’s basically just sugar and once that starts to heat it becomes really sticky. But the bigger job was trying to reconnect the clutch cable underneath the car. We got the car to do another 10 miles and it cried enough. It’s a nice story.”

Known for helping humans in their need for replenishing energy, Lucozade can now add reviving Avenger clutches to its capabilities, it seems. But a sugary drink and cable ties can only get you so far. A 220-mile journey north lay ahead as the team managed to get the car to its Carlisle-based workshop for an all-nighter. First, a clutch had to be sourced before the repair commenced, finishing in the early hours. Come Saturday morning the car was headed for the Scottish borders for the 70-mile third leg based around Newton Stewart in Dumfries and Galloway.

Scotland proved to be much kinder on the Avenger and Jardine managed to find his rhythm, ending the day with two top-three stage times in the C2 1600 class.

There was still a sting in the tail when the rally moved back to England around the famous Kielder Forest that once hosted the

WHAT THE WRC COULD LEARN FROM THE ROGER ALBERT CLARK RALLY

There’s no question that the 2023 Roger Albert Clark Rally was an overwhelming success. It captured the imagination of UK rally fans and, by attracting World Rally Championship stars Kris Meeke and Oliver Solberg, the event went to another level. On social media it was a smash hit, with Autosport’s own video output from the event exceeding more than a million views, in addition to the many millions of watched clips captured by fans.

So, are there lessons to be learned from the RAC’s success for the wider rallying world and even the World Rally Championship?

There is no doubt that nostalgia is big business at the moment, and the RAC taps perfectly into that market with its historic vehicles and its homage to the original RAC Rally. This is, of course, difficult to replicate in the WRC, but a healthy dose of nostalgia among the discipline’s modern monsters in some shape or form can surely do no harm.

One area where the RAC excelled was the way fans could interact with the rally. At WRC level certain protocols are in place – and for good reason, since safety is paramount. But the set-up at Sweet Lamb was the perfect example of how



fans could get extraordinary value for money.

Sweet Lamb featured a remote service park located within the stage confines. Fans could walk around the tents, look at the cars and talk to drivers before taking a short walk to several viewing points to watch the cars tackle a water splash, navigate a hillclimb or slide around various hairpins. This concept was widely praised. It must be said that the inclusion

of more remote services is being considered by the WRC for the future.

“Honestly, it’s been fantastic,” says Oliver Solberg. “The organisers seem to understand completely how to make it work – they have the service area close to the stages, so we can spend lots of time with the fans, the spectators can see everything and still we’re doing a lot of miles in fantastic stages.”

“It’s simple. We need to have the WRC back here. You can see that for a historic race there are more people watching than what we have in the WRC now. I also think it’s important for the WRC to learn that to take 10% of what they have done here will bring people closer and have a bit more of an open and free atmosphere for people to enjoy more.”

His 2003 world rally champion father Petter adds: “This rally is so special and with this type of RAC Rally over five days. It brings back memories.

“In general, they have sold out all of the tickets and the reaction on social media and YouTube has been incredible. It’s a really cool thing. For WRC, this is a big motorsport country so of course it would be important to have it back here.”



Meeke was leading when he hit terminal engine trouble. He's pledged to be back

PAUL LAWRENCE



83rd out of 101 crews to make the finish feels like a win for Jardine/Harryman

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“Hurdle after hurdle you feel like you’ve conquered a flipping mountain. It feels euphoric”

WRC’s finest. As night fell on the Harwood stage, rocks caused an unusual off into a ditch. “I was coming down a hill into a 90-degree left and we hit some rocks and my elbow struck the car door and I hit my funny bone – I took my hand off the wheel and steered straight into a ditch,” explains Jardine, who luckily was able to recover the car back onto the road thanks to the marshals.

Jardine wasn’t the only driver to succumb to the perils of the night-time stages. Solberg had amassed a five-minute lead, thanks to 20 fastest stage times, but hopes of a victory were extinguished in an instant by a driveshaft failure on his Escort.



Oliver Solberg relishes the simplicity of the Escort and the challenge of mastering it

But the RAC bug had definitely bitten the 22-year-old: “I felt we had everything under control until we had the problem with the driveshaft. One went and then I was trying to nurse the car out with just one-wheel drive and the other broke. That was a shame, but what an event.

“My main priority is the WRC. If there’s time in the future, I would really like to come back for some fun. I want to say thank you to the people – in the rain, the fog, the freezing night time, they were there and they never stopped cheering. The passion and enthusiasm in the Solberg family is huge for rallying – these people were just like us, and I love them for that.”

Solberg’s words hit the nail on the head. The passion for rallying on display from the thousands who congregated stage-side and on the road sections helped evoke memories from the original RAC.

This passion was matched by the competitors striving to conquer this marathon. Solberg’s retirement offered up an opportunity for Marty McCormack and Barney Mitchell to guide their Mk2 Escort to outright victory by a margin of 5m30s from Cathan McCourt, while the fan favourite, Perez-driven Stratos was denied a podium after dropping out on the final stage, simply known as the ‘The Big One’ due to its whopping 29-mile length.

Positions are in many ways secondary on an event like this, as Jardine can attest after navigating the trials and tribulations of the RAC’s 33 stages to finish 83rd.

“Honestly, hurdle after hurdle you feel like you’ve conquered a flipping mountain – I’m still in shock that we got home,” he sighs. “It feels euphoric absolutely because everything comes together, all the planning, the car preparation and the work with Allan. You are listening for every noise in the car and the last stage was just littered with cars. Kielder was a car graveyard. They were in the ditches, and we caught and passed six cars over the 24 miles, as it was truncated.”

Aside from the achievement of being among the 101 intrepid and determined crews to reach the finish, the true winner is rallying. This homage to the original RAC encapsulated everything the famous rally stood for, and the response from the public and those watching around the world online proved that the passion for UK rallying remains strong.

“I think there is a lot of growth in historic rallying,” concludes Jardine. “The people were out there in their droves, tickets were sold out. Rallying is the sport of the people, rallying comes to the people, it goes and travels around, and drivers are in cars the people recognise, and these are cars people aspire to own.

“When you have people turning up in retro clothes, you know what, the organisers have cracked it.” ❄️



NASCAR PREVIEW

WHAT'S NEW IN NASCAR FOR 2024

Exciting new (and old) drivers, two fresh-shape cars, a manufacturer defection by a legend and a changed-up schedule kick off at the Daytona 500 this weekend

CHARLES BRADLEY, JIM UTTER & NICK DEGROOT

PHOTOGRAPHY  motorsport
IMAGES



Van Gisbergen won on his Cup debut, but will be a “full rookie” on superspeedways

CUP IRREGULAR SVG BIDS FOR GLORY IN XFINITY

The most exciting newcomer to NASCAR in 2024 isn't even going to be a Cup Series regular, but Shane van Gisbergen's victory in the Chicago Street Race last year for Trackhouse Racing rocked the stock car world.

The first man in 60 years to score a Cup triumph on his debut is to compete full-time in the second-tier Xfinity Series with Kaulig Racing to learn the ropes, but he will run in at least seven Cup events among a 40-race programme that will start in the ARCA series at Daytona. “I've never done anything like this before,” the three-time

FORD AND TOYOTA DEBUT NEW CAR BODIES

While the 2024 NASCAR Cup season features new drivers and new venues, there will also be an updated look to the entries from Toyota and Ford: Toyota Racing Development and Ford Performance are to debut new iterations of their respective Camry and Mustang race cars.

In early November, Ford unveiled its new-version Mustang for competition in 2024 based on the Mustang 'Dark Horse', the seventh generation of the revered model. Since arriving in Cup in 2019, the Mustang has won a manufacturers' championship and series-best 18 races in 2020, and drivers' championships with Team Penske pair Joey Logano and Ryan Blaney in 2022 and 2023 respectively.

Later that same month, Toyota followed with its new Camry XSE race car for Cup

series competition. The Camry XSE Next Gen follows the Toyota Camry TRD Next Gen, which produced 18 victories and 25 poles during the past two seasons of competition.

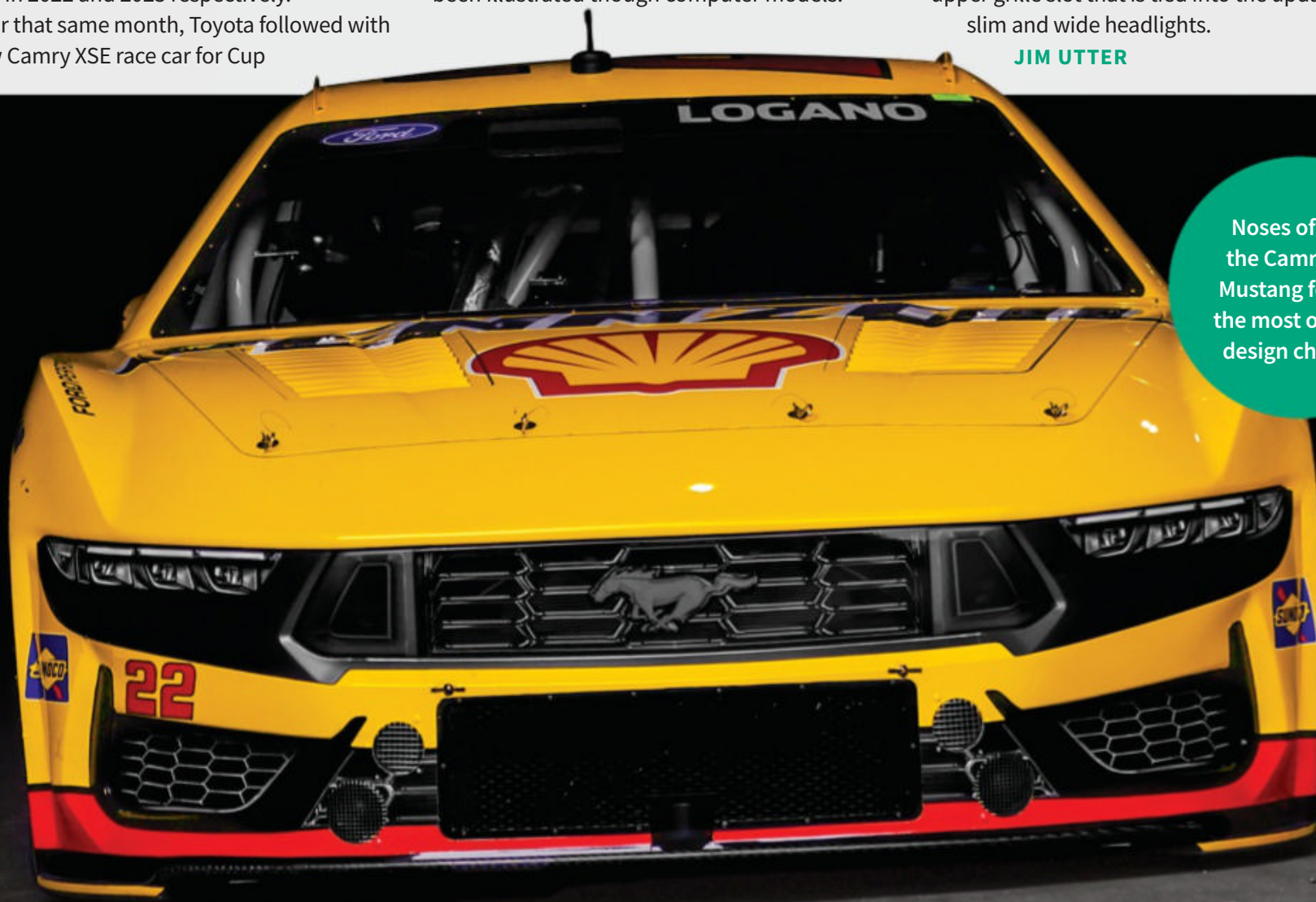
How the new bodies will change those teams' performance is pretty much an open book yet to be filled with data. Each car had just one limited on-track test prior to the 3 February pre-season Busch Light Clash exhibition at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, which was won by Toyota driver Denny Hamlin. With such restricted testing and only a short exhibition race under their belts, the expected performance gains have largely been illustrated through computer models.

"All the tools we use – the wind tunnel, the CFD – all of that carries back and forth," says Richard Johns, Ford's NASCAR performance leader. "So, what we learn in the development of the Cup car carries over to production and what we learn in production carries over to the Cup car. There's a lot of technology transfer, especially on the aerodynamic side."

Both car models feature some visible differences from their predecessors, with the largest coming in the nose designs. The Mustang has some sharp character lines that draw to a more rounded nose. The Toyota has a distinctive hammerhead styling, with an upper grille slot that is tied into the updated slim and wide headlights.

JIM UTTER

Noses of both the Camry and Mustang feature the most obvious design changes



ROSENBLUM

Australian Supercars champion admits of superspeedway racing. "I'm a full rookie."

SVG will share the #16 Kaulig Chevrolet in Cup with Josh Williams and AJ Allmendinger. Also worth keeping an eye out for in 2024 is reigning Supercars champion Brodie Kostecki, whose falling out down under with Erebus Motorsport could manifest itself into a sooner-than-anticipated switch to the US with Richard Childress Racing. Fellow Supercars star Cam Waters is also expected to run three races in RFK's #60 Ford.

In full-time driver moves, Kevin Harvick's

retirement has opened the door for Josh Berry to graduate to Cup in the #4 Stewart-Haas Racing Ford, while Noah Gragson (who lost his drive at Legacy MC by disgracing himself on social media) moves to the #10 SHR machine vacated by Aric Almirola. Xfinity standout John Hunter Nemechek takes over the Legacy seat from Gragson.

Justin Haley has swapped Kaulig for Rick Ware Racing's #51 entry, while the sister #15 car will be shared between Kaz Grala, Cody Ware (returning to the sport after strangulation charges against him were dropped) and Riley Herbst.

Lanky Truck Series firebrand Carson Hocevar will drive the #77 in place of Ty Dillon at Spire Motorsports, which has added a third entry – bought for \$40million from Live Fast Motorsports – for the highly rated Zane Smith, 24, who won the 2022 Truck title.

And seven-time champion Jimmie Johnson's part-time schedule with Legacy MC has increased to at least nine races, adding the returning Brickyard 400 to his roster that will kick off with his bid to win a third Daytona 500.

CHARLES BRADLEY



JIMMIE JOHNSON RACING A TOYOTA WILL BLOW FANS' MINDS

Only Richard Petty and Dale Earnhardt have recorded the same number of NASCAR Cup titles as Jimmie Johnson but, at the age of 48, 'seven-time' is back for at least a nine-race schedule with a major twist... he'll be racing a Toyota.

It's something that's not lost on David Wilson, the head of Toyota's US motorsports division: "Jimmie Johnson running a Toyota Camry, can you believe that? Fans are going to go mental!"

Johnson, who 'retired' from NASCAR competition in 2020 and switched to IndyCar for a couple of seasons, just couldn't stay away from stock cars. The recently inducted Hall of Famer was a mainstay of Hendrick Motorsports' Garage 56 project, driving alongside Jenson Button and Mike Rockenfeller as they took NASCAR to the Le Mans 24 Hours.

Johnson also took an ownership role in the Petty GMS squad, which has morphed into Legacy Motor Club under the stewardship of airline entrepreneur Maury Gallagher. Last May, it made the big decision to switch manufacturers, moving away from Chevrolet and putting NASCAR legends Johnson and Petty squarely in the Toyota camp. It also pairs full-season

drivers Erik Jones and John Hunter Nemechek, both no strangers to Toyota's stock car ranks.

Another big off-track move was the appointment of industry veteran Cal Wells as Legacy's CEO, and he brings a ton of Toyota knowhow to the team.

"It's almost too good to be true how all this has come together," adds Wilson. "Cal and I have been working together for 35 years, and he's raced just about everything we've done. Most importantly, he understands our culture, so he's already made a major impact in the short time he's been there."

Johnson adds: "We are confident [Cal's] leadership will take us to the next level during many upcoming transitions of the manufacturer change, as well as continuing to build our brand. We're growing quickly, and certainly hope to be a force in the NASCAR industry. I'm excited to have a shot at another Daytona 500 trophy in our new Toyota Camry XSEs."

Legacy's inclusion also raises Toyota's market share on the grid to eight full-time entries, giving it more drafting partners at the superspeedways.

CHARLES BRADLEY



SHAKING UP THE MASSIVE SCHEDULE

The 2024 NASCAR Cup season brings with it some intriguing schedule changes, highlighted by the revival of the Brickyard 400. The return of this crown-jewel event will represent NASCAR's first race on Indianapolis Motor Speedway's 2.5-mile oval since 2020.

The Cup Series will also compete in the state of Iowa for the first time since 1953, adding the Iowa Speedway short track to the 2024 schedule. The Bristol Dirt Race is no more, with the half-mile now hosting two races on the concrete once again.

Where things get really interesting is when you look at the playoffs. Due to the TV demands of the Olympics in Paris, NASCAR is taking a two-week hiatus after the Brickyard 400. As a result, the first round of the playoffs will look very different.

The Southern 500 at Darlington will now serve as the regular season finale, while Atlanta Motor Speedway becomes the opening race of the playoffs. Watkins Glen International will join Atlanta in the Round of 16, meaning this is the first time NASCAR has ever run two road courses during the Cup Series playoffs, the Charlotte Roval being the other.

Another shake-up involves Texas Motor Speedway. Just two years ago, it hosted the All-Star Race and a playoff round. Now it'll host neither, with Texas removed from the playoffs entirely. The track, which lost its IndyCar date after 2023, will host a single Cup race weekend in April.

Following the successful revival of North Wilkesboro Speedway last year, the historic track will host the All-Star Race for the second consecutive year.

California's Auto Club Speedway has been taken off the schedule entirely, so the 2024 season will now open with back-to-back drafting tracks, with the series' first of two trips to Atlanta immediately following the Daytona 500. With carnage the norm at both tracks, crash damage could set some unfortunate teams behind before we even reach March!

Starting with the Daytona 500, NASCAR teams will be spending 37 of the next 39 weekends at the track in the longest schedule in motorsport.

NICK DEGROOT



Watkins Glen joins Atlanta as two road courses are run in the Cup playoffs for the first time

NEW AERO PACKAGE TO LIVEN UP THE SHORT-TRACK SHOW

While NASCAR's Next Gen car in the Cup Series has visibly improved the quality of racing on the series' intermediate and superspeedways, the effort on short tracks and road courses remains a work in progress.

For the second consecutive season, NASCAR begins the year with a new aerodynamic rules package for road courses and most short tracks. On road courses and most ovals of 1.058 miles

or less, cars will run a simplified diffuser along with a handful of other updates. Among them: use of the 2023 short track/road course splitter stuffers, removal of engine panel strakes, a three-inch spoiler, and simplified diffuser strakes.

These changes came about following driver feedback from a test at Phoenix last December, which was prompted by a second season of short track and road course events that featured long

green flag runs rather than the typical bumping and banging seen with the Gen 6 car. Five short track and road course races in 2023 had five cautions or fewer, and green flag passes for the lead on those tracks were down for the second straight year.

Due to cost and parts availability concerns, the new rules were not used in the pre-season Busch Light Clash at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum. Instead, they will debut in the 10 March race at Phoenix.

NASCAR believes that the biggest gain from the package will be how cars handle in traffic. "At the test, the car did not lose rear downforce when it yawed, which is an issue we fight with the current car," says NASCAR vice-president of vehicle performance Eric Jacuzzi. "The drivers would be able to slide around more on the short tracks and really have to be less careful about putting power down. At the test, they felt they could really tell that it was more forgiving."

Another element to the success of the new rules package will be Goodyear's continued efforts to try new tyre compounds – something it began last season. "I think we really proved that we could continue to work on making the compounds we have softer, to where they have more grip initially, but then fall off more significantly," Jacuzzi adds.

JIM UTTER



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Algarve Pro snatches Le Mans slot

ASIAN LE MANS SERIES
YAS MARINA (ARE)
10-11 FEBRUARY
ROUND 3/3

Algarve Pro Racing capitalised on a nightmare weekend for 99 Racing in the Asian Le Mans Series' Abu Dhabi double-header finale to snare an automatic invite for the Le Mans 24 Hours. Canny pitstop timing helped Malthe Jakobsen, Colin Braun and George Kurtz to win the opener, while fifth in the second race won by their stablemates Toby Sowery, Freddie Tomlinson and Chris McMurry was enough to scoop the title as pre-event LMP2 points leader 99 Racing slid to third in the table.

Nikita Mazepin being sidelined through illness proved the least of 99 Racing's concerns. Ahmad Al Harthy claimed pole for both races in the ORECA he shared with Louis Deletraz and stand-in Filipe Albuquerque, but the Omani rear-ended Alex Malykhin's Pure Rxcing Porsche under the safety car, putting both out. The damage was enough to require a new tub for race two, but it was never in contention

and finished two laps down in 11th.

After Kurtz had lost time to a spin, APR called Jakobsen in under a safety car following a red flag. The Dane's final stop as the race resumed was shorter than the rest, vaulting him into the lead.

Kurtz was tagged at the start of race two by Paul-Loup Chatin, who later collided with Setiawan Santoso's Porsche to bring out red flags. The timing of the stoppage was crucial for the sister APR car that had just pitted and could complete the rest of the race on only two more stops.

Second in race two secured Pure's Malykhin, Joel Sturm and Klaus Bachler the auto-invite afforded to the GT champion. Triple Eight's Mercedes driven by Luca Stolz, Jordan Love and Prince Jefri Ibrahim claimed both class victories.

In LMP3, CD Sport's Michael Jensen/Nick Adcock/Fabien Lavergne won the opener to set up a winner-takes-all showdown with Cool Racing title rivals James Winslow and Alex Bukhantsov. But when Lavergne passed Seth Lucas off the track moments after being spun by the American, he earned a penalty that dropped CD behind Cool.

WEEKEND WINNERS

ASIAN LE MANS SERIES

YAS MARINA (ARE)

- Race 1**
- LMP2** Malthe Jakobsen/Colin Braun/George Kurtz
Algarve Pro Racing (ORECA 07)
- LMP3** Michael Jensen/Nick Adcock/Fabien Lavergne
CD Sport (Ligier JSP320)
- GT** Luca Stolz/Jordan Love/Jefri Ibrahim
Triple Eight (Mercedes-AMG GT3 Evo)
- Race 2**
- LMP2** Toby Sowery/Freddie Tomlinson/Chris McMurry
Algarve Pro Racing (ORECA 07)
- LMP3** Dan Skocdopole/Julien Gerbi/Mihnea Stefan
Bretton Racing (Ligier JSP320)
- GT** Luca Stolz/Jordan Love/Jefri Ibrahim
Triple Eight (Mercedes-AMG GT3 Evo)

FORMULA REGIONAL MIDDLE EAST

YAS MARINA (ARE)

- Race 1** Taylor Barnard
PHM Racing
- Race 2** Rafael Camara
Mumbai Falcons Racing
- Race 3** Tuukka Taponen
R-ace GP

FORMULA REGIONAL OCEANIA

RUAPUNA (NZL)

- Race 1** Roman Bilinski
M2 Competition
- Race 2** Michael Shin
M2 Competition
- Race 3** Liam Sceats
M2 Competition



For full results visit motorsportstats.com

Barnard wins but Taponen closes on 2024 crown

FORMULA REGIONAL MIDDLE EAST
YAS MARINA (ARE)
9-10 FEBRUARY
ROUND 4/5

Ferrari F1 protege Tuukka Taponen extended his Formula Regional Middle East series lead over Taylor Barnard at Yas Marina last weekend, with the pair taking a victory apiece.

Barnard took pole for the opening race in his PHM Racing car, with the R-ace GP machine of Taponen alongside. The F2-bound Brit led throughout, repelling numerous bids from the Finn to take the win by just 0.423 seconds. Australian Costa Toparis, who raced in GB3 last season, was the surprise package and drove his Evans GP car to third position ahead of Taponen's team-mate Zachary David.


From the fifth row of the reversed grid for race two, Taponen won his first-lap fight with Barnard and climbed the order to finish fifth. Barnard was eighth on the road, but was penalised out of the points for a botched move that eliminated Alexander Abkhazava. Up front, suspension failure sent early leader Bruno del Pino into the wall, and it was Rafael Camara who took victory in his Prema-run Mumbai Falcons car from team-mate Ugo Ugochukwu and David.

Taponen was a comfortable winner from pole in the finale, with Mumbai Falcons' James Wharton second from David, who made a big step forward this weekend. Mari Boya was fourth, while Barnard moved up to fifth when Ugochukwu lost his front wing on a safety car restart.

The gap between Taponen and Barnard is now 50 points, meaning Taponen needs



only to be the higher-placed of the two in the opening race of this weekend's Dubai climax to be crowned champion.

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- Close communication with the Production Manager, Head of QA and Planners on the status of work orders.
- Maintaining a safe and healthy work environment by following standards and procedures
- Operate allocated CNC machinery to produce finished components, meeting specific dimensions and tolerances.

Key Competencies

- Certificate III in Engineering – Mechanical Trade or equivalent
- Practiced experience in a CNC Machining role
- Must have superior machining and tradesman's skills.
- Must have the ability to read blueprints, engineering drawing and technical specifications.
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- Expedite and progress deliveries from Suppliers & maintain timely reporting of delivery status of parts outstanding.
- Communicate with end customers to keep them informed of progress with outsourced parts.
- Manage the supply base performance through monitoring of KPI's.

You will ideally have:

- Previous procurement experience working within a fast-changing engineering or manufacturing environment.
- F1, Automotive, Motorsports procurement experience is desirable, but not essential.
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TCR EUROPE

Lynk & Co machines to race in TCR UK

TCR UK

Chinese manufacturer Lynk & Co's world title-winning 03 TCR car will make its British debut this year, with Pro Alloys Racing running a two-car team in TCR UK.

Geely Group subsidiary Lynk & Co's first international motorsport foray yielded back-to-back World Touring Car Cup successes in 2020 and 2021 with Yann Ehrlacher, as Cyan Racing's 03s recorded 20 wins across a three-and-a-half year period.

Neil Greenland's Pro Alloys outfit sampled TCR UK with a two-event programme for Alistair Camp in a Hyundai i30 N last year, securing a win at Donington Park. It will now run one-time Stock Hatch champion Ryan Bensley, a Civic Cup race winner with the

team, in the Lynk & Co aboard which Viktor Andersson took two pole positions and sixth in last year's TCR Europe standings.

The team's second driver is still to be announced but the cars will run from Pro Alloys' Wiltshire base, with support from Geely Group Motorsport in Northamptonshire, where they are built.

"Neil's putting the infrastructure together to make sure that we can have a proper go at it," said Bensley, who is coached by British Touring Car Championship ace Josh Cook. "I drove a BTCC car in November at Snetterton and I really took to that – it suited my driving style. So hopefully with a TCR car, it won't need too much adjustment.

"It'll be interesting to see where we are at the first couple of rounds. And then, no

doubt, as the season goes on we'll start making inroads towards the front, hopefully. I'm not going to kid myself and say I'm just going to turn up and win."

Greenland added: "Ryan will be able to hold his own. His driving style definitely suits a TCR car more than a Civic because it's ultra-smooth.

"He's got a really good feel for the car, good feedback and that's why it was brilliant to work with him last year."

Ron Hartvelt, Geely Group Motorsport's customer sport director, said: "Pro Alloys Racing made an impressive TCR UK debut last year and we are delighted to welcome them to the Geely Group Motorsport customer racing family."

MARK PAULSON

MX-5 ace Hills targets TCR UK outings in 2024

TCR UK

Mazda MX-5 Supercup champion Aidan Hills is targeting a part-time TCR UK programme later this year, with a view to a full-time effort in 2025.

Hills tested a Rob Boston Racing-run Cupra Leon Competition at Donington Park last month, having first sampled a TCR car at the

British Racing & Sports Car Club's Driven by Racing event at Silverstone in November.

"We're looking at the second half of the year," said Hills, who contested part-seasons in the Ginetta GT5 Challenge in 2021-22 but has not driven a front-wheel-drive competition car since his rallycross days in 2016. "The money's there for two or three rounds and then that gives me



[a platform] to try and get a full season in for 2025."

Hills will contest at least the opening rounds of the MX-5 Supercup, where his Hills Motorsport outfit runs multiple cars. Championship

runner-up James Cossins and frontrunner Alex Stott remain with the team, while Jack Sycamore returns to the BRSCC category after a three-year layoff.

MARK PAULSON

Brabham plans full campaign in BT62 this season

GT CUP

David Brabham will contest a first full season of racing since 2012 in this year's GT Cup aboard one of the trackday cars bearing his family's famous name.

The ex-Formula 1 driver and 2009 Le Mans 24 Hours winner will race a Brabham BT62 Competition run by Kendall Developments alongside Paul Bailey. The 58-year-old will be attempting to help Bailey retain the GT Cup GTO class title he won last year during a campaign predominantly at the wheel of a Lamborghini Huracan GT3 EVO.

Brabham's previous full-season campaign came in the inaugural year of the reborn World Endurance Championship with the JRM Acura LMP1 squad. His race outings since have included a couple of events in the BT62 and BT63, as well as appearances in the historic ranks.

The decision to make an active competition return follows the announcement of the end of the collaboration between his family and Fusion Capital to manufacture the BT62 and its GT2 racing derivative, the BT63, in Australia under the Brabham Automotive banner.

"That has given me the freedom



Le Mans winner plans GT Cup bid alongside champion Bailey

MICK WALKER

to do this, to do more racing, which is an important part of the Brabham story and something we should have been doing more of before," said Brabham. "Unfortunately, our partners didn't really want to do motorsport."

Brabham explained that the opportunity came up when he went to see Bailey to tell him about the upcoming announcement about the end of Brabham Automotive.

"I wanted to make all the customers aware of what was going on and told Paul that I'd love to race with him one day in the Brabham," he said. "He asked, 'How about this year?' It took about five minutes, we shook hands, and off we go."

Brabham explained that Bailey wants

to "put a full season under the belt" of his BT62 for the first time. He had to abandon the car last year after encountering engine problems during the second weekend of the MotorSport Vision Racing-run GT Cup at Brands Hatch. He swapped briefly to a Mercedes-AMG GT3 during that event and subsequently moved on to the Lamborghini, which he drove with Ross Wylie and, for one weekend, James Dorlin.

Brabham stressed that he wants to keep racing beyond 2024 and that he expects to be downgraded from silver to bronze under the FIA system of driver categorisation when he hits 60. "Then I want to be the best bronze out there," he said.

GARY WATKINS

New Ginetta G56 Evo to join British GT grid

BRITISH GT

The new Ginetta G56 GT4 Evo will make its British GT debut this year with Colin White and Tom Holland.

White will return to British GT after finishing third in last year's Ginetta GT points, having recovered from serious injuries suffered in a crash at Thruxton in 2022. The four-time GT4 Supercup class champion's own CWS team will run the G56 Evo.

"I'm excited to be making my British GT comeback with my team, CWS," said White. "I feel that Tom and

I will make up a strong Pro-Am pairing that should be ready to take it to the other teams. I also think the combination of this driver pairing and the new Ginetta G56 GT4 Evo should allow us to operate a competitive package from the outset."

Holland will compete in his sophomore season of British GT having raced the older G56 model in 2023, taking one podium in the opening round with Raceway Motorsport. White and Holland teamed up for the first time in the Dubai 24 Hours last month ahead



White and Holland set to pilot new Ginetta this year

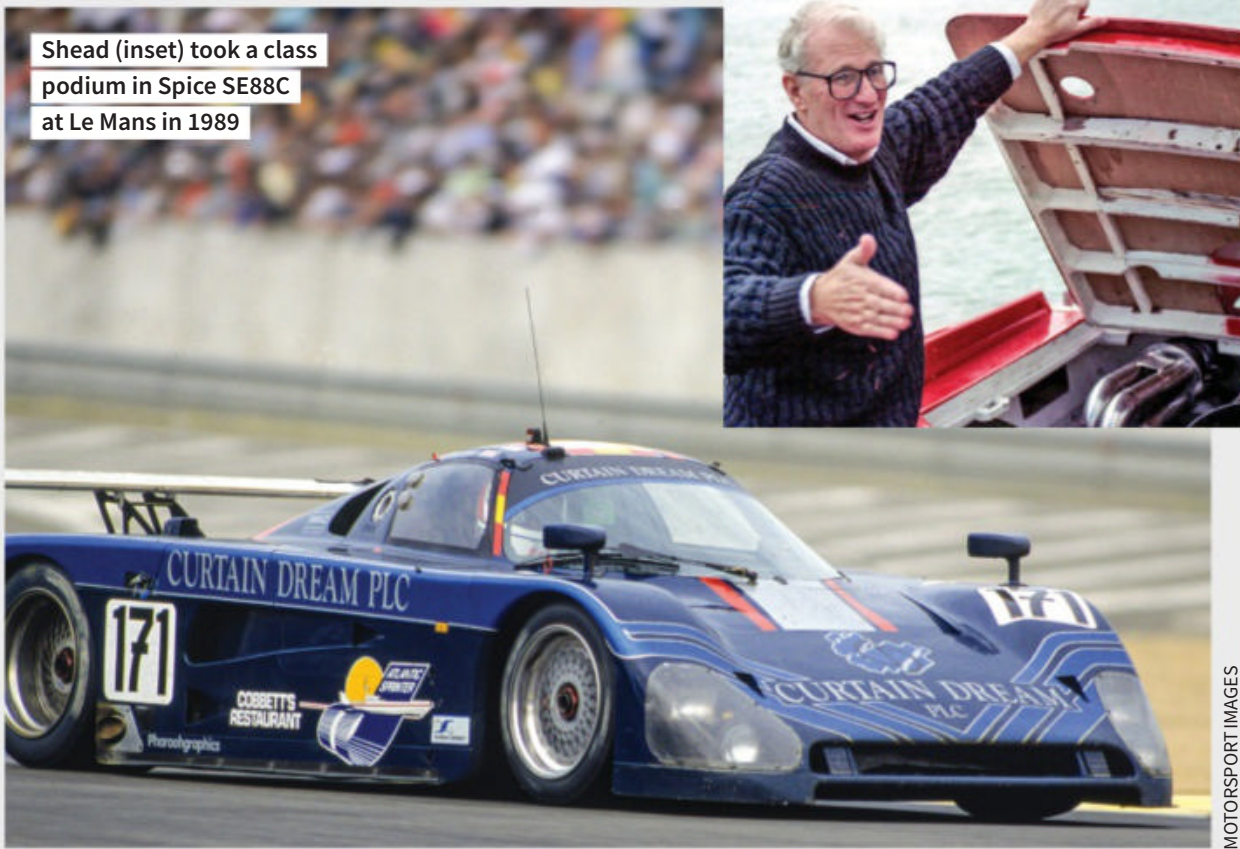
of the British GT campaign.

Meanwhile, in GT3, Barwell Motorsport has confirmed its second driver line-up of Sandy Mitchell and Alex Martin, who will join father-and-son duo Rob and Ricky Collard this term. Factory Lamborghini driver Mitchell remains with Barwell for a fifth season in

the category, having taken the overall British GT title with Collard Sr in 2020.

He will be partnered by Martin, who has previously raced in the British Touring Car Championship, Porsche Carrera Cup GB and Ferrari Challenge, with the 36-year-old making his British GT debut at Silverstone last year.

Shead (inset) took a class podium in Spice SE88C at Le Mans in 1989



MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Don Shead 1936-2024

OBITUARY

A sporting hero from the *Boy's Own* mould, Donovan 'Don' Shead, who has died aged 87, was Britain's greatest designer of offshore racing powerboats, then competed in cars.

Birmingham-born Shead raced hydroplanes before switching to boats in the early 1960s, whereupon he rose rapidly to the pantheon of specialist naval architects. His innovative Avenger, Enfield Marine, Planatec and CUV designs won dozens of races and championships, while Shead won the gruelling Cowes-Torquay-Cowes race thrice in his designs – including in 1970 with Tommy Sopwith of Equipe Endeavour. He also penned leisure craft for Sunseeker.

A back injury ended Shead's frontline career in 1980, so he took up car racing with a Lister-Jaguar Costin in 1982. He won the 1983 Historic Sports Car Club Sportscar championship, scoring his first

outright victory at Thruxton, close to his Hampshire home. For 1984, a Chevrolet V8 supplanted the straight-six engine.

Shead saddled the Chevron B16 Spyder with son James in Thundersports and historics in 1985. But big American V8s stirred his soul, thus he upgraded to the ex-Gordon Dewar McLaren M8C/D, dormant since the 1972 Can-Am series.

Contemporary racing from 1988, Shead shared a Group C2 Ecosse with David Sears. Having acquired the ex-works Gordon Spice/Ray Bellm Spice-DFL SE88C for 1989, he made his Le Mans 24 Hours debut at 53, finishing second in class with Ross Hyett and Robbie Stirling.

Shead returned to historics, enjoying a thuggish Kurtis-Chevrolet 500S, but a horrific cartwheel in an Allard-Cadillac J2 at Brands Hatch in 2003 ended his fun. Brilliant medics and intricate neck surgery saved Don's life. He bounced back defiantly, built an aircraft and flew it!

MARCUS PYE

Junior Saloons star Dix to race Cayman

PORSCHE SPRINT

Junior Saloons race winner Oskar Dix will step up to the Porsche Sprint Challenge GB with Team Parker Racing.

Dix finished fifth in last year's JSCC standings and has since conducted several tests in a Porsche Cayman

with Stuart Parker's squad as he evaluated options for his graduation to senior racing.

"I am hugely excited for the step up to the Porsche Sprint Challenge GB and can't wait to show everyone what I can do," said Dix. "I was first introduced to the series through my coach and

mentor, who put us in contact with Team Parker Racing.

"From there on, it was obvious that the team has been very successful and is able to extract the best from their drivers, so it was a simple choice to join them, especially as I am aiming for race wins this year."

TCR UK CAPTURES GOLF

Capture Motorsport's Volkswagen Golf GTI will return to the TCR UK grid this year, with team boss Will Beech switching from Club Enduro – where he placed third in Class A alongside Mark Grice last year – to take the wheel. The car was previously campaigned by Jack Depper in 2022. Veteran racer Garry Townsend has also confirmed his continuation in the championship at the wheel of his Gen 2 Audi RS3 LMS.

CLIFFORD'S PRIZE DRIVE

Karter Callie Clifford will make her debut in cars in this year's Fiesta Junior Championship after winning the Jamsport scholarship. A team of judges including British Touring Car drivers Bobby Thompson and Ant Whorton-Eales chose Clifford ahead of runners-up Henry Howarth and Hayden Gray, and seven other finalists at Bedford Autodrome last week following two previous rounds of selection.

FROM FIESTAS TO CIVICS

Fiesta Junior graduates Harry England and Wesley Swain will spend their maiden seasons of senior competition with Pro Alloys Racing in the Civic Cup. England contested the final round of 2023 at Brands Hatch with the team but will switch from the EP3 model he raced there to a newer FN2 for his full-season campaign. Swain remains with the team that ran him to 10th in last year's Fiesta Junior standings. Former autograsser Will Butt is also set to join the grid in a self-run EP3.

DOUBLE GARLICK AT XENTEK

Conner Garlick will join his brother Luke at Xentek Motorsport to contest the Ginetta GT Championship this year. Conner (below) finished sixth in last season's standings, after taking one victory, and is targeting further success in 2024. "The GT Championship was a great challenge for us last year and I feel it's given us a good platform to build on and challenge for regular silverware this season," he said.



Lepley scores landmark win in Mitsubishi Galant

HISTORIC RALLYING

George Lepley and Dale Bowen took the historic victory on the Riponian Stages last weekend with a faultless performance in their Mitsubishi Galant VR4 on a very muddy and slippery rally.

Once again, the Riponian started the British Historic Rally Championship calendar with two runs through the stages of Wass, Cropton and Gale Rigg. Torrential overnight rain ensured that the normally fast Yorkshire forests were thick with mud and flooded in some places.

Though not eligible for overall points this year, the four-wheel-drive Mitsubishi was ideal for the testing conditions and Lepley did a fine job as they emerged from the stages with more than half a minute in hand. It was a significant result as the later Category 4 historic cars start to make their mark in UK historic rallying. Lepley said: "It was



Four-wheel-drive Galant was well suited to tricky conditions

so slippery and muddy. There's more to come from the car but today was a case of managing the risk."

Running second in the historic field and scoring maximum championship points were Matthew Robinson and Sam Collis in their Ford Escort Mk2 after a big battle with the similar car of Adrian Hetherington and Ronan O'Neill. Both crews reported some scary moments in the conditions and it was

Robinson who took the top score with an 11s advantage after six forest special stages.

Only 10s adrift of Hetherington were Ben Friend and Cliff Simmons in their Escort Mk2 as they battled ahead of the Fiat 131 of Nick Elliott and Dave Price. "Very, very tricky," said Friend of the conditions. "It was so slippery and it would have been very easy to put it off."

PAUL LAWRENCE

Igoe tops dramatic Snetterton Stages battle



Citroen driver benefited from O'Donovan penalty

CIRCUIT RALLYING

Michael Igoe and Will Atkins' Citroen C3 Rally2 emerged victorious from a three-way battle on the latest Circuit Rally Championship round at Snetterton last weekend.

Igoe led John Griffiths and Emma Morrison's Ford Fiesta R5 by nine seconds after the opening stage, with the Hyundai

of Patrick O'Donovan/Jack Morton level in third with Chris West/Steve Cox's Peugeot 306 Maxi.

Griffiths then briefly led after stage three, before he picked up a one-minute penalty for booking in early, leaving O'Donovan and Igoe to fight for the win. They entered the final test tied, a five-minute penalty for O'Donovan for hitting a chicane having

been rescinded earlier. O'Donovan went quickest again and provisionally won by a solitary second.

However, an appeal was lodged and O'Donovan's penalty was reinstated, dropping him to sixth and handing Igoe a third victory. Despite his earlier woe, Griffiths was second, with West the first two-wheel drive in third.

PETER SCHERER

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Gans' Cooper just defeated
Shaw's Lotus at Killarney



TANIA VERMAAK

Coopers take the glory as HGPCA heads to South African events

HISTORICS

Cooper drivers dominated the Historic Grand Prix Cars Association features within South Africa's recent Passion For Speed events. Charlie Martin was victorious in Paul Waine's T53 at Zwartkops, but hit trouble at Killarney, where Michael Gans triumphed in his T79.

The latter venue hosted grands prix in the HGPCA's pre-1966 era, and featured rousing battles between Gans in the 1964 car, raced by Bruce McLaren and John Love, and Scot Mark Shaw in his ex-Jim Clark 1961 Springbok series-winning Lotus 21.

Gans prevailed in the 2.7-litre machine

in which Love won three SA F1 crowns, but Shaw chased hard in the 1500cc car in which his compatriot finished second at Killarney in the 1962 Cape GP, directly behind Team Lotus partner Trevor Taylor's sister car.

Richard Smeaton (Wainer Formula Junior) and Geoff Underwood (Cooper T56/59) led the chase in the opening leg, from which poleman Martin retired. The top three remained the same on aggregate after heat two, in which Shaw had gear-linkage issues.

A highlight of the Killarney weekend was 82-year-old Clive Puzey demoing the Lotus 18/21 he raced in period, courtesy of current owner Erik Staes.



SWEDISH KARTER TO JHR

Swedish karting star Joel Bergstrom (above) is the latest driver announced as competing with JHR in British Formula 4 this year, having impressed during winter testing. "JHR have had a lot of achievements in the past with very experienced people and I really enjoyed our test days together," he said.

ARDEN JOINS GB4 RANKS

Arden is moving into GB4 this season and has announced it will run Young Racing Driver Academy member Leon Wilson in the category. "We've enjoyed great success in GB3 since 2021, but GB4 gives us an ideal opportunity to further develop our YRDA members before climbing the ladder with us," said team boss Garry Horner.

ARCTIC RALLY INTEREST

The Historic Endurance Rallying Organisation-Endurance Rally Association's new Arctic Midnight Sun Rally has attracted a diverse range of entries so far. The event will be held between 30 June and 13 July, and crews from the UK and Europe are set to be joined by some from America on a rally that takes in Sweden and Norway, including classic World Rally routes. Among the entries is a 1970s Saab, with the event passing the Saab museum.

FITTIPALDI F1 AT DONINGTON

Ollie Hancock gave his family-owned Fittipaldi F8 Formula 1 machine (below) a post-rebuild shakedown at Donington Park recently, the first time the car had been on track for over five years. It is hoped the ex-Keke Rosberg 1980 chassis will compete at this year's Monaco Historique event in the hands of Ollie's older brother Sam, before father Anthony then contests selected Masters F1 races.



MICK WALKER

Pearce plans to return to racing in F3

HISTORICS

Nicholas Pearce, 68, plans to end a 16-year sabbatical when he returns to racing this season in a One-Litre Formula 3 car in the category's landmark 60th anniversary campaign.

Pearce, whose last circuit race was in a Formula Ford 2000 Delta at Pembrey in 2008, has acquired the Ford-powered U2 Mk4 dormant in Iain Rowley's shop since colourful American Tupper Robinson

last used it circa 2015.

Pearce's only competitive events in the interim were outings in Richard Falconer's spectacular Chaparral-Chevrolet 1 sportscar at the Chateau Impney Hillclimb and Crystal Palace Sprint in 2017-18.

His family has F3 history, father Gordon having raced a 500cc Staride in the 1950s. Pearce Sr then supported his son's FF1600 exploits in Hawke DL11 and Saracen chassis from the mid-1970s.

The U2 also marks a return to front-engined action for Pearce, who made his race debut as a teenager 50 years ago in the unique 750 Formula Davaire built by Barry Dixon, later a 750 Motor Club scrutineer.

"It's ready to go," said Pearce, who plans to test at Mallory Park next month. "Our first race should be at the Goodwood Members' Meeting in April, but the championship starts at Cadwell Park in mid-May."

MARCUS PYE

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EVENTS**

Life of Surtees to be celebrated at Goodwood

GOODWOOD REVIVAL

The life of Formula 1 and motorcycle world champion John Surtees will be celebrated at the Goodwood Revival in September, with this year marking the 60th anniversary of his F1 title success.

Surtees remains the only person to have achieved the feat of winning a world title on four and two wheels, accomplishing the former in 1964 with Ferrari.

He had already claimed seven motorcycle world championships between 1956 and 1960, and would also win the 1966 Can-Am crown before moving into F1 team ownership in 1970.

The tribute to Surtees at the Revival, which is due to be held from 6-8 September, will comprise machines from 250cc, 350cc



and 500cc motorcycles to grand prix winners, unlimited sportscars and GTs.

The Duke of Richmond said: "As an eight-time world champion and the only man to achieve the honour on both two and four wheels, John Surtees was not only a huge figure in the history of the Goodwood motor circuit, but also played a big part in the establishment of our modern events."

"Along with Stirling Moss, John was a patron of the Festival of Speed and was deeply involved from the very beginning. More than anything, he was an exceptional racer and a great friend."

The Goodwood Motor Circuit was the

venue Surtees tested a racing car for the first time in 1959, before he made his four-wheeled debut in a Formula Junior Cooper, racing for Ken Tyrrell, at the 39th Members' Meeting the following year, finishing second to Jim Clark.

Surtees became a patron of the very first Festival of Speed in 1993 and rode his 1952 Vincent up the hill. Following his death in March 2017, the 75th Members' Meeting paid tribute to Surtees on the anniversary to the day of his first car race in 1960, with a minute's noise and the Duke of Richmond leading a commemorative lap in a Team Surtees Lola T70.



J BLOXHAM/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Clubmans exceeds 50 registered drivers

CLUBMANS

Interest in the Clubmans Sports Prototype Championship is booming in the 60th year of the front-engined sportscar category, with more than 50 drivers already registered.

The significant interest comes despite there still being two months before the MotorSport Vision Racing-organised contest kicks off at Silverstone.

"We are well ahead of last year's numbers at this point, which is very encouraging," said coordinator Pete

Richings. "It's looking very exciting, with several changes in the [front-running] CSP1 division."

"Multiple Classic Clubmans champion Mark Charteris has reconfigured his Mallock Mk20/21 from Ford pushrod to Vauxhall red-top engine to renew his rivalry with Clive Wood's Mallock Mk23."

"Alan Cook has switched from the works Mallock team into the works Phantom team, driving the PR22 in which James Clarke won the majority of last year's rounds."



JOYRICHINGS

"Alex and Jarred Lester are back with their Suzuki Haybusa-engined Clubman 35s, as is Steve Dickens with his Mallock Mk29 with K-series power."

Defending champion and second-generation racer Tom Muirhead expects greater opposition in the Ford Kent-engined CSPB

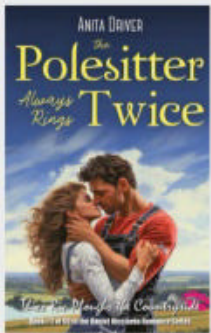
set with his all-conquering Mallock Mk18.

One interesting registration is from intrepid veteran Phil Weaver, who intends to compete for the first time in around a decade, having recovered from the fall in which he broke his neck.

MARCUS PYE

FINISHING STRAIGHT

The return of Ric's romantic adventures



BOOK REVIEW
THE POLESITTER
ALWAYS RINGS TWICE
Anita Driver
RRP £10.99

Lewis Hamilton may have pulled off the romantic move of the Formula 1 off-season with his

recently announced 2025 switch to Ferrari, but if it's Valentine's Day reading that you're after, Anita Driver has you covered with book two (of 69, of course) of her 'Daniel Ricciardo' romance series.

The Polesitter Always Rings Twice tells the fictional tale of the whirlwind romance of innkeeper Amelia Coxwell – a name seemingly inspired by those of early Bond girls – and F1 driver Ricciardo. Once again, this takes place in a parallel world where Nicholas Latifi is a world champion, but it's certainly not a sequel.

Unlike the previous publication – which was dubbed as an 'erotic adventure' – this tale is more subdued in all aspects, with the 'action' being more of a sideline than the main thrust of the plot.

One of the most unexpected aspects of book one was the level of knowing humour on display and, once again, this is front and centre. Kangaroos bouncing like a porpoising Mercedes F1 car, Charles Leclerc suffering a disastrous pitstop because his Ferrari mechanics are 'all behind the garage having a smoke', and Will Buxton-esque pauses – a staple of *Drive to Survive* – are just some examples.

But much like with the Netflix series, Guenther Steiner is the unexpected star

The real Daniel Ricciardo has other things to focus on

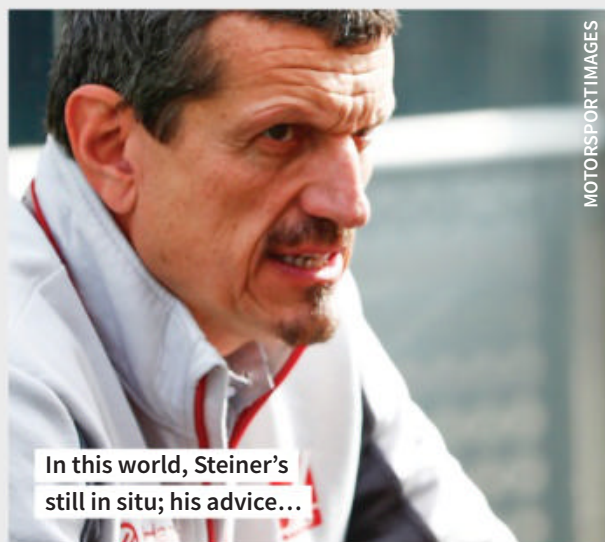


CORNELIUS / RED BULL CONTENT POOL

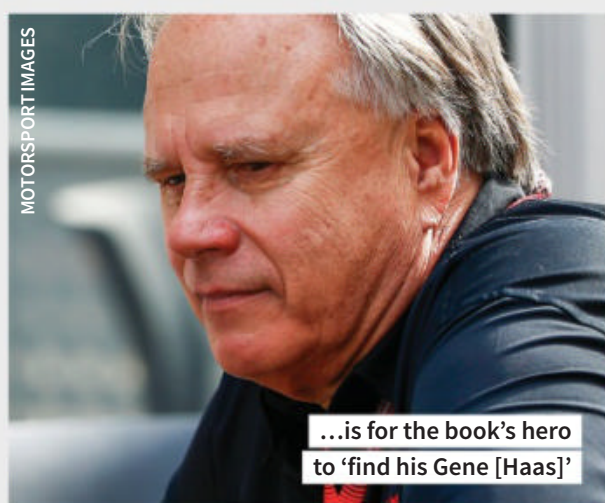


COATES / MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Pitstops were not taking place during this ciggie break



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of *The Polesitter Always Rings Twice*. He may only feature for a few pages but, in a yarn that was clearly written before January's news that he had been axed as Haas team principal, Steiner offers some sage romantic advice for Ricciardo to 'find his Gene [Haas]'.

The conversation then takes an unexpected turn based on a throwaway comment concerning what Steiner stated he would do to the paddock to score a world championship point and, well, you can read the rest if you wish!

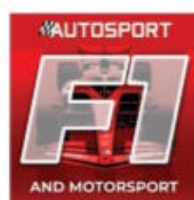
Condensed into just 62 pages of storytelling, this is not a book that will require multiple sittings to churn through. This is also part of the charm, with the story engaging enough that you do not want to put it down and short enough to all but remove that temptation.

All in all, *The Polesitter Always Rings Twice* is a thoroughly entertaining read. Playing to the same tropes as its predecessor and avoiding some of the more overt moments, this is a far easier read that sits more comfortably within the boundaries of what those depicted may describe as acceptable.

This said, the clear and categoric disclaimer at the start – a feature of all of Driver's publications to date – is still 100% necessary: "None of the things the characters in this book say or do actually happened. It's not real, OK? It's a fiction. A fantasy. A fabrication. Nothing is real."

Is this a book that will win awards? Most probably not. But is it an entertaining way to spend an afternoon giggling to yourself and then reciting passages out loud to your partner, only for them to roll their eyes.

SAM HALL



[autosport.com/podcast](https://www.autosport.com/podcast)



ASTONMARTIN

Is Aston Martin's AMR24 its most important car yet?

Aston Martin has launched its new car for the 2024 F1 season, the AMR24, the team hoping to make a step forward and challenge for wins while avoiding a mid-season slump like it experienced last year. Its driver line-up for 2025 is uncertain, with Fernando Alonso's future potentially up in the air, so the AMR24 could be Aston Martin's most important car yet. Bryn Lucas is joined by Jon Noble and Matt Kew as they discuss the AMR24 and what this season could look like for the team in green.



WHAT'S ON

INTERNATIONAL MOTORSPORT

Rally Sweden

World Rally Championship
Round 2/13

Vasterbotten, Sweden

15-18 February

TV Live

TNT Sports 4, Thurs 1800,
TNT Sports 2, Fri 0745,
0945, TNT Sports 1, 1330,
TNT Sports 2, 1800,
TNT Sports 3, Sat 0630,
0730, 0900, 1300, 1400,
1530, 1800, TNT Sports 2,
Sun 0715, 0900, 1100

TV Highlights

TNT Sports 2, Fri 2200,
TNT Sports 3, Sat 2200,
TNT Sports 4, Sun 2200;

Red Bull TV, Fri 2100,
Sat 2100, Sun 2100

Intercontinental GT Challenge

Bathurst 12 Hour
Bathurst, Australia

Round 1/4

17-18 February

Livestream on
Motorsport.tv, Sat 1800

NASCAR Cup

Round 1/36

Daytona 500, USA

18 February

TV Live on Viaplay 1,
Sun 1900

NASCAR Xfinity

Round 1/33

Daytona, USA

17 February

Livestream on
Viaplay, Sat 2130

NASCAR Trucks Series

Round 1/23

Daytona, USA

16 February

Livestream on
Viaplay, Sat 0000

Formula Regional Middle East

Round 5/5

Dubai Autodrome, UAE

17-18 February

Livestream on
Motorsport.tv, Sat 1305,
Sun 0740, 1140

Toyota Formula Regional Oceania

Round 5/5

Highlands, New Zealand

17-18 February

Livestream on
Motorsport.tv, Sat 0300,
2300, Sun 0300

Extreme E

Round 1/5

Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

17-18 February

TV Live ITV 4, Sat 1200,
Sun 1200

REE/RED BULL CONTENT POOL





FROM THE ARCHIVE

The Jaguar E-type shared by Roy Salvadori and Paul Richards, Lola Mk6 GT of Richard Attwood/David Hobbs, and the Ninian Sanderson/Peter Bolton AC Cobra skirt the

wreckage of the Rene Bonnet Aerodjet LM6 (*who needs flag marshals when there's a gendarme trackside waving a white-gloved hand? - ed*) that flipped on lap five of the 1963 Le Mans 24 Hours,

Roger Masson emerging unscathed. The race was marked by accidents, the most severe of which resulted in serious injuries to Salvadori and Jean-Pierre Manzon and claimed the life of 28-year-old Brazilian Christian Heins.



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It was love at first sight for Alex Lynn when he pitched up at Laguna Seca in the spring of 2022 as part of his maiden, and so far only, full season in the IMSA SportsCar Championship. “Most drivers know immediately, on your first laps, if you are going to click with a circuit,” says the Briton. “And I loved it straight away.”

Lynn’s debut at the 2.24-mile Laguna Seca Raceway came during a season aboard a Ganassi-run Cadillac Racing Daytona Prototype international. Then as now, the World Endurance Championship regular with the same team was paired with Earl Bamber, a driver familiar with all the circuits on the North American sportscar trail after his years as a Porsche factory driver.

“Earl was always my primary reference, and Laguna was the first track I’d been to that year where I was on his pace from the outset,” says Lynn. “I thought, ‘OK this is going to be a good weekend’, and it kind of just flowed from there.

“It was really a special time for me. I fell in love with everything about Laguna: it’s a special track and a special place – it’s beautiful – that holds some great memories for me.

“There’s a real flow to Laguna; it’s about the radius of the corners, with an element of banking to a lot of them. And then you’ve got the fast section out



the back leading up the Corkscrew. The fast left, Turn 6, going up the hill before it is a proper corner.

“It’s quite a lift and, in quali trim with the ride height really low, you’ve got a lot of touching – it’s tap, tap, tap with the splitter. You chuck it in hoping you are going to miss the sausage kerb on the apex. And then there’s no run-off on the exit. It’s definitely quite a challenge.”

The Acuras were in the ascendent during the race and the Ganassi Caddy came home only fifth. So there’s a bit of unfinished business for Lynn.

“I’ve promised myself I’ll go back one day,” he says. “I only did the one year of IMSA and all the tracks were new. I’d love to do it again so I can go back to all the great places like Laguna.”

GARY WATKINS



Motorsport Network Media UK Ltd, The Power House, Isleworth, London, TW7 6QG
Email autosport@autosport.com
Individual email firstname.surname@autosport.com
Website www.autosport.com **Twitter** @autosport

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Director **Richard Rowe**
richard@tandemmedia.co.uk **Tel** +44 (0) 1233 228757

Account Manager **Joel Tanton**
joel@tandemmedia.co.uk **Tel** +44 (0) 1233 228753

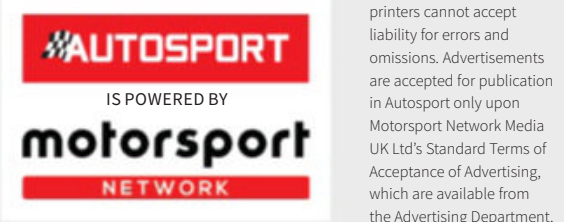
RECRUITMENT
Head of Motorsport Jobs **James Robinson**
james.robinson@motorsport.com

ADVERTISING PRODUCTION
autosport@tandemmedia.co.uk **Tel** +44 (0) 1233 220247

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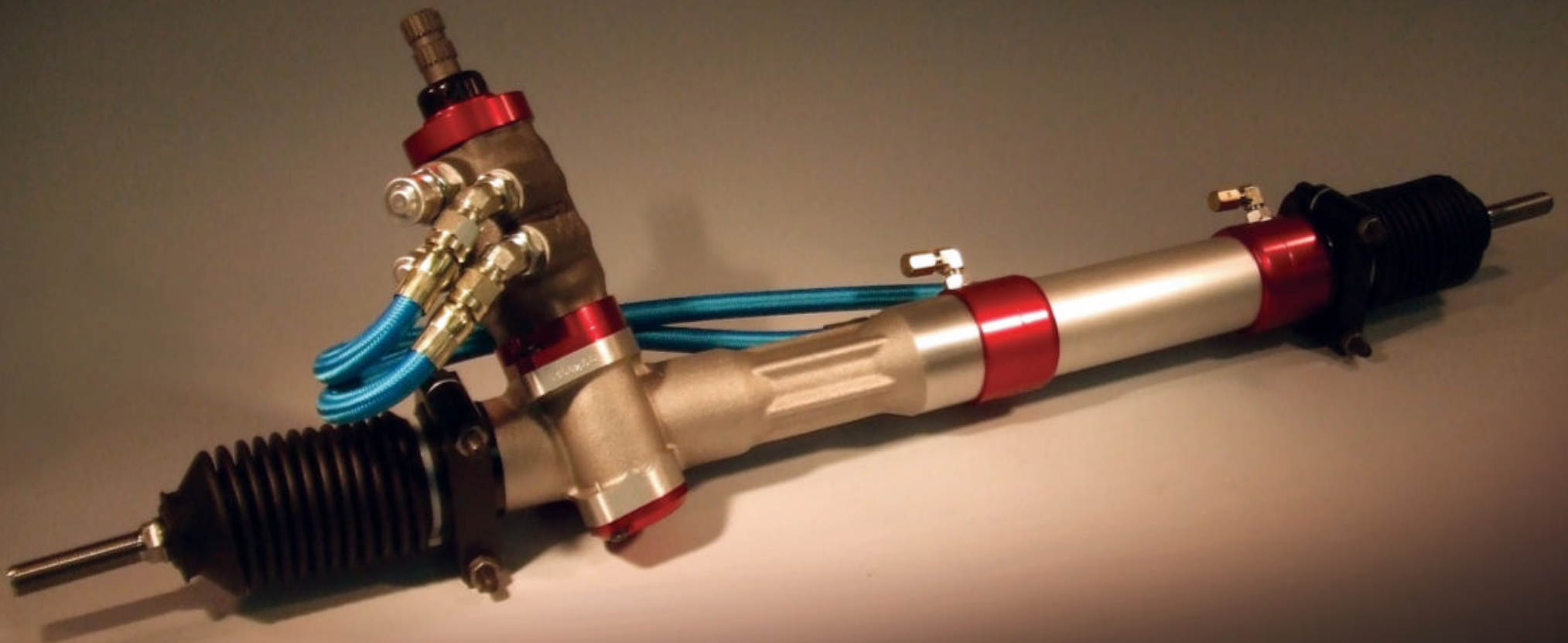


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